Cyber-space oddity? An analysis of political parties' websites and online campaigning

Maria Laura Sudulich

Dissertation
Presented to the
University of Dublin, Trinity College
in fulfilment
of the requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Dublin, Trinity College

February 2010

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this work has not previously been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University. It includes the unpublished and published work of others, duly acknowledged in the text wherever included. I agree that the Library may lend or copy the thesis upon request.

Maria Laura Sudulich

I

Summary

This dissertation is an empirical investigation of how the internet is used by political parties and their candidates. This project seeks to make an original contribution to the literature on political parties, electoral campaigns and democratic theory.

With regard to the literature on political parties, this study contributes to our understanding of how the internet affects parties' communication strategies and practices. It explores the possibility that different types of party might use the internet in different ways. This study represents the sole example of a comparative study of political parties in 'peacetime' to date. In this dissertation, we investigate the impact of party ideology, levels of democracy within parties and party resources in determining the quality and status of parties' websites. We examine these variables, over thirty-three parties' websites from four European countries, in relation to the informative side of parties' websites, the interactive side and finally to their overall status. In so doing, we make use of a parsimonious model, which introduce several improved measures of party characteristics and website interactivity; we challenge the existing conceptualization and operationalization of participatory/interactive activities online by introducing the idea of *immediate participation*. In terms of information dissemination, we observe strong evidence of websites undergoing a process of standardization. With regard to participation/interaction, we encounter consistent evidence of large and leftist parties being more prone to introduce participatory features in terms of both 'general' participatory activities and *immediate* ones. On the impact of party internal democracy on online participation we found mixed evidence, in terms of overall participation, this factor appear to play a role, but when it comes to *immediate* participation its effect fades away. With regard to the overall status of parties' websites, in line with previous studies, we find that interactivity and participation are promoted to a smaller extent than dissemination of information. We also test the explanatory power of the aforementioned independent variables on Web 2.0 platforms by selecting three different applications and we show that, across types of applications, the only stable characteristic of parties that 'have gone Web 2.0' is resources.

Big parties appear to be more up to date; they seem to have more readily grasped the potential of Web 2.0 applications than their smaller counterparts.

With respect to electoral campaigns, we explore what elements facilitate cyber-campaign. This investigation takes the form of a case study of the Irish general election 2007. We begin by presenting a longitudinal analysis of Irish parties' websites in the run up to the 2007 election. We observe a relatively modest growth in parties' online activity, and no evidence of inter party variation. When looking at candidates we did not observe any viral spread of the internet phenomenon. We show, through an empirically grounded analysis, that launching a website seems to be motivated by symbolic considerations rather than strategic ones. The empirical proof of what is known in the literature as the 'me too' effect - at the candidate level - represents one of the major contributions of this research.

With regard to implications for democratic theory, we seek to identify whether factual evidence supports the normative claim that the internet can enhance democratic participation, favour dialogue and empower resource-poor actors. Our findings show that better-resourced actors bring their offline advantages with them into cyberspace, and that political parties do not invest much in implementing forms of online interaction with the public. Our evidence points towards the conclusion that technology *per se* won't create any more participation or any virtual public sphere.

Acknowledgments

I have accumulated quite a few debts during my time as a graduate student at Trinity College. I would like to thank all the academic and administrative staff at the Department of Political Science, Trinity College. In particular, I owe a great deal to my supervisors Dr. Eddie Hyland and Prof. Michael Gallagher for their patience and support; they accepted to undertake the supervision of a project, which only few years ago was considered as fringe.

When I began my journey into politics in cyber-space, the sceptics outnumbered those who believed it could turn into a meaningful dissertation; Professor Michael Marsh was among the latter and is someone to whom I am sincerely thankful.

I am grateful to my fellow graduate students at TCD for their support and stimulating discussions. I am especially thankful to Slava and Shane, extraordinary colleagues and most importantly, good friends.

The person who helped me most with the various phases of this dissertation is Matthew. I am grateful to him for proofreading it, co-authoring Chapter 7 with me, listening to every single bizarre idea I had, and providing stimuli and suggestions all the way through. Working with him reminded me that it is the playful side of research that guided all my efforts.

Very special thanks go to my housemates, the Braemors, the Mountjoynts and all of their satellites. Marc-Antoine, Seb and Sergio made me feel at home and always took very good care of me, thanks guys. Without Giuseppe, I never would have come to and survived in Dublin, I am very thankful to him. Alex and Jane, on top of their friendships, also helped me with the English language and Marco worked hard to annul their efforts; I appreciate everybody's contribution.

All my gratitude goes to my family and lifelong friends back in Italy. Fra, Claudio, Paolo, Silvia N., Silvia P. and Nicola provided me with constant 'stupidity support'. Honestly, knowing that they were there for me kept me sane during this time.

This text never would have come to fruition without the unconditional love and support of my parents, who have always believed in me more than I do; this work is for them.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Introducing the study

> 'The internet is the first modern communications medium that expands its reach by decentralizing the capital structure of production and distribution of information, culture, and knowledge.'
>
> Yochai Benkler, The Wealth of the Networks (2007:30)

This project represents an empirical investigation of how new technologies, particularly the internet, are used by specific political actors, namely political parties and candidates. The study seeks to explore how new technologies have been integrated in political activity and what sort of change, if any, they have made to systems of political communication. It also aims to evaluate and discuss what sort of impact new technologies are having for democracy at large. The focus on parties is due to the fact that political parties have proven essential to the achievement of democracy in a modern state. Therefore, this journey into political parties' activities in cyberspace will start by describing what relevance its findings might have in terms of democratic theory. This opening chapter will commence by outlining some considerations on democracy, on the internet and on the relationship between the two terms; we will then explain why parties will be the object of interest of this study and why the impact that the internet has on them has important implications for democracy at large.

Lastly, the research design will be presented and the organization of the inquiry, with chapter outlines, will be provided.

Intro

At the beginning of 1990s the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) transcended the limit of scientific communities and become a mass phenomenon, reaching extensive diffusion in many regions of the globe. The use and abuse of what we commonly refer to as the internet affected a number of dimensions of citizens' lives. The internet has entered the private as well as the public life of people by introducing new practices

that have quickly become routines. E-commerce practices have transformed the way business is done, emails have revolutionised private communication, and social networking sites have created the systems for connecting and interacting with people around the world. The internet has radical implications not only for the social and economic domain but also for the political one. Indeed, the internet growth as a social and economic phenomenon necessarily let to its politicization. Especially in western democracies, political actors of all kinds, *nolens volens,* have to face up to the existence of the internet. Such a global and extensive phenomenon, which experienced an exponential expansion over the past fifteen years, inevitably brought about myths and expectations. In the political sphere the prospect for the internet to improve the quality of democracy often got mixed up with the return to some mythical forms of direct democracy.

This study does not extensively explore the overall transforming potential of the internet in the political realm. We will briefly look at this issue in this opening chapter and we will also clarify why this dissertation will instead look at élite political actors (parties and candidates) in their use of new technologies. Therefore we will begin by discussing the *democratic* dimension of the internet and we will then isolate the objects of interest of this project.

1.1 Squaring the circle of democracy

A number of scholars, especially in the last century, attempted to capture in a concise definition what democracy is; many theorists tried to explain democracy on the normative level (Gallie, 1955; Macpherson, 2001) or basing their elaborations on empirical observations (Cnudde, 1969; Przeworski, 1999; Schumpeter, 1994). If on one hand the literal meaning of the word democracy in not debatable, coming from the Greek δεμοκρατια, which literally means ruled by the people, on the other hand, the term democracy raises a number of dimensions of disagreement over its *true* meaning. Democracy is indeed an essentially contested concept, one of those concepts that 'inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper use on the part of

their users.' (Gallie, 1955) to the point that Dahl claims that nowadays the term democracy is almost meaningless, it has come to represent 'a vague endorsement of a popular idea' (Dahl, 1989: 2)

Clearly, the importance and centrality of the idea of democracy in the modern world is undeniable. The rise of the idea of democracy is relatively recent, as is the dispute over its real meaning: 'Crudely speaking, up to the 18th century everyone had a clear idea of what democracy was and hardly anyone was in favour of it. Now that position is reversed' (Graham, 1986: 1). The agreement on the positive connotation of the term is unanimous:

> 'in antiquity, intellectuals in the overwhelming majority disapproved of popular government, and they produced a variety of explanations for their attitude and a variety of alternative proposals. Today their counterparts, especially but not only in the west, are agreed, in probably the same overwhelming majority, that democracy is the best form of government, the best known and the best imaginable' (Finley, 1985 :8).

The comparison between modern and ancient democracy is often made on the basis of two dimensions, one qualitative and the other one quantitative. Indeed, if on one hand Athenian democracy, widely accepted as best exemplification of an ancient democracy - or even 'the true ancestor' - of democracy, was highly exclusive, cutting out the greater majority of the Athenian population (quantitative dimension), on the other hand, those who enjoyed citizenship rights were equally and absolutely involved in the decision making process (qualitative dimension). They all enjoyed all the same political rights, namely isonomia (ἰσονομία)- a condition of equality in terms of political rights- and isegoria (ισεγορια) - the same right of speaking in the assembly. Athenian citizens, through their participation in the ecclesia (εκκλεσια) had a say in any political decision to be taken. Therefore, such a form of democracy guaranteed high quality of participation for a small quantity of participants.

Obviously, such an intensive level of engagement would be simply impossible in a modern state, as Dahl puts it 'size matters. Both the number of persons in a political unit and the extent of its territory have consequences for the form of democracy' (Dahl, 1998: 105). Representative democracy undoubtedly requires lower levels of engagement; it fits big as well as small units, producing lower quality but no limits in terms of quantity. For Mill 'the

ideal type of a perfect government must be representative' (Mill, 2004 [1861]:40) this type of government guarantees a minimum and equal amount of participation to every citizen, through the instrument of the vote. [i]

Evidently, the very idea of representation implies some forms of delegation and prevents citizens from taking part directly in the decision making process. Rousseau would argue that a system based on representation is not intrinsically democratic, by claiming that the true exercise of sovereignty by the people only occurs when the entire body of citizenry participates in the decision making process. On the other hand, Rousseau's countryman Condorcet would claim that

> 'in a free society based on equality, accurate popular choices are necessary not only for public prosperity and the safety of the state, but also to ensure the preservation of the basic principles upon which that society is grounded' (cited in Dahl, 2003)

pointing out that the representative mechanism not only ensures certain levels of participation, but it also concurs with the achievement of some levels of equality.

Arguing about what democracy actually is or what it should be goes well beyond the intent of this project, which rather deals with some components of democratic institutions and builds on already known conceptualizations. Therefore, we should only briefly touch on the subject here, and we should rather seek to explain the reasons why this study and its findings can contribute to the debate on the current democratic paradigm.

For Dahl, the problem of participation- of the qualitative dimension- is strictly linked to the size of the state, and contemporary society leaves no choice: representative democracy is the only solution. He compares small city-states, ruled by a participatory system, and big nation states, and his conclusions are that, even if a new form of city-state could be established, it would not survive:

> 'To make matters worse, a world of small and completely independent units would surely be unstable, for it would take only a few such units to coalesce, engage in military aggression, pick off one small unit after another, and thus create a system too large for assembly government. To democratize this new and larger unit, democratic reformers (or revolutionaries) would have to reinvent representative democracy' (Dahl,

1998: 112).

A majority of theorists and political thinkers share this point of view, yet there are also some notable voices critical of or rejecting representative democracy. For instance G.D.H. Cole, argues that

'[t]he fact that a man cannot be represented as a man seems so obvious that it is difficult to understand how many theories of government and democracy have come to be built upon the idea that he can. Each man is a centre of consciousness and reason, a will possessed of the power of self-determination, an ultimate reality. How can one such will be made to stand in place of many? How can a man, being himself, be at the same time a number of other people? It would be a miracle if he could; but it is a risky experiment to base our social system upon a hypothetical miracle' (Cole, 1920 : 50).

Critiques of representative democracy focus on the lack of power for citizens, who are only able to participate in the selection of representatives, but who are in fact prevented from influencing the government in any effectual way. Moreover, depending on the type of electoral system the freedom of choice of the citizen-voter can be rather limited, imposing an extra limitation on the ability of people to take part in the democratic process through the instrument of voting. Throughout the 20th century, when representation became the main mechanism with which to rule democratic states, there have been a number of critical voices, mostly concerned with low level of citizens involvement in the decision making process, but no feasible alternative has been found. The advent of new technologies such as the internet has been considered as the instrument that may square the circle of democracy finding the right balance between participation and representation, voting and deliberating.

1.2 Democracy and the internet

One might ask why should the internet be able to ameliorate the democratic process. It is widely recognized how radio and TV changed the face of political communication (Kavanagh, 1996; Mancini, 1999) and both phenomena had a certain political dimension, but they were never expected

to change the face of the democratic process at large. The internet, on the other hand, has been accompanied since the beginning of its broad diffusion by the idea of it being able to change the very nature of the democratic and political discourse. To cite the pioneering work of Naisbitt

> 'Today, with instantaneously shared information, we know as much about what's going on as our representatives and we know it just as quickly. The fact is we have outlived the historical usefulness of representative democracy and we all sense intuitively that it is obsolete.'(1984)

who challenged the concept of representative democracy until, the idea of wisdom of the crowds (Suroweicki, 2004). This enthusiasm, especially in the United States in the early 1990s, kept growing and developing towards the possible creation of a virtual agora (αγορά).

Coleman points out how 'With the rise of the broadcast media, a style of politics evolved that emphasized the role of voters as spectators upon the deliberation of the Great and the Good' (1999: 196) and with the advent of the internet the spectator may even be able to be become a protagonist of the deliberative process. Indeed, not only theorists (Barber, 1998; Negroponte, 1995)emphasized their belief in the democratic possibilities brought about by the advent of new technologies, but also private projects (Centre for Democracy and Technology) and publicly financed ones (for instance the Virtual agora' project) are attempting to accomplish real experiences of cyber-democracy. Former US vice-president Al Gore made no secret of his endless confidence in the democratic and democratizing potential of the internet and President Obama made no mystery about being receptive to the inputs coming from technological innovation. Barak Obama also ran the most successful internet campaign to date, producing a communication revolution (Vaccari, 2009), which generated an unprecedented enthusiasm for the internet's political capabilities. However, such faith in the democratic potential of the internet has been questioned from a number of perspectives; therefore we will now dig a bit deeper in the subject of democracy and the internet.

A sort of disjuncture characterizes normative positions on the democratizing potential of the internet: on one hand we have the *optimists,* who argue that the internet will revitalize and reinvent politics by introducing

diffuse practice of participation and multiplying arenas of civic engagement. Anstead and Chadwich point out an important distinction is to be made between different types of optimists (2009: 59), the watershed being their attitude towards representative democracy. Therefore, the *representative democracy optimists* argue that the internet's potential to reinvent politics will apply within the frame of representative democracy (Trippi, 2004)and the *direct democracy optimists* (Morris, 1999) argue that the internet may be able to actually recreate the previously mentioned Greek agora in the form of virtual agora. On the other hand, the normalizers argue that the internet more and more resembles the structure of power existing in the real world and that cyberspace will eventually reflect equilibria typical of the offline world (Margolis, 2000). On the extreme side of pessimistic positions we even have those who would claim that the internet is bad for democracy. Indeed, it has been argued that forms of e-democracy might be likely to enhance the risk of populism (Kampen, 2003: 494) who would control the agenda setting of online deliberation? Who would verify the procedures? (Moore, 1999: 56) and finally: 'if everybody speaks, who will be listened to?' (Noam, 2005:58)

The basis of the optimistic positions derives from the fact that democracy is meant to be an egalitarian collective decision making process and central to such a process is access to the two dimension of the internet captured in the phrase ICT: information and communication. They are central to collective decision making on two inter-related levels: the actual decision making process and background policy relevant information. In looking at the normative foundation of the *direct democracy optimists'* position, based on the idea of a virtual agora, we need to take as a direct reference Athenian democracy and the functioning of the real world agora.

The direct and indirect information relevant to the decision making process was of a relatively limited nature and it was easily sharable because of the size of the citizenry; the relevance of size is indeed related to both information and communication. In a modern state, with millions of people spread over territory that is, to say the least, vast compared to ancient Athens, the face to face communication format, that made direct egalitarian access to important knowledge and information relevant to the decision making process

is inevitably lost. However, the advent of internet is seen as able to reverse this; some enthusiastic voices claim that 'the Internet offers a potential for direct democracy so profound that it may well transform not only our system of politics but also our very form of government' (Morris, 2000 : 1033). Potentially the internet could produce: a) egalitarian access to general policy relevant information b) the collective registering of policy preferences c) the electronic aggregation of expressed policy preferences, all in the virtual world. However such an argument has a number of weaknesses: in order for such a process to work all barriers to the access of the internet would have to be removed and the access to the internet would have to be absolutely cost free. The existence of a *digital divide* has indeed posed major difficulties to this notion, cooling down the initial enthusiasm on the endless capabilities of the medium. Levels of digital divide indeed do not appear to decrease with growth of internet usage (Husing, 2002; Mossberger, 2007; Mossberger, 2003). The digital divide consequently results in a *democratic divide* (Norris, 2001) which makes questionable, the very idea of the virtual agora, to say the least. Even if material costs could be removed, there is another fundamental obstacle: the sheer quantity of knowledge necessary to take informed decisions for the day-to-day life of a modern state clashes against a logical constraint, namely limitations in citizens' time. The scale and number of decisions and people involved with the implementation of those decisions, in a modern state, generates an unsolvable problem of time.

Therefore the idea of a virtual agora is regarded here as highly unrealistic; in a similar vein we consider highly unlikely the idea that the internet may be bad or even a threat to democracy. This project seeks to deal with actual measurable elements of the political sphere; therefore any contribution it may bring has to be intended as a part of the debate between the *representative democracy optimists* and the normalisers.

The former would emphasise that thanks to new technologies a new dimension of knowledge, information and communication became available to a large public and that this can only improve the relation between representatives and represented. Indeed the advent of the internet should make easier and more transparent, on one hand, the potential

representatives' policy positions and, on the other hand, the public' policy preferences. Secondly, the facility in communication could produce greater engagement and involvement, especially by appealing to young people. Finally, given the relatively low-cost nature of making information available on the internet, poorly resourced actors can compete with better resourced actors on a hypothetically equal basis. Normalisers, on the other hand, would claim that unequal resources would eventually emerge as discriminatory factor in the virtual world as they do in the real one, and that the internet substantially produces no change. This study is to be read as an empirical contribution to this dispute, given that the complexity of the contemporary world makes the idea of governing a modern state through public meetings impracticable. Even if we could remove time and costs constraints, two thousand five hundred years of history of human beings and their decision making procedures could not be single-handedly cancelled by any technological revolution. The concept of representation and mediation between citizens and government it is most certainly unchangeable, and an investigation of what impact ICT could have on it is certainly more constructive than any speculation on the establishment of direct internet democracy. As Raab and Bellamy put it

> 'democratic institutions find it easier and less threatening to innovate- and particularly to embed innovation into their day to day routines- in ways that are commensurate with existing communication paradigms, established structure of political control and well established organizational roles' (2004 :21)

It is more sensible to forecast that the internet will impact existing components of the social and political system, rather than imagine the new medium as an element able to establish a different model of democracy. According with Brandenburg 'the technology will of itself not alter the nature of the established Eurocentric and non-participatory model of representative democracy' (Brandenburg, 2003).

Therefore, this project will investigate what type of impact the internet has had and is having on the main political entrepreneurs in modern representative democracy: political parties. If parties represent the linkage between people and government, it is crucial to understand the nature of

such a relationship in the age of digitalized information and communication. Political parties are vehicles of representation and, by looking at the way they make use of the internet; we will explore the implications it has for the quality of the democratic process at large. Indeed, we will move now to providing a brief normative explanation of why parties were chosen as object of analysis, leaving the extensive discussion of their heuristics and of their relation to new technologies to chapter 2.

1.3 Representative Democracy and Political Parties

The concept of representative democracy is founded on the idea that citizens express their right to participate in political life through voting in elections of representatives. Nowadays, political representation means both delegation of power and accountability, it constitutes the link between governors and governed. Representation was not originally created for democratic institutions, in fact, during the Middle Age, it was a corporative and oligarchic form of exercising power, and the procedure was not related to any sort of free elective process. With the extension of suffrage, however, and through the ideas of French and American thinkers it became the main characteristic of modern democracy.

The concept of representation is defined in the Oxford dictionary as 'The fact of standing for, or in place of, some other thing or person, esp. with a right or authority to act on their account; substitution of one thing or person for another' thus in the case of political representation, representatives should stand in place of the represented behaving as the represented would do. Given the multiplicity of, often conflicting, opinions and interests existing in any form of human community the formation of divisions and partitions is inevitable. Nevertheless, the mechanism of electing representatives, in order for societies to function, has to be performed through entities which aggregate interests,

> 'as a matter of fact, if elections were truly a selection- between and of individual names rather than political group names- representation would

vanish because each candidate would run for him or herself alone and in fact become a party of his or her own interest' (Urbinati, 2008: 39)

Political representation thus is reached by mean of elections, where not only individuals, but mainly groups compete in order to govern. Political representation in contemporary mass democracy takes place through political parties (Dalton, 1985: 267); they make representation possible. The process of taking part in electoral competition is indeed a very distinctive feature which is seen by Sartori as defining characteristic of a political party, which he characterize as a group that 'presents at elections, and is capable of placing, through elections, candidates for public office' (Sartori, 1987: 64). Therefore, the achievement of democracy depends upon the capacity of achieving electoral representation performed by political parties, or as Hyland phrase it 'the efficiency of electoral representation itself seems to require those organisations that have become central to the political life of democracies, namely, political parties'(Hyland, 1995:247).

Parties provide the structure and organization that make representation a feasible process. One may argue that, in modern democracies, there is a plurality of groups such as trade unions, professional associations, religious organisations, sport groups and social movements which can be representative of citizens as much as parties are; however they do not embody political representation as parties do. Parties compete for power, they ultimately 'seek control of the governing apparatus' (Downs, 1957:24). Where the aforementioned groups aim to influence the government, political parties aim to *be* the government. There are no examples of contemporary democracy functioning without political parties; that's the reason why any form of change in democracy, with respect to the quantitative as well as the qualitative dimensions, regards, to some extent, the life and activities of political parties. Parties are at the core of any modern democracy, and evaluating the quality of democracy of a given society needs to be done by looking at its institutional and political system and ultimately at its party system.

This project endeavours to explain a phenomenon which has been thought as able to modify democracy, or to make democracy more

democratic, and our contribution to answering the questions of whether or not the internet is a greater equalizer for the political process is to be given by looking at parties. Indeed, the empirical investigation of political parties allows for the measurement and quantification of parameters which will indicate the trend and will permit us to formulate hypotheses and evaluative theories. This dissertation deals mainly with empiric and measurable issues but some levels of elaboration and speculation will be present in order to answer enquiries and more importantly to pose new questions. Dealing with democracy, its definition and its meaning is a problematic process which can be simplified by the analysis of empirical facts. Indeed, the discussion of whether or not the internet can perform and deliver as a democratizing agent will be faced only after having exposed the empirical component of the study. Having clarified that parties will be the main object of investigation of this project and that they will be the lenses through which the democratic potential of the internet will be evaluated here; the next step is to introduce the study, outline the research design and specify the original contribution that this thesis brings to the literature.

1.4 Organization of the enquiry

In framing the analysis performed here, we started from the broad implications that the internet may have for the democratic process, but the inquiry will deal with an overarching research question – that of how do parties use the internet – and with a number of specific research questions, posed in each research chapter. In doing so, we seek to outline some of the important implications that technological advancements have for democracy. However, we think that no single research project can provide an ultimate answer for such an important question. Our choice of facing a number of very specific –and even limited- research questions is based on the assumption that contributions to such an important question can only be brought by empirical evaluation of real word phenomena.

This project seeks to make an original contribution to the literature on

political parties, electoral campaigns and democratic theory. With respect to democratic theory's implications, we seek firstly to identify whether factual evidence supports the normative claim that the internet could enhance democratic participation, favour dialogue and ultimately produce better informed political decisions. We also intend to relate our findings to the literature on the political impact of the internet and on democracy at large. With regard to the contribution we seek to bring to the literature on political parties, this study will attempt to clarify how the internet affects parties' communication strategies and practices and finally, with regard to electoral campaigns, we will explore what factors facilitate cyber-campaign and how parties' websites change in the run up to an election.

This thesis will have a tripartite structure:

Part I provides a necessary framework for the study, containing a literature review, some considerations on the significance of the topic and the necessary methodological specification. In this first section the objects of the study, its methods and goals are clarified.

Part II deals with empirical investigation, presents findings and finally debates their implications on how parties use their websites at peacetime[ii]. It explores the possibility that different types of party might use the internet in different ways. The unit of analysis here are a number of European political parties, more specifically a sample of thirty-three parties from four European countries, namely Ireland, Italy, the United Kingdom and Spain. An important conceptual step we take in this section regards internal party democracy. Estimating levels of internal party democracy will be done by looking at party organizations and how power is structured within parties. We will also consider the impact of ideological legacy and the availability of resources. The choice of the sample will be better explored in the methodology section; here it is enough to explain that this project studies four representative democracies. All the countries in the sample score the maximum in terms of level of democracy (Freedom House Index)[iii] and they all have experienced high levels of internet diffusion in the past decade. Political parties' websites are the dependent variable and their level of variation is thought to be dependent upon different forms of party characteristics: levels of internal

party democracy, ideological position on the left/right scale and party's resources. The study will provide a better understanding of what sort of implications, if any, the internet has had and is having for such crucial agents as political parties. Only finding high levels of participatory and engaging online opportunities could suggest that the internet actually performs a role in making democracy more engaging and more plural. However, previous empirical researches suggest that, by and large, this is not the case; therefore in the first place we investigate whether we can find consistent evidence of such a trend and subsequently we will seek to identify whether there are patterns of differences among parties and what could explain them. The research performed in Part II will be substantially different from previous studies primarily because it represents the sole example of comparative study of political parties online in peacetime to date. The peacetime setting will guide our journey into explaining differences and in making a contribution to the equalization versus normalization debate.

In contrast to the peacetime setup of part II, part III will outline how a better knowledge of cyber campaigning necessarily leads to a greater understanding of campaigning at large. It will concentrate on the Irish scenario, using data from parties' websites as well as data on candidates campaigning online, providing snapshot of cyber campaigning. The study will take the form of a case study of the Irish general election 2007. This component of the dissertation will present descriptive as well as inferential evidence on how campaigns are run online.

Finally, a set of conclusions will be drawn, the findings of part II and III will be harmonized and the contribution of the study summarized. In some more details, the inquiry will be organized as follows:

Chapter 2 will review previous literature on the impact of the internet on democracy in general and with regard to political actors in particular. It will explore and define the core elements under investigation: the internet and political parties. Firstly, the political dimension of the internet will be highlighted and literature on the democratic potential of the internet will be reviewed. Second, the focus will move to the definition and description of political parties, which are fundamental units of analysis of the study. The

overarching research question will be posed and a review of the relevant literature will be presented. Third, this chapter will indicate the sort of scholarly contribution it will bring to the literature on cyber parties. Finally, the implications and consequences of possible findings will be considered.

Chapter 3 will elucidate the methodological approach used in this study. Firstly, the choice of the cross national analysis for our study of the impact of party characteristics on parties' online behaviour will be explained and the political systems under analysis will be presented. Countries under analysis will be Ireland, the UK, Italy and Spain. The selection criteria will be exposed together with data availability and language constraints. The sample will provide some sort of homogeneity in terms of stability of institutions and political systems (all well established western European democracies) as well as in terms of diffusion of the internet usage. Having explored the advantages that such a sample offers, we will proceed by pointing out that the sample size will justify the use of econometric techniques in order to test the main hypotheses and establish consistent evidence. Second, the focus on one country with regard to cyber campaigning will be explained, and the choice of focusing on the 2007 Irish general election will be justified. Reasons that make Ireland a good research environment for such a study will be provided (availability of material, sample size, recent election, and originality of candidates' survey data). Finally the selected methods of analysis employed to address the research questions will be explained. Overall this chapter will outline methods and data, informing on the reasons why the selected units and techniques have been selected.

The *first part* of this inquiry, concerned with research design of the study, will be then concluded. The *second part* will face the question of how the internet is used by political parties and what sort of implications we should evince from observed patterns in peacetime.

Chapter 4 will represent an examination of parties as organizations and the impact that a number of factors might have on the parties' online presence. Here the main hypotheses will be outlined and tested with the support of the methodological instruments previously described. The theory will be specified and the research question will be addressed in a falsifiable

fashion. To date, the investigation of political parties has mainly provided descriptive findings; whereas this chapter will outline and test an explanatory model aiming to account for inter party variation in online behaviour. Here the concepts of decentralization/centralization of power and internal party democracy will be discussed; differences and similarities between party organizational settings, ideological position and relative importance, will be underlined with regard to inter-systems and intra-system variation. Subsequently, the empirical analysis will take place and its findings will be discussed and evaluated. As such chapter 4 will represent a systematic analysis of empirical evidence, producing replicable results.

Chapter 5 will be a short trip in what is considered to be the next generation of online dynamics. It will look at Web 2.0 applications and it will evaluate what implication Web 2.0 may have for political parties by using data from the aforementioned sample. The chapter will provide some data on the phenomenon and it will look at the relevance of Web 2.0 applications for political parties in the near future.

The *third part* of the study, as opposed to the second that looks at parties in peacetime, will regard parties during electoral campaign, which will be explored through a case study.

Chapter 6 will look at Irish political parties' cyber-campaigns for the 2007 general election. On the theory side, electoral campaigns will be explored especially with regard to the latest development in terms of campaigning styles. The Irish political system will be briefly introduced and the impact of new media in contributing to the electoral campaign will be tested. Data on the development of cyber campaigning will be presented and compared over time as well as among parties. This chapter will focus on parties as electoral machines and will present cross party comparisons. The extent to which campaigning is affected by new technologies will be discussed on the basis of the obtained evidence and comparisons with previous studies will be produced.

If chapter 6 will end with the formulation of descriptive inferences about cyber campaigning, chapter 7 will add causal inferences and evidence from a quantitative analysis of candidates' cyber-campaigns. Indeed chapter 7

will contribute to the debate on campaigning styles by focusing on the candidates' perspective. We seek to understand the reasons that induce candidates to campaign online. In so doing we will explore several research hypotheses and we will put forward a new explanation. Data on the actual use candidates made of the internet (via websites, weblogs, direct mailing and so on) and on the importance they attribute to cyber campaign will enrich the debate on the impact of new technology on politics. The combination of data on cyber campaigns from the party perspective with candidates' opinions will produce a more comprehensible picture of the role new media has acquired in electoral campaigns.

Chapter 8 will summarize the main conclusions reached in this research. The chapter will sum up the main findings with regard to cyber campaigning in the third part of the dissertation and it will combine them with what emerged in part II. It will recapitulate the contribution brought by this research to the political science literature. It will then sum up what sort of lacunae this thesis has succeeded in filling. Ultimately, the final chapter will indicate new routes for further research.

---

iActually there are some exceptions to the universal and equal distribution of political rights 'All democratic systems, it can be argued, have operated with some exclusion principle that specifies who should be included/excluded from the franchise; modern-day Western democracies exclude non-nationals, children, the certified insane, for example.' (Hyland, 1995).

ii The expression 'peacetime' was firstly used by Gibson and Ward (2000c: 122) from whom it is borrowed here. There the authors use it to define the period of time following the election. Elsewhere it is use to indicate periods of the electoral cycle others that the election period (Ward et al. 2003: 24.) and so we use it here.

iiiIt might seem obvious that countries in the European Union have maximum levels of democracy and freedom, but actually Romania and Bulgaria do not meet those standards (House, 2007).

The Theoretical Framework

This chapter is an introduction to the fundamental elements discussed in this dissertation: the internet, political parties and electoral campaigns. A brief history of the internet will be provided, together with data on its rapidly growing diffusion; its impact on politics at large will then be evaluated. Firstly, we will pay some attention to the definition and discussion of political parties, as they represent the fundamental units of analysis in this study. In doing this, we will focus on two components that will be of particular interest in this research: party online activity in peacetime and electoral campaigns. We will then look at the political science literature on political parties online (parties in cyberspace) and cyber-campaign at large; finally we will clarify the contribution this study will bring to the field. In the concluding section, the implications and consequences of possible findings will be considered. This chapter will serve as an introductory platform for chapter 3 the methodological specifications will be discussed.

Intro

In 1984 William Gibson coined the neologism cyberspace in a novel, Neuromancer (Gibson, 1984: 11), which became then a milestone of the cyberpunk culture. The word cyberspace comes actually from the Greek word κυβερνητική meaning the craft of piloting. Nowadays, cybernetics is the scientific study of how machines and electronic devices can simulate a human brain functions; more strictly it is the study of control mechanisms in complex dynamic systems. In very recent times, it has become a synonym for the Internet; the Cambridge dictionary defines cyberspace as 'the Internet considered as an imaginary area without limits where you can meet people and discover information about any subject'. Such a term maintains, to some extent, a mythical connotation originating from the multiple romantic and naive ideas associated with the Internet. The possibility of overcoming

traditional space and time constraints and the particularly inexpensive maintenance and use of the internet contributed to build its mythical dimension. The sociologist Vincent Mosco identifies three forms of myth related to the idea of cyberspace: the end of history, the end of geography, and the end of politics (Mosco, 2004)

This study does not intend to discuss philosophical interpretations of cyberspace; it rather deals with empirical phenomena relevant to the political world, which happen to take place in cyberspace. In order to do so, the idea of cyberspace needs to be elucidated and the expectations and beliefs that surround this concept must be identified.

Mosco and Foster claim that growth in Computer Mediated Communication diffusion (CMC) would have brought 'the arrival of a new age of abundance freed from history's scarcities' (end of history), it would have eliminated spatial constraint (end of geography) and it would have transformed the hierarchical structure of power (end of politics) (2001). The belief that CMC, especially in the form of the internet, might regenerate democratic practices and bring about a democratic renaissance has been envisaged by many (Barber, 1984; Negroponte, 1995; Morris, 1999; Dahlberg, 2001) CMC has been seen, by some, as an instrument capable of empowering citizens and non institutionalized actors, who, thanks to the internet, would make their voice heard and would engage in regenerated forms of political participation (Norris, 2003). The internet has indeed been seen as the ideal medium to fight political apathy and disengagement, especially among young people. Benjamin Barber (1984) was probably the precursor of those cyber optimistic views, envisaging in tele-communication the channels and instruments of democratic growth.

In the next section we will briefly go through the history of the internet, we will review its political implications and then move on to the impact that these implications may have on political actors.

Chapter II

2.1 The internet

There has been a widespread diffusion of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), primarily characterized by personal computer-based communication and their network connection: the internet has deeply changed modern societies in the past twenty years.

Before assessing what sort of implications new technology may have for the political world, we should devote a few words to how such technologies developed and how they have become inescapable for the functioning of, at least, western societies. Therefore, we will produce a brief overview of the history of the internet, sympathising with Chadwick's claim that 'the Net's origins have attained almost mythical status in recent times [...] different stories emphasize different individuals, institutions and technologies. It would be impossible to do justice to the story's full complexity' (Chadwick, 2006: 28). Despite Al Gore claiming paternity of the internet, its real history is quite long and populated by a number of protagonists.

The very first idea of what we call the internet of today was exposed by the computer scientist J.C.R. Licklider in 1962 at an MIT lecture, titled 'Galactic Network'. He envisaged a network of computers able to keep citizens connected and informed; the idea of computers networking and that of rapid transmission of data was further developed with the creation of the research programs DARPA (1962) and subsequently with ARPANET (1969) at the U.S. Department of Defence. Towards the end of the 1960s a mixture of security agencies and university based programs generated networks of computers linking to one other through Interface Message Protocols (IMPs). By 1972 the possibility of communication through computers, between 40 machines, was demonstrated to the public at the International Computer Communication Conference (ICCC) at Washington DC; electronic mail dates back to the same year (Leiner, Cerf et al., 1999) when Ray Tomlison developed the first email program. Margolis and Resnick regard this moment as fundamental in the development of the internet, as at the ICCC it was clear for the first time that 'all users began to use network to send electronic mail rather than to access

scientific resources on distant computer. Communication had taken precedence over computation' (2000: 32). Thus, the internet was born long ago, even though for long time its applications were conceived more in terms of national security than mass communication (Lusoli, 2004). Indeed, ARPANET was designed during the cold war era as a defensive strategic instrument in case of attack.

The basic idea was straightforward: storing information on a network could have efficiently protected data in case of intrusion or destruction of one or more physical machines (Bomse, 2000). However, the growing popularity of the system among researchers encouraged its implementation beyond the defence purposes. In the Seventies, not only did the small-scale diffusion of personal computers (Chadwick, 2006: 43) favour a multiplicity of experiments, but it also contributed to creating a networking culture. In January 1983, ARPANET adopted the Domain Name System (DNS) - .org .net .com - the platform for addresses allocation that represented a crucial turning point for the consequent mass diffusion of the net. The next step of the internet 's evolution was the extension of its usage from research centres and academic circles to ordinary people, mediated by large corporations (Margolis and Resnick, 2000: 38). In 1989 Tim Berners-Lee a researcher at CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire) completed the design of the WWW (World Wide Web), a system of global communication, by transforming data into text, images and sound: 'he envision the WWW as a shared information space -- a web of hypertext documents -- within which people communicate with each other and with computers' (Moschovitis, Poole et al., 1999). In the mid 1990s, the internet exploded; the commercialization of ICT began during the late 1980s but global diffusion and better consciousness of its possibilities among users arrived only a few years later, when the internet changed from being 'a research oriented vehicle dominated by technocrats to a commercially oriented one dominated by business' (Margolis and Resnick, 2000). Nowadays the internet diffusion has reached extraordinarily high levels; table 1.1 below indicates the status of the internet diffusion by regions in 2008.

Chapter II

Table 2.1 Internet diffusion in 2008, by region

	Population (2008 Est.)	Internet Users Dec. 31, 2000	Internet Users Latest Data	Penetration % of population	Users Growth 2000-2008
Africa	975,330,899	4,514,400	54,171,500	5.6 %	1,100.0 %
Asia	3,780,819,792	114,304,000	657,170,816	17.4 %	474.9 %
Europe	803,903,540	105,096,093	393,373,398	48.9 %	274.3 %
Middle East	196,767,614	3,284,800	45,861,346	23.3 %	1,296.2 %
North America	337,572,949	108,096,800	251,290,489	74.4 %	132.5 %
Latin America	581,249,892	18,068,919	173,619,140	29.9 %	860.9 %
Oceania/ Australia	34,384,384	7,620,480	20,783,419	60.4 %	172.7 %

Source: Internet worlds stats, usage and population statistics.

According to these figures, three out of four Americans use the internet, so do more than half of the Australian population, and half of the European one. The gap with other regions of the world is still very large and the international *digital divide[i]* is enormous. However, the usage growth in the past seven years demonstrates that internet diffusion is a large scale phenomenon all over the world, and one which seems to keep growing.

Since the internet become more and more of a mass medium by facilitating business, communication and information diffusion, its political implications have emerged and they have been debated by theorists, politicians, journalists and political science scholars. Undeniably, the internet has had a strong impact on the political sphere with regard to a number of issues. On one hand, the possibility of cutting costs in terms of resources and time has pushed governments towards adopting instruments of e-government in order to provide and deliver better services to citizens, by cutting waiting times and expenses in general. On the other hand, higher expectations for the establishment of a richer democracy, both qualitatively and quantitatively,

have accompanied the internet's mass diffusion. The internet has indeed acquired a political relevance as politics have acquired a relevant position on the internet.

2.2. New Technologies and political discourse

Even though the vast majority of activities performed online do not have to do with either participation or political information, the political implications of the internet are widely recognized not only by intellectuals, professional politicians and academics but also by citizens who perform a number of political activities online(Van de Donk, 2004). Our contribution, as specified in the previous chapter, will indeed contain an attempt to estimate the internet's democratic potential within the frame of modern representative democracy.

The participatory tradition coming from the Social Contract (Rousseau, 1968[1762]) through J.S. Mill, Milbrath (1965) and Carol Pateman (1970) found in the possibilities offered by the new technologies a revitalizing resource, capable of generating so-called electronic democracy or e-democracy. Thus, technology would offer a concrete possibility of creating a virtual public sphere, as envisaged in Habermas's discourse (1987). Theorists of strong democracy envisaged in technology part of the answer for the actual implementation of a more participatory democracy (Barber, 1984). A better informed and more participatory society is what many theorists of strong democracy had in mind; with the internet mass diffusion myths such as the 'open society' and the 'public sphere' Pateman (1970) McPhearson (1977); Habermas (1987) are now illuminated by the new technological development. The internet rapidly becomes a platonic form of democratic advancement to some who see it as being able to 'revitalize citizen-based democracy' (Rheingold, 1993: XXIX). As Gibson puts it 'speculation on the internet's democratic potential is based on the understanding of its inherent and unique properties as a medium of communication' (Gibson, 2001: 562); a medium,

able to reach an extraordinary large audience and to absorb any reaction of such an audience, by generating a process of exponential interaction.

Some scholars note how the rise of e-democracy, instruments and experiments has intensified the 'cleavage' between representative democracy vs. participatory democracy in the literature (Coleman, 1999; Hague and Loader, 1999). Indeed, a considerable number of authors envisaged the possibility of overcoming democratic deficits by enhancing citizens participation with the support of new technological devices (Barber, 1984; Etzioni, 1995; Grossman, 1995; Browning, 2001). However, conceptualizing the challenges brought about by new technologies merely in terms of empowerment of participatory democracy vs. representative democracy does not take into account the multidimensionality of politics in cyberspace. Moreover, any modern democracy is necessarily a representative democracy; the relevance of pushing any further arguments in favour of a virtual agorà is fictional rather than actual. Nixon and Johansson (1999) suggest that discussing how technology can be used within representative democracy is more constructive than speculation on the hypothetical marriage between digital and direct democracy. As Hacker and Van Dijk put it, digital democracy is

'a collection of attempts to practise democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions using ICT (Information Communication Technology) or CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) instead, as an addition, not a replacement, for traditional analogue political practice'(Hacker and Van Dijk, 2001: 1).

The contribution that the internet might bring to the democratic process can be categorized into three dimensions: information, discussion and participation (Vedel, 2006). The first regards the capacity of publishing vast amounts of information which can be instantly accessed by users, being at the disposal of a substantially large number of citizens. The second regards the promotion and exchange of free individual expression of opinions and the third the capacity to perform political acts on the web; alongside these three elements we will look at the activities of political parties in cyberspace.

Vedel identifies three phases of electronic democracy in the 20th century: the first one, in the fifties, when computers were seen as

instruments capable of rationalizing the political process by providing services and increasing diffusion of information. The second phase, teledemocracy, aimed at the modernization of representative democracy with the technical support of cable TV networks. Even before the mass diffusion of the internet Barber argued that, with support of technological devices, citizens could be better informed and could have immediate access to the decision making process. The third phase, cyber-democracy, started in the nineties with the mass diffusion of the internet (2006). It was characterized by widespread awareness of its democratic potential:

> 'what the Counterculture promised, cyberspace could deliver. Intra-Net politics was humanistic, egalitarian and voluntary in contrast to the corrupt politics of organised special interests of the real world. Cyberspace created possibilities for liberation that even the most radical counter-cultural theorists never imagined' (Margolis, 2007: 5)

This third phase, or, as Chadwick puts it, 'the 1990s e-democracy paradigm' (2009: 15) was mainly concerned with the actual research into and implementation of online deliberative arenas. However, much of the early days' enthusiasm came to an end. The 21st century brought new awareness of the limitations of the internet and a wave of scepticism, motivated by the lack of actual mobilizing power of the internet. The growing consciousness that the internet is mainly favouring participation of those who are already mobilized (Norris, 2001; Norris and Curtice, 2008) and of those who have skills and resources to fully enjoy the advantages of the web, favoured the emergence of rather pessimistic attitudes. Some of the medium's downsides were considered for the first time: the possibility for anonymity could create fictional rather than actual characters, making online participation ephemeral. Secondly, searching for information on the web is completely up to the user so that it may favour the pursuit of specific information rather than an overview of the world. This may intensify narrowing interests rather than opening users up to new ones; so that the narrowcasting function recognized as a peculiar characteristic of the internet, has its own dangers. Moreover the quality of information available online is questionable, indeed some of this may be of doubtful accuracy or may even be deliberate misinformation. Therefore, nowadays, scholars have somewhat cooled down the enthusiasm

from the 1990s, with the advent of 'balanced and empirically driven approaches of the post-dotcom era' (Chadwick, 2009: 12). On one hand, much of the zest for the capabilities of the medium has been restrained by the realization that no substantial amelioration to democracy has been actually produced thanks to the technology *per se*, and that cyberspace has not delivered the expected democratic surplus value. Moreover, levels of internet usage for political engagement - both in terms of information and actual participation - have not gone up dramatically and such a phenomenon only involves a very minor portion of the population (Schifferes, 2007). However, even though the current scenario does not provide much room for an optimistic approach towards ICTs reinvigorating potential for democratic engagement, the rise of Web 2.0 technologies opens up new challenges and may somewhat revive the expectations. If, as O'Reily claims, web 2.0 creates an 'architecture of participation' (2005), we should definitely rethink the extent to which new technologies may revitalize politics.

This project won't deal with the impact of technology on democracy as a system; rather it will focus on specific actors of the democratic process: political parties and their candidates. We will engage in the debate on whether technology might enrich the quality and quantity of democracy only *a posteriori*, once empirical evidence, pointing towards one, or the other scenario has been found. As already pointed out, the impact of new media has had and still has consequences for a number of elements and actors within the democratic system. Government as well as private citizens, lobby groups and political parties have all adopted new technologies and they have all also adapted to them. This project will deal specifically with the impact of new technologies on political parties. The focus on political parties has been selected for a number of reasons that will be elucidated in the following section.

2.3 Political parties

Political parties have been portrayed as a essential component of representative democracy (Duverger, 1954; Downs, 1957; Aldrich, 1995; Sartori, 2005). From the moment Alexis De Tocqueville described them as fundamental institutions in a democratic civil society, the role of political parties has been debated but hardly denied. Even democratic theorists calling for 'strong' democracy (Barber, 1984) 'participatory' democracy (Pateman, 1970), or even 'direct democracy' recognize the function of political parties as a necessary medium for this goal. Those who deny the role of parties also deny democracy and promote other forms of governance (Burnheim, 1989). Parties represent the linkage between citizens and governments and most theorists agree that no modern democracy could work without parties; 'modern democracy is unthinkable, save in terms of political parties' (Schattschneider, 1942: 1). However, this has not always been the case, the word party itself came into use as synonymous with the derogatory term 'faction' (Sartori, 2005). For instance, Rousseau (1968[1762]) saw in parties a deeply negative element for democracy, representing heterogeneity rather than homogeneity and uniformity, and as such an impediment to the manifestation of the general will. Edmund Burke was one of the first theorists arguing in favour of political parties (1990 [1770]) and gradually, during the course of the past three centuries, the negative connotation related to the very word party has been dropped. Ever since party based politics was invented in the 19th century (Scarrow, 2006), no democratic political system has operated without parties and competition among parties. The idea of single party, as in authoritarian regimes, represents a contradiction in terms, and parties themselves are expression of divisions in the political arena (Panebianco, 1988).

Therefore, parties represent one of the basic objects of study for political scientists, and they still offer challenging tasks to them: the first one regards the very basic definition of party. Scholars have elaborated a number of definitions, from minimalist ones to extensively articulated ones. On the minimalist side, Sartori defines party as 'any political group identified by an

official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office' (Sartori, 2005: 57). Such a definition merely points out one of the main characteristics of political parties: electoral competition; yet political parties are also complex machines internally organized and structured in a multifaceted way, involving a hierarchy of leadership, members, officers, candidates and public representatives (Katz and Mair, 1994). Even though political scientists have extensively studied and debated the nature and functioning of political parties, scholars still disagree on what motivates their existence. The debate on whether parties exist in order to win elections (Downs, 1957) or for totally different reasons (White, 2006) goes beyond the aim of this piece of research, but findings on any component of political parties enable a better understanding of parties at large. In particular, this project aims to contribute to the understanding of how political parties communicate with the external world and how they employ new information technology to do so.

Parties are an obvious choice for a study which aims to deal with the impact of ICTs on the political sphere; political parties are evolving institutions which adapt to changes in society, but they also contribute to the shaping of society itself. Political parties are possibly the most powerful type of political entrepreneurs; they (a) structure the political word, (b) recruit and socialize the political elite, (c) provide linkage between ruled and rulers and (d) aggregate interest (Gallagher, Laver et al., 2005: 272) so that the impact new technology may have on parties necessarily reflects on society at large. Since Michel's *Political Parties*, scholars (Duverger, 1954; Epstein, 1980; Panebianco, 1988; Katz and Mair, 1992; 1995) have identified models of party organization and patterns of adaptation and change. Epstein claims that the circumstances responsible for the development of political parties have been: the enlargement of the suffrage, changing social structure, the relationships between legislative and executive, the degree of federalism and what he calls electoral arrangements (1980). Panebianco adds to those elements changes in the technological environment. The systematic identification of patterns of changes and transformation within political parties is not one of the goals of this project, but there is little doubt about the evolution of political parties in

the past sixty years, and we will contribute to assessing the dimension of change by outlining what role technology is playing in it.

Scholars have indicated different ideal types of parties, especially by looking at their organizational structure, ranging over: the cadre party, the Duvergerian mass party (1954), strongly ideologically oriented and deeply dependent on its members; the electoral party (Epstein, 1980) the 'catch all party' (Kirchheimer, 1966), the electoral professional party (Panebianco, 1988); the cartel party (Katz and Mair, 1995), up to the rather unrealistic model of the cyber party (Margetts, 2006). The identification of different party types responds, to some extent, to changes in terms of timeline, for instance the cadre party is historically antecedent to the mass party, whose evolution is embodied in the catch all party. However, such a clear demarcation is not always possible and it often does not represent a good enough conceptualization. For instance, Blyth and Katz (2005) indicate a series of conditions a party system needs to meet in order for such a system to be considered a cartelized one. According to those criteria not every European system could be correctly described as cartelized and even where all those conditions are met, differences in terms of party organization still exist, so that, attaching labels is not always a straightforward task. Indeed as Katz and Mair themselves claim

> 'contemporary parties are not necessarily wholly cartel parties any more than parties of a previous generation were wholly elite parties or wholly mass parties, or wholly catch-all parties. Rather all of these models, represent heuristically convenient polar types, to which individual parties may approximate more or less closely at any given time.' (1995: 19).

Whether or not we agree with Panebianco's claim that 'a party's organizational characteristics depend more upon its history i.e. on how organization originated and consolidated, than upon other factors'(1988: 50) we can empirically explore organizational characteristics and find differences and peculiarities. Only the observation and subsequent analysis of a party organization's elements, can expose differences which still exist among parties operating in the same system and at the same time (Janda, 1980; Katz and Mair, 1992).

Indeed, one of our primary research goals is to highlight, and possibly explain, patterns of difference between parties, in relation to the rise of new communication technologies. Party organization, together with electoral goals and ideological legacy represent peculiar characteristics of each party and we will explore the role of these factors in structuring online behaviour in chapter 4, and to a smaller extent in chapter 5.

2.3.1 Parties and political communication

Changes in the media environment are indeed both causes and effects of parties' changes over time. As Semetko puts it, 'the evolving media landscape presents both opportunities and threats to political parties' (2006: 515) and we will seek an empirical understanding of how parties relate to a medium such as the internet. Our intention here is not only to evaluate how parties make use of new technologies but also to understand the implications of such a process.

Data on party membership in the past thirty years show a clear the decrease is taking place throughout Europe (Mair and Van Biezen, 2001), together with the falling levels of partisan attachment (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). If we combine those with a less dramatic but still clear decrease in levels of electoral turnout in several European countries (IDEA, 2004), we can conclude that the last two decades have been questioning much of the core elements and functions of political parties. The process of abandoning the class gardèe in favour of a message directed to the electorate at large, typical of catch all parties as opposed to mass parties, has placed strong emphasis on political communication. Moreover the relations between social and media change are 'complex and reciprocal' (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999: 210). Indeed, the revolution in information and communication technologies has been expected to have implications and influence over political parties with regard to both their electoral message and their internal structures. While a number of elements point to the fact that, with regard to the internal side of party activity, 'the internet is unlikely to revolutionise

party democracy' (Gibson and Ward, 1999: 25) the nature of the online message and activity, the extent to which they vary from party to party and their implications remain open to research and debate.

Therefore, we focus on the impact of the internet on political parties by looking at parties' websites, and by concentrating on both the characteristics of parties and the internet. Norris calls the internet the medium of choice *par excellence* (2004: 4). However, describing the internet in terms of choice is a problematic operation; such a portrayal does not truly capture the characteristics that the internet has acquired in the past years. If the choice is a free one for the user, agents like political parties cannot escape from using the internet, and not having a website is not an option anymore. The reason why parties must have their own websites has been described as a 'me too' effect (Selnow, 1998) which does not reflect a meditated choice, rather a necessity in order to be competitive and up to date. Nevertheless, what parties can and actually do with their websites is neither predefined nor standardized. Indeed, we seek to observe, estimate and evaluate patterns of differences among political parties online. The internet has often been regarded as an instrument capable of revitalizing party based politics and even though we won't specifically address such a question here, we believe that our findings can contribute to this debate. The claim that 'parties have been adapting, by choice or necessity, to the new information and communication environment' (Norris, 2001: 148) lies at very basis of this research project and before specifying what this project intends to investigate and what sort of contribution it aims to bring to the literature, we should summarize some of the findings existing on political parties online.

2.4 Political parties in cyberspace

Parties are not the only entities populating cyberspace, and the study of cyber parties has often been combined with analyses of pressure and protest groups on the web. Low access costs represent an incentive for resource poor actors which are usually disadvantaged in attempts to entering

traditional politics, and 'the net is accelerating the process of issue group formation and action' (Bimber, 1998b: 2). Such an argument emphasizes the democratic potential of the internet and opened up a debate on whether traditional political actors like parties might be competing with unconventional actors on the web (Van de Donk, 2004). However, empirical research has shown that parties actually perform better than any other political entrepreneur online, being more informative and more open to interaction (Lusoli, Ward et al., 2002). This online prominence, combined with a number of considerations on the specific nature of parties, as explained in chapter I, motivate our choice. Moreover our choice is also intentioned to cover a gap in the literature.

To date, research has mainly focused on parties as a whole trying to identify how they behave online, whereas here inter-party variation will be taken into account. Indeed we will look at levels of interaction as one of the dependent variables, and we will particularly focus on variation among parties, seeking to explore and explain this variation with the support of econometric techniques. We argue that the internet does not change the nature of parties; rather the nature of parties contributes to explain the way the internet is used. We also reckon that on theoretical and empirical grounds, a number of factors contribute to the explanation of parties' online appearance. This study seeks to provide a theoretical framework which anchors itself in an empirical analysis of parties' activity on the web. Specifically, it will fill a gap in the literature, which so far has not extensively empirically studied the existence of differing inter-party patterns of online behaviour.

2.4.1 Some research evidence on parties on the web

The corpus of literature based on empirical studies is still relatively small and much needs to be done especially with regard to the elaboration of solid empirical analysis of cyber parties. Also, it has been argued that the studies of cyber parties produced so far merely draw *post hoc* conclusions,

and that the lack of theoretical framework, specifically on cyber parties, represents a major problem for the development of the field (Gibson and Rommele, 2003a: 82).

A number of forerunner studies in the US (Margolis, Resnick et al., 1996; D'Alessio, 1997) and in the UK (Gibson and Ward, 1998; 1999) attempted an evaluation of both parties' website status and the substantive impact of the internet on electoral competition. With regard to the study of cyber-campaigning, the investigation of online parties was initiated by American scholars. Given the widespread diffusion of the internet in the US and the percentage of people using the net in order to get political information, estimated at 31% of the American population (Pew Internet and America Life Project, 2006), it is not surprising that American scholars were interested in the phenomenon well before anybody else. The first systematic study of political parties on the web is also US based: *Politics as usual* assessed the status of American parties online at the turn of the millennium. It formulated the theory according to which cyber politics do not differ at all from traditional politics, and that the internet *per se* does not bring about any real change: 'those who have been powerful in the past - the established organizations, the wealthy and the privileged - are moving into cyberspace and taking their advantages with them' (Margolis and Resnick, 2000: 28). Indeed, to Margolis and Resnick, cyber politics are nothing more than *politics as usual*. Such a claim has also been then elaborated and rephrased as the *'normalization thesis',* putting forward the idea that the political scenario online will start looking more and more like the political scenario offline, with dominant actors establishing their prominence also in the online world. Such a pessimistic view was balanced by those who thought that 'the implications of internet based mobilization are of broad practical and normative importance in politics, and they also are of particular interest in the nascent field of Internet studies' (Bimber, 1998a: 391).

Chapter II

Normalization versus equalization

A considerable amount of studies (Margolis et al, 1996; Gibson, Margolis et al 2003, Gibson Newell et al 2000; Strandberg 2008, to cite a few) focused on the balance between small and large parties online. The internet has been regarded as the medium though which resource-poor actors could somehow fill the gap that separates then from their richer counterparts and get their message out without suffering from their lack of means. Such a scenario has been labelled as *equalization*: the mechanism that empowers resource-poor actors and equalizes their communicative potential to the level of better resourced actors. Normalization, as said would rather depict a scenario where differences in terms of resources continue to matter in cyberspace as in the real world.

The idea that the internet could be a levelling element potentially applies to a number of grounds of competitions and to a large range of resource-poor actors; however the investigation of whether or not such a dynamic took place, has been somewhat limited to the study of parties online. Margolis and Resnick's pioneer work (2000) looked at parties and movement, but the European literature seems to focus almost exclusively on political parties. As such, this piece of work follows such a trend and engages with the investigation of equalization versus normalization on the party ground only.

The debate on whether the internet has really provided an opportunity for poor-resourced actors has been mainly studied in relation to the heuristics of small versus large parties and eventually poorly-resourced became a synonymous of small party. Parties with little or no parliamentary representation have been often regarded as the poor-resourced actors. However, no clear distinction has been drawn and different studies uses different forms of distinction. For instance, one of the first studies dealing with the empirical assessment of the status of online competition in Europe looked at Italian parties in 1999. In such a study Gibson and co-authors (2000) did not provide a clear demarcation between large and small parties, the categorization seemed to respond to a vote winning logic: parties with bigger electoral support were regarded as large parties and parties with slimmer

vote share were considered as smaller parties. However such logic is not applied elsewhere, in the 2003 Anglo American comparison (Gibson et al. 2003), Gibson and co-authors make a distinction on the basis of parliamentary represented actors versus non-parliamentary represented ones. We will deal with our operationalization of smaller versus larger parties in chapters 3 and 4; our logic will respond to electoral support and our differentiation will be based on vote share at the last general election.

The literature presents conflicting evidence between normalized and equalized scenarios. To date, there has been no systematic evaluation of whether methodological differences have contributed to the lack of agreement on the matter. Strandberg (2008) looked at 16 studies realized between 1997 and 2004 on parties' websites, of those 10 depicted a normalized scenario. On top of those we should add Vaccari's study (2008) of the 2006 Italian election presenting a rather normalized scenario; on the other hand, Schweitzer (2005) found limited support for normalization in the German context. Gibson at al. (2008: 26) also found that 'conclusions of a normalization of online politics in terms of major parties dominating the net campaign are not wholly justified'.

Leaving aside methodological considerations on how those findings were reached, we are left with no definitive conclusions on whether normalization or equalization seems to be the prevailing tendency. However, one important distinction between the aforementioned studies on one hand and this dissertation on the other hand needs to be made: the empirical reserach we will present in chapter 4 and 5 substantially differ from previous ones. Indeed, our analysis of parties' websites is designed to look at parties at peacetime as opposed to the aforementioned studies, which are almostly exclusively studies of electoral campaigns.

We therefore envisage our contribution as able to clarify what seems to be the norm (equalization or normalization of cyberspace) when there is no electoral campaign taking place.

Chapter II

The state of the art

The size of the academic community studying the political implications of the internet has experienced a significant growth in the past ten years. Empirical studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s have, first and foremost, identified factors which brought parties online, and have focused on articulating what functions can be, and actually are, accomplished online. The first empirical studies in the field dealt with the heuristics of comparing and quantifying websites' content (Margolis, Resnick et al., 1996; Gibson and Ward, 1998; 1999; 2000b, 2000c). Once some forms of classification were established, most of the empirical literature started dealing with the balance between information and communication provided by parties' websites (Gibson and Ward, 1998; 1999; Newell, 2001; Gibson, Römmele et al., 2003a; 2003b; Norris, 2003; Ward, Gibson et al., 200; Schweitzer, 2005; Schweitzer, 2008; Vaccari, 2008; Vaccari, 2008). The broad picture of the status of parties online depicted in the decade 1997-2007 showed, by and large, that parties' websites, with few exceptions, were mostly designed for dissemination of information (Gibson and Ward, 1999; Newell, 2001; Lusoli, Ward et al., 2002; Norris, 2003; Schweitzer, 2005) with interactive features being consistently less prominent than informative ones. In what is possibly the only longitudinal study of parties' websites, Lusoli et al. find that the prominence of informative features over mobilizing ones is consistent over time (2007). Thais appears to be one of the undisputed findings in the literature to date: parties' websites are by and large disseminating information more than promoting interaction, in Vaccari's words: they are *informative but not engaging* (Vaccari, 2007). The development over time of this field of study also pointed out that on the information provision side an 'increasing uniformity of web pages contents' was observed (Gibson, 2007: 25); showing a tendency towards standardization of design and content, with almost every party presenting a range of information on its views, policy positions, history and organizational settings. Vaccari's claim that

'more than a decade since political parties and candidates began integrating the internet in their communication infrastructure, research on

the role of ICTs in politics and campaigning has reassessed most of the early hypotheses, which claimed that new media would revolutionize politics and democracy' (Vaccari, 2007: 1)

sums up findings to date. As Norris and Curtice put it 'the use of the Internet as a mechanism to develop new participatory forms of interaction with parties and candidates, or to widen the circle of those who are politically active, has failed to meet early optimistic predictions' (2008) therefore it is most likely the Revolution Will Not Be Televised nor it will be taking place online. Moreover the empirical literature, almost ten years after 'Politics as Usual', has failed to falsify the normalization thesis, which appears to be the norm. If from evidence on parties online, we move to the broader picture, the expectation that the internet would have acted as a Deus ex machina, able to make a contribution to better democracy by facilitating mobilization, interaction and bottom up communication between political actors and citizens seems to remain an expectation only. However, in contrast to such a position one may argue that the internet remains capable of intervening in traditional politics, by not only increasing levels of information but also levels of communication, exchanges and participation and even to act as a solution to 'anti-politics' (Hay, Stoker et al., 2008) especially in the light of the emergence of web 2.0 applications in the form of video sharing sites, blogs and social networks sites. Therefore, within a theoretical frame, largely depicting a 'normalized' scenario, we will explore parties' online behaviour, approaching the study of the heuristics of parties in cyberspace from a slightly different angle.

While the literature has focused on outlining differences in online behaviour at the system level, little attention has been paid to inter party variation. However, variation is observable and actually has been observed (Lusoli, 2007) among parties. The investigation of patterns of differences and similarities has remained though something of a marginal concern in the field; the study of parties' websites has mostly provided descriptive findings. This project intends to present the same - at least, highly comparable - descriptive findings but it also explores the possible causes of variation. We put forward a

number of hypotheses and test the impact of systemic elements as well as party characteristics in determining patterns of variation.

Secondly it will assess the status of a number of parties' websites in 'peacetime', when electoral campaigning is not taking place, or if we believe in the notion of a state of permanent campaign, when electoral campaigning is not at the highest level of intensity. Such a choice is motivated by the intention of filling one major gap in the literature, which has produced numerous studies of electoral campaign, but almost no investigation of 'peacetime' (Gibson and Ward, 2009). We seek to shed some light on peacetime status of parties' websites for a number of reasons. Firstly, clarifying the dynamics of online competition when campaigns are not taking place may enhance our capacity of making claims and test hypotheses on campaigns as well. Low mobilization does not mean lack of activity, peacetime dynamics may be static and slow but they still represent a crucial component of parties 'life. Secondly, by unfolding peacetime dynamics we seek to look at forms of variation that may be somewhat hidden by electoral mobilization.

In a rapidly changing communication environment, within the frame of new technologies, we seek to understand which actors are more likely to gain advantages from this process of change and what long term implications this may have for politics at large. Therefore this research will combine the study of inter party competition and electoral dynamics, by looking at party websites in 'peacetime' (chapters 4 and 5) with particular attention dedicated to cross party variance with the study of electoral campaigns (chapters 6 and 7). Indeed, one of the areas dramatically impacted by changes produced in the media environment is campaigning and electioneering, as we are going to see in the next section.

2.4.2 And some research evidence on cyber-campaigning

Studies on cyber campaigning began around the mid 1990s in the United States: if the 1992 campaign was the first presidential race witnessing candidates' online presence, only in 1996 did the online sphere become

relevant in the real word and it begin to attract some academic attention, 'by 2000, use of the Internet had become virtually ubiquitous in Presidential politics, and was spreading rapidly among candidates and local parties' (Gibson, 2004: 98). The phenomenon, in the US, experienced a quick growth in a short period of time and its impact becomes widely patent if we look at figures on online fund-raising: Al Gore raised $ 1.6 million with online donations in 2000, and four years later Kerry got almost ten times more, by fundraising more than $ 10 million online. In 2008 the Obama campaign eclipsed those figures by collection online of almost $ 500 (Vaccari, 2009).

During the second half of the 1990s political science scholars began to dedicate greater attention to online campaigning emphasising the potential the web has, with regard, not only to information dissemination, but also to mobilization and resource generation. According to Whillock the 1994 midterm campaign, even if only with 'sporadic and unsophisticated effort' (1998: 179) marked the debut of the internet in politics. Robert Kloz published in 1997 the first study of candidates web pages, aiming for 'reconciling the divergent claims about internet campaigning' (1997: 428). Rather than reconciling divergent claims he opened up a new subfield of investigation in political science. Soon after, a few pioneering studies of parties and candidates websites (Dahl, 1989; Margolis, Resnick et al., 1996; D'Alessio, 1997) concluded, with the support of quite strong empirical evidence, that online campaigning brings effective electoral gains. On the same effect, which is possibly the most important finding of the past few years, only two other studies engaged with empirical analysis (Gibson and McAllister, 2006; 2008) with both studies pointing to a positive relationship between cyber-campaigning and electoral performance. However, the discussions that accompany these findings indicate that they occur in spite of generally low levels of usage and interest in such sites by the public at large. Moreover, the observed positive effects of cyber-campaigning on electoral performance may not be wholly attributable to the *direct* vote-winning effects of cyber-campaigns, as pointed out by D' Alessio's analysis of the 1996 US House of Representatives election, and subsequently by Gibson and McAllister for both the 2004 and the 2007 Australian federal elections. An alternative proposition

is that there is a degree of peer-pressure at play in political actors deciding to go online; Gibson et al. argue that, for political parties 'even though parties were uncertain of the tangible benefits, it seems the risk of not having a website and giving your opponents edge was a great stimulus to moving online' (Gibson, Ward et al., 2003: 168).

The few previous studies in this area are characterized by something of a disjuncture between their analyses of citizen usage of the internet for political information and their findings regarding the impact that a campaign website makes on candidates' performances at the polls. Specifically, Gibson and McAllister (2006) argue that, though there is a generally expanding usage of the web to procure political information, the usage of party and candidate websites is relatively rare; with only approximately 5% of citizens accessing such sites in the 2004 Australian federal elections, for example. D'Alessio characterizes internet usage as being of a 'news-gathering' rather than a 'decision-making' function, arguing that it is unlikely that web campaigns alone will cause voters to change their vote intentions. However, both articles, and also Gibson and McAllister (2008) report positive and statistically significant effects for the presence of a personalized campaign website on candidate vote totals. The critical discussions accompanying these findings can be divided into (1) those which call into question the validity of findings indicating that web campaigning have a positive net effect on vote performance and (2) those which discuss the mechanism through which such an effect may be taking place. Simply put, one set of discussions has centered around *whether* the findings demonstrate that such an effect exists while the other has focused on *how* such an effect might have occurred. If the study of the effect of cyber campaigning on electoral performances has been only marginal, a number of other components of online electioneering have been studied in the past ten years. Electoral campaigning online has been investigated in several electoral contexts: from the US (Gibson, 2001; Puopolo, 2001; Foot and Schneider, 2002; Bimber and Davis, 2003; Vaccari, 2009) to the UK (Ward and Gibson, 2003; Ward, Gibson et al., 2005; Lusoli and Ward 2005b), Italy (Newell, 2001: ; Lusoli et al., 2007; Vaccari, 2007: ; Vaccari, 2008a), Germany (Gibson, Römmele et al., 2003a, 2003b; Gibson and

Rommele,2003, 2005; Schweitzer, 2005; 2008), Australia (Gibson and Ward, 2003; Gibson, Lusoli et al., 2008), France (Vaccari, 2008b) and cyber-campaigning during the European Election (Jankowski, Foot et al., 2005: ; Lusoli, 2005a; 2005b; Lusoli and Ward, 2005b). All those studies have shown how inescapable campaigning online is for political parties and how unavoidable it is becoming for candidates.

As such, online campaigns have been investigated under a number of angles. To date, the literature has produced contributions toward the following areas: party competition, voter mobilization, impact of e-campaigning on campaign styles and effects of cyber-campaigns on parties' internal structure. In the following section we will provide a brief overview of those contributions and we will address what relevance this dissertation will have with regard to each of them.

2.4.3. Cyber-campaigning and its implication

Online campaign has been taking place in a number of countries, starting from the US and then spreading around the world. In Europe, a number of studies have been produced on (a) levels of competition, (b) voter mobilization, (c) impact of e-campaigning on campaign styles and (d) effects of cyber-campaigns on parties' internal structure. As those areas are fundamentally related to this study, we will explore them a little further.

(a) Levels of competition

A number of studies (to cite a few: Jackson, 2007 , Vaccari 2007, Ward et al 2005) looked into the appearance and development of parties and candidates' websites in the run up to elections, at the national, at the local and at the European level. If no definitive consensus on the value of the web for party competition exists, there are a few general trends on which the literature tends to converge.

The first element to be pointed out is a sort of disjuncture between the American and the European scenario. Ward and his co-author in summarizing the lesson from the 2005 British election point out how "despite the temptation to do so, we should not necessarily expect the US experience to be replicated here... the British political system erodes some of the potency of the web as a campaign tool" (2005: 17). Systemic characteristics affect the way campaigns are run and competition dynamics at the party and candidate level. Therefore, if American practices have 'set the example' that European campaigns somehow followed; there should be no expectation for an exact replication of the American scenario elsewhere. Electoral environment with their rules, laws and traditions do affect the way online campaigns work.

The second element of relative agreement is that cyber-campaigns win votes.. The emphasis placed on the use of online technologies in politics has not, with a few notable exceptions, (D'Alessio, 1997; Gibson and McAllister, 2006; Gibson and McAllister, 2008) been accompanied by rigorous empirical testing of whether cyber-campaigning actually wins votes for candidates across different political contexts. However, where such an analysis has been conduced, results point towards the fact that having a website produces electoral gains; even though scholars in this area have been disinclined to believe that the observed positive effect of cyber-campaigning is due to citizens being directly persuaded to vote for a candidate as a result of having looked at their website (D'Alessio, 1997; Gibson and McAllister, 2006; Gibson and McAllister, 2008).

On the contrary, to date no clear agreement exists on whether *normalized* or *equalized* conditions characterized cyberspace. Strandberg (2008) in attempting to systematically understand what conditions would favor one or the other scenario, reviews sixteen studies showing ten normalization outcomes versus six equalized ones. Part of our contribution (especially chapter 6) will evaluate the 2007 Irish election scenario and will bring an extra piece of element to the debate. The discussion of normalization versus equalization trends is also underlining chapter 4 and 5, but having set those at peacetime, their outcomes will have to be evaluated separately from cyber-campaigning studies.

The ground on which we aim to make a relevant contributions has to do with the determinants of cyber-campaigning. Indeed chapter 7 will look into the heuristics of what is still a rather obscure phenomenon. If what sort of dynamics may have taken place when parties websites had to be launched (Selnow, 1998; Gibson, Nixon et al., 2003; Ward, Gibson et al. 2003) have been discussed an analyzed, little research (Gibson et al., 2008; Zittel, 2009) has been done on the determinants of candidates campaigning online.

(b) Voters mobilization

The public at large has shown indubitably strong attitudes towards using the internet for gathering political information and interest towards some forms of online political activity is also growing (Lusoli and Ward, 2005b; Lusoli 2005b;). Voting Advice Applications are multiplying in number and popularity (Wall et al 2009,Trechsel and Mair, 2009), at the level of political news consumption on the web goes up (Gibson and McAllister, 2008). Bennet (2007) found that young Americans are keen on gathering online political information, and if any barrier exists, that is due to the reluctance of political actors, not to lack of public interest.

As such, the debate is wide open: on one hand public interest in online politics does not necessarily translate into voter mobilization and some scholar would claim the internet 'will not produce the mobilization of voters long predicted' (Bimber and Davis, 203: 167). On the other hand, parties and candidates do attempt to mobilize voters, and as we saw in the previous section those attempts seem to be successful (D'Alessio, 1997; Gibson and McAllister, 2008, Sudulich and Wall 2010). Experimental evidence (Hooge et al .2010 ADD) also shows that online mobilization is 'proved to be at least as effective as face-to-face mobilization'. Norris and Curtice (2008) weighed into this debate, arguing that there may exist a two-step process of information diffusion, with highly politically interested individuals consulting political websites in the first step and then discussing the policies and information that they found online with associates, friends and family in the second step. The Obama campaign offered new insight into the potential of internet

mobilization and made a strong case for those optimists who would envisage a strong web based component in the process of mobilizing and engaging citizens.

This study, is only marginally concerned with campaign mobilization, we will touch such a debate by looking at parties 'websites in the run up to the 2007 Irish general election and determining whether or not parties had attempted (and if so to what extent) to incentive citizens to vote, supporters to mobilize and undecided to make a choice. However, we won't enter the broader debate on political mobilization and how internet based mobilization takes place and differs from 'traditional one' (Krueger, 2006).

(c) Impact of e-campaigning on campaign styles

A third set of questions on the rise of online campaigns relates to the changes that the availability of a channel as the internet brought to campaign styles at large. In discussing what sort of impact online campaign has for campaigns in general one crucial element has to be taken into account: as Anstead and Chadwick phrase it 'the Internet campaigning does not exist in a media vacuum' (2008: 69). The internet is indeed an 'add on' to pre-existing models of campaigning and its contribution to campaign at large will be here addressed in chapter 6, where we will analyze style of online campaigning adopted by Irish political parties. We will indeed go through the evolution of campaigns styles (Farrell, 2006) and we will look at those features that have been regarded (Gibason and Ward, 2009; Norris 2005) as key components of the innovative online campaign mode, as narrowcasting, targeting and fundraising.

The online element does indeed build into a larger set of factors determining campaign styles (Swanson and Mancini, 1996). Media environment, party system and electoral rules play a greater role in determining how campaigns are ran and won. The literature has indicated that while online campaigning is becoming more and more of common practice and that its dynamics largely depend upon systemic characteristics (Anstead and Chadwick, 2008; Nixon et al. 2003). Our study will deal with a rather pre-

modern campaign environment as the Irish one, and will attempt to estimate what sort of impact online campaign has on such a hostile territory. We will investigate the extent to which new campaign techniques have been integrated in the strategy of parties and candidates.

Direct mail together with the possibility of tailoring sections of the electorate through parties and candidates' websites have been regarded as key features of new campaigns techniques (Farrell, 2006). After the 2006 midterm election and especially during the latest Presidential campaign in the US, academic research has been focusing on how important new technologies, especially the very latest developments of Web 2.0 instruments, can be for a successful campaign (Williams and Gulati, 2007; Williams and Gulati, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). Finally, the Obama campaign has recently revitalized studies on the impact of the internet for electoral campaigns, by bringing some new answers but mostly new questions. Its strong characterization in terms of Web 2.0 instruments has indeed contributed to the growing interest on the implication that Web 2.0 technologies may have for political communication and competition.

Youtube, social networking sites, twitter and other web 2.0 tools have been recently integrated in the study of electoral campaigns (Carlson and Strandberg, 2008; Gueorguieva 2008; Williams and Gulati, 2008a, 2008b; Kalnes, 2008) with regard to both the likelihood of candidates to adopt such instruments in their campaigns and with regard to the impact that those instruments may have on winning votes (Williams and Gulati, 2008c, Gibson and McAllister 2008). New campaign practices have been analyzed in studies of cyber campaign (to cite a few: Ward and Gibson 2003a; Vaccari 2008a, 2008b; Gibson et al. 2008; Gibson and Rommel 2003a) and our contribution here will focus on cyber campaigns in web 1.0 times. Indeed, in chapter 6 we will present an overview of parties websites in run up to the 2007 Irish general election and in chapter 7 we will look at same election from the candidates' perspective. Such an election was most definitely the first Irish internet election, and as we will see, the internet was hardly used by a third of candidates. As the election was what we could safely call a web 1.0 election, our investigation in that section only covers parties and candidates websites.

(d) Professionalism and parties internal structures

Post modern campaigns have been characterized by a steep increase in costs (Farrell, 2006, Norris, 2005; Farrell and Webb 2000). The process of Americanization has indeed been characterized by the incremental use of professional consultants, and external agencies that parties contract for electioneering. Therefore, the tendency points towards outsourcing and delegating the organization of election campaigns to experts and professionals external to the party. A number of studies have been produced in the last few years on the subject: Negrine (2007) looked at professionalization in a number of countries in Europe, with regard to both the external impact that professionalization has on electoral outcomes, and to the impact it has on party internal equilibria. Lilleker et al (2005) focus on the latter by considering what sort of implication electoral marketing has for party internal democracy and points out the trade off between maintaining a loyal base and shopping for new voters through marketing techniques.

Changes in party recruitment dynamics and more importantly changes in the internal equilibria between local and national party, membership and leadership have somehow been reflected in and affected by technological developments. The evolution in party organizational paradigms, especially from mass party to 'catch all' parties, has been marked by the declining role and size of party membership and by the empowerment of leadership alone. Slimmer membership, strong focus on winning election and less emphasis on ideology have been accompanied also by higher professionalization, increase in costs and lower accountability to the membership. The amount of change has been enormous and the increasing development of ICTs has intervened in such a process. However, the extent to which the implementation of new technology in parties' lives have been only marginally investigated to date. Even though the question of whether new technologies affect – and to which extent they do- internal party dynamics is of indubitable interest, the amount of empirical work on such an issue has been rather small. Gibson and Ward (1999) produced in in-depth study of British parties concluding that ICT was primarily used to coordinate and disseminate information in a rather

centralized fashion. In terms of relationship between membership and leadership Lusoli and Ward found that:

> 'the increasing use of the new media in internal party affairs is likely to enhance pre-existing trends towards individualisation and direct relationship between elites and members rather than reviving collective grassroots democracy' (2003: 15)

The empirical work produced to date has indubitably pointed towards the implementation of new technology in order to increase efficiency and communication rather than in order to empower members' views. As such, the limited evidence from empirical analysis suggests that parties have made use of new technology to carry on their routine activities. However, the study of internal dynamics has been very limited, covering a relatively low number of parties and countries.

On the theoretical level, there are a number of possible scenarios of change for parties' internal equilibria in relation to the adoption of new technology. Moreover, those dynamics take time to develop, even though the pace of technological change is extremely fast, the adaptation and transformation of parties' equilibria proved to be a rather long process.

In this study we made a clear choice of using party organization as an independent variable (chapter 4 and 5), therefore an explanatory element accounting for patterns of variation among parties online. The focus of our study is parties online at peacetime; part II of the dissertation deals with party organization as a stable quantifiable element that we measure through quantitative content analysis of parties' constitution. Our approach does not deny *per se* the idea of potential party's change due to the implementation of new technology. We analyse our data at a number of time point, but we do not oppose *a priori* the possibility of evolution and change. Our approach is however different from the research goals of Pederson and Saglie (2005), Gibson and Ward (1999), Lofgren and Smith (2003) as we do not take internal organizational equilibria as our dependent variable. As such, we do not seek to make a contribution to the debate on the influence of new technologies on parties' internal structures. However, we acknowledge that such a relationship

is of great interest and should be investigated to a larger extent, especially in the age of web 2.0 technologies, which may be able to make a visible difference within a short period of time. The quick diffusion of web 2.0 is indeed part of our concern in attempting to describe and possibly explain how political parties use the internet and what sport of factors may explain their online behaviour.

2.4.4 Web 2.0

The analysis of parties and even candidates websites has shown that the interactive possibilities of the internet are definitely underdeveloped if compared to their informative features (Gibson and Ward, 2009); at least until the very recent and dramatic increase in implementation of Web 2.0 features, the capabilities of the media had not been fully exploited and the internet had not transformed the direction of communication between parties (and candidates) and the electorate. A number of factors suggest that this may soon change due to the widespread diffusion, among political actors, of Web 2.0 features. Before going any further in reviewing those features and speculating on their political potential, we should clarify what Web 2.0 is and while leaving its discussion to chapter 5, we should provide a definition for it. Going back to the very first attempt at defining web 2.0 Tim O'Reilly pointed out the 'huge amount of disagreement about just what Web 2.0 means' (2005). We favour a definition that emphasises the innovative characteristics of Web 2.0, without being too technical 'Web 2.0 is read-write. Earlier versions of the web were more passive and encouraged only downloading, whereas the new applications are more interactive and dynamic, encouraging users to be more involved and upload content onto the web'(Shuen, 2008: XVI).

Web 2.0 applications favour the intervention of users or as O'Reily puts it 'the collective intelligence of users to build applications that literally get better the more people use them' (O'Reilly, preface to Shuen 2008). When

it comes to political discourse it is imaginable how those applications would have potentially a very strong impact.

The first campaign extensively investing on Web 2.0 applications was Howard Dean's 2003 primary campaign. Dean's campaign advisor, Joe Trippi promoted the use of blogs and discussion boards not only as fundraising instruments, but mainly and more crucially as platforms where citizens could actually intervene and contribute to the content of the campaign (2004). Candidates have recently started making use of Web 2.0 instruments, especially by establishing their presence in Social Networks, and the 'YouTube-ification' (Salmond, 2008) of electoral campaigns is becoming more and more of a certainty. Frontrunners for the Democratic presidential nomination announced their candidacy online by posting videos on YouTube and the Obama campaign made extensive use of YoutTube posting thousands of videos online. Twitter, the fastest growing (mini) social network ever, was extensively used by candidates and parties running for the 2009 June European Election and the Parliament itself was stimulating electors to vote through Twitter (http://twitter.com/EU_Elections_en [03/06/09]). On the implications of Web 2.0 for electoral campaigns much still needs to be said, only a few exploratory studies have attempted an estimation of what tangible implications may be for candidates and parties (Williams and Gulati, 2007: ; Gibson and McAllister, 2008; Salmond, 2008; Williams and Gulati, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c) and even descriptive research is still at an embryonic phase. If networking, narrowcasting and fundraising have been regarded as important activities within Web 1.0 capabilities, one may quite safely forecast that they will play an even more crucial role in the Web 2.0 era. Indeed, the presence of candidates and parties' blogs, as well as their profiles on social networks and video sharing platforms is becoming nowadays the norm, rather than the exception. In part II of the dissertation, we will be dedicating the discussion to the extent to which political parties implement Web 2.0 applications and which actors are likely to gain the most from their implementation.

2.5. This study and its contribution to the literature

We will now specifically address the scholarly contribution that this study seeks to bring to the literature, its degree of innovation and its core research question, firstly by considering the dissertation as a whole and then by looking separately at the two components of this investigation: parties' online behaviour in 'peacetime' and during electoral campaigns.

By and large, the dissertation poses the question of how the internet is used by political parties and we seek to answer it by disentangling a number of dimensions of such a phenomenon. In other words, we address the question of how do parties use the internet and, in order to get a multiple angle perspective on that, we divide the analysis into two components: parties at peacetime and parties campaigning. The former will take the form of a comparative analysis of four European countries and will look at the determinants of different patterns of online behaviour. The latter will be a single case study of one country focusing on over-time developments and determinants of online candidates' campaigns.

The contribution that we seek to bring to the literature is threefold. Firstly, we aim to assess the status and quality of political parties on the web at peacetime. Second, we aim to clarify what factors are accountable for inter parties differences. In so doing, we will be able to make a contribution to the debate on normalization versus equalization and we will bring to such debate new evidence gathered at peacetime. Third, we will investigate what changes in parties' websites when a campaign is taking place and what are the explanatory elements determining online campaigns.

Overall, the question we pose is straightforward in its phrasing and its meaning: *how are political parties using the internet?* However, even such a simple question cannot be answer exhaustively without looking at a number of sub questions. Moreover, the adoption of a diversified research design better suits the characteristics of a multidimensional phenomenon as the one under analysis here. The next sections intend to point out what components of such a phenomenon will be dealt with in the second and third part of this work.

Part II

Part II of this study (chapters 4 and 5) will deal with political parties on the web at peacetime, by seeking an answer for differences in patterns of online behaviour across parties. If to date, a number of studies have dealt with the assessment of what impact the internet has, has had, may have and should have on political parties at large, smaller attention has been given to differences in patterns of behaviour. In other words, there is still little we know about differences between parties in cyberspace. The investigation of variance in patterns of online behaviour is the core element of the second part of the dissertation and it will be empirically analyzed in chapter 4. Here, we want to assess the importance of such an investigation and we also seek to clarify our research approach.

Not only is the internet a fast and inexpensive way of communicating, but it also permits a form of interaction that is radically different from any of the previously experimented one, it allows for top-down communication as well as bottom-up and even exchanges on the horizontal level (bottom-bottom) (Norris, 2003; Rommele, 2003). The qualitative difference between the internet and other forms of electronic communications (TV and radio) lies in the very basic structure of the web; the internet is by its own nature an active and reactive medium, whereas other media allow the users to play merely a passive role; the internet gives editorial control to all users, diffusing the capability of publishing information and reacting to other users' inputs (Gibson, et al. 2003). Therefore the intrinsic characteristics of the medium justify the high expectations for its democratic potential and the support it may provide parties with. How parties decide to use the vast range of possibilities brought about by the internet and what factors can account for such a choice, are the questions addressed in this research. If we take a closer look at what activities parties can perform online, in accomplishing their linkage function between rulers and ruled, we will have to look at information diffusion, aggregation and exchange of opinions.

This study will test in a cross national environment whether patterns of online behaviour could be explained by party organization, ideological

orientation and electoral strength as proxy for resources. We investigate whether the way a party uses the internet, the way its presence on the internet is shaped, could depend on pre existing factors: party organization, especially the level of internal democracy- determined by organizational procedures- ideology and party electoral strength.

The nature of a party, rather than any exogenous component, such as the technology itself, would motivate adaptation to technology and parties online behaviour (Nixon, Ward et al., 2003: 241). Norris underlines how 'the characteristic of each medium will create certain opportunities and constraints' (Norris, 2003: 26). We argue that within the frame of those opportunities and constraints different patterns are observable and it is our intention to observe and possibly explain them. We echo Vaccari in his claim that

> 'parties are complex, self-perpetuating organizations whose built-in agents for resistance confront and often hamper external pressures for change. The pace and depth with which parties accept and implement innovations depend on their organizational features as well as the institutional context' (2007: 4)

and we provide an empirical test for it. We know that there are a number of purposes parties can use the internet for, such as: networking and organization linkage, participation and interactivity, resources generation and recruitment (Gibson and Ward, 2000a). We also know that parties, by definition, are different from one other - at least to some extent - and that those differences may be crucial to our understanding of how parties adopt the internet. Therefore, we focus on party internal characteristics such as organizational setting and ideology and we seek to account for patterns of differences which may be observed in parties' online behaviour. Moving on to intrinsic characteristics of parties we estimate the extent to which those characteristics make a difference in cyberspace or if the internet is actually acting as a great leveller (Chen, Gibson et al., 2006). In doing so, we will provide an empirical account of differences in party organization, especially with regard to the extent to which parties are internally democratic. We will look at the role of ideology and we will account for different levels of strength within a given party system.

A number of studies have dealt, especially theoretically (Gibson and Ward, 1998; 1999) with the possible changes that the internet may bring with regard to the party internal sphere; we adopt a more 'conservative' theoretical approach by focusing on whether the internet only facilitates trends which were already in place. Far from denying the potentiality of the internet as an engine of change in party politics, we seek to falsify the reverse scenario: namely that elements, pre-existing to the internet, explain parties 'online activities. Such an approach not only is motivated by the intention of contributing to the debate on 'normalization' but it also provides a different angle on the investigation of parties' websites, linking them directly to the nature of parties as organizations (Key, 1947). Parties are organizations with well-defined internal structures of power (Michels, 1915) electoral goals (Strom, 1985) and ideological legacy; they always have been characterized by differences (with some exceptions) and it is rational to expect that those differences will emerge in the online world as they do in the offline one. If not, we will have to rethink the 'greater equalizer' idea as opposed to the normalization of cyberspace. Therefore, we will look simultaneously at two elements: the extent to which parties differ from one other in cyberspace, and the sort of activities parties are more likely to engage with on the net.

Such a task will be undertaken in chapter 4 with regard to parties' websites, and chapter 5 will attempt to extend this to Web 2.0 platforms. The nature of Web 2.0 platforms makes their investigation quite unstructured, and with Web 2.0 emerging only recently as a study-worthy phenomenon its investigation is inevitably exploratory at this point of time. Indeed the nature of what we will attempt in chapter 5 is rather exploratory, even if we will seek to empirically test a number of research hypothesis.

Both the analysis of parties' websites and parties' adoption and attitudes towards Web 2.0 are done at 'peacetime'. The choice of such an approach is motivated by the intention of looking at parties while they run 'business as usual'. Studies of parties' websites tend to investigate them when a campaign is taking place and mobilization is higher than normal. If electoral campaigns represent moments of peak activity - and by now we know quite a lot about parties' websites and cyber-campaigning - we have much less

information about styles of web usage by political parties in 'regular' time. Very little empirical study has been done on what we should expect to find by browsing parties' websites when electoral mobilization is not at its peak.

Election campaign is not the norm, parties spend way more time running *routine* activities than electoral ones and the online component of those activities is still under investigated.

Part III

As such, the first empirical arena investigated here relates to party competition at large, whereas the second one deals specifically with electoral competition. This third part will focus on how the internet has modified campaign styles, and on what motivates parties and candidates to campaign online. In dealing with new technologies' implications for electoral campaigns we will begin by looking at campaigns at large, and we will then proceed to the identification of the heuristics that we will be concerned with. The literature on electoral campaigns and competition refers to a series of ideal types of campaigning patterns and modes.

Norris's tripartite classification pre-modern, modern, post-modern style of campaigning represents one of the most well-known categorizations of campaigning types (Norris, 2000). The pre-modern style is characterized by campaigning based on face to face relationships, door to door canvassing, direct contact between candidates and the electorate, a kind of campaigning which relies more on members' involvement than on technological support. The modern style is instead a form of campaigning that bases the transmission of messages on powerful media like TV and radio able to reach voters without the need of any massive mobilization of party members. It also relies on some levels of specialization and professionalization of the campaign work. The third form, the post modern campaign, depends on professional campaign teams and makes use of new media able to target segments of the electorate and to reach them with *ad hoc* messages, especially thanks to direct mail and the internet. The post-modern phase represents 'the

increasing efforts by the parties to reach individual voters via the internet, direct mail, and telemarketing' (Gibson and Rommele et al., 2003b: 33) and we investigate the extent to which those efforts are actually made and with what sort of results.

We approach the study of electoral campaigns with the belief that the chronological order does not represent an exhaustive account and the three models are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, we expect the three models to coexist. The focus of the third part of this project will be indeed on cyber-campaigning and attention will be firstly concentrated on parties and subsequently on candidates. The 2008 American presidential campaign has largely contributed to reinvigorating the faith on the internet as medium of political action and change; the large support Barack Obama enjoyed in the web, the strategic and intense use his campaign team made of the web, especially with regard to Web 2.0 technologies point to the necessity of a deeper investigation of the phenomenon. We acknowledge that the role of the internet in electoral campaigns across Europe is nowhere close to the American one, but we also expect to find traces of effective implementation of online strategies. Indeed, if we are to believe what scholars of electoral campaign have been claiming in the past few years, European parties are going toward a process of Americanization of their electoral campaigns (Scammell, 1997). A number of studies have been produced in the European context and growing interest has surrounded cyber-campaigns. In an article that dates back ten years, Gibson and Ward claimed that 'it is not unreasonable to assume that over the next decade party communication and campaigning on the Internet will have moved from fringe toward the mainstream.' (1998: 33). Testing this after a decade will clarify whether such a move actually took place and what are its implications. For Farrell and Webb 'it is hard to escape the conclusion that the internet will have major implications for the nature of campaign discourse' (Farrell and Webb, 2000: 112). Lusoli has shown that the general trend in European countries indicates that the internet is still a secondary source of information for European citizens (Lusoli, 2005a). However, the same study shows the existence of a significant online electoral sphere in a number of European countries,

indicating once again that no definitive conclusions can be drawn. Recent studies of cyber-campaigning have shown that in the Australian electoral context campaigning online wins votes (Gibson and McAllister, 2006 ; Gibson and McAllister, 2008) bringing back D'Alessio's claims and reinvigorating the possibility that the web could play an important role in shifting votes.

With regard to online campaigning, a national level approach will be used here. Lusoli shows how internet use is not correlated to electoral system, but we know that system peculiarities are able to explain much about electoral campaigns (Lusoli, 2005a). Thus, as will be further specified in the next chapter the approach we chose to adopt toward cyber-campaigning will take the form of a case study; we will explore the electoral campaign for the 2007 Irish general election by firstly providing an overview of the campaign and then by assessing the extent to which the internet has been used by candidates and parties. In chapter 6 we will look at parties' websites, at their over time development in relation to the electoral cycle. We will longitudinally observe the extent to which parties modify their website as the election come closer. Once again we will look at the overall system, but also at inter-party variation. The electoral context under analysis will be looked at from a global perspective combining findings on parties' websites with the investigation of candidates' approach to cyber-campaigns. Therefore we will be able to assess the impact of the new media on the campaign by combining different angles. As campaigns are at the core of political science research, the evaluation of what impact the internet has had on them emerges as a core question to be answered.

2.6 Democratic theory:

So far we have clarified where this study intends to place itself in the literature on cyber parties and cyber-campaigning but, as said at the very beginning of this chapter and extensively in the previous one; our findings would also have some relevance to democratic theory as such. This investigation of parties' behaviour online will also look at parties' website

seeking to explain the likelihood of implementing forms of interaction and participation as opposed to mere information provision. It will use, as explanatory factors, parties' internal democracy, ideology and electoral strength as proxy for resources. With regard to cyber-campaigning, we will estimate what favours its likelihood, what role it plays in campaigning at large and what practical advantage it could bring. For both components of the investigation, the data analysis will provide empirical results, which may be straightforward in their statistical meaning, but their repercussions in the broader debate on the impact of the internet on politics will have to be thought through.

The democratic potential of the internet has been challenged in practical terms and a certain amount of evidence suggests that its potential, especially in the 1990s, was most probably overestimated. With regard to parties' websites, to date, no empirical proof has shown that parties' focus on the web is mainly on the implementation of participation; on the contrary, there are clear indications that it has been only a marginal concern (Gibson and Ward, 2009). Research evidence points to parties using the internet mainly to disseminate information, with almost no implementation of any engaging function. In 2004 Gibson et al. concluded that:

> 'there is evidence of a general enthusiasm for developing the technologies towards more democratic and reformist ends. What we do not see as yet, is much evidence that this adaptation is producing any fundamental change in how these units operate or the ends they pursue' (Gibson, Rommele et al., 2004: 198).

If evidence would point towards parties enhancing participatory channels either through 'traditional' interaction or through Web 2.0 activities, we should definitely regard it as a sign of promotion of increasingly plural society. On the other hand, if Michels's claim that parties are intrinsically non democratic entities is to be believed, we should note very little effort towards implementation of dialogue and substantial interaction between parties and citizens. That would diminish the enthusiastic attitude towards the internet and show that the medium *per se* has no capability of producing those fundamental changes that a number of authors talked about.

Moreover, even though this research concentrates on cyber parties, meaningful generalizations could and should be drawn in terms of democracy at large. We believe that our finding can contribute to the debate on new technologies and political discourse, by either strengthening the normalization thesis or by challenging it. With regard to democratic theory, finding evidence of 'politics as usual' would indicate that the real world shapes the internet and not vice versa, so that there is no chance the internet *per se* can make democracy better, no matter the diffusion it reaches. On the other hand, this research might find no further evidence of normalization and suggest a more positive attitude towards the internet's potential to challenge the *status quo*. Such a scenario would be quite complicated to interpret, especially considering the quantity of noise associated with the identification of explanatory factors.

If the latest trends, in evaluating the democratic potential of the internet, are definitely moderate and the initial enthusiasm has dramatically cooled down, the rise of Web 2.0 activities suggests the need to rethink the matter. The very recent diffusion of web 2.0 applications for political purposes needs to be empirically investigated, as happened for web 1.0, and the assessment of their impact in politics need to be derived from factual analysis rather than based on speculation. It is our intention to evaluate the broad implications of our findings and place them in a wider discourse on new technologies and democratic process at large, but we will be doing that only after the completion of a factual analysis.

2.7 Conclusions

Political parties structure the political world by providing a link between citizens and the government. They represent a core element for the correct functioning of modern democracy. This dissertation is based on the empirical analysis of political parties' online behaviour in order to better understand the extent to which the internet impacts on politics. Specifically, this project aims to understand whether the internet can actually produce an

effect in political competition by altering electoral performances and the forms of political communication that are promoted online.

Myths and expectations generated by widespread diffusion of the internet have been reviewed here; some of the most common questions arising together with the internet's mass diffusion have been presented and the hypotheses put forward by this study have been anticipated. In order to provide an account of the contribution this research intends to bring to the discipline, a brief review of the existing literature on cyber parties has been offered. The next chapter will describe the methodological approach this thesis will adopt and it will also describe the sample and specify case selection criteria.

---

[i] 'Digital Divide refers to the gap between those who benefit from digital technology and those who do not.' www.itu.int/ITU-D/digitaldivide. The term began to be broadly known after a public speech President Clinton and Vice President Gore gave in 1996 in Knoxville, Tennessee. In that occasion they both used the expression digital divide.

Data and methodology

This chapter will elucidate the methodological approach of this study. Initially, the choice of the cross-national analysis, with regard to part II of the dissertation, will be explained and the political systems under analysis will be presented. Subsequently, the focus on one country, with regard to cyber campaigning (part III of the study), will be explained and the choice of the 2007 Irish general election will be justified. The necessity of adopting different methodological approaches will be explained in conjunction with the explanation of the different nature of the phenomena under analysis.

Part II of the dissertation will be looking at the online behaviour of thirty-three parties from Ireland, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain. In this methodology chapter the selection criteria will be explored and constraints deriving from data availability and language related constraints will be reported. Second, the use of econometric techniques in order to test the main hypotheses will be justified and the advantage of this approach will be outlined. Part III of this dissertation will be concerned with the Irish electoral context and the 2007 campaign. We will discuss the availability of primary and original research material, sample size, and a number of systemic elements that make Ireland a good research environment for such a study. Finally the selected methods of analysis employed to address the research questions will be explained.

Overall, this chapter will outline methods and data, detailing the reasons why the selected units of analysis and techniques have been chosen.

Intro

The Greek word αίτιολογία, composed by αίτια meaning cause and λογος meaning word/discourse, is commonly used in medicine to indicate the study of causality, the relationship between cause and effect. Even though such a word is not common in political science, what political scientists do,

most of the time, is seeking to research the causes of political phenomena and investigating relations of causality. Before building up normative theories and generalizations, researchers look for explanatory elements, thus they perform aetiological research. To do so, a vast range of instruments and methods are nowadays at the disposal of social scientists. The choice of one or more of those instruments needs to be motivated and the selection of one technique over another has to be explained.

This study will face the same difficulties that any investigation of social phenomena faces: the definition and operalization of variables, measurement errors and data collection problems. This project aims to test a number of hypotheses stated in a falsifiable fashion and the main concerns of this section will be the clarification of *how* the study will be conducted. This chapter will also clarify what sorts of constraints have bounded this research and why the selected methodological approach is adequate to the purpose of the study.

The methodological specification should represent a core concern in the area of internet studies; as a matter of fact, in such a new subfield of political research, improved measurement techniques and clear operationalization processes would represent findings *per se*. Indeed, the area suffers of a lack of comprehensive and accurate measures, especially with regard to the classification and codification of parties' websites, but also and more problematically, the field suffers from little implementation of comparative analytical techniques. The subfield of internet studies in politics needs to pay some attention to the implementation of more sophisticated techniques. A substantial problem comes from the multiplicity of indexes capturing websites features; there is no unique measure and different measures may lead to different results. If, on top of that, there also is a lack of reliable analytical techniques, we expose our findings to the risk of inaccuracy. Obviously, given the changing nature of the internet, researchers face substantial challenges and often the nature of our investigation is exploratory more than explanatory in nature. Finally, the pace of technological change often makes our findings outdated within a very short period of time; we acknowledge that a dissertation based on the analysis of internet related

phenomena may contain elements that, by the time the project is concluded, are already 'historical'.

This research seeks to bring a contribution to the literature on parties in cyberspace. In so doing it will combine a number of angles and perspectives, whose specific components will be explained in some details on the next sessions of this chapter. Here we will clarify what is the rationale behind using different approaches, and what advantages we see in such a choice. The main research goal of this study is to shed light on political parties online. As we regard such a research object as a complex one, we do attempt to disentangle it by looking at different components of such a phenomenon.

Firstly, we intend to combine the study of electoral campaigns online – which seems to be the norm in this type of research – with the study of political parties at peacetime, which is often a neglected component. Therefore this study will bring together two complementary elements that often are not regarded as related. Secondly, we will combine a case study approach with a comparative study of different countries. Detailed account of each component will follow in this chapter; however, in our view they complement each other. Indeed, the single case study of the run up to the Irish election gives an insight on how electoral campaigns evolve and what factors are accountable for the decision to 'migrate online'. The comparative analysis seeks an understanding of whether party's characteristics make a difference in determining quality and status of parties' websites. As such, the combination of the two approaches will results in a broader understanding of parties' attitudes towards the internet. If we intend to answer not only the question of how parties use the internet, but also whether or not the internet is a missed opportunity or an effective medium for parties, we need to look at such a phenomenon from more than one angle.

We claimed in the first and second chapter that our contribution to the debate on whether the internet is capable of delivering a democratic surplus will be an *a posteriori* one. In order for it to be meaningful, it has to regard and evaluate more than one dimension of parties online. By combining peacetime and campaign, comparative analysis and case-study we seek to account for a complexity that is often overlooked. Part II and III are linked on

the normative level; they investigate different sides of the same phenomenon, namely parties 'activity in cyberspace. The choice of adopting different research strategies to investigate such a phenomenon responds both to practical concerns (time and resources) and the intention of adapting research practice to the different logics of electoral campaign and peacetime.

We will now explain what data and methods are used in each component of the dissertation and we will sum up their joint value in the conclusion section.

PART II

The second part of this dissertation is mainly concerned with the analysis of parties' websites and web 2.0 arenas. Descriptive and explanatory inferences will be presented here. The particular nature of the phenomenon under research, political parties and their communicative strategies makes the subject particularly suited for comparative analysis. This part of the dissertation will consist of two main chapters, which are substantially different from one other, but represent two faces of the same coin. Chapter 4 will look at the status and quality of parties' websites through the implementation of econometric techniques and it will provide a number of findings based on causal observable relationships. Chapter 5 will represent, on the other hand, an informed discussion of Web 2.0. This chapter will be mainly oriented towards the identification of how Web 2.0 affects previous research on internet related political phenomena and it will present data on the same websites under analysis in chapter 4; a few explanatory tests will be attempted. The balance of descriptive and analytical evidence and the discussion of implementation of new research methods and techniques will also be presented in the third part of the thesis.

The pace of change in Internet based phenomena indeed represents a major concern here and it crucially informs the research design. In order to produce a useful contribution, this research ought to mix a number of elements, as will be explained in the next pages. The dissertation will combine

a case study approach, focusing on one country - with a combination of large N (candidates) and in-depth analysis of a few cases (parties' websites) - with a fairly small N analysis for the investigation of parties' behaviour online.

3.1 The statistical/comparative method

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the literature on cyber parties has often taken the form of case studies focusing, most of the time, on one country, sometimes on two or three countries. Even the most extensive analyses of cyber parties represent collections of papers (Gibson, Nixon et al., 2003; Gibson, Rommele et al., 2004) and the comparative dimension has been often explored only *a posteriori,* by elaborating comparisons with previous studies rather than *a priori,* as defining component of the study.

Our choice is to produce a comparative study of four countries, all of them in 'peacetime' at time of analysis. We will begin by pointing out the reasons which led to the choice of such an approach and by clarifying the advantages of adopting the statistical and comparative method. Indeed, we seek to produce a meaningful cross-national comparison, at a given time, so that the study is *a priory* designed to be comparative.

Arend Lijphart, in a well-known piece on the comparative method recognizes that 'the comparative and the statistical methods should be regarded as two aspects of a single method' (Lijphart, 1971: 684). In the political science literature comparative and statistical methods might point to two different concepts, the former being 'small scale comparative studies' and the latter being large-scale statistical ones. However we do regard the statistical method as a comparative methodology, meaning that the use of statistical techniques will apply to cross national research contexts in order to better understand general tendencies. As Jackman points out 'it makes little sense to distinguish comparativists from those who analyze cross-national statistical data' (Jackman, 1985: 165)Far from implying that comparative methods must necessarily make use of statistical techniques, in this particular

study the comparative dimension will be analyzed with the support of statistical techniques.

Having pointed out what is meant here by comparative method, the next step is to underline what are the advantages of adopting such a methodology in this particular study. Previous studies have often focused on one country, taking the form of a case study (Gibson and Ward, 1998; 1999; Newell, 2001; Gibson, Römmele et al., 2003a; 2003b; Schweitzer, 2005; Vaccari, 2007; 2008a; 2008b). Therefore, generalizations have often been drawn on the basis of studies, which had been conducted without a common methodological frame. Only a couple of cross-national studies on cyber politics were conducted on European Elections (Bille, 2001; Lusoli, 2005a; 2005b; De Landtsheer, 2007) and Norris (Norris, 2003) remains the only attempt to give a global overview of politics online.

The problem of formulating comparisons and important generalizations emerges as a major one; studies of cyber parties differ in terms of variables' categorization, measurement and, above all, a vast number of studies suffer from a lack of analytical techniques. Research on cyber parties has not established a widely shared common ground; the field remains less institutionalized than other areas of political science, and such a peculiarity represents one of its highly challenging features. One of the core goals of this dissertation is to provide evidence from different countries, by using the same categorization style and the same level of analysis, in order to produce meaningful generalizations on the impact of ICT on political parties. Indeed the goal of the comparative method is to produce scientific generalization (Radcliffe-Brown, 1951: 162), and the basic requirement to produce reliable generalizations is to treat (measure and categorize) units of analysis in a unique way.

To sum up, the comparative approach to the study of cyber parties offers a series of advantages: firstly, it permits us to improve the level of accuracy of findings, through an increase in the number of observations and by overcoming national boundaries. Indeed, it does not have to sacrifice any of the features analyzed in a country based case study; when it comes to the analysis of parties' websites, once a general coding frame has been

established there is no reason why it could not be applied to any country[i]. Most of the literature on parties online has used the coding frame originally designed by Gibson and Ward (2000a) or, more commonly, revised versions of it, in order to measure parties' websites and there is no reason why such a frame could not be applied for cross-national comparisons. The most likely explanation for the very limited employment of comparative analysis probably is due to the linguistic barrier and the lack of large international research projects on the topic. The language constraints have indeed played a major role in the case selection of this study; they will be part of the next section's discussion.

3.1.1 Case Selection

The case selection for this study is an *intentional* one, so that observations will be consistent with the research objectives of the study (King, Keohane et al., 1994: 139). In order to establish why parties' websites look the way they do, we need to identify which parties are suitable for such a study.

The objects of this dissertation are cyber parties, thus the very first selection criterion has to do with the existence of parties online. If it is obvious that the study requires the existence of parties' websites, it is not given that we also need to consider other components related to the internet. For instance, the internet penetration rate represents a primary concern of this study, in order for its findings to be important in the real world. For instance, conducting this study on African parties online would make little sense, given that the internet penetration rate in the continent is around 3.6% (Internet Word Stats). Therefore, one primary concern in the process of case selection is the relevance of the phenomenon under analysis; and in Europe the rate of internet diffusion is around 50% indicating that the internet has a fairly strong impact on the overall population. The extent to which the internet impacts politics is much smaller, if we look at figures on the usage of parties' websites or even the use of the internet at large for political purposes, at least in Europe.

Nevertheless, the creation, maintenance and transformation of parties' websites represent relatively new political phenomena which need to be investigated for a number of reasons. Firstly, the creation and sophistication of parties' websites started in the mid 1990s (Gibson, Nixon et al., 2003: 3) and nowadays there is no doubt that this process is irreversible. Parties, in any advanced democracy, simply need to have websites, whether sophisticated and technologically advanced or only a little more than an electronic leaflet; the new communication environment has made the presence of parties' websites a necessity. The second reason why the study of such a phenomenon is important regards its impact on the population; the demand side. Even though it has been pointed out before that the number of European citizens using the internet to get political information is not extraordinary if compared to data from the United States (75 million users according to Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2005) or Australia, where the percentage of citizens getting political information online quadrupled between 1998 and 2004 (Gibson and McAllister, 2006: 249), in Europe the phenomenon involves 3.5 millions of European Citizens (Lusoli, 2005a: 252) and it appears to be growing. Furthermore, the very low figures on consulting parties' websites are slowly but surely going up (Gibson and McAllister, 2008). Finally, the Obama 2008 campaign has shown how 'viral' the phenomenon is[ii].

The choice of a cross-national study guarantees patterns of variation in the independent variable - which represents the best way of building an 'intentional' design (King, Keohane et al., 1994: 140) - as well as in the dependent variable. Another important element for case selection is the availability of data. The need for empirical data is primary, and time and resource limitations affect this investigation as well as many others in social science (King, Keohane et al., 1994: 25). Having decided to base case selection criteria on the explanatory variables, in order to prevent major selection bias issues (King, Keohane et al., 1994: 137), the availability of data is possibly the major concern of the research design.

With regard to *data on party characteristics* we went through a process of original data collection and coding, for the variable accounting for

dispersion of power. The International Comparative Political Parties Project (ICPPP), founded at Northwestern University by Kenneth Janda, represents one of the best collections and design of empirical data on party organization, and this is our starting point in the elaboration of our coding frame. Even though this project does not have up to date data available and ready to be used, it does provide an understandable and replicable methodology. Indeed, as will be then explored in-depth in Chapter 4, we based our classification of power centralization within parties on the non-judgemental component of the ICPP coding frame. [iii] Janda's coding frame offers a straightforward platform to perform the analysis we need to produce in order to classify dispersion of power within parties.

With regard to data on party ideological positions, we employed expert surveys, either already publicly available Benoit Laver (2006) and CHESS: Chapel Hill Expert Survey Series 2006[iv] or gathered thanks to Professor Ken Benoit. Finally, data on electoral performance were relatively easy to gather, being largely available.

Overall, three factors played a role in the case selection of this inquiry: the relevance of the research question to the research environment under analysis; the existence of variation in the explanatory variables; and the availability of data. Having summarized the reasons which grounded this particular case selection, it is time to take a closer look at the countries and parties under analysis.

3.1.2 European parties in cyber-space

From a practical point of view the language constraint represents the major limitation that prevents the sample from including more countries. Unfortunately, in the process of original data collection such a problem is simply inescapable. Ireland, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy have been included in the sample primarily because of the familiarity we have with the languages but also because they do fit the research goals and the selection criteria. Indeed, they all are western well-established parliamentary

democracies (Spain is the youngest democracy, but its level of democracy ought to be considered as well established), all the countries are members of the European Union, which constitutes a guarantee on their levels of institutional stability. Moreover, gathering data on party characteristics was problematic but doable. With regard to internal power distribution there are established and clear rules on parties' organization and the formal rules and procedures are most of the time transparent and accessible. Even though there are no formal requirements for parties to have statutes, rule-books or constitutions, the majority of British, Irish, Italian and Spanish parties actually have well regulated formal procedures. Even though parties, in general, are reluctant to diffuse information on internal dynamics, the party constitutions are generally accessible. Most of the parties in the sample actually display their statutes and constitutions on their website[v].

The second reason primarily motivating the choice of countries and the time frame of this project has to do with the intention of analysing parties' website during 'peacetime', when there were no elections planned for, at least, the six months following the data collection. That represents a crucial element: indeed, it allows us to provide an insight of parties when there is no electoral pressure as opposed to part III where we look at parties during electoral campaigns. Spain held a general election on March 9th 2008, Italy on April 13th-14th 2008, Ireland on May 24th 2007 and the farthest in terms of time line is the British general election in 2005 (May 5th). Parties' websites have been monitored for a number of months but their aggregate analysis was finally performed on data collected in November 2008 (for chapter 4) and January 2009 (chapter 5), so that the findings of this project can still be relatively fresh by the time this project is concluded. Such a decision was based on the conscious choice of analysing parties' websites when no election is imminent, in order to avoid the bias deriving from having a number of parties actively campaigning and a number of parties carrying out their routine online activity. We decide to set the data collection is such a way that all the countries under analysis were at peacetime. Therefore all parties were equal in their condition of not being actively campaigning for an imminent election.

Indeed, in order to cover both 'peacetime' and electoral campaign without mixing them up, we split the analysis into the two components of the dissertation, being part II dedicated to peacetime and part III to electoral campaign. As a result the two parts of the dissertation are complementary to each other representing two faces of the same coin,

The analysis of parties' website at peacetime has received very little attention in the literature. If the value of investigating parties' online activity during electoral campaign, when mobilization and public interest in parties reach a peak, is self explanatory, the investigation of peacetime may appear less meaningful at first sight. However, there are a number of normative as well as empirically inspired reasons to look at parties when the electoral campaign is not taking place.

Firstly, if we assume that parties are responsive to the electorate – at least to their own electorate – we can also assume that such a function does not cease when there is no election taking place. In peacetime, mobilization is definitely lower than in the run up to the campaign, but parties are active entities *all the time* and they should pursue their informative and communicative function as vital part of their role in society. Looking back at the definition of political parties we used in chapter 2, "parties structure the political word, recruit and socialize the political elite, provide linkage between ruled and rulers and aggregate interest" (Gallagher, Laver et al., 2005: 272), they do so with no restriction of their functions to periods of high mobilization only. Parties are constantly active in the exercise of their functions, and we should assume that communicative and interactive activities make no exception. Therefore, investigating parties at peacetime is looking at a component of parties' life that may be less known than what happens in the spotlight of the election, but it represents a key component of parties 'activity.

Secondly, focusing on parties' online activity at peacetime fills a gap in the literature, by providing a snapshot of what parties 'websites look like when, intuitively, less people are paying attention. Having said that, we need to clarify that our expectations have take into account the particular timeframe and that by and large the level of activity and the degree of

innovation expected at peacetime is dramatically lower than what we could expect un the run up to an election. Specific expectations will be outlined in the empirical component of the thesis.

3.1.3. Systemic characteristics

Looking at four different political systems allow us to get an insight on whether country specific elements affect parties' websites. There have been claims in the literature (Cunha et al. 2003: 70-74, Gibson and Ward 2002: 104) that country specific conditions may affect campaigning online. However, having set our comparative analysis at peacetime, we tend to consider the effect of some systemic characteristics - as the electoral system- less dramatic than during campaigns. Indeed, the electoral system possibly produces patterns of variation in online styles of web usage: it may be the case that proportional electoral systems provide larger incentives for smaller parties to be active online. It may as well be the case that the provision for a threshold represents an extra barrier for online activities. Electoral system related elements could be an important explanation for differences in patterns of online competition, but their impact has to be measured in studies dealing with electoral campaigns.

With regard to constitutional architecture, all the four countries under analysis here are parliamentary democracies with bicameral system, so that in terms of constitutional settings the similarities outnumber differences. The political settings depending on the form of government (federal vs unitary) can be regarded as a potentially influential factor, but once again in the case of our sample no difference exists among the four countries. We have no federal state in the sample; all of the countries are unitary state – even though arguably with different localized issue – therefore the potential impact of such a factor can't be tested here.

In terms of technological development the scenario is rather complicated. The four party systems under analysis have all experienced intense internet diffusion in the past few years, so that they are all touched by

the impact that the web has had in society at large and in particular in the political sphere. Table 3.1 below indicates levels of internet penetration in the four countries and as we can see, the four countries all experienced relatively high levels of Internet penetration which would tend to indicate some levels of uniformity.

Table 3.1. Levels of internet diffusion in the 4 countries under analysis and EU averages

	2007	2008	2009
EU 27	54	60	65
EU 25	56	62	67
EU15	59	64	68
Spain	45	51	54
Italy	43	47	53
United Kingdom	67	71	77
Ireland	57	63	67

Table 6.2 Percentage of Household with Internet Access. Eurostat
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/information_society/data/main_tables

However, some differences do exist in terms of internet diffusion; even though we are in the range of medium-high level of internet use, some levels of difference still exist. The UK has the greatest level of internet diffusion, with about two thirds of the population wired. Spain and Italy are just above 50%, displaying a sensibly lower level of internet penetration. Ireland is somewhat in between, with a total of 67% of households connected to the internet in 2009. From 2007, all these countries experienced roughly a 10% increase in number of connection. If the level of growth in number of connections is equal, the starting points in 2007 were not the same, so that there seems to be a constant discrepancy in level of internet diffusion. If such a discrepancy plays a role in determining inter-websites variance remains to be seen.

On the theoretical level we could speculate on the effect that internet penetration may have. It could be that such a factor does play a significant role and accounts for some of the variance in patterns of web usage. It may not matter at all, or it may as well be the case that country specific technological development does not follow a linear pattern, and that its effect

is difficult to observe. In his ex-post meta-analysis of parties' websites and electoral competition Strandberg (2008) does not test for levels of internet penetration in different electoral context, neither strong empirical studies controlling for such a factor exist. Nevertheless, we could expect the size of the audience in each national context to represent a relatively important factor in driving parties' activity online. Parties in the sample offer a certain amount of variation in terms of size, organization (concentration of power), a good mix of mainstream/fringe parties and a vast range of ideological positions on the left-right dimension. Data on parties' organization, ideological legacy, electoral performances (which will serve as a proxy for resources) will be presented in the next chapter where an account of the independent variable will be provided. The total number of parties in the sample is thirty-three: twelve Italians, six Spanish, nine British and six Irish; such a number is enough to justify the employment of econometric techniques such as regression analysis, employed in Chapter 4.

3.2 Operationalization and measurements

As Jacoby puts it 'in any discipline, scientific progress is strictly limited by the capacity to measure relevant concepts' (Jacoby, 1999: 271). Political Science as a soft science is particularly concerned with measurement problems and this study does not make an exception. Indeed, one of the most challenging components of this research design regards the operationalization of the dependent and independent variables. With regard to the explanatory variables, we have mentioned a number of concerns we had – especially on party characteristics - and the solutions we put in place in order to overcome them. With regard to the dependent variable the set of problems deriving from measurement issues is more problematic. Research on cyber parties only started roughly a decade ago and this sub-field of Political Science still has much to achieve in terms of efficient and extensive measurement. On one hand, the subject itself, being subjected to such frequent developments and updates, it is not easy to capture. On the other hand, the academic

community of scholars researching such a field has not done enough, merely applying what Gibson and Ward had firstly proposed around ten years ago (Gibson and Ward, 2000a).

3.2.1 Capturing parties' websites

Gibson and Ward were the first researchers coming up with a systematic coding frame to measure parties' websites; its first use dates back to 1998, but its extensive treatment as methodological tool came in a later article entitled 'A proposed methodology for studying the function and effectiveness of party and candidates websites' (2000a). The coding frame specified in that article has become an established technique in the field, adopted, often in slightly modified versions, by almost every empirical study produced on cyber parties in the following years (Newell, 2001; Cunha, Martin et al., 2003; Norris, 2003; De Landtsheer, 2007; Vaccari, 2008a; 2008b). Some attempts at improvement and enrichment of the originally proposed coding frame have been made, but a systematic reassessment of such a frame has not been done and this study won't engage with such a task.

In evaluating which features should be captured by the study of political parties websites Gibson and Ward (Gibson and Ward, 2000a: 305) suggest paying some attention to the four goals that parties might want to achieve through their presence online:

I.   Information provision

II.   Campaigning

III.   Networking

IV.   Promoting Participation

In order to actively achieve each of these goals, *ad hoc* instruments were to be put in place on the websites[vi] and measures were to be elaborated in order to produce empirical estimators for each of the four goals. However, much has changed since the year 2000 and an interval of a few years can make a substantial difference, in this field perhaps more than in any other

subfield of political science. Indeed, developments in terms of both political communication and technology have shifted the focus from exclusive analysis of parties' websites to candidates' web-pages, social networks and blogs, so that parties' websites do not fully account anymore for tasks such as campaigning and networking. Indeed, an important series of changes have been taking place in cyberspace, some of them having fundamental implications for political actors online. The Financial Times editorial of Novermber 1st 2008 highlighted how 'the online networks have turned into important mass market distribution systems for political messages' and how 'YouTube has become a hub for the video 'clip culture' that marks the biggest difference in media habits this election season.' In the past year academic attention towards political communication phenomena on YouTube, Myspace and Facebook has grown dramatically (Carlson and Strandberg, 2008; Gibson and McAllister, 2008; Gueorguieva, 2008; Salmond, 2008; Williams and Gulati, 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2009; Williams, 2009). Therefore, if on one hand, the Gibson and Ward's 2000 article (and its developments and adaptations from the same authors) will be considered as a key point of reference in our investigation, on the other hand, we will explain which features are functional to our analysis and which one should be thought about again in the light of the changes that took place in the past few years.

The categorization of parties 'goals with regard to their online presence is obviously affected by some levels of overlap between categories when it comes to measurements. Campaign activities do imply some level of information diffusion; in the same vein, the promotion of participation is based on information exchange and circulation. Networking does not happened in vacuum, it implicitly has to do with participating in one other's visions. Web 2.0, as we will discuss in chapter 5 is a complex phenomenon and it involves information dissemination as well as participation, but its primary characteristics is to network individuals and groups. Similarly, campaigns do have a networking dimension, they spread messages through networks, either pre-existing or ad hoc ones. As such the aforementioned categorization, as many of this sort, is somewhat arbitrary but it has served research purposes in the past and it will be used here as follows.

In chapter 4 we will extensively deal with 'Information provision' and 'Promoting Participation', the measurement of participation will be discussed and challenged. Chapter 5 will be dedicated to 'Networking' though Web 2.0 instruments and, finally, 'Campaigning' will be dealt with in Part III of the dissertation- both at the party and at the candidate level, so that each of the four aforementioned goals will be accounted for. As such, the classification of parties' goals in four categories serves the purpose of clarity and it points out what the main focus of each section of this dissertation will be.

In terms of measurement, the coding scheme Gibson and Ward proposed in 2000 accounts for a very extensive treatment of parties' websites and introduces different levels of measurement, using a simple dichotomy of absent/present (which assumes the numeric values of 0 and 1) for an extensive number of features. With regard to a few features, a more in-depth level of measurement was conceived. It was suggested that features like the presence of a values/ideology section or the existence of a policies' explanation area should be measured with a word count. Finally, some other elements were measured as ordinal scales: for instance the possibility of making a donation was split in four levels: download form (1), online inquiry form (2), online transaction (3), or no reference to donations (0). Although the coding frame proposed is a rather sophisticated form of measurement, the great majority of studies on cyber parties have ignored some of the measurement techniques suggested by Gibson and Ward in the 2000 article and have rather focused on the presence vs. absence of informative and interactive elements. For instance, word count has often been neglected and parties' websites have been analysed on the basis of absence or presence of certain features, without any further quantitative or qualitative description. Even though we reckon that the qualitative analysis of parties' websites represents an important component of this subfield of political studies, we do not engage with it. The word count, in a comparative project such as this, appears to be a rather biased form of analysis, given that the three languages are substantially different. Therefore the comparison would be rather problematic.

The analysis of websites' functions has often been done through additive indexes-generated by adding up dichotomous variables- for information provision, participation, navigability, and so on (Newell, 2001; Lusoli, Ward et al., 2002; Gibson and Ward, 2003; Norris, 2003). Similar scales have been associated with different forms of standardization (Cunha, Martin et al., 2003; Vaccari, 2008b). All those scales and indexes are perfectly justifiable and justified by the scholars who created and/or applied them; nevertheless the lack of unique methodology represents a problem in the field, especially considering the difficulties arising in making comparisons. The already discussed case study nature of many studies, together with the different types of measurement and treatment of the websites' features make comparisons highly problematic.

A crucial step in solving the methodological confusion in the field would be to employ a unique standardized measure which would enhance levels of comparability, and we will make an effort in order for our findings to be not only replicable, but also and mainly comparable with previous and further research. We will make use of a revised version on the 2000 coding scheme and we will also question its validity, by proposing a revised version with regard to participatory/interactive features in chapter 4.

3.2.2 Capturing parties' websites today

In the light of such a big change as the one produced by the widespread diffusion of Web 2.0 platforms in online communication, the necessity of paying attention to these new communication phenomena rises. Therefore, the Gibson and Ward's scheme discussed in the previous section appears now rather outdated and some of its pillars have to be reconsidered. The categories: Information provision, Campaigning, Networking, and Promoting Participation remain somewhat valid, but their relative importance in parties' websites is likely to have dramatically changed. Moreover, as clarified above, the classification is a useful tool that simplifies the clarity of

our investigation, but we acknowledge that it does not account for overlapping between categories.

With regard to 'Information provision', we can now safely assume that every party will provide a range of information; for instance it is highly unlikely that a party won't present its position on major national issues, so that there won't be high variation, but with a relatively large range of possible informational activities we should still be able to capture differences and/or confirm data on homogenization.

With regard to the second goal that parties may pursue: online 'Campaigning', we should find some traces of that even if an election is not planned within the next six months according to the notion of permanent campaigning (Farrell and Webb, 2000; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002; Farrell, 2006). However campaigning can be now efficiently performed thanks to a number of instruments, which were not available a few years ago (social networks, video messages, and so on) and candidates campaigning online has become more widespread than it used to be. Therefore, the investigation of cyber-campaigning will be extensively carried out in the third part of this dissertation by looking at both the quality of party websites and the diffusion of candidates' webpages. The 'Networking' function is now instrumental to successful achievement of participation and campaigning. In a recent note on new media and revitalization of politics in the UK, Gibson, talking of the next electoral campaign in the UK, claims

> 'Practically, parties have already started making use of new social media tools to set up new national supporter networks, with a number of leading and lesser known politicians now enjoying profiles on Facebook and MySpace' (2008: 5).

Parties now give prominent space on their website to social networks and Web 2.0 features at large. Therefore we will examine the type and number of social networks and sharing platforms incorporated by parties' websites and we will attempt to provide an explanation of their variance, in relation to a series of possible explanatory elements in chapter 5.

As we will explain in greater detail in chapter 5, the study of political parties' activity in social networking sites is an unknown territory, whose

exploration implies a number of *caveats*. The lack of systematic investigation on such a phenomenon and its own nature make its study a rather difficult task. We attempt an investigation of three different forms of Web 2.0 by using the same set of explanatory variables that we used in chapter 4 and as a dependent variable we use a binary variable accounting for the presence or lack of links to the three Web 2.0 applications, specifically: Twitter, Facebook and Blogs. Such a choice allows us to overcome some of the high level of noise associated with the study of Web 2.0 application and a very slim model will be able to give us few but rather stable answers on it.

We regard web 2.0 as new channel for parties to be implemented in their online activity. We analyze it separately from other websites 'features for a number of reasons. Firstly, as explained above we look at web 2.0 tools as possible multiplier of networks rather than as a proxy for participation. Secondly, given the degree of novelty of those platforms the study we perform here is more exploratory than explanatory. Explaining why a party adopts web 2.0 strategies, and if so which one, would require a time series data combined with the availability of large N study of a multiplicity of websites. That could indeed explain whether a 'me too' logic apply to web 2.0 as well.

This project means to contribute to the establishment of an improved methodology in the field of cyber politics, by performing a neat and replicable data classification and analysis. Obviously the research design is not immune from possible forms of bias and we acknowledge that this study deals with several limitations, especially in terms of number of parties' websites under analysis. For instance, as we are able to test only a limited number of explanatory variables, we admit the possibility of omitted variables may affect the results. Nevertheless, we believe this study can shed some light on explaining variation in parties'websites.

Finally, a note on the use of multiple dependent variables throughout the dissertation is required. In the empirical components of the dissertation, parts II and III, a number of different dependent variables are explored and explained. The operationalization of each of them is dealt with in the relevant chapters' sections. Given the different sides of parties' online behaviour that

we seek to capture a number of different dependent variables are employed and we will evaluate for their aggregate meaning in the final chapter. Appendix A will describe and explain the different indexes used to measure parties websites. In the third part of the dissertation – chapter 7 – we look at candidates' websites and the dependent variable in use there is a rather different one: we look for presence or absence of candidates' webpages. As such, we do not control for the quality of those websites as our main goal is to determine what motivates candidates to go online and not how their websites look like. A similar criterion was used to measure the dependent variable in chapter 5, the presence or absence of blogs and links to social networking sites.

Overall, each component of the thesis contains one chapter looking at quality and status of parties' websites (chapter 4 in part II and chapter 6 in part III) and one chapter taking as dependent variable the existence of certain elements (chapter 5 in part II and chapter 7 in part III).

3.2.3 The explanatory variables

In this part of the study, the model had to be oriented towards parsimony and, as will be extensively described in chapter 4, we will provide an account of party ethos in terms of ideological position on the left/right scale and diffusion of power within the party. We will then combine these factors with electoral performances, which will enable us to differentiate between small and large parties and, finally, country. The set of exploratory variables will be accounted for in Chapter 4, but we need to spend a few words on the variable 'centralization of power within party', firstly because it is the result of an original process of data collection and secondly because it represents a novelty in the field of internet studies

As Katz and Mair put it 'a party is itself a political system' (Katz and Mair, 1995: 14), the party organization is a complex machine and a multidimensional phenomenon that could be analyzed in different ways. Indeed, a number of studies investigated the essence of party organization

(Key, 1947; Duverger, 1954) and described types and ideal-types of party organization, other studies have investigated the reasons why parties organize the way they do (Strom, 1985; Panebianco, 1988), finally some scholars have gone more in depth on the empirical level and told us more on the actual articulation of party organization (Janda, 1980; Katz and Mair, 1994; Katz and Mair, 1995). Thus, there are a number of ways of looking at party organization and every study should use and specify the organizational features that best fit the goal of the study (Crotty, 1970: 282).

As said in the 'case selection' section we will make use of the coding frame originally introduced by Janda, coding parties' constitutions and formal rules by using ordinal scales in order to understand how diffuse power is within the party hierarchies. One might argue that inference based on formal rules and procedures does not account for how things work in practice, in the real world. Even though such an objection is legitimate, formal rules are the most reliable and comparable data source at our disposal:

> 'as far as empirical research is concerned, the party's formal rules and procedures also offer an comparable source of reasonably hard data which can be utilized in the analysis of party organization across both time and space. These formal rules constitute one of the very few elements of party organization which can be subject to systematic cross-national comparison, and for which comparable data exist over time' (Katz and Mair, 1995: 16).

Party statutes and rulebooks can indeed be compared over countries and they allow for a greater level of understanding. The possibility of conducting in-depth study of each political party comes up against resources constraints and feasibility for a doctoral dissertation. However, such a choice was not merely empirically driven, but also informed by the intention of drawing generalizable conclusions on a representative number of European parties. Thus, formal rules and procedures will be the basis of this empirical analysis of party organization, oriented towards the empirical estimation of party internal democracy as the extent to which parties allocate decision making powers within their internal structure.

Party internal democracy is regarded as one of the goals of, at least, some types of political parties such as the mass party (Duverger, 1954: 63-71). Even without assuming that parties ought to be internally democratic, or, on

the other hand, that they are intrinsically oligarchic entities (Michels, 1915); speculation on their loyalty to internal democratic values has been of major interest in the political science literature (Duverger, 1954; Janda, 1980; Harmel and Janda, 1982; 1994; Sartori, 2005) The definition of internal party democracy we will be referring from now on is borrowed from and Gibson and Harmel; it considers the democratic character of party organization as

> 'the extent to which party members (or, in the absence of membership, party militants or activists) are able to govern decisions of their party and the behaviour of their party leaders and their representatives in government and the behaviour of their party leaders and their representatives in governmental offices' (Gibson and Harmel, 1998: 653)

Internal party democracy will be mapped through two main indicators: leadership selection and candidates' selection, which should give us indications on

> 'the location and distribution of effective decision-making authority within the party. Thus a centralized party is one which features the concentration of effective decision-making authority in the national party organs, with a premium placed on a smaller number of individuals participating in the decision.' (Janda, 1980: 108)

At the end of chapter 4, when the aforementioned variables will be actually employed, we will provide an appendix containing an extensive account of the ordinal scale used to code the process of selecting candidates and leaders.

The other explanatory variables are relatively straightforward to operationalize; being the measure of left/right derived from the aforementioned expert surveys (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Benoit, 2009), the electoral size variable based on electoral performances and a clustrized variable for country.

The hypothesis is that the aforesaid set of explanatory variables accounts for the set of independent variable we will make use of in chapter 4 and 5. The empirical application of such a set of explanatory variables represents one of the contributions that this project seeks to bring to the study of parties in cyberspace. Despite the findings, which may falsify some of our hypotheses, we are interested in providing an empirical control for a

number of normative claims, which have been around for long, but they have not been tested in a cross national study.

Part III

3.3 The case study

The first part of this dissertation is a comparative study, the second part, focusing on cyber campaigns, takes the form of a case study, such a choice depends on a number of reasons, which we will now provide an explanation for.

The feasibility of the study suggested that the focus on one country should have been preferred to other methodologies with regard to the cyber campaign component of this project. Indeed, only the case of election for the European Parliament would allow one to gather data for a number of countries at the exact same time. Therefore, a number of practical reasons have determined the study of cyber campaign to be done in the form of a case study; however such a choice also presents a number of advantages. Often, political science is challenged by the choice between qualitative vs. quantitative methodology; many scholars have tried to make sense of such a dichotomy and some have tried to establish good practice for both qualitative and quantitative research (King, Keohane et al., 1994: 3)

This research project will mainly make use of quantitative technique, but it will face the challenge of justifying why a comparative study is combined with a case study of a single country. Having expressed the practical concerns that motivated such a decision, we also believe that the combination of the two approaches is productive. The reason is easily explained by the concept of triangulation. The term is defined as 'The tracing and measurement of a series or network of triangles in order to survey and map out a territory or region, *spec.* by measuring the angles and one side of each triangle'(Oxford dictionary) but its use goes beyond geometry and mapping. The term is also used in military, navigation and Global Positioning System

(GPS) technologies to describe the process of using multiple points to locate an object; the logic of using different points to describe an object is applied in social research as well and such a research technique is described as 'between (or across) methods' (Denzin, 2009: 302). The process of describing political parties in cyberspace can be more exhaustive if the observation of relevant phenomena is carried out by looking at it from different angles. Combining different forms of observation and analysis will ensure that the findings have robust external validity. Therefore, the study of cyber-campaign will take the form of an in-depth case study of the Irish general election 2007; we will look at parties' websites and the way they changed during electoral campaigns, and we will also look at candidates' websites, enlarging the number of cases under analysis to hundreds. This part of the study will offer a broader picture of cyber campaigning by reporting and analysing data from the Irish Candidate Survey as well as data on the whole population of candidates running for the 2007 national election. The inclusion of the candidate' point of view will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the internet on campaigning style (Norris, 2000) by bringing empirical evidence and elaborating on them in order to clarify (a) whether and how the internet is used for electoral campaigns at the party as well as at the candidate level and (b) if it plays any effective role in terms of electoral gains.

As anticipated before, also this section of the inquiry will include a descriptive component (chapter 6), which will be the first consistent data collection of Irish parties in cyberspace and a second stage where the causal inference on the nature of cyber campaigns will be examined (chapter 7).

3.3.1 Why Ireland?

The case study will focus on the Irish general election held in May 2007. The decision to focus on the Irish election has a threefold motivation: first, the contribution of this research fills a significant gap, given the lack of data on the impact of the internet in the Irish political system. Second, a number of contingent circumstances made possible the collection of original

and extensive data for the Irish case. Third, even though the Irish case has been often considered particular, with regard to a number of elements, some of the peculiarities of the system make of Ireland an ideal candidate for this study, and with regard to a number of elements the Irish system is not so exceptional.

The Irish exception?

The Irish political system has traditionally been considered anomalous in the European context for a series of reasons. Firstly, the difficulty in distinguishing between the two main antagonists in the political system: Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Gallagher and Marsh argue that the puzzle of explaining the difference between the two major parties is 'one of the most intriguing mysteries of Irish politics' (2002: 180) and some authors characterise the two major parties as the political equivalent of Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee (Mair and Weeks, 2005: 136). Second, the scarce relevance over time of the left/right cleavage made Ireland an even more peculiar case. Looking at the figures regarding the left/right location of electoral outcomes does not help in fitting Ireland into any European pattern; indeed Ireland shows a counter trend in terms of right wing oriented electorate. Indeed the past two elections gave over the 70 percent of the vote to centre right parties, following the trend already pointed out by Gallagher et al. against the 45 percent mean among the other European countries (Gallagher, Laver et al., 2005: 230). Part of the anomaly is due to the fact that the two major Irish parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, do not fit particularly well into the ideal types of European centre right parties. Another factor makes Ireland a rather peculiar case: the Proportional Representation Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) electoral system. This system emphasizes centrifugal forces in electoral competition, putting emphasis on candidate competition rather than on party competition and produces a particularly strong relationship between representative and constituencies (Sinnott, 2005). These factors have contributed to the marginalization of the Irish case in comparative studies

(Mair and Weeks, 2005: 135) and they might inhibit any attempt of building generalizations inducted from the Irish case.

However, what seems to be, at first analysis, a rather unfortunate case, is actually a good research context for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is a certain amount of variation among political parties (bigger against smaller, strongly ideological against electoral parties, new formations against old parties, highly hierarchical parties against more dynamic ones) (Farrell, 1994), which should provide a good test of existing theories on ICT use by political parties. Second, the considerable increase in ICT usage in the country makes it an good candidate for a study of this kind, which combined with the lack of previous research in the field, motivated a certain degree of curiosity for the Irish case. Finally the system is changing towards a sort of more European pattern; therefore the exception is probably not so exceptional anymore.

Or not?

Three fundamental elements of change have been identified and considered as clear indicators that 'Ireland might as well be losing its off-shore distinctiveness' (Mair and Weeks, 2005: 139). The three indicators are: the emergence of a liberal party[vii] (Progressive Democrats), the rise of the Green party in the form of a typical environmental political actor and the increasing practice of government coalitions. Thus the exception seems to be less and less exceptional; therefore the Irish case becomes more appropriate for generalizations. Second, also the peculiarity of PR-STV does appear less special if we accept that campaigning at large is becoming more candidates oriented (Swanson and Mancini, 1996) and if we consider that a number of other European electoral systems (the Finnish one, and the Swiss one, for instance) incentivise candidates-based campaigns. The extent to which post-modern campaigns put emphasis on candidates rather than parties will be discussed elsewhere in this study (chapter 7), but as a matter of fact campaigns focusing on candidates are not as rare as in the past in many European countries. The peculiarity here is rather represented by the fact that

PR-STV does put *by default* emphasis on candidates, therefore on intra-party competition, whereas for a number of European systems such a shift represents a novelty. The PR-STV system indeed allows voters to rank candidates according to their own preferences, thus the candidate, rather than the party, is basic object of the voters' attention. This type of structural constraint obviously affects the electoral contest, by structuring strong dynamic of competition at the intra-party level (or at least that would be the logical argument, which will be tested against empirical evidence in chapter 7).

We argue that particularly in the context of post-modern campaigns the Irish case is not such a special or peculiar *case* and the outcomes of this study should be extendible to a broad range of countries. However we need specified some characteristics of Irish system. Indeed, at the systemic level there are a number of factors to be taken into account as the electoral provisions; which fall under the definition of electoral laws rather than electoral system. The differentiation between electoral system and electoral laws is necessary, the former being the mechanism which translates votes into seats and the latter all the regulations allowing for such a mechanism to perform. First of all, the financial regulation, which binds parties' expenses, has to be considered. The 1997, 2001 and the 2002 Electoral Acts established limits to campaign expenditure at the candidate level and they strongly restrict the extent to which parties can enjoy donations, by posing a low limit and compelling parties to higher degree of transparency[viii]. Therefore, political parties in the new millennium have been committed to greater financial transparency, and at the district level limits on campaigning expenses per candidate have been redefined. This will be of particular importance for us in chapter 7, where we will use electoral expenditure as one of the explanatory elements accounting for the likelihood of candidates to campaign online.

Second, the extent to which legislation regulates parties' access to media, indicates that the Irish case is quite similar to a number of other European countries where the access to TV is based on the proportion of vote share obtained at the previous election (Farrell, 2002: 107).

With regard to the party system's influence on shaping campaign styles, Ireland appears to follow a stereotypical trend: the extent to which parties can count on volunteer labour seems to be decreasing in terms of quantity and at the same time diminishing in terms of importance. Which phenomenon causes the other one is not the object of investigation here and it seems a chicken and egg type of problem. Decline in levels of party membership seems to be a widespread tendency all over Europe (Gallagher, Laver et al., 2005: 312), Ireland makes no exception. By and large the figures on party membership are extremely low, less than 3% of the voting population is affiliated to a party (Marsh, 2005). Counting on quite small membership bases contributes to structuring the electoral campaign in a certain fashion and it inevitably increases its costs. Moreover, the costs of post-modern campaigns are high. Such a fact represents an extremely important argument in favour of the claim that the employment of a relatively inexpensive medium as the internet might have a strong impact on the Irish campaigning scenario.

Probably the most salient element in the Irish party system is represented by the electoral dominance of one party, Fianna Fáil, over the others; such dominance structures the electoral competition (Murphy, 2008: 4). However, in the past twenty years coalition government has been the norm and in analysing the electoral campaign the government-opposition dimension has to be taken into consideration. So that the system is characterized by Fianna Fáil, whose dominance is not as absolute as in the past and that requires now coalition partners. Once again Ireland does not seem to represent an exception anymore; on the contrary, findings on the Irish scenario could be extended to any European system characterized by a coalition government. The combination of the possibility of coalition government and the PR-STV originate a very peculiar phenomenon, which has to be taken into account analysing the Irish system: 'parties recommend their supporters to give lower preferences to coalition partners' (Marsh, 2000: 6). However, orienting the electorate towards a positive attitude to coalition parties is common to party system characterized by long history of coalition governments.

The government system is once again quite typical in the European panorama, the greatest majority of European democracies being parliamentary systems as opposed to the presidential American model.

In terms of Internet penetration, Ireland is in line with the European average, slightly above in terms of dial up and slightly below in terms of broadband[ix]. Different levels of internet penetration over the country will be analyzed elsewhere, being an important element at the constituency level; here the interesting dimension is the comparative one in the European scenario. Obviously, an increase in the internet diffusion does not imply *per se* any revolutionary consequence in the political sphere, but it suggests the possibility that ICT has had or will have an impact in the political system and the electoral competition, and we place particular emphasis on investigating such a possibility.

The Irish system also offers the advantage of having a relatively small number of parties and candidates, which constitutes a major plus for the feasibility of the study. Indeed, a relatively small number of candidates (470) made the process of data collection, at the population level, a feasible amount of work for a single researcher.

3.3.2 And how?

A snapshot of Irish electoral campaign in cyberspace will be portrayed in chapters 6 and 7, therefore a descriptive component will characterize chapter 6; if description is fundamental for explanation (King, Keohane et al., 1994: 34)in this case description is also the basis for any further inquiry. Chapter 6 will employ rather simple statistical techniques, it being mostly devoted to the description and evaluation over time of parties' website in the run up of the election. Chapter 7 will instead make use of a number of econometric techniques such as Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and multinomial logistic regressions to estimate which factors are accountable for candidates engaging with campaigning in cyberspace.

A number of different data sources will be employed for this component of the dissertation, from the original collection and analysis of parties' websites over the period of six months to the data gathered through the Irish National Election Study (INES) and the Irish module of the Comparative Candidates Study.

The former is a study following over a thousand voters from 2002 to 2007, the first panel data available on the Irish electorate; the study contained a number of questions on media use and media trust, as well as an extensive set of questions on the electoral campaign. The latter is part of an international project, the Comparative Candidate Studies Project (CCSP), designed and coordinated by the University of Mannheim.

The Irish module of that started in the summer 2007, after the May general election. Surveys were sent to 470 candidates. The survey includes five sections: political background and activities, campaigning, democracy and representation, issues and policies and background. With regard to the internet in particular, candidates were asked if and how much use they made of the internet (personally and through the party) and what importance they attributed to the internet for campaigning purposes. Thus questions on the actual use of the internet and on the opinion candidates have of that will be used in order to answer the research questions addressed here. Information on the candidates' backgrounds will tell more of who attributes more importance to the web as a mean of campaigning.

While we will make only marginal use of the data from the INES and the CCSP, we will make extensive use of an original dataset containing information on the entire population of candidates. Such a dataset includes a number of original figures and integrates a number of data sources in a unique form. Indeed, data on campaign spending, at the party as well as at the candidate level - gathered from the Standard in Public Office (SIPO)- is integrated, for the first time, with a comprehensive account of who did and who did not cyber-campaign.. The dataset constructed for this section of the dissertation is an original contribution of the author. The dataset is available on request and it is designed in such a way that it would be easy to integrate with figures from other countries, therefore not only it could bring a

contribution to the study of cyber-campaigning in Ireland, but hopefully in broader context.

The employment of econometric techniques will tell us whether or not the internet is a marginal instrument of campaigns, and if the internet can actually play a role in determining vote distribution. Speculations made ten years ago on its potential and its centrality for campaigns need to be rethought and effective estimation of the internet, focused on actual rather than potential capacity for delivering votes will indeed be assessed here.

3.4 Conclusions

To conclude, this chapter offered a methodological outline of the project. It provided an explanation of the reasons driving this project to be designed as a quantitative study, which integrates a cross-national comparative study with a single country case study. The necessity of integrating multiple research objects and strategies was outlined. So was the intent of combining campaign studies with peacetime ones, to get an overall idea of how political parties make use of the web and what sort of meaning such an element has in the broader debate on the internet's potential. The chapter provides an account of how this research deals with time and resources constraints. It also explains the operationalization of the variables under analysis and why the instruments that will be employed are believed to be the most appropriate. This project is composed of two components, the study of the status and quality of parties' websites at 'peacetime' and the study of cyber-campaigning; they tell complementary stories on the same phenomenon and they allow for greater degree of information in drawing conclusions. The methodological differences outlined here not only respond to practical constraints but also to the logic of triangulation, aiming to a better understanding the effect of parties on the internet and the internet on parties.

<hr/>

[i] Beside the obvious language constraints.

[ii] 'Politics is No Longer Local. Its Viral' by J. A. Vargas, Dec 28, 2008. *The Washington Post*
Available at
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-
dyn/content/article/2008/12/26/AR2008122601131.html

[iii] The choice of making use – in a slightly revised fashion-of their categorization was not made without taking into account alternative classification. The Katz and Mair project of 1992 probably represents an equally good collection of data, and it even covers a larger number of countries, but it has a limitation, which makes it unsuitable for this study. Indeed such a study does not make use of ordinal scales on the classification of party organization; this element played a decisive role in the selection of Harmel and Janda's frame for party organization. Even though the Katz and Mair 's collection represent a rich exploration of party organization, it does not fit the nature of this study as the ICPPP data do. Therefore, having to perform an original process of coding, we adopt the frame which best suited our research goals.

[iv] Available at http://www.unc.edu/~gwmarks/data_pp.php

[v] All major parties, with the exception of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), have been willing to provide us with the relevant documents, where not already available online.

[vi] Gibson and Ward clearly assume that, those goals being roughly common to all parties, the coding frame based on them would have applied to any party

[vii] In November 2008 the party voted to disband.

[viii] A detailed account of campaign expenditure per party and per candidate will be provided in chapter 7.

[ix] 57% of individuals regularly use the internet in Ireland, the EU 27 average is 56%, EU 25 is 58% and Euro Area 57%. Source Eurostat
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/information_society/data/main_tables

An analysis of parties' websites: exploring variation and similarities

This chapter analyzes thirty-three European parties in cyberspace. The research goals are twofold: firstly, an analysis of the status and the quality of parties' websites will provide a snapshot of political parties in cyberspace at a given time (November 2008). Secondly, differences will be explored, especially the extent to which variation in patterns of online communication/interaction can be explained by parties' organizational settings, ideological positions, electoral size and national political environment.

The chapter will be structured as follows: a brief overview of the 33 parties' websites, and some considerations on parties in cyberspace will be presented. The research hypotheses to be tested in relation to parties' online communication will be then outlined. Dependent and independent variables will be described in the following section. Finally, the analysis, its results and their implications will be presented and discussed, so that meaningful conclusions can be drawn in the final section of the chapter.

Intro

Nowadays, there is little doubt that any political party, at least in the western world, must have a web presence and President Clinton's 1996 famous quote on the diffusion of the web captures the extent to which the internet is widespread: 'When I took office, only high energy physicists had ever heard of what is called the Worldwide Web.... Now even my cat has its own page.' (Bill Clinton, *Announcement of Next Generation Internet initiative*, 10th October 1996). Thirteen years later, immediately after an American presidential campaign which relied heavily on the web and made use of new

technologies as never before, there is little doubt about the importance of cyberspace for political actors.

In the past ten years, several explanations have been put forward with regard to why and how political parties go online, and a number of empirical studies has dealt with the implications that new technologies have in relation to the internal life of political parties (Gibson and Ward, 1998; 1999; Ward et al. 2003a; Ward, Gibson et al. 2003b). The literature has left us with a number of proposed scenarios to explain the relationship between parties and new technologies.

As we agree with the claim that 'the internet is unlikely to revolutionise party democracy' (Gibson and Ward, 1999: 364) the hypothesis put forward here is that, on the contrary, party democracy might affect the implementation of some internet features over others. Specifically, those features that can possibly enhance the level of interaction/communication and discussion between parties and the electorate may be employed more intensively by parties with higher level of internal democracy. Other elements which are considered as possibly influential in shaping the interactive dimension of parties' websites are: ideology, political system and party strength (measured in terms of electoral size). The explanatory power of this set of variables will be empirically tested here.

The lack of large N empirical studies dealing with this question relegates the debate to speculative generalizations of observed trends. This study aims to partially fill the gap in the literature and it addresses the question of whether a number of party characteristics are responsible- and if so, to what extent- for different patterns of internet usage.

Cyber enthusiasts envisioned a democratic scenario for the internal life of political parties, facilitating the exchanges of opinions and bilateral communication between members and leaders. On the other hand, ICT could possibly serve the opposite function, and it may favour a plebiscitarian form of decision making. Leaders or oligarchies could bypass the party and appeal directly to voters and members. These broad allegations of parties' activities in cyberspace have to be integrated with the factual analysis of how parties

actually behave online. Indeed, favouring one scenario rather than the other without providing an empirical control for it would be merely speculative and even confusing.

This study does not directly deal with the possible implications that the internet may have in terms of party organization, rather it uses some characteristics of party organization in order to explain variation in types and quality of parties' websites. In doing so, we are aware that the technology could be one of the factors responsible for changes in party organization (Panebianco, 1988: 242; Scarrow, 2000), but such a change would need to be observed and analysed over time. Rather, this research presents original data on a number of parties' websites in four European countries at a given time. The possibility that technological change has already modified some of the organizational procedures used to explain variation in parties' websites is not excluded, but we argue that such a possibility, given the relatively low level of internet usage for consulting parties' websites (Carlson and Strandberg, 2005; Lusoli and Ward, 2005) is quite improbable at the moment.

The model we apply here guarantees very minimal bias and performs an efficient task in allowing us to put forward generalizations on the status of parties' websites. The findings of this analysis may bring new pieces of evidence to the discussion of what repercussions the internet may have on party organizational structure and in a party's life at large. However, this study seeks first and foremost to explain variation among parties' websites and it researches factors accountable for such variation, leaving aside speculations on what long-term patterns of intra-party change may be observable in the future. In the discussion section of this chapter, a number of generalizations will be put forward and our findings will be located in the frame of the literature on cyber parties.

4.1 Parties' websites

While the first enthusiastic studies of the role on the internet in politics tended to focus on the democratizing potential of the medium and on its revolutionary capabilities of mobilization, the 'second wave of more sceptical theorists suggested that the web [...] has largely failed to alter 'politics as usual'' (Norris, 2003: 42). As seen in Chapter2, the investigation of political parties has mostly provided descriptive findings and this chapter, in line with such a practice, will offer an overview of the summary data collected for this project. However, the chapter will focus on outlining an explanatory model which aims to account for inter party variation.

As explained in the methodology chapter, the basis for the data collection on parties' websites was provided by Gibson and Ward 2000, while the coding scheme applied here is borrowed from Gibson and Ward 2003. The analysis of party websites was conducted in November 2008, when parties were at 'peacetime', meaning that no electoral campaign was taking place, as explained in chapter 1. Indeed none of the four countries under consideration here was planning an election within the next six months at the time when data were collected. As discussed in chapter 3, Spain and Italy had a general election in April 2008, Ireland in May 2007 and the UK in 2005. Therefore, the country planning the closest general election in time was the UK. However, the election, which will be held sometime in spring 2010, had not been planned at time of data collection, nor it has yet been officially called now [February 2010]. It is a rather unlikely scenario that British parties were already campaigning in 2008 for an election whose date has not been announced yet. Over sixteen months after data collection, there is still no clear indication of when the next British general election will take place. Obviously, if we accept the concept of permanent campaign (Farrell and Webb, 2000) we should expect some level of mobilization and competition, but no intensive campaign activity is expected to take place online (nor offline) so much in advance. Electoral rules vary from country to country, but it is rather unlikely to detect high electoral activity in the six months prior to

elections; moreover at the time of data collection there was not even debate on the possibility of going to the polls anytime soon. There are some differences in where in the electoral cycle for the four countries were, being Italy, Spain and Ireland at its beginning and the UK closer to the end. Those differences may be playing a role for governments (Marsh, 1998; Miller and Mackie, 1973) and their levels of popularity but once ascertained that no election is planned within a few months; such a factor should not play a role at the country level.[i]

Recently, empirical studies have focused on parties and candidates' activities online in campaign time (Gibson and Rommele, 2001: Gibson and Rommele, 2003a,2003b; Gibson and McAllister, 2006; 2008; Carlson and Strandberg, 2008: ; Gibson, Lusoli et al., 2008; Vaccari, 2008a, 2008b), and this dissertation will also do so in its third part. However, it was felt that there was a need for an evaluation of parties' websites, in a sort of neutral time, when the pressure for cyber-campaigning is low for all the parties included in the study. Indeed, the reverse situation-all parties holding an election at the same time therefore feeling the same pressure for cyber-campaign- would only be possible for European elections, but it would present a number of problematic angles, from the different electoral systems (favouring different degrees of party centred or candidate centred campaign) to the second order election argument (Reif and Schmitt, 1980: ; Marsh, 1998; Schmitt, 2005) and its application to the communication environment (Lusoli, 2005a, 2005b).

If we believe that campaigning is nowadays permanent, we do expect some campaign items and issues to feature on parties' websites but a relatively low party competition. However, we do not expect to find sections dedicated to candidates and we believe that party manifestos and other electoral specific material won't be there. On the other hand we do expect, on the basis of what the literature has shown with a certain degree of certainty, that there will be widespread high levels of information provision and a lower level of interactivity than in electoral campaigns (Newell, 2001; Gibson and Ward, 2003; Vaccari, 2008a). Moreover, having set our analysis during 'peacetime' gives us the opportunity of testing the claim that 'in 'peacetime',

when sites have often become dormant, fringe parties can narrow the gap'
(Ward, Gibson et al., 2003: 24), which we will discuss after having performed
the empirical analysis. In the previous chapter we explained the reasons
which led to the choice of the four countries and the selection of observations
(parties' websites). Therefore, we won't extensively deal with case selection
here; rather we will provide a list of parties analysed and a very concise note
on their inclusion.

Table 4.1. Parties analyzed, by country

Party	Country
Conservative Party	United
Democratic Unionist Party	United Kingdom
Labour Party	United Kingdom
Liberal Democrats	United Kingdom
Playd Cymru (National Party of Wales)	United Kingdom
Respect	United Kingdom
Scottish National Party	United Kingdom
Social Democratic and Labour Party	United Kingdom
Ulster Unionist Party	United Kingdom
Bloque Nacionalista Galego	Spain
Convergència i Unió	Spain
Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	Spain
Izquierda Unida	Spain
Partido Popular	Spain
Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Spain
Alleanza Nazionale	Italy
Azione Sociale	Italy
Forza Italia	Italy
Italia Dei Valori (Lista di Pietro)	Italy
Lega Nord	Italy
Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore	Italy
Nuovo PSI	Italy
Partito Dei Comunisti Italiani	Italy
Partito Democratico	Italy
Rifondazione Comunista	Italy
Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e Democratici di	Italy
Verdi	Italy
Fianna Fáil	Ireland
Fine Gael	Ireland
Greens	Ireland
Labour	Ireland
Progressive Democrats	Ireland
Sinn Féin	Ireland

The case selection section in Chapter 3 provided an explanation for countries selection, whereas here we will provide a brief overview of the actual observations, the parties, under analysis. The study aims to be as inclusive as possible and it wants to maximize its capacity of capturing variation. By and large, the goal was to include in the study all parties in each country with parliamentary representation. For Ireland, Spain and the UK, we included parties with parliamentary representation at the national level. With regard to the UK, we were able to get data for almost every party with representatives in Westminster[ii]. The party constitutions (used to construct one of the independent variables) were either obtained directly from the websites or through personal correspondence with party officials by email, regular mail or telephone. Ireland is represented by every party with TDs in the Dáil (the Irish Legislative Assembly); for the six major parties it was indeed possible to gather party constitutions. Sinn Féin has been coded as an Irish party even though the party also runs for the Westminster election. The reason for such a choice is mainly motivated by the fact that Sinn Féin candidates in case of election for Westminster refuse to take their seats. On November 8th 2008 the Progressive Democrats party congress voted to disband, therefore all the data collected with regard to such a party dates before November 8th.

Spain actually has a few more parties with parliamentary representation than those under analysis here; however it was impossible to gather data on internal organization or ideological position. The Spanish parties analyzed here account for more that 98% of vote share in the country. Therefore, we extensively cover Spanish parties in cyberspace.

For Italy, we had almost the opposite problem: covering only parties with parliamentary representation, would have excluded a number of parties, which are, not only traditionally, crucial to Italian politics. After the April 2008 general election. the, traditionally fragmented, Italian political system has experienced a strong reshaping process. Indeed, the Italian parliament, typically crowded with a large number of parties, at the moment-2008/2009-, has only six parliamentary groups aggregating eleven parties. Some of the

parties however are 'paper' parties (MPA, and Italiani nel Mondo) or they have such a small parliamentary representation that scholars talk of only five parties in the system (Pasquino, 2008). Such a number is extremely low for the Italian case, which produced high levels of party fragmentation even under a semi-majoritarian electoral system (1993-2005). For the first time in the history of the Republic, communist and socialist parties were not able to pass the threshold necessary to obtain parliamentary representation. The two communist parties (RC and PDCI) and the Green party at the three previous elections indeed collectively received 10% (2006), 9% (2001) and 11% (1996) of vote share and at the 2008 election the coalition aggregating extreme left parties, Sinistra Arcolableno gained more than 1 million votes. Radical right parties winning almost 900.000 votes were equally unable to get parliamentary representation. Given the traditional importance that those extreme formations have had in historical perspective, it is reasonable to expect them to keep playing a primary role in Italian politics. Therefore, a few parties with no elected representative in the parliament, have been included in the analysis: Partito dei Comunisti Italiani, Partito della Rifondazione Comunista, Federazione dei Verdi and Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore.

Overall, the process of selecting parties was oriented towards the highest possible inclusion, and exclusion is due to lack of data rather than a conscious decision to eliminate cases. The observations secure, firstly, a good cross national overview, secondly their number is large enough to allow the use of regression techniques, and, thirdly, it presents some degrees of variation in the explanatory variables. Indeed, we have small and large parties, fringe and mainstream, left wing and right wing and, the cross national element guarantees that our findings will have some degree of representativeness of the European scenario, combining two Anglo-Saxon liberal democracies with two southern European ones.

Having outlined some of the characteristics of our units of analysis, we move now to the formulation of an explanatory model, which comes primarily from evidence from the literature for which we perform accurate empirical measurements and checks.

4.2   The explanatory model

To date, the literature that has dealt with how parties use new technologies was put forward only a few explanatory theories accounting for differences in parties' online behaviour. In what still represents the sole coherent collection of studies on political parties online, three main factors are indicated as accountable for differences between countries and individual parties: (Nixon, Ward et al., 2003: 241)

> a.   Political and Social system
>
> b.   Party internal characteristics
>
> c.   Technological development

On the basis of this, our research goal here is to collect empirical estimators and to produce a thorough control for a number of relevant elements. We will indeed produce a 'lighter' model seeking to account for differences in parties' online behaviour.

With regard to political and social systems, we investigate this by producing a comparative analysis that includes four countries. Indeed we tend to agree with what Gibson et al. had foreseen in 2000: 'how these new technologies are used will depend in part on the political system within which they are applied' (Gibson, Newell et al., 2000: 134). A number of pre-existing political factors affect, directly or indirectly, politics online; specifically electoral laws, electoral cycle, electoral system and party competition, have been regarded as factors which may be playing a role in determining patterns of online behaviour (Nixon, Ward et al., 2003: 241). Electoral laws and electoral system are particularly important when it comes to cyber-campaigning, and we will come back to these in chapter 6 and 7 where we will deal with electioneering online. Here, having set the analysis in 'peacetime', those elements seem to be rather irrelevant as at 'peacetime', the effect of electoral cycle should also fade away.

Theoretical considerations as well as empirical evidence have suggested that there is variance at the party system level (Gibson and

Rommele, 2007: 12) meaning that different national systems may produce different patterns of online behaviour; and we intend to capture this by performing an empirical control for such a factor, in one of the few comparative analyses of parties' websites to date. In order to produce a parsimonious model —considering the number of units of analysis — we will capture the effect of each national political system by using a cluster operationalization for the variable country.[iii] Moreover, providing a control for country will allow us to specifically contribute to the discussion of whether or not there are 'distinctively southern European features of the political implications of the new technologies' as Cunha et al. suggest (2003: 88). Therefore, we will be testing country specific difference setting the electoral related phenomena as *ceteris paribus*. Spelling out the differences in terms of country specific patterns could help us in identifying other phenomena which may be playing a role. If the differences in terms of election related phenomena are minimized by setting the data collection in 'peacetime', we may still observe inter country variation which could be due to political culture or technological profile of the country.

Party internal characteristics such as resources, incentives and orientation have been regarded as a key set of explanatory factors (Gibson and Ward, 1999; Gibson, Nixon et al., 2003; Nixon, Ward et al., 2003; Padró-Solanet and Cardenal, 2008) and they are evaluated here. Indeed, the main explanatory variables are expected to be related to party internal characteristics, both in terms of organizational setting-thus level of concentration of power- and in terms of resources. While for organizational setting there has been a process of original data collection and operationalization, for resources, the control is provided by party electoral strength. That should provide us with a good indicator of available resources, in a political scenario where the professionalized party seems to have almost entirely substituted the mass party habit of relying on a free workforce supplied by members. Moreover, introducing a variable accounting for party strength allows us to enter the debate on whether or not there is a process of normalization taking place. Margolis and Resnik (2000) did not exactly define

what they meant by minor or major actors no specific indicators of what a mainstream party -as opposed to a fringe party- is, have been identified by empirical contributions (Gibson, Margolis et al., 2003). Even though the terms are somewhat self explanatory, we chose to use an empirical indicator accounting for it; hence, we look at electoral performances at the last general election and we take as threshold the 10% vote share to make a distinction between big and small parties. Such a proxy will provide us with a control for party relative strength. Finally, for what concerns party characteristics, we were able to assign left/right positions on the basis of expert surveys so that ideological orientation is accounted for in the model. Such a measure, which will be precisely described in the next section, is quite accurate and it accounts for variation much more than any previous dichotomous measure employed (Vaccari, 2008b) or proposed (Gibson and Rommele, 2001) to date.

Regarding technological development, we assume that, given the characteristics of our sample, such a factor would actually not be playing any major role in determining variation. Indeed, the similarities between the four countries in terms of receiving and adapting to technological innovations should be very marginal and they would be captured by the cross country variation, if there actually is any. Given the number of observations analyzed here, a choice not to control for technological development was made. On one hand, the methodological concern was not to overload the model and, on the other hand, the theoretical argument that technology may explain initial developments but it does not necessarily explain its own implementation (Nixon et al., 2003), suggested that the variable could be excluded from the explanatory model and that its effects would be captured by the clusterization of the country variable. Finally, by setting the data analysis at "peacetime", we have minimized the effect of election related variables. In doing so, we have attempted to reduce the bias affecting previous comparative studies, which did not provide a control for the closeness of election (for instance, Cunha, Martin et al., 2003).

To sum up, our revised model will account for:

- Party internal characteristics, controlling for: internal democracy, ideological position and resources
- Country specific effects

These sets of variables have been put forward as key components accounting for differences in parties' websites and the application of such a model should answer some of the questions that Gibson and Ward put forward almost ten years ago on the impact of ideological position, size and context (2000a: 316). However, as research on parties' websites evolved in the past few years, such explanatory factors seem to apply to level of interaction/participation more than to websites at large. Indeed, with regard to information provided we expect low levels of variation as recently pointed out (Gibson and Ward, 2009). Therefore we will test a set of formal falsifiable hypotheses, with regard to three components of parties' websites: provision of information, participation/interactivity, and overall state of the websites. Even if we suspect that the explanatory model will perform well when applied to participatory features and rather poorly with regard to overall websites (if low variation is observed in terms of information provision), we feel that we should first apply it and leave its discussion to the final section of this chapter.

Formally we test the following:

H1= *Standardization and homogenization will be observed for information provision. If variation is observed at all, its existence may be accounted for by systemic differences. In other words, if any pattern of variation exists with regard to information provision, country specific differences will account for that.*

H2= *Variation will be observed with regard to participatory/interactive possibilities. The reasons for such a variation will relate to party internal characteristics (levels of internal democracy and Ideology), party size and country differences.*

H3= *In terms of overall differences between parties' websites, variation will be observed. If some sort of variation is observed in information provision, the same explanatory factors accounting for variation in H2 will be responsible for overall variation; finally, if the previous condition is fulfilled, the model should be more explanatory that when it is applied to interactivity only.*

Hypotheses two and three will be thus explored by applying the following model, with the aforementioned variables tested, firstly as explanatory factors with regard to variation in levels of participation/interactivity that websites offer to users, and secondly as an account for overall variation in the websites.

More formally, the model tested here can be expressed as follows:

$$Y2 = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \varepsilon \qquad [1]$$

$$Y3 = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \varepsilon \qquad [2]$$

Where:

Y2=Participation/interactivity
Y3=Whole website
x1=Party internal democracy
x2= Resources
x3= Ideological position
x4= Country

Considering the small number of observations in the study, the model should not be overloaded, thus no other variables will be added. Even though the sample is rather small, the number of cases allows us for the use of regression techniques so that the model will be tested with ordinary least squares (OLS).

Regarding H1, we do expect very low level of variation or no variation whatsoever; in both cases (as well as in the case of observing detectable levels of variation) analysis of variance (ANOVA) and parametric tests will be performed in order to check whether country specific elements might explain the variation.

Having described the model and the impact we expect from each explanatory variable, it is time now to describe, in some details, how the

variables were actually constructed empirically. The next section will provide a comprehensive description of how dependent and independent variables were constructed.

4.3 The independent variables

As specified in the previous section, the explanatory variables relate to two major factors: country and party internal characteristics. With regard to country, the measure employed here (in the regression analysis) is very straightforward: we use a clustered variable, with one country taken as reference category, which allows us to control for variation produced by differences in country specific political environment. Ideally, a multilevel model should be applied, but the small number of cases makes the efficiency of such a technique uncertain, therefore the application of such a model is inappropriate.

Much more of an explanation is required by the variable accounting for internal democracy/diffusion of power within each party. We suspect that party organization may tell us something about the way parties' websites look. In plain terms, we claim that websites may look the way they do because they provide a reflection of important elements -pre-existent to the internet- such as organizational settings and diffusion of power within the party. We echo Gibson and Harmel, as discussed in chapter 2, in their description of party internal democracy. Party internal democracy is thus conceived as the extent to which power is distributed within the party; the more decentralized power is within the party, the more internally democratic the party is, and vice versa.

In terms of empirical indicators able to capture the centralization of power we follow Janda (1980), by attributing scores to each party on the basis of analysis of party constitutions and rulebooks. The broader frame within which the measures were produced was extensively described in chapter 3, so that here we will limit its discussion to the practical concerns we faced during

the data collection process and to their final operationalization. Janda's coding frame allows for a number of dimensions to capture the extent to which power is concentrated or diffuse within a given party. However theoretical considerations suggest that some dimensions are more crucial than others and the operationalization process therefore focused on candidate selection and leadership selection as the two best measures of party internal democracy, and here we give an account of such a choice.

If we take Hazan and Rahat's word for it: 'candidate selection reflects and defines the character of a party and its internal power struggle' (2006: 110), we cannot prescind from this dimension in dealing with characteristics of party organization. Candidate selection is a crucial process of party life and its evaluation, on the basis of its regulatory procedures, possibly represents the most powerful indicator of how power is diffused throughout the party. Empirical research on candidate selection has encountered substantial problems and has suffered from inaccessibility of data, so that the process has been rightly described as 'the secret garden' of politics (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988). However a number of studies dealt with the heuristics of candidates selection (Janda, 1980; Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Katz and Mair, 1992; Bille, 2001; Rahat and Hazan, 2001; Lundell, 2004) and there seems to be substantial agreement on the idea that 'the way in which political parties select their candidates may be used as an acid test of how democratically they conduct their internal affairs' (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988: 1). The claim that the greater the inclusion of party members in the process the more internally democratic the party is, has been put forward by several scholars (Janda, 1980; Harmel and Janda, 1982; Rahat and Hazan, 2001; Hazan and Rahat, 2006) and here we apply Janda's numeric scheme going from 1 (selection made in direct primary) to 9 (selection made by party council). The lowest score indicates low level of centralization of power and high scores are used for highly centralized procedures, thus less internally democratic parties. This represents the first component of the variable we construct in order to capture power concentration, therefore internal democracy, within parties.

The second element has to do with another fundamental process: the procedures for leadership selection. With regard to its absolute significance Janda claims that such a process is a crucial indicator of distribution of power within the party (1980: 111). In his operationalization of this variable, he gives lower scores to procedures that tend to enlarge the selectorate and attribute a say to members and identifiers. On the other extreme the highest score is given to leadership selection procedures that rely on a small selectorate. Even though such an approach has been questioned by those who don't necessarily see a relationship between inclusiveness of the selectorate- both for leader and candidate selection- and actual control of members over leaders (Katz, 2001: 293), it has been adopted (Laffin, Shaw et al., 2007) and echoed by a number of studies, especially in recent times (Scarrow, 2000; LeDuc, 2001; Salmond, 2008). Even though we do not believe that the relationship between inclusiveness of the selectorate and the level of membership control over the leaders is perfectly linear, we do sympathise with the argument that a more inclusive democracy is achieved when levels of enfranchisement are maximally inclusive (Hyland, 1995: 2). Therefore we apply here the same logic used to operationalise candidate selection: the greater the inclusion of party members in the process the higher the levels of party internal democracy.

Information on the ground were gathered, as specified in chapter 3, through an examination of parties' constitution and rule-books, on the basis of the claim that 'formalized structures, rules, and procedures constitute one of the principal ways in which the internal struggles of parties are channelled, constrained, and even pre-empted' (Katz and Mair, 1992: 6).Changes in the balance of power within a party must be reflected, sooner or later, in the governing rules of the party. The choice of basing the operationalization of the variable on the reading of party constitutions rather than on judgmental analysis of other party documents restricts the number of variables possibly at our disposal-in Janda's coding frame-, but it provides a number of advantages. Firstly, non judgmental data allow us a larger degree of comparability: if the documents used in order to produce the scores are parties' constitutions, the study could be easily replicable in other counties. Every political party has a

rulebook or a constitution, whereas with judgemental data there is the necessity for secondary literature, which may vary, in scope and reliability, from country to country and from party to party. Thus, relying on procedures, regarding candidates and leadership selection, which are generally outlined in the party constitution, provides us not only with a replicable measure but also with an unbiased measure. Indeed, when the personal judgment of the coder is not involved, the level of bias dramatically decreases, while the accuracy of the measure increases.

The two variables firstly received a separate score, based on a slightly revised version of Janda's scheme[iv], and they were consequently standardized and summed up, so that a unique measure could be employed. Such a measure therefore represents our measure of party internal democracy, and it will serve as an empirical indicator of the participatory ethos of the party.

With regard to ideological orientation, we make use of continuous measures given by expert surveys on the left/right placement of the parties in our sample. The justification for employing left and right measures of ideological positions comes from the acknowledgment that in Western Europe 'the terms 'left' and 'right' have always been widely accepted as part of the political currency' (Gallagher, Laver et al., 2005: 211). Moreover, in comparative analyses parties have typically been placed on the left/right dimension on the basis of their social and economic policies (Janda, 1980; Castles and Mair, 1984; Laver and Hunt, 1992; Benoit and Laver, 2006) and the terms have offered a satisfactory way of identifying convergences and differences. As mentioned before, an interval measure of left and right is more precise than a simply dichotomy; indeed the simple classification of ideology in two groups does not capture its complexity. For instance, the difference between a communist party and a social democratic party would not be accounted for. Moreover the dichotomy left/right does not represent well those parties which have a genuine ideological orientation towards the centre of the continuum and they would have to be pushed into one category or the other, without them unquestionably embodying left (or right) values. Our analysis here will make use of positions gathered from Benoit and Laver

(2006), integrated and upgraded with newer experts' surveys waves (2007 and 2008)[v].

Finally, we have to explain the operationalization of the variable accounting for party size. As mentioned before, there has been no clear indication of what is meant, on the empirical ground, by minor vs major parties. However, party size has been regarded as a potentially strong explanatory factor accounting for variation in the quality of parties' websites (Gibson, Römmele et al., 2003a; Gibson and Ward, 2003; Gibson, Margolis et al., 2003) and Cunha et al. (2003) attempt an empirical test for correlation between parties' electoral size and their websites appearance. We employ a categorical measure of party relevance in the system by giving to parties which received less than 10 % of vote share, at the last general election, a score of 0 and a score of 1 to those which passed that threshold. Such a measure builds on electoral performances and it goes further, by specifying what is meant by major parties (more than 10% votes share) and minor ones (less than 10% votes share). The 10% of vote share should provide quite an accurate idea of party strength and it also has implications in terms of resources, as often assumed in the literature. Vaccari (2008) had used a 5% threshold for Italian parties, but given the differences existing between electoral contexts in the 4 countries under analysis we consider 5% as an over restrictive figure. As such, any demarcation based on vote share may be regarded as arbitrary and there is an indubitable degree of discretional decision behind any figure. However, in a field where the lack of definition, demarcation and consistency represents one of the biggest barriers to meaningful generalizations, some lines need to be drawn.

In practical terms, operationalizing resources is not straightforward, especially in cross-national studies, as different political systems have different regulations on parties' financial matters. However, we assume that bigger parties have more resources at their disposal. Also, parties with parliamentary representation receive reimbursements (proportional to electoral performances) therefore we use party electoral strength as a proxy for resources and we use the vote share to build our binary variable.

Overall, we expect the aforementioned variables to play a role in determining variation among parties' websites. Clearly, we do not expect those factors to account for the total amount of possible variation, but substantial theoretical considerations and previous empirical research (Padró-Solanet and Cardenal, 2008) suggest that they may play a significant role and we intend to test this analytically.

4.4 The dependent variable

With regard to the dependent variable we need to give a detailed account of its operationalization and the way such a variable was built. In order to do so, we will focus on separate functions of parties' websites, on one hand their informative feature and on the other their interactive features, which here are limited to Web 1.0 applications.

Information provision

We will start by looking at information provision, the extent to which parties' websites are informative and the possible degree of variance. As previously pointed out, there is a growing degree of uniformity and standardization in the provision of information on the parties' websites. The construction of a variable able to capture the variety of information offered by websites builds on a number of studies (Gibson and Ward, 2000a; Newell, 2001; Gibson and Ward, 2003; Mocan, Badescu et al., 2003; Schweitzer, 2005; 2008) and it does not depart from them. Indeed the index accounting for level of information displayed by parties has been constructed by adding up dichotomous indicators of a number of features, explicitly: Organizational history, Organizational structure, Values/Ideology, Policies, Documents, Newsletters, People/Who is who, Leader focus, Calendar/Events, Conference info, FAQ, Groups/Ancillary Organizations page.

Participation Interactivity

The dependent variable which we are mostly interested in is the level of interactivity offered by each party's website so that we will be able to estimate variance and test the model outlined before. On the theoretical level there are a number of considerations which have been driving the process of selecting, operationalizing and constructing the variable under analysis.

The first theoretical concern regards the very concept of interactivity: we agree with Sundar et al. in their claim that 'interactivity resides in technological aspects of the medium' (2003: 33) and that such a concept can be empirically observed and measured in terms of functional features such as chat rooms, forums, feedback forms and so on. Again in line with Sundar et al. 'the higher the number of functions included on a website, the greater its interactivity' (*ibidem*). Therefore the structure of an additive index will be once again employed in order to construct the dependent variable. The key puzzle to solve then becomes what features should be integrated in such an index. A number of different elements have been used in order to compile indexes of participation/interactivity (Newell, 2001; Schweitzer, 2005; Ward, Gibson et al., 2005; Vaccari, 2008a; 2008b) and a number of possibilities are available, all building on the Gibson and Ward 2000's article. In order to avoid confusion, we chose not to come up with another version of the mentioned coding schemes, but to make use of one of the existing ones, used by Gibson and Ward in a piece investigating Australian parties (Gibson and Ward, 2003: 155). The reason being that such an index accounts for a number of features, which are both theoretically relevant and still up to date[vi]. Indeed, if interactivity really stays in the technological aspects of the medium, we should be aware of technological development and update the index as the technology develops. Nowadays the most important developments have to do with the implementation of Web 2.0 technologies. The next chapter will deal with this development, while here we will concentrate on 'traditional' types of online participatory activities. The activities used to construct our index, listed here, do allow for some level of interaction, but parties generally run them:

users can interact with the parties but on a largely party-controlled platform. Specifically they are:

1. Information gathering –level one (checking for the presence of cookies, audio and video features whereby the user can get more information on the party)
2. Information gathering –level two (email updates and newsletter)
3. Talking about politics with friends (the website offers some kind of bulletin board or chat room for interested visitors to exchange views with one other)
4. Trying to influence other's opinion (the website allows to send email postcards, messages or to forward the page to 'friends' to attempt to get broader support)
5. Advertising (the websites offers downloads of wallpaper, screen savers, banners, bumper stickers, which can be used to promote the organization)
6. Leafleting (the websites offers leaflets to download and print that can be distributed offline)
7. Contacting (the website offers email contacts for itself/ and or other individual/organizations that encourage people to express opinions and provide feedback)
8. Petitioning (The websites offers some kind of online petitions to sign)
9. Dialogue (the website offers online chat/Q&A sessions with leaders/officers)
10. Donating (you can donate money online)
11. Joining associate (the website offers associate membership or a 'friend' status online)
12. Joining full (you can fully join the party online)
13. Campaigning (the sites offers facilities to campaigning online)
14. Membership section(members only pages are available, a log in id and password are required to access those pages)

Whole website

Finally, a test for the overall status of the parties' websites will be provided as specified in the modelling part. The dependent variables, taken separately in the previous sections, will be combined and an overall measure of parties' websites will be generated. Information and interaction will be evaluated together, and the impact of the independent variables will be tested on the whole websites. Once again the operationalization of the

variable is done by adding up a number of components, in this case the indexes described above.

Finally, a note on the technical sophistication of websites, which has represented a concern of a number of studies dealing with parties' websites: we do not either evaluate or measure the level of websites' sophistication for a number of reasons. First of all, we believe that levels of sophistication are important in assessing the quality of a website, but they do not affect the substance of information or the possibilities for interaction. Those items are either there or not there, and the form, in which they appear, the extent of their sophistication, does not affect their substance. We acknowledge that better functioning websites will be preferred by surfers and that slow websites may put users off, but graphic sophistication is not immediately relevant to the substantial research question addressed here. The possible psychological effect that the features we are looking at might have on users is not being investigated here. Indeed, the technical evaluation of sophistication relates to a number of explanatory factors, which go well beyond the political science side of the subject we therefore leave it to other disciplines and better-suited analysts.

4.5 Analysis

The data analysis section will be threefold as in line with the number of dependent variables investigated.

4.5.1 Information provision

We begin with an exploratory analysis of levels of information and we do so by presenting some figures.

Figure 4.1. Box plots of information provision by country
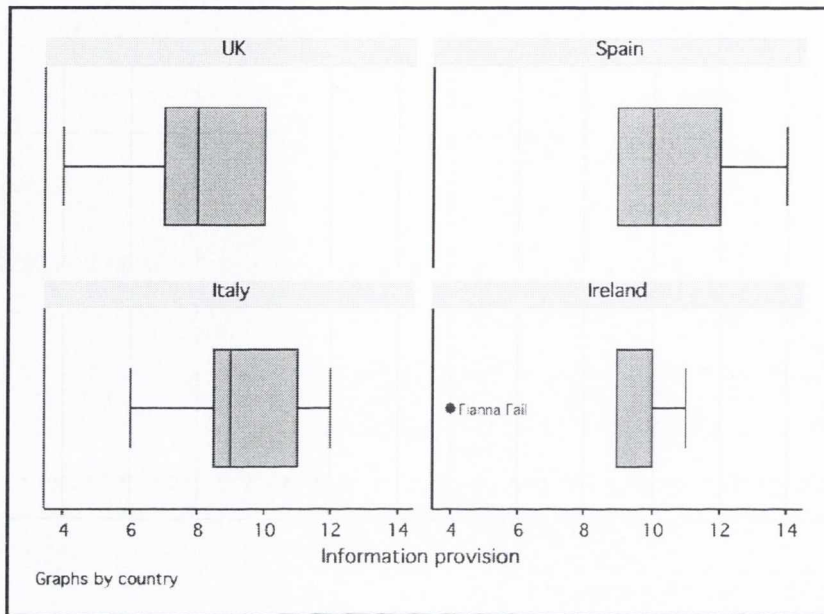
The box plots show an interesting picture; if taken by country the level of information of parties' websites seems to be quite different. British parties are definitely providing the lowest level of information, with a maximum of ten features covered, whereas Spanish parties reach the maximum possible level of 12. Spain also has the highest mean (10.1) and median (9.5). Ireland is the only country where we can clearly identify an outlier in the leading governmental party Fianna Fáil, which only provides four out of the possible 12 features. By looking at the picture, it would seem that patterns of country specific behaviour can be identified and that the expected uniformity is actually not there. The box plots whiskers are indeed showing rather different intervals for the four countries. However, a graphical analysis of this sort does not guarantee any level of statistical confidence. Therefore an analysis of variance of information levels by country was performed. Table2 below shows the results of the ANOVA.

Table 4.2. ANOVA table for information provision by country

	Partial SS	DF	MS	F	Prob > F
Country	23.66	3	7.88	1.62	0.206
Residual	141.30	29	4.87		
Total	164.96	32	5.15		
Number of obs = 33 R-squared = 0.1434					
Root MSE = 2.2074 Adj R-squared = 0.0548					

The ANOVA table tells a slightly different story: there is no statistically significant evidence that the level of information provision is different in the four countries. The null hypothesis of no variation cannot be safely rejected. The F test indicates that there is no significant difference attributable to system differences. Therefore, we find extra evidence of homogenization and standardization. Before claiming that the process of standardization is actually taking place we provide a control for party size as well. We want to check whether large parties are more informative than small parties and this time we only need to perform a simple T test, whose results are reported here in table 4.3.

Table 4.3. T Test information provision, large vs. small parties

	Obs.	Mean	SE	Confidence Interval
Large	22	8.59	.40	[7.74, 9.44]
Small	11	9.90	.82	[8.07, 11.74]
Ho: diff = 0		Degrees of freedom = 31		
t = -1.6109		Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.1173		

The test shows no significant difference in terms of level of information provided by small parties and large parties. For possibilities of gathering information, there is no major difference between large and small parties. Nothing, so far, suggests dominance of one group over another, the scenario emerging rather points toward global standardization.

Therefore, with regard to H1 we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no variation. There is no substantial difference in patterns of information offered by different websites; the apparent country system variation is not backed up by any statistically significant evidence, nor is the party size making a difference.

By and large, parties' websites appear to be quite informative, with a group mean of 9 and a relatively small standard deviation (2.2), the variable having a rather normal distribution. As expected the overall level of information provided is high and a broad range of informative possibilities is covered: the least informative party is the Irish Fianna Fáil as shown in figure 4.1, and the most informative one is the Spanish Partido Popular for which every possible informative box is ticked.

4.5.2. Participation/Interaction

The levels of interaction provided by party websites have been frequently found to be lower than levels of information provided. Therefore, we begin our analysis of interaction by looking at overall levels of interaction by country, so that, we generate figures comparable with information provision. Figure2 shows box plots of overall participatory features offered by parties' websites, by country.

Figure 4.2. Box plots of participative/interactive features by country

117
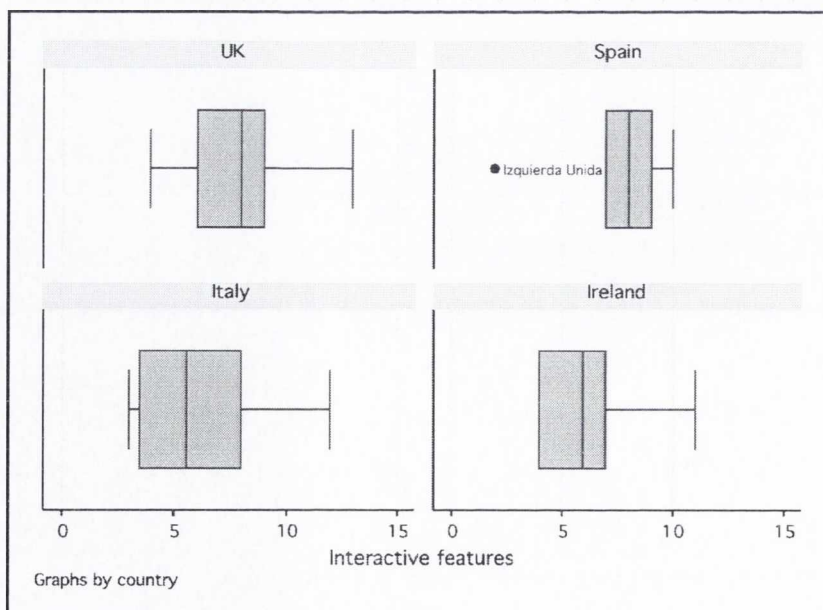
The plots depict slightly different scenarios in the four countries, and a different picture from the one relative to informative features. In the UK, out of the possible 14 features, parties score a mean of 8.3, which is the highest average; British parties are better than their counterparts at providing users with participatory and interactive features. Italy has the lowest mean (5.9), the right whisker of the box plot approaches the maximum of 14; and that suggests different patterns of behaviour in the system. On the contrary, the box plot for Spain depicts very low variation around the mean (7.2), but an outlier offering extremely low levels of interactivity: Izquierda Unida with only two features present. Ireland has a rather low mean (6.3), but no party has particularly low levels of interactive features. As a whole the parties' websites in the sample have a mean of 6.8 with a standard deviation of 2.9, which represents a clear improvement from a number of previous findings. Gibson and Ward (2003: 148) adopting the exact same coding scheme found a mean value of 4 among Australian parties. Comparisons with other studies, using slightly different coding schemes, give less straightforward results but it is worth looking at some previous finding and attempting some post hoc considerations. Cardoso (2008) in a study of Italian political parties prior to the 2008 general election found an overall large gap between participatory and informative activities, the latter being, almost traditionally, overdeveloped compared to the former. Again on Italian parties, Vaccari, looking at the run up of the 2006 election, found that possibilities for interaction, which were remarkably small compared to information provision, tended to go up, together with the general richness of the website, as the election comes closer (2008).

Our sample, on average, covers almost half of the possible participatory activities, indicating a general improvement in levels of interactivity offered by political parties in cyber-space. Depending on what expectations one may have had, that can be considered either a reasonably big improvement or a slow march. We do not possess previous data on the exact same sample, so that estimating a precise shift is an impossible task, but we can read the findings as they stand, and attempt such an evaluation in the

concluding section of this chapter. In order to get a clearer idea of what those numbers mean we can firstly express them as percentages, a reasonable comparison with level of information can be done. Indeed, averaging, parties' websites in our sample cover 75% of the range of possible informative features and 49% of the possible interactive features. As expected, the difference is rather large, but an improvement, in levels of interaction online, has been definitely achieved.

Having looked at the descriptive scenario, it is now time to test the explanatory model previously described, and estimate how well it performs when it comes to factual analysis. 4.4, below, shows the results of the linear regression, with robust standard errors, as outlined in equation [1].

Table 4.4. Regression table explaining variation in participative activities

Party organization(power decentralization)	-0.044
	(0.025)*
Large	0.188
	(0.061)***
UK	0.175
	(0.086)*
Spain	0.116
	(0.107)
Italy	0.111
	(0.068)
Left/Right	-0.015
	(0.006)**
Constant	0.476
	(0.087)***
Observations	31
R-squared	0.47

Robust normalized beta coefficients in parentheses
* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%
The reference category for countries is Ireland.

By looking at the results, we have the impression that the model has performed well. Firstly, it does not come as a surprise that there is a statistically significant difference between large and small parties; the coefficient accounting for such a difference is not only the largest, but it also has the highest statistical significance[vii]. It indicates that large parties actually

perform better than small parties in offering users possibilities for participation and interaction online. As such, this would indicate an extra piece of evidence in support of the normalization of cyberspace, but we will leave these sorts of considerations for the final section of this chapter.

With regard to left/right dimension's implications we find the variable measuring left/right position to be significant at .05 and negatively signed. This suggests that a 1% increase in the percentage of interactivity offered by websites correspond to a shift of 0.25 to the left (in a scale from 0 to 20). Therefore, left wing parties are significantly more prone to have participatory features on their websites.

The country differences are accounted for by a clustered variable, which takes Ireland as its reference category. The coefficients for the other three countries are all positively signed, indicating that the reference country is the worst performing in terms of interactivity, but only the coefficient for the UK is significant. Therefore, the model tells us that the UK is significantly different from Ireland; the coefficient is also positively signed, so that we understand that, by and large, parties from the United Kingdom are actually better than Irish ones at providing participatory features. That does not come as a surprise, having the UK a much longer and richer history of online politics. Considering the differences between the four countries under analysis, we also included in the model a variable accounting for regional parties, as the UK, Spain and Italy have a fairly strong number of parties with scattered support. However, such a variable is not statistically significant and therefore excluded from the regression table, in consideration of the required parsimony with a very small sample as the one in use here.

Finally, the variable accounting for dispersion of power within parties is, as anticipated, negatively signed[viii]. Parties with largely decentralized structures are indeed expected to particularly value membership input and active involvement; so that the less concentrated power is within a party, the more likely such a party is to offer participatory features online. The more democratically organized the party is in the real world, the more interactivity it provides in cyberspace. The coefficient is significant only at .10, but it can

still be counted as one of the variables responsible for variance in level of interactivity put into place by political parties' websites.

The overall variance explained by the model is 47% and it indicates that there still is a long way to go before we can offer a satisfactory answer to the question of: what determines variation in website interactivity?

However the model, outlined and tested here, provides us with empirical results for a number of claims that had not been analytically tested before. With regard to the European scenario, we could quite safely claim that parties with an ideological orientation towards the left, an electorate bigger than 10% and with higher levels of internal democracy are more likely to have participatory/interactive features on their websites. With regard to our formal hypothesis (H2), we found variation and we attempted to explain it in terms of party internal characteristics, party size and party system, finding that there is sufficient evidence demonstrating the effect of party characteristics and size but not for country differences. The model has performed quite well and most of the claims made in the literature about factors influencing participation seem to have found a good empirical corroboration; however before claiming any reasonably solid conclusion we would push the analysis a little further and provide a more strict definition of interactivity/participation.

4.5.2.1 Immediate participation/interaction

Earlier in this chapter we presented a list of binary items which we use to build the participatory/interactive variable that served as the dependent variable in the previous section. This list of fourteen items allows for some levels of interactivity and some forms of participation.

If, like Gibson and Ward, we consider participation to be the collection of 'parties' efforts to increase citizens' engagement in the political process ', and we also assume that the web can facilitate this in a number of ways '(a) by offering more information, more quickly, and in multimedia format, Web sites make information gathering easier; (b) the global reach of the Web

allows parties to publicize any events and demonstrations to more people; and (c) by increasing the possibilities for interactive communication, new opportunities for joining or assisting a party are offered, as well as more chances for contacting and debating with party leaders directly' (2000: 301), we can see why all of the aforementioned items concur in bringing about a model of participation. In dealing with such a concept, we are concerned with the particular way each party channels opinions, diffuses its message and favours participation in the political process using its website. It is highly unlikely, we recall, that the web alone could generate a process of internal transformation of political parties. Nor do we believe that the possibility of members exchanging opinions or taking part in a Q&A session with party leaders had the capability of transforming the nature or the ethos of a party. Parties were born well before the internet and they exist online only because they pre-existed in the real world. Indeed, we favour the idea that the pre-existing characteristics of a party are responsible for its online appearance. For instance, it is reasonable to assume that a democratic ethos within the party could incentivise active participation in the real world as well as in cyberspace. In the same fashion, it is reasonable to expect better resourced parties to cover more activities online. Previous studies, in this vein, point to the tendency of left wing parties – compared with right-wing parties – to make greater use of new technologies to facilitate both information diffusion and participation (Bentivegna, 2006: ; Vaccari, 2007: ; Vaccari, 2008).Party ethos and ideological orientation, together with resources, have all proved significant in determining levels of participation offered by parties' websites, as we have seen in the previous section, where we used a widely known and employed index of participatory activities. Such a measure gives us the double advantage of being comparable with previous studies and being relatively comprehensive.

One may argue, however, that such an index is rather broad and, by including items which are not strictly participatory, fails to provide an efficient estimate of participation. Indeed, some of the fourteen activities listed in section 4.4, are only indirectly associated with participation. Activities like

'advertising' or 'donating'. For instance, may be promoted primarily for the party's own benefit rather than for the express purpose of facilitating participation. Equally, it is likely that such activities may be a combination of both these factors. Other activities, on the other hand, are indisputably participatory: 'talking about politics with friends' (3) and 'dialogue' (9) represent forms of *immediate* participation, (that is, activities that are conducted in 'real time' and without 'mediation'). These activities, moreover, play a fundamental role in determining levels of party responsiveness to the electorate. If we are to take Sartori's definition of responsive government as 'a government attentive to and influenced by the voice of the people' (Sartori, 2005: 18), we can appreciate just how important it is to receive inputs and feedback from the electorate. 'Talking about politics with friends' and 'dialogue' can indeed produce a good proxy of the electorate's policy position to which parties, in turn, need to respond. Those activities are indeed substantially more directly participatory then all the others in the list we used in the previous section. We produce, therefore, an extra piece of analysis which allows us to separate these two elements from the rest of the list; we then test the effect of our explanatory variables on these two items only.

In order to perform this task, we first combine the two activities in a unique variable controlling for the presence or absence of each of them and of both of them, our dependent variable accounts for what we can label 'immediate' participatory activities; given we employ a probit model, which fits the binary nature of the dependent variable. The outputs are reported in the table 4.5 below;

Table 4.5. Probit model explaining immediate participatory activities

Party organization (power decentralization)	-0.162
	(0.83)
Left/Right	-0.134
	(2.18)**
Large	2.449
	(2.77)***
UK	1.497
	(1.59)
Spain	2.787
	(3.09)***
Italy	3.497
	(3.36)***
Constant	-1.665
	(1.99)**
Observations	31
Nagelkerke R2:	0.57
Goodness of fit Pearsons Chi^2	23.72
Prob chi2 =	0.4778

Robust z statistics in parentheses
* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

The results are interesting from a number of points of view. *First,* it is notable that the variable 'intra-party decentralization' seems to have little effect on the dependent variable. This is in marked contrast to previous applications of the same explanatory variables (table 4.4). Second, our measure of internal party democracy is, as expected, negatively signed but it is not statistically significant. It seems to be the case, then, that – if we consider only *immediate* participatory activities – there is no relationship between 'democratic ethos and practice' and online interaction. Fourth, both resources (using electoral strength as a proxy) *and* ideological position (considered on the left/right scale) play a significant role. Finally, the model clearly outlines some levels of differences between countries: having set Ireland as reference category and being the other countries are all positively signed, we can easily see that Italian and Spanish parties provide significantly higher level of immediate participation online. Overall, mainstream left-wing parties from southern Europe seem to be the most likely to provide online channels for the direct exchange of opinion; these online channels,

furthermore, are, both vertical (members/voters to leaders) and horizontal (members/voters to members/voters).

All of the above re-inforces the conclusions of the previous section; namely, that ideological orientation and resources are, all other things being equal,, largely responsible for the implementation of more participatory channels online. It is also worth pointing out that we do not equate resources simply with money; our conceptualisation of resources, indeed, also extends to expertise and professionalization. Larger parties have more money and staff to take care of the website, and/or because they may want to maintain a certain up-to date profile. With regard to ideological orientation on the left - right axis, we found once again evidence that left wing parties are more likely to implement effective and direct instruments of exchange of opinions and interaction between party and the electorate. The insignificance of the internal democracy is quite surprising and can be interpreted in a number of lights. It may be the case, first, that when it comes to effective interaction, parties which are highly internally democratic first and foremost value the opinions of their members, rather than receiving inputs from the general public through their websites. Second, it might equally be the case that – in spite of their strong democratic ethos – parties simply do not have enough resources to put forward and manage the aforementioned channels of online involvement. Third, parties may also have decided to eschew the use of online participation, instead favouring more traditional channels such as branch meetings.

Fourth, parties may well be creating opportunity for exchange of opinion with Web 2.0 tools. We will be able to test this final scenario – the use of Web 2.0 features – in Chapter 5. The number of observations at our disposal, unfortunately, is too few to split the sample and test rigorously whether parties that otherwise facilitate the participation of the membership in partisan activities simply cannot overcome the obstacle of insufficient resources. The first and third scenarios, equally, are difficult to explore in any real detail, though, given their plausibility, they should be investigated further.

Finally, political parties – in spite of their ethos or internal commitment to democracy – may prioritise their web presence for its symbolic value. Considered in this light, such parties may not make a particular effort to implement effective online participation, instead focusing on a number of side activities which do not necessarily involve direct dialogue.

In view of these slightly divergent findings, an overall evaluation of participatory and interactive activities should be phrased as follows: ideological positions and party resources affect the likelihood that members and the public will be given an opportunity to participate in both immediate and generically participatory activities. If we take only feature which facilitate direct dialogue and real time exchange of opinion online with both leaders and with other members/voters, we observe significant cross national differences; parties' ethos does not appear to play any significant role in explaining such a phenomenon.

On the other hand, if we look at a broader definition of participation and we do not limit our investigation to activities promoting direct dialogue, we obtain a slightly different picture. When a range of participatory activities are analyzed, party's resources, ideological position on the left/right dimension and a party's ethos are all significant explanatory factors while cross national differences do not appear significant.

To summarise, cross national variation is present only when a sub-sample of activities is taken as indicator of participation/interaction offered by party websites; otherwise it fades away. On the other hand, levels of internal democracy play a role only when we consider a broader range of participatory activities. Therefore Hypothesis 2 is not falsified, but it needs to be reformulated if we wish to distinguish between participation/interaction in general terms and immediate participation only.

4.5.3 Whole websites

The last analytic component of this chapter deals with the overall status of parties' websites. We try to apply the explanatory model used to understand interactivity to the overall websites. However, we need to clarify our expectations before actually test the model.

Hypothesis 3 stated that the model represented by equation [2] would work if variation could be found in terms of information provision. As we saw in the first part of the analysis section, this condition cannot be satisfied. Standardization prevails with regard to informational provision, and there is no evidence of variation due to systemic elements, nor to party size. In other words, parties, first and foremost, use the internet to inform the public, and they all roughly offer the same typology of information. By and large, they all use newsletter, they explain their policies' positions, their views and ideological orientation on their websites. Obviously, there may be variation in terms of quality of information, but this goes beyond the scope of this research. After ten, in some countries fifteen, years of political parties being online, such a finding is hardly surprising. Regarding participation, the mechanism behind it is rather different; interaction is based on bilateral efforts (from the party on one hand and the users on the other) and parties might have different motivations to make (or not) such an effort. Moreover, from the party perspective the effort is doubled, firstly the party's websites has to provide interactive features and secondly it has to take care that users' inputs are received and possibly answered. As the range of possible interactive activities varies, the extent to which parties implement them varies as well. Combining the two elements (information and interaction) gives us a new dependent variable, which is the sum of the participatory index and the information one. As one of the two components of such an index (information) presents low levels of variance, we do not expect the model may perform better than when applied to participation only. So we take as given that, in terms of the power of the model, H3 will be most likely falsified.

Chapter IV

However, to see how the model performs with regard to the individual coefficients, we test it with another linear regression.

Table 4.6. Regression table explaining overall variation in parties' websites

Party organization (power decentralization)	-0.629
	(0.455)
Left/Right	-0.171
	(0.119)
Large	3.563
	(1.349)**
UK	2.228
	(1.957)
Spain	3.057
	(2.674)
Italy	2.203
	(2.133)
Constant	14.726
	(2.118)***
Observations	31
R-squared	0.31

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

As expected the explanatory power of the model is lower than when applied to participation activities only. The R2 decreases to .31 suggesting that the model accounts for some variation but a relatively low amount of it. In terms of explanatory coefficients the model once again performs poorly. The only statistically significant effect seems to be party size. Mainstream parties have much richer websites; they cover a broader range of features than their smaller counterparts. No significant difference is detected between different party systems. No effect whatsoever is played by country specific factors. Ideological orientation and internal party democracy are both, as expected, negatively signed as in the previous regression, but neither of them is significant. In terms of overall richness of parties' websites there is neither proof of left wing parties being better, nor empirical support of (more) democratic parties offering better websites. As such, the findings indicate that the overall quality of websites has hardly anything to do with internal party characteristics.

We believe that such a negative finding has an important meaning. Indeed, with its lack of empirical significance it makes a theoretical contribution by reshaping some of the considerations on parties' website at large. Much of what the literature has attributed to parties' websites should only be applied to their interactive component. Differences in parties' websites are mainly due to size related issues. In other words, our findings indicate that size, therefore resources, is making a difference in overall status of websites, with bigger parties having richer and arguably better websites. That would suggest that big parties actually translate their offline dominance into cyberspace; the advantages they (may) have in terms of resources make them better and probably dominant. Obviously the extent to which such dominance translates into actual gains in terms of electoral competition remains to be seen, and it will represent one of the main goals of chapter 7.

The lack of variation may also be due to the peacetime setup; if parties don't have strong incentive (as an election would be) to invest in their websites, the level of variation may be lower. As such, our findings here would have to be compared with a similar research design run when campaigns are actually taking place. Without such a comparison, we can just hypothesize that either the lack of variation is due to the evolution of parties' websites towards an incremental homogenization, or it may be due to the fact that our analysis took place at peacetime. If the latter explanation is correct, we should expect higher variation when parties are actively campaigning.

4.6 Conclusions

There are a number of implications to our results, so that in this section not only do we need to sum up our findings but we also have to evaluate them in the light of previous studies and discuss what sort of pattern seems to be supported by our results and what normative considerations have to be made.

To begin with, we find consistent evidence that, by and large, parties' websites are very informative and that such a pattern is observable despite differences in party size and party system. Therefore, a process of standardization in terms of informative content is seems to be taking place, in Anglo-Irish countries as much as in Southern Europe. Informative features and possibilities exceed, in number, the possibilities for participation. These participative/interactive features are mostly implemented by large parties; with a rather leftist ideological profile and a quite decentralized structure of power within their internal organization. Our empirical analysis demonstrated that, at least in terms of supply of participation opportunities, there is a clear role played by party size (large parties are better than small ones), ideology and internal organization. We should delimit our discussion to the supply of participatory opportunities because what we have been looking at are activities, which parties put into place, but we have no systematic control for their actual way of functioning and their responsiveness. The kinds of activities we have analysed are, naturally, belonging to the Web 1.0 generation and we will evaluate them as such. As was systematically pointed out before in the literature, participatory activities are 'largely a party led and top down phenomenon rather that two way dialogue' (Gibson, Margolis et al., 2003: 66), but we would argue that that is due mainly to their own characteristic than to their practical implementation. Indeed, despite them being controlled by the party, their presence favours *per se* dialogue and interaction. The discussion of how interaction could be better achieved through the implementation of Web 2.0 features is left to the next chapter.

The regression analysis we performed gives us the advantage of providing a powerful analytical test that facilitates drawing broader conclusions. With regard not only to participatory features, but also to the websites at large, we observed a gap between smaller and bigger parties. Large parties are better than smaller ones; they provide more information and more diversified opportunities for interaction. This may be due to their advantages in terms of resources; we cannot state it, with any level of certainty on the basis of our model, but we have good theoretical reasons to

suspect it. In terms of general debate in the field of political entrepreneurs online, such a finding favours the idea of a normalization taking place in cyberspace, with large parties performing better than fringe actors. Therefore the empirical answer to the claim that in 'peacetime' fringe parties could narrow the gap is only partially positive, they do so in terms of information provision but not with regard to implementing participation.

We ran our model using two sets of dependent variables, a broad index of interaction and an index for *immediate* participatory activities only, on the interaction side, and separately, overall website, and we found that the model performs better when applied only to the former. That suggests a couple of considerations: the process of homogenisation that has been lately taking place especially with regard to informative features reduces overall variation and the components which do not appear to have experienced such a process are indeed interactive activities. That may be due to the need for a sort of 'extra effort' on the party's side, which not every party may want to make or could actually make. Resources and orientation seem indeed to become important here; only parties with a leftist background, a tradition of democratic organizational setting and with an electoral size bigger than 10% seem to be willing to make such an 'extra-effort'. Whether their efforts are rewarded is still to be examined. When we look only at dialogue online and forms of immediate opinion exchange, we found significant cross country variation, and the effect of resources and ideological legacy play a crucial role in explaining which parties do and which parties do not implement such features.

In terms of environmental differences, we found that the four countries under analysis are not very dissimilar to one other. However, in the case of immediate participation we found the Spain and Italy to be significantly different from Ireland, and in the case of participation at large we fund the UK to be significantly different from our reference category Ireland. As such we do not have enough elements to say what sort of variables may cause the detected differences, as we did not specify a number of country specific variables. As already pointed out the very little number of

observations has limited our capacity of controlling for more specific country effects. However, we consider the possibility that further research, controlling for more elements on a much larger sample, could extrapolate detailed information on country specific effects. Here we are only able to speculate on what may be generating the differences: we tend to regard different sizes of the audience, not only in terms levels of internet diffusion, but more specifically in terms of consumption of political news and information online as one of the potentially influential factors. Providing a control for the percentage of the population interested in online political activity may be able to clarify whether there is a pattern between public demand and party offer.

Certainly the standardization of informational features has produced a shift on the applicability of a number of conclusions made a few years ago, and this needs to be pointed out. The likelihood of national political environment and parties characteristics to influence their online behaviour, considered as influential factors by a number of studies (Cunha, Martin et al., 2003; Nixon, Ward et al., 2003; Padró-Solanet and Cardenal, 2008), applies only to levels on interactivity and seems to be better suited to further investigation focusing on participation rather than on websites at large. Overall variation is not adequately explained anymore by such a model, therefore there we need to introduce other explanatory factors. Since party size seems to be the only element playing a role, it would be worth further investigating party resources and, even more precisely, the extent to which parties invest in different communication strategies and media. We do not have at our disposal data on parties spending on online activities, but we suspect that resources would have a positive impact on developing online activities and we will systematically test such a claim when looking at cyber-campaign in the third part of the dissertation.

4.7 Discussion

The model discussed here was limited in its capacity of controlling for a range of factors that could be playing a role in explaining the status of parties' websites at peacetime. The peacetime setting is indeed somehow conditioning our expectation, as we intend to look at a situation of 'business as usual'. In light of recent findings on the increment of standardization (Gibson and Ward, 2009; Vaccari2008) we did expect a pattern towards a rather similar level of information provision. We also expected to find differences in patterns on interactive behaviour, and we believe that the peacetime setting enlightens the nature of those differences. When no electoral incentives are preset the normalized scenario seems indeed to be the norm. Parties, while running their routine online activity, tend to be quite similar in levels of information provided and to be rather different in the implementation of online interactive tools. Indeed in terms of participation, when the electoral spotlights does not hit parties' websites, strong evidence supports a normalized scenario with larger parties being well ahead of smaller ones in their interactive approach towards the public.

Country specific elements need to be added to the theoretical model as well as to the empirical analysis; if on one hand we do not regard electoral systems characteristic to be paying a fundamental role in peacetime, we do regard technological development of the country in general, and size of the audience for political web activity in particular, as elements that need to be further investigated. Our intuition here is that differences due to technological advancement may be playing a strong role up to the point where technology becomes widespread. Once internet penetration is rather large, it may be the case that different levels still impact parties' websites, but to a smaller extent. In plane terms, it may be the case that looking at parties' websites in a country with 10% internet penetration in comparison to a country with over 50% penetration leads to patent differences. The difference between a 75% and a 65% internet penetration may be harder to capture.

Most of the comparative studies conducted to date were not designed to be purely peacetime comparisons; on the contrary scholars' attention has almost entirely focused on election campaigns. Therefore, our findings shed some light on what was a previously under investigated subject as parties at peacetime. In comparing with previous studies, we do need to make a clear point on how the peacetime condition my influence our findings. As such, the normalized scenario seems to mostly agree with a number of previous studies (Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Gibson et al. 2003; 2003a) and we would conclude that at peacetime normalization seems to prevail over equalization and that smaller parties do not appear to be filling the gap when there is not electoral incentive to do so. Obviously, such a claim would need to be validated by a study on a larger number of countries and possibly at a different time of the election cycle, capturing both peacetime and electoral campaigns. The literature has indeed provided so far very mixed evidence of normalization versus equalization in the run up to elections.

Testing a similar model on the same sample both at peacetime and electoral campaign would make a strong contribution to the debate. Studies based on electoral campaigns' data are most definitely useful in formulating expectations, but we do not engage in *post hoc* comparisons of outcomes as comparing peacetime with campaign studies would create unreliable conclusions. Our contribution, albeit small, is valuable in its attempt of testing a number of variables in comparative perspective in a low mobilized non-electoral scenario.

Appendix

Selecting the National Leader

0	No national party leader can be identified.
1	The leader is selected by vote of party identifiers or supporters .
2	He is selected by vote of party members, a smaller group than above.
3	He is selected by a national convention or congress, the delegates to which represent regional or local party organizations.
4	He is selected by a mix system combining the parliamentary party, the membership and some national level of the party
5	He is selected by the parliamentary delegation of the party.
6	He is selected by a national convention or congress, the delegates to which are appointed or primarily determined by the national party organization.
7	He is selected by the national executive committee or party council subject to ratification by some lower levels of the party.
8	He is selected by the national executive committee or party council without further review of the decision; selections include change in leaders as a result of 'power struggles' within the top leaders group.
9	He is selected by his predecessor; selections include the situation in which the party was created the incumbent leader and no

Selecting Parliamentary Candidates

1	Nominations are determined locally by vote of party supporters, for example, in a direct primary.
2	Nominations are determined locally by vote of party members, for example, by vote in local party meetings.
3	Selection is made by local party leaders whose selection must be ratified in some way by party members.
4	Selection is made by local leaders with little or no participation by rank-and-file members.
5	Selection is made locally, but the selections must be approved by the national organization; this includes cases that provide for local 'recommendation' rather than selection of candidates.
6	Selection is made by associations affiliated with the party or regional associations, but the selection must be approved by the national organization.
7	Selection is done by the national organization, but the selection must be approved by local or affiliated organizations .
8	Selection is determined by a national party congress or caucus.
9	Selection is determined by a national committee or party council.

Chapter IV

Range of variation in selection of national leader and selection of candidates and combined measure

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Selection of national leader	4.03	2.2	0	8
Selection of candidates	4.7	.78	3	6
Combined standardized measure	-9.31e-10	1.7	- 2.3	3.27

Chapter IV

Dependent variables:

In the case of Participation and whole website, the regressions were not sun on the absolute indexes but on ratio of actual scare in each index over the maximum score. So where the index maximum score is 14 as in the case of participation the dependent variable in use was the score (λ) divided by14. As such, the coefficients of the regressions reported here refer to percentages. If the regressions are run on the untransformed scores coefficients are different but levels of significance are the same.

Participation (untransformed)
     N of observations: 33
     Mean: 6.8
     SD: 2.96
     Min: 2
     Max: 13

Participation (transformed)
     N of observations: 33
     Mean: 0.48
     SD: 0.21
     Min: .14
     Max: .92

Immediate participation
     N of observations: 33
     Mean: .363
     SD: .419
     Min: 0
     Max: 1

Whole website (untransformed):
     N of observations: 33
     Mean: 15.84
     SD: 4. 02
     Min: 8
     Max: 23

Whole website (transformed):

    N of observations: 33

    Mean: .06

    SD: .15

    Min: .30

    Max: .88

---

[i] We however acknowledge that fact that a government/opposition dynamic related to the position of a certain government in the electoral cycle may be playing a role. In order to preserve a parsimonious model we do not include the position on the electoral cycle in the list of control variables. We will give adequate consideration to the possibility of unobserved variables to be paying a role, in the conclusions section.

[ii] With exception the Democratic Unionist Party

[iii] Considering the low number of observations we do not intend to overload the model by plugging in varaiables which may create cases of muticollinearity. To do so a simple robust model with the variable country clusteredclustered with an omitted country as reference category has been preferred to more advanced model (fixed effects, multilevel equations, vce standard errors).

[iv] The code for leadership selection was modified by the introduction of an extra category between Janda's 3 and 4. Indeed the score of 4 is given to selection procedure carried on by the parliamentary party; having found, in Ireland, parties whose leader is selected by a mix system combining the parliamentary party, the membership and some national level of the party we felt the necessity of accounting in our measurement for such a system, giving it a score of 4. Therefore we renumbered the following categories (from Janda's 4 on).

[v] Data for Spain and UK are from the 2006 wave of surveys, data on Ireland are upgraded to the 2007 surveys (Benoit, 2009) and finally data on Italy are gathered from the latest wave, 2008. These two latest data points have been possible to include in this study, thanks to Professor Ken Benoit, who kindly made the data available. The position of Esquerra Republicana and Bloque naciona Gallego are from Gary Marks, the Chapel Hill expert surveys 2006 [http://www.unc.edu/~gwmarks/data_pp.php] their scores have been converted from an 11 points scale to a 21 points scale.

[vi] Later in the chapter (section *4.5.2.1*) we will deal with a number of issues and possible problems related to such an index.

[vii] As discussed in section 4.3 the selection of a threshold is a rather arbitrary choice, however if instead of the dichotomy measure is use here, we plug in the percentage of vote won at the last general election the variable keeps being significant and positively signed.

[viii] The index for power decentralisation has low scores for high decentralisation and high scores for low decentralisation, so a negative coefficient means that decentralisation has a positive impact.

Web 2.0. The future is unwritten

The expression Web 2.0 was first coined at a conference organized by O'Reilly Media and MediaLive International, in October 2004. Since then, Web 2.0 has become widely known as the platform through which sharing and creating interactive content on the web is not only possible, but also free and at everybody's disposal.

In this chapter, we will firstly introduce and discuss what is meant by Web 2.0 technologies; we will then engage with the task of clarifying what potential implications Web 2.0 holds for politics. In particular we will look at their impact on political parties. We will then take a closer look at the parties we analyzed in chapter 4, and we will describe how they make use of Web 2.0. We will seek to establish whether any of the explanatory variables tested in chapter 4 affects the variation of Web 2.0 applications in use by political parties.

Finally, we will discuss the snapshot of parties and Web 2.0 and we will seek to evaluate and discuss how those political actors implement such instruments and what trends we should be looking for in the future.

Intro

Tim O'Reilly in an article titled *What is Web 2.0* claims

'the term 'Web 2.0' has clearly taken hold, with more than 9.5 million citations in Google. But there's still a huge amount of disagreement about just what Web 2.0 means, with some people decrying it as a meaningless marketing buzzword, and others accepting it as the new conventional wisdom' (2005).

O'Reilly himself does not come up with an unambiguous definition; instead he goes through a number of Web 2.0 features in order to explain how they work and what is intrinsically new about them. Social network platforms, audio and video sharing sites, wikis and blogs are the most common examples of Web 2.0 platforms. Table 5.1 below reproduces what O'Reilly used to exemplify what Web 2.0 is in comparison to the previous

generation of internet features, which are now commonly referred to as Web
1.0.

The common denominator of Web 2.0 platforms lies in their openness and
their multilateral implementation, making them a 'social' phenomenon

Table 5.1. Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

Web 1.0		Web 2.0
DoubleClick	-->	Google AdSense
Ofoto	-->	Flickr
Akamai	-->	BitTorrent
mp3.com	-->	Napster
Britannica Online	-->	Wikipedia
personal websites	-->	blogging
evite	-->	upcoming.org and EVDB
domain name	-->	search engine
page views	-->	cost per click
screen scraping	-->	web services
publishing	-->	participation
content management	-->	wikis
directories (taxonomy)	-->	tagging ('folksonomy')
stickiness	-->	syndication

The table above associates a number of Web 1.0 features with their
development as Web 2.0 features; most of the latter are blogs, social
networking sites or wiki applications, which have quickly reached astonishing
diffusion levels: Facebook is estimated to be used by 200 million users
worldwide and to be used at least once a day by over 100 million users.

If one had to say what elements of novelty best characterize Web 2.0,
one would have to highlight the capacity of Web 2.0 features to network and
to host user created content (UCC)[i]. However, defining Web 2.0 is a highly
problematic task, the term refers to a number of features and platforms,
which share a degree of openness and interactivity, but differ – from both
technical and non-technical points of view. Indeed, Web 2.0 is often defined
as a way of networking and communicating, an 'architecture of participation'
(O'Reilly, 2005) 'a state of mind, an attitude, a new business model, the next
generation of Web-based software and services, a set of development
principles, a revolution' (Birdsall, 2007: 1) and, the emphasis is often placed
on Web 2.0 being capable of performing a number of 'social activities online'.

Web 2.0, more than any previous platform, exists and grows only thanks to an exponential growing number of users, who generate content and link it with other users. The very nature of Web 2.0 is socially generated, and we argue that inevitably those activities at some point cross the border between social and political. As was the case for the internet in general, as discussed in chapter 1 and 2, Web 2.0 has developed a number of political implications. If in the political sphere, Web 1.0 was expected to deliver an increase in political participation, civic engagement and dialogue, Web 2.0 is expected to deliver even more of a revitalization of politics. However, the horizontal nature of Web 2.0 technologies, as with any other technology, does not perform *motu proprio* any sort of revolution.

Once again, we will focus on how new technological possibilities are used by well-established political actors, specifically, political parties. We have consistent evidence that the medium is actually used to perform very traditional political tasks such as fundraising and networking, to begin with. We will look at what sorts of Web 2.0 platforms were implemented - if any - by the political parties we looked at in chapter 4. In order to do so, we will first frame the analysis in the rather embryonic literature on Web 2.0 and political actors, and we will outline expectations before proceeding to the data analysis.

5.1. Web 2.0 and political activity

The implementation of Web 2.0 platforms is a very recent phenomenon, therefore it represents a relatively unexplored field for research in political science. However, a certain amount of information on their effects on the political sphere is already at our disposal. Williams and Gulati (2008a, 2008c; 2009) have shown that social networking sites (Facebook, in this case) and online activity positively impact candidates' electoral success. The effects of blogs on the campaign process are attracting major academic attention, especially in the US, where more and more scholars talk of a 'blog revolution' (Wallsten, 2004; Ford, 2009) The impact of

Youtube has been recently given greater attention in the literature (Carlson and Strandberg, 2008; Gueorguieva, 2008; Williams, 2009), and the relevance it had during the 2008 Presidential campaign indicate what sort of future relevance it might have for political competition. A number of exploratory studies look at the use of Web 2.0 by public representatives (Francoli and Ward, 2008; Lilleker and Jackson, 2008; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). Long-term effects of Web 2.0 are obviously only an object of speculation and most of the literature is composed either of pioneering empirical studies or of normative contributions. The most obvious point of reference on the political impact of Web 2.0 at the moment is the primary race for the 2008 American presidential election and the actual electoral campaign itself. However, we need to produce research evidence in the European context, which from a number of points of views, may generate very different scenarios. Therefore, in this chapter we will, on one hand produce some descriptive inferences, and on the other we will aim to put forward some theoretically coherent expectations and we will attempt to test them in an exploratory empirical analysis.

5.1.2 Web 2.0 and political parties in four European countries

Most of the literature on the political implications of Web 2.0 is focused on electoral campaign and on how candidates, and to a smaller extent, parties, use Web 2.0 applications during electoral races. In this respect, our investigation differs from previous ones, being based on data gained on parties at 'peacetime'. Even though there was actually no campaign taking place any time soon, many of the parties under analysis had made their debut in the 2.0 era.

The British videoblog of the conservative leader David Cameron, webcameron.com (actually separate from the conservative website, but well advertised on the homepage), the Spanish Socialist Party Ipsoetv and the network of progressive volunteers (red de voluntary@s cyberprogresist@s), the Italian Democratic Party Network are a few examples of how parties approached the new technologies. The Italian Partito Democratico even has a

provision, in its rulebook, on the possibility of forming 'internet branches' (to date, this is still only a possibility, there are no active internet branches).

Once again, our interest is mainly to highlight and analyse patterns of differences between parties. Therefore, we will explore if and how the parties under analysis implemented Web 2.0 applications. Before so doing, it is important to point out the relative impact of social-network sites and sharing applications in each national context. Table 5.2 below reports the 6 most popular websites, in terms of traffic, in 2009 in the four countries under analysis.

Table 5.2. Most popular sites in Italy, Ireland, UK and Spain

	Italy	Ireland	UK	Spain
1	Google.it	Google.ie	Google.co.uk	Google.es
2	Facebook	Google.com	Facebook	Windows
3	YouTube	YouTube	Google.com	YouTube
4	Windows	Yahoo	YouTube	Google.com
5	Yahoo	Bebo	Yahoo	Facebook
6	Google.com	Facebook	Windows Live	MSN.com

Source: Alexa.com [May 2009]

Youtube and Facebook feature in the 6 most popular websites in all the four countries; Facebook in Italy and UK is second only to the Google searching engine. Given the difference in task performed by Social Networks and searching engines, this number is rather striking. People use the internet to socialize there almost as much as they use it to search for information (which could be of any nature). Thus, the relative importance of Web 2.0 phenomena seems to be dramatically growing and its effect on politics may grow accordingly.

In the next sections we will take a closer look at what sort variance exists in parties' implementation of Web 2.0 applications; before proceeding, we need to remark that data presented here may be out of date within a very short period of time. The June 2009 European election has already modified the scenario and the Web 2.0 phenomenon has invested a large number of candidates and, parties themselves have already multiplied their visibility in the blogsphere, in social networks and sharing platforms.

The snapshot that we will look at in this chapter was taken in January 2009, and such is the speed of innovation and growth in this field that the data presented here may be already valid exclusively in 'historical' perspective. We will begin by providing some descriptive tables and figures, and we subsequently attempt to formulate some causal inferences, in the next sections.

To the best of our knowledge there are no existing studies investigating the use of social networks by political parties across different countries.

5.2 Are parties' websites going 'interactive'?

As we pointed out in the previous chapter, the majority of features present on parties' websites were informative as opposed to interactive. We also discuss the possibility that Web 2.0 is actually preferred by parties to other forms of participatory features and we will now attempt to test the validity of this claim.

There are a number of *caveats* to the study of the relationships between social networks and political parties and, given the lack of a well-established literature on the subject, we need to point them out. First of all, as Kalnes remarks in his study of Norwegian parties and Web 2.0 (Kalnes, 2008) , social networks can generate a great degree of chaos when it comes to identifying political parties' presence on them. With regard to the Norwegian case, he notes that

> 'In general Facebook was a party political anarchy at the time of the election campaign in 2007, as there were myriads of groups over which the national parties felt they had little oversight or control. Several parties discovered that a person already had established groups using the party name, the party logo etc. and henceforth appeared to be an official group, but was not. On the other hand, local and activist initiatives were appreciated, although several of the informants expressed skepticism towards what they felt was Facebookhype' (ibidem).

Therefore, in our analysis, we look primarily at parties websites and whether or not they link to a number of social networks, rather than

proceeding the other way around, searching for parties on social networking sites. The second tricky task, in producing a comparative analysis, has to do with the different popularity and diffusion of social networking sites in different countries. For instance, as shown in table 5.2, In Ireland the Bebo social network is more prominent than Facebook, however we won't be able to test every single social networking site, we will go through two platforms: Facebook and Twitter, keeping in mind that in such a case the cross national context may actually play a role. With regard to blogs, we should also pay some attention to distinguishing between party representatives' blogs and supporters' ones. In our experience, there is a mixture of the two on parties' websites, we observed a combination of the two forms of blogging: the party's website links to both public representatives/politicians blogs and to supporters' ones (this is the case for instance with the Spanish Socialist Party).

Given the above considerations, and that this study is exploratory in its nature, we will outline a very straightforward methodological approach. We will look at parties' websites and social networks with regard to three Web 2.0 applications: Facebook (social network), Twitter (social network and micro blogging) and Blogs. We will firstly produce a brief overview of parties under analysis and their overall use of Web 2.0 applications. Second we will look at the three above-mentioned applications and attempt to identify patterns of variation or homogeneity. Third, we'll attempt to investigate whether any of the variables responsible for variation among parties' websites have some explanatory power with regard to Web 2.0. Finally, we will discuss our descriptive and causal findings and address the question of how further research on Web 2.0 and parties should proceed.

5.2. 1 Are Italian, Spanish, British and Irish parties going 'interactive'?

Given the growing popularity of social networking sites, parties should be getting more and more familiar with them and implementing them extensively. However, in January 2009 – latest data collection – out of thirty-two parties[ii], thirteen of them had a link to their Facebook profile against

nineteen of them that did not. Only nine parties had a link to Twitter. Even allowing for the fact that no national election was imminent at the time, and that the EU election was still six months ahead, parties did not seem to be fully exploiting cutting edge technology online. We will now look at three distinctive social networks that have different levels of diffusion and are based on very different technical features: Twitter, Facebook and blogging. This approach is motivated by the intention of having a quite diversified set of applications, which may lead to different findings, and open up a number of scenarios to be interpreted. If, on the other hand, they lead to a convergent conclusion, such a finding will be a way of strengthening our research.

5.2.2 Twitter

Twitter, which represents the absolute novelty in Web 2.0 applications, was created in 2006 and it is currently experiencing different levels of popularity in different countries. In the US, 'one in five adults ages 18 and 24 have ever used Twitter and its ilk, as have 20% of online adults 25 to 34' (Lenhart, 2009, February 12) If in the United Kingdom and Ireland it has recently grown dramatically, being respectively number 15 and 26 in the global Alexa ranking, in Italy and Spain it is not yet a mainstream phenomenon, ranking respectively 141 and 140[iii]. Twitter is a social network which makes use of very limited functionalities compared to Facebook or MySpace; it allows users to post comments in real-time but with a maximum length of 140 characters. It is indeed often classified as a micro blogging tool rather than a proper social network, and it is also known as a form of internet sms (short message service). Twitter relies on a number of applications, which make the service available from and to a number of portable devices. The idea behind it is to be able to communicate very simple messages, appointments and events to a potentially very large audience. Given the nature of the service, it seems rational to believe that its implementation will be mainly in periods of high mobilization, therefore during electoral campaigns. Candidates can indeed spread costless information on what they are doing and what they

are planning to do: it is fairly easy to imagine that such a tool could become a very efficient way of organizing social gatherings, fundraising and so on.

In looking at parties' websites in 'peacetime' we obviously expect a non intensive use of such an instrument, but observing which ones do and which ones do not make use of this type of cutting edge technology can offer us a good insight of which parties are aware (or more aware) of the possibilities that Web 2.0 offers. We are also interested in patterns of variation, before the electoral campaign for the 2009 European Parliament election. Therefore, Twitter represents a very interesting case of Web 2.0 application to look at; the large variation in its diffusion within the four countries under analysis and the 'peacetime' status make patterns of Twitter usage very interesting.

As said before, only nine parties were linked to Twitter at the beginning of 2009. Given the differences in terms of twitter popularity, we therefore expect to be able to observe significant cross-national variation. In plain terms, we expect Irish and British parties to have implemented Twitter more than their Southern European counterparts. In exploring which parties are more up to date and receptive to new technological development, we also expect large parties to perform better. Given that we found consistent evidence of large parties being better at promoting interaction (at large and immediate) and to have more informative and participatory overall websites, we expect large parties to be keener on making use of Twitter. Such an expectation is also based on the idea of bringing the normalization hypothesis to Web 2.0. Expecting large parties to be more receptive to new technologies and to react promptly to new trends in society, is indeed in line with the idea that their privileged position in the real world might translate into the online ones. In the previous chapter, we also saw that leftist parties are more likely to put in place (on their websites) participatory features and, as anticipated, a number of times in the literature, the position on the left/right axis seems to be affecting the way parties set up their websites. When it comes to the impact that such a dimension may have on explaining the presence of social networks, there is almost no literature to refer to. Kalnes expects right wing parties to be more comfortable with the unilateralism of what is now associated with Web 1.0 rather than Web 2.0 (Kalnes, 2008: 17), on the basis

of what Ignazi (2005) calls the 'caesaristic profile' of new right wing parties. However, no previous research has been done and we do not actually expect the left/right dimension to be significant. Indeed the nature of an application such as Twitter is connective and networking, but it can hardly be regarded as way to promote debate and effective participation. The limit of 140 characters does not *per se* favor any meaningful form of opinion exchange, dialogue or participation. It does allow people, parties and candidates to post information; it also allows a large public to be reached by the information, and it incentivizes reactions to that. It definitely strengthens connectivity possibilities, but we do not see a necessary tie with participation. Therefore we do not expect the left/right dimension to be a significant predictor of Twitter use. The same applies to internal level of democracy; twitter should not represent a channel of meaningful interaction between voters/members and parties and, among the all the possible applications of Web 2.0, it offers the lowest degree of informed opinion exchange and the most restrictive level of communication.

If we simply look at the level of correlation between the above mentioned variables in table 5.3, we do not have any reason to run a logistic regression, as the only significant correlation is between Twitter's presence and party size.

Table 5.3. Correlation matrix

	Presence of Twitter on
Large	0.4253*
Ideology, Left/right	0.1350
Twitter's diffusion	-0.0530
Party organization (power decentralization)	-0.0742

Note: in order to capture the possible relation between Twitter's cross national diffusion and parties' website implementation, we make use of a binary variable aggregating countries with high diffusion (UK and Ireland) coded as 1, and countries with low diffusion (Spain and Italy) coded as 0.

There is a statistically significant difference between small and large parties; we double-checked it with a ttest, which gives a   t= -2.5738 (p=0.0152) and group means of .142 for small parties and .545 for large ones, significantly different from one other.

As such, the only factor which appears to explain differences in adopting

Twitter does not have anything to do with the level of diffusion of such a platform in the country, nor with the particular nature and ethos of the party. The only element that may be playing a role (that would, though, have to be supported by stronger and more extensive evidence) is the dichotomy of large-small. Large parties are, by and large, more prone to use Twitter; if such a situation lasts, this could be proved by further research. This exploratory analysis seeks to provide some descriptive evidence, but the task of systematically testing the implementation of very new Web 2.0 technology cannot be undertaken here. However our journey into a very new side of the internet and parties still has to touch two elements, blogs on one hand, and, on the other, Facebook.

5.2.3 The phenomenon Facebook

If Twitter represents the very latest application of Web 2.0, Facebook possibly represents the most successful one. Created in February 2004, with the name of 'The Facebook,' by a Harvard undergrad student, it was meant to be a platform to be used by his fellow Harvard students. However, within a few months 'The Facebook' became a mass phenomenon, quickly transcending the border of University related networks. Facebook creator, Mark Zuckerberg, had not foreseen in 2004 the growth in terms of popularity and profit the company would have had in a very short amount of time; in August 2008, the company was estimated to be worth between 3.5 and 5 billion dollars. If Twitter allows the user a very limited amount of activities, Facebook represents the opposite in terms of capabilities, allowing for a wide range of activities: real time chat, publication of photos and videos, gifts, games and blogs. The popularity of Facebook in Europe has grown dramatically in the past two years, and even if in the US MySpace is still the most preferred social network, in Europe Facebook seems to be the number one networking site.

Facebook's possible influence on the political sphere has already been considered, and some academic attention has been given to the phenomenon

in the past two years. Williams and Gulati (Williams and Gulati, 2007: ; 2008: ; Williams, 2008: ; Williams, 2008: ; Williams, 2009) have investigated the impact of Facebook diffusion in electoral races finding that '32% of candidates for the U.S. Senate and 13% of candidates for the House updated their Facebook profiles. In addition, incumbents added 1.1% to their vote share by doubling the number of supporters on Facebook, while open-seat candidates added 3% by achieving that same increase.' (2007: 19). These findings are particularly interesting if we consider the previously mentioned gap of empirical studies on effective 'net gains'. Williams and Gulati's studies, indeed, fill part of the gap in the literature by estimating what sort of electoral advantage the use of web-based platforms (both Web 1.0 and 2.0) may give to a candidate. However, no study of parties on Facebook has been produced, to the best of our knowledge. The mobilizing potential of Facebook (and similar social networks) has to be further investigated and in-depth analyzed; here we do not aim to produce any comprehensive analysis of those phenomena, rather to offer a snapshot of patterns of usage and possibly to identify some elements to be considered for further analysis.

If Twitter represents the very latest trend, Facebook has already some sort of history. Therefore we would expect parties and politicians to be aware of its potential. Regardless of the type of implementation, use and sophistication of Facebook profiles-how often it is updated, what sort of functionalities are used most- it is rational to expect most parties to already have a Facebook profile, or to have one before the next EU electoral race in June 2009. We would indeed expect a sort of 'me too' effect, (Selnow, 1998), to take place on Facebook with parties establishing profiles under the pressure of a snowball effect. On the other hand, Facebook profiles require some sort of dedication to their maintenance, they do not simply produce information, they are intrinsically interactive platforms, so that we may expect some variation in their usage. We won't produce any in depth analysis or monitoring of parties Facebook profile, so that we won't be testing for pattern of usage (no content analysis will be performed), simply for patterns of implementation. By looking at the data, the first noteworthy information is that only 13 out of 32 parties had a link to Facebook in their website, as the

aforementioned snowball effect has not taken place yet, and it may not be happening at all.

Table 5.4. Facebook link by party size

	Small	Large
No Facebook links	15	4
Facebook links	6	7

The group means are .285 for small and .636 for large parties with a statistically significant difference (at .10) indicating that large parties are more likely than smaller one to introduce links to Facebook party profiles on their websites. In terms of country specific characteristics, table 5.5 offers an interesting overview: in Italy, Spain and United Kingdom there is a balance between parties with and without Facebook links on their webpages, but Ireland presented a unique case, with no party offering such a link, as Web 2.0 had not touched Irish parties at all.

Table 5.5. Facebook links on parties' websites by country

	UK	Spain	Italy	Ireland
No Facebook links	4	3	7	5
Facebook links	5	3	5	0

The UK, Italy and Spain are however still likely to experience the 'me too' effect in the short term, whereas we may expect such a phenomenon in Ireland to take a little longer. As such, data indicate that there is a movement towards Web 2.0 and that large parties seem to be quicker than smaller ones, but we would need to see if and how things change within the next few months, once the electoral campaign for the European parliament have begun. The advantage of running data collection in 'peacetime' is indeed to account for variation that may not be there within a very short period of time. On the contrary, if variation is observed during electoral campaign the literature would have to reconsider the impact of Web 2.0, but at the

moment, these are mere speculations.

None of the previously employed explanatory variables provides an explanation for variation in terms of Facebook presence, with the exception of the party size and country. Party characteristics don't play a role, and the country variable is significant because of the peculiar case of Ireland, but we see a rather standardized scenario for the other three countries (correlation coefficients are not reported given their lack of significance).

Our brief investigation of popular social networks has left us with more questions than answers; we have no certainty about the behavior of political actors, and particularly of political parties on social networking sites. It may be the case that social networks will play a role in electoral campaigns, and the emphasis may be on candidates' profiles as opposed to parties, especially in electoral contexts with strong emphasis on candidates. It may also be the case that parties will produce official Facebook profiles anyway, once the electoral competition is more intense. However, we don't know yet whether there will be pressure on parties to be more active in Web 2.0 applications, whether the 'me too' effect will actually take place and, even if all the above were at some stage fulfilled, we don't know what sort of pattern of usage we will be observing over the next few months. Neither can we foresee, at this stage, what sort of factors will play a role in determining Web 2.0 activities, so far we have only found consistent evidence of larger parties being more proactive than smaller ones.

As such, a number of elements would indicate a well-normalized panorama of parties in cyberspace, with well-resourced actors being more receptive towards technological developments. However, before coming to any conclusion we have to look at a substantially different interactive element of the web and of political communication at large: the blogsphere.

5.2.4 Parties and blogs

A blog (short form for weblog) represents a particular form of website through which individuals can regularly publish text, videos and pictures.

Blogs are meant to be frequently updated with readers being allowed to post their reactions and responses. The entries are organized in reverse chronological order and the site is designed to be easily manageable and costless, 'Blogs can function as personal diaries, technical advice columns, sports chat, celebrity gossip, political commentary, or all of the above' (Drezner and Farrell, 2004).

The use of blogs started in the late Nineties but the political connotation only came after September 11, when the phenomenon, in the United States, grew dramatically (Wallsten, 2005) and academic attention was eventually paid to it. Political blogging has been increasing in size, popularity and importance ever since; the 2004 US election marked the introduction of blogs, first in the primary race and, subsequently, in the actual Presidential campaign. Dean's 'Blog for America' represents the breakthrough of blogs in electoral campaigns (Pole, 2009).

The size of bloggers' audience is also constantly growing. The 2008 presidential race represented an even bigger stage for blogs, with 14 out of 17 candidates having active blogs. Barak Obama was able to make very effective use of this instrument, which was launched live the same day he announced his candidacy (10th of February, 2007). The claim that blogs, social networks and the internet at large fundamentally contributed to Obama's success is often surrounded by a number of oversimplifications, but is definitely clear by now that Obama's capacity to make extensive and efficient use of the web brought him some sort of advantage. It is, however, difficult to quantify the extent of such a 'net gain' and we do not intend to enter such a lively debate; we rather use such a debate to introduce our discussion of blogs and parties.

In the United Stated political blogs and politicians' blogs seem to have some impact in politics and a large audience, with influential bloggers invited to both the Democratic and Republican conventions in 2008 (*ibidem*).

The phenomenon in Europe is certainly less widespread, the size of the blogsphere is significantly smaller, and the academic attention paid to it is quite marginal. The integration of blogging features into parties' and candidates' websites appears to be becoming quite extensive, but there is not much literature on the subject. Once again our task will be rather exploratory

here, even though, in this case, there is a quite developed literature on the American case, which can be used as a guide. If there is some research done on the political British blogsphere (Jackson, 2006; Francoli and Ward, 2008; Lilleker and Jackson, 2008; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009) we have very little information on the Italian, Spanish (Campo Dominguez, 2008) and Irish blogspheres, therefore formulating hypotheses is once again a very tricky exercise. We approach the task of depicting the status of blogs on parties' websites from a rather descriptive perspective and we will then attempt to formulate meaningful hypotheses for further research.

We look at the distribution of blogs in political parties' webpages by making a fundamental distinction: on one hand, parties' websites can link to politicians/leaders/public representatives' blogs, on the other hand, they can link to supporters/members' blogs. Even though the nature of the instrument does not change, the purpose of supporters' blogs as opposed to representatives' and politicians' ones may be different and we believe that a distinction between the two of them is necessary. Moreover, parties, when it comes to promoting the implementation of a bloggers' network, may be pursuing different ends than when they offer insight into public representatives or officers activity and opinions. Also, the qualitative content of the blog may depend upon the social (and in this case political) role of the blogger, and even though we are not about to produce a qualitative evaluation of the blogs, we acknowledge that such an analysis may give an interesting insight into blogs affiliated to political parties.

Therefore, we should take a look at the distribution of blogs on parties' websites and identify patterns of variance with regard to two types of bloggers: party officers/leaders on one hand and activists/members on the other. Firstly, we take a look at the distribution by country in Table 5.6

Table 5.6. Blogs in parties websites, by country

	UK	Spain	Italy	Ireland	Percentage
Presence of public representatives and party cadres' Blogs	4	5	7	1	51%
Presence of supporters blogs	3	3	4	1	33%

By and large, the inclusion of public representatives' blogs on parties' website is more common that the inclusion of supporters' blogs. That may be due to public representatives' blogs serving a sort of accountability function and the promotion of transparency. It may be the case that at "peacetime" those functions are valued more than the networking function attributable to supporters blogs. Such a hypothesis should be systematically tested by monitoring over time if the balance changes between 'peacetime' and electoral campaign.

The second major implication of the figures reported in table 5.6 is that only half of the parties have introduced public representatives or leader's blogs. Once again Ireland is outstanding for its poor performance, only one party (Labour) has introduced blogs as an established feature of its website. The other Irish parties seem more and more unaware of, or unreceptive to Web 2.0 applications. Italian parties perform better than their Spanish and British counterparts, with more than half of them equipped with a representatives/leaders' blog. However, when we controlled for a relationship between the presence of blogs on parties' website and the national context we found no significant relationship, both with regard to public representatives' blogs -ANOVA (F=2.04 p=0.13)- and supporters' blogs, ANOVA (F=0.46 p=0.71). Large parties once again seem to perform slightly better than smaller parties, with a significant difference summarized in the next table 5.7.

Table 5.7. T test blogs feature by party size

	Large parties Group mean	Small parties Group mean	t	p
Presence of public representatives and party cadres' Blogs	.72	.40	-1.7518	0.0897
Presence of supporters blogs	.72	.13	-4.0782	0.0003

As such, bigger parties are more prone to make use of Web 2.0 applications. They seem to be more up to date and more aware of trends in society. Is this due to their dominance in terms of resources? We know that there is no ideological commitment related to the implementation of Web 2.0 (both levels of internal democracy and left/right position were proved uncorrelated to the Web 2.0 features), and we have observed consistent evidence pointing towards better performances of big parties. This does somehow suggest that resources could be making the difference, but the extent of such a difference has to be further investigated. Furthermore, the relationship between web performances and resources has to be clarified in terms of financial vs other types of resources. It will also be important, for future research, to analyze what sort of interaction takes place on those blogs and what kind of messages they tend to spread. Finally, the electoral cycle has to be related to them and patterns of hyperlinks can also give us some additional information on Web 2.0 applications.

To conclude on blogs, we found that they are used by half of the parties we have been looking at, in the form of public representatives/politicians' blogs and that there is no significant cross national variation. The promotion of supporters' blogs is more of a minority concern, with only a third of parties having them directly linked to their webpages. However, initiatives such as the socialist blogsphere (PSOE) in Spain and the PD- Network (Partito Democratico) in Italy are quite recent and their impact has to be evaluated in the longer run. Blogs have a longer history

than many other Web 2.0 applications but their relation to parties' websites has not been an object of major attention in the literature, indicating that it is still a niche phenomenon.

5.3 Parties' websites and Web 2.0 make a strange pair

In the light of what we said here on Web 2.0 and parties' websites, we are under the impression that they make a strange pair for a number of reasons. First, the nature of the two types of applications (websites on one hand and Web 2.0 features on the other) makes their relationship interesting, even though only a rather sophisticated network analysis could clarify how and if Web 1.0 platforms can gain direct benefit from having Web 2.0 spin-offs. Second, the relationship between parties' websites and Web 2.0 platforms is not clear yet in terms of its fundamental balance: will that be a sort of solar system with Web 2.0 applications used as satellites to the main websites? Or, will Web 2.0 applications eclipse the role of parties' website? Or will it be a balanced relationship with an efficient division of labor?

All the above questions cannot be answered here: our research is limited in time and resources and we cannot provide an answer to all the questions we just posed. However, we believe that posing such questions is an important exercise: it informs our investigation of the broader picture and it may help clarify what our research can bring to the literature. Indeed, looking at the mainly descriptive findings presented here, there are a few interesting elements which can be regarded as a contribution.

Firstly, the recurrent finding here is that large parties, in 'peacetime', are more likely than their smaller counterparts to implement Web 2.0 applications. The type of specific application does not seem to matter, the pattern is constant across applications and, if we add it to what we saw in chapter 4, we have a case for the normalization thesis to be vindicated once again. As such, the normalization thesis seems to be able to travel to Web 2.0.

By and large, bigger political parties are systematically better than smaller ones at developing and implementing their websites. With regard to

participatory/interactive features as well as with regard to Web 2.0 platforms, bigger parties are more active and proactive. Such 'dominance' may be due to their greater capacity to recruit more advisors, who run exploratory research and surveys of the voting population, than parties with little resources. It may also be the case that they can employ more and better-qualified staff, and that a combination of pure finance and professionalism translate into more activity on the web. Neither internal power balance nor attitudes on the left/right scale have an impact on parties' implementation of Web 2.0; the variance seems to be due to resources only. Such a scenario strengthens, once again, the normalization thesis indicating that availability of resources in the real world translates into an advantage in cyberspace. We will be coming back to the debate on resources in the final chapter of the dissertation, resources being a crucial element for both part II and III.

Resources are a complex matter; their impact on political behavior in cyberspace is one of the most intriguing elements in the field. Indeed, there is a need for a deeper investigation of resources, on their pure financial element and their interaction with professionalization and sophistication not only of electoral campaigns, but also with party life at large.

Before closing this section and part II of the thesis we need to come back to one question that we raised in chapter 4, where we noted a discrepancy between participatory activities at large and immediate participatory activities. For the latter we found no impact of party internal democracy and we hypothesized that parties with higher levels of democracy may favor the implementation of Web 2.0 technologies to communicate with their electorate. However, we found no substantial support for such a hypothesis and even if we did not perform any rigorous hypothesis testing exercise here, such a possibility appears rather unlikely.

In terms of Web 2.0, only resources, which may as well mean capacity of understanding and exploiting the most profitable trends, seem to determine variation.

Overall, much still has to be investigated of the relationship between parties and Web 2.0, especially in 'peacetime'. If we have some information on candidates' use of Web 2.0 (Williams and Gulati, 2007; 2009; 2008a;

2008b; 2008c; Gibson and McAllister, 2008; Williams, 2009) we don't know much of parties use of Web 2.0 and we intended to provide here a very exploratory frame to investigate patterns of variance. Clearly, our analysis has been less than comprehensive, but we do believe we have posed important questions and identified some possible ways of investigating their answers.

We will move now to the third part of this investigation, where we concentrate on parties and candidates in electoral campaigns; once we will have taken the journey throughout cyber-campaigning we will combine findings of part II and III in order to produce meaningful conclusion looking at parties in cyberspace in a more comprehensive fashion.

---

[i] 'The term UCC may thus cover content creation by those who are much more than just 'users'. Still, the creation of content outside of a professional routine and organization and potentially not for reward is a useful characteristic to separate it from content produced by commercial or quasi-commercial entities for commercial purposes.' (OECD, 2007: 18).
[ii] Data on the Irish Progressive democrats were not collected in 2009, given the party's decision to disband in November 2008.
[iii] May 2009.

Irish Cyber-Parties in the electorate

'As so much social interaction moves online, there is pressure for political parties to do the same, particularly given that their key competitors for citizens' attention and participation are interest groups and social movements, which have been particularly innovative in using the internet' (Margetts, 2006: 530)

This chapter focuses on political parties as campaigning agents, competing with one other for citizens' votes. Despite being a fairly recent research area, campaign studies rely on a quite well established literature. In reference to such a literature, this chapter will focus on the latest development in campaigns styles: cyber campaigning.

The study will move from a general discussion of campaigns styles to an evaluation of parties' websites based on the empirical collection of data on the Irish case. The websites of the six major Irish political parties were observed, tracked down and analysed, from December 2005 until the general election of May 24th 2007. This chapter will offer an account of the development that occurred during this period, and it will then focus on the run up to the general election (six months before the polling). Such a collection of data is original and represents the first longitudinal investigation of Irish political parties in cyberspace.

Firstly, the chapter will provide an overview of campaign styles. Second, we will focus on the observation of how Irish parties reacted to the challenges of a changing communication environment, by observing their websites over time. Third, we will concentrate on the official electoral campaign (in the case of the 2007 election: the three weeks preceding the election day) and the extent to which the role of parties' websites changes during such a period will be assessed. Finally, the study's outcomes will be discussed in relation to the literature and we will attempt to formulate meaningful generalizations.

Overall, this chapter will provide not only an assessment of the extent to which new technologies are employed in electoral campaigns by parties, but also an overview of how the 2007 campaign was run.

Intro

Parties compete for citizens' attention, but most importantly they compete for citizens' votes. If parties' ultimate goal is to win votes/elections/seats- and noticeably there are parties whose ultimate goals are different- the best occasion to compete for the electorate's attention is during electoral campaigns. Electoral campaigns are 'a process by which a campaign organization (a party, candidate, or special interest group organization) seeks to maximize electoral gains (usually measured as the proportion of the vote)' (Farrell, 2005: 63), nowadays, they are widely regarded as crucial activities for political parties (Farrell, 2006: 122) and for the political process at large(Schmitt-Beck and Farrell, 2002: 2). Parties are indeed very likely to mobilize all of their resources in the run-up to an election, when they attempt to maximize their visibility and message.

The literature on campaigns has recently focused on highlighting the dimension of change in campaign styles. A number of studies have focused on the fundamental changes that have happened in communication and organizational strategies for electoral campaigns (Farrell and Webb, 2000; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002; Schmitt-Beck and Farrell, 2002; Farrell, 2005; Farrell, 2006), emphasising how European parties borrowed a number of features from American electoral campaigns (Scammell, 1997). This study will use the tripartite theoretical framework of the campaign styles development in order to assess the extent to which new technologies have actually affected electoral campaign in Ireland. If we believe that 'electioneering by parties and candidates has changed in terms of the three 'Ts' of technology, technicians and techniques'(Farrell, 2006: 125) this investigation gives an account of all of them and focuses particularly on the first T.

Technology has indeed brought a number of actual changes and it has been expected to dramatically transform political communication. In order to assess the dimension of such a change we should take a step back and discuss some general trends observed by scholars of electoral campaigns; therefore a brief analysis of the tripartite history of campaigning will be provided in the next section.

6.1 The tripartite history of campaigns

A number of scholars have focused on the historical development of electoral campaigns and despite the imaginative type of labels in use, they all seem to agree on the fact that the history of electoral campaigns is tripartite. Going backwards: the very last stage of campaign style is commonly defined as post-modern campaigning (Norris, 2000) different scholars use different labels to classify the phenomenon, such as Americanization (Scammell, 1997) or phase 3 (Farrell and Webb, 2000). Norris identifies two previous phases of electoral campaigning: initially a form of political communication based on capillary diffusion of information across the territory, performed by party members (pre-modern) and then a model of indirect campaigning performed by mass media such as TV and radio (modern) (Norris, 2000). Each of these models of political communication corresponds to different types of party organizational arrangements, the first one being based on local branches' activities and ideological identification of the electorate with the party, and the second one based on the rise of centralization, headquarter-driven organization, fall in party attachment (Gibson and Rommele, 2001), and electoral volatility.

From the mid-nineties on, parties seem to have entered an identifiable third phase of campaigning; whatever label we use to indicate such a change, one of its crucial characteristics is the intense use of new technologies: 'the increasing efforts by the parties to reach individual voters via the internet, direct mail, and telemarketing' (Gibson and Rommele, 2001: 33). The post-modern phase has indeed a strong cyber characterization, which is the main

object of interest of this chapter. The tripartite classification of campaign styles is a conventional framework which does imply either a rigid temporal sequence or the mutually exclusive nature of the phases. Indeed, in reality, elements characteristic of different phases coexist.

Table 6.1. Campaign styles

	Pre-modern	Modern	Post-modern
Time frame in established	Mid 19th century - 1950s	Early 1960s-1980s	1990s-
Preparation	Short term and ad hoc campaign	Long campaign	Permanent campaign
Party campaign organization	Local and decentralized party volunteers	Nationally coordinated with greater professionalism	Nationally coordinated but with decentralized targets, use of
Media	National and local press, local handbills, posters and pamphlets,	Television broadcasting	Television narrowcasting, targeted mail, e-mail, targeted ads,
Direct Channels	Local rallies, public meetings, candidates debates,	Daily press conferences, paid TV ads, target direct mail	Emails, online discussion groups, parties intranets, forums, weblogs
Indirect Channels	Partisan newspaper and election radio broadcast	News and current affairs programs on the major channels	Specialized channels, talk radio, websites
Costs	Low budget	Moderate	High costs
Public Feedback	Door to door canvassing and local rallies	Occasional opinion polls	Regular opinion polls, focus groups, email, and interactive

Table adapted from Norris (2005).

The table above sums up the main characteristics of each campaign phase and it gives a clear overview of how campaigning activities have been classified. As already pointed out, the categorization is rather formal especially in terms of time line: for instance, posters and billboards are still widely in use in the third millennium and stickers and flags were widely employed by the Obama campaign, which is commonly regarded as the high-

tech campaign *par excellence*. However, the table serves the purpose of clarity and schematisation by providing a framework that will inform our discussion of campaigns in Ireland. The table also overlaps fairly well with the categorization proposed by Farrell, who labels the three phases as stage I, II and III (Farrell, 2006: 126). Obviously the tripartite interpretation of campaigns styles contains elements of simplification, but it also provides a useful frame for an empirical study such as this.

Having said that, there are still a number of other elements that need to be taken into account when approaching the study of electoral campaigns. Parties' communication strategies are influenced by the structure of mass media, the diffusion of ICT, literacy rates and level of access to mass media (Norris, 2005). On top of that, structural systemic elements also need to be considered: specifically the governmental system, the party system and the electoral laws (Farrell, 2005: 67).

The governmental system matters in terms of defining which actors will be the fulcrum of the campaign: parties in parliamentary systems and candidates in presidential and semi-presidential ones (Farrell, 2006: 125). The party system is also influential in determining what shape the electoral campaign will assume: as Farrell puts it 'parties have to pay due regard to the likely coalition scenarios that may result after the election, and so campaign slogans and rhetoric have to be tempered as appropriate' (2005: 70). Electoral laws represent another element to be considered: firstly the electoral system does play a fundamental role by strengthening centripetal or centrifugal forces (Cox, 1990: 904; Zittel, 2007: 9). For instance, electoral laws placing emphasis on candidates (as with the Irish PR-STV) are more likely to produce a decentralized electoral campaign. Beside the electoral system, there are a number of other electoral rules regulating different campaign matters, such as the modus of campaign finances, the existence of expenditure limits, the access to (public, but not only) TV and the length of the electoral campaign. Obviously all the aforementioned constraints contribute to determining the communication environment and 'within such an environment parties can formulate and develop their specific communication objectives' (Norris, 2005: 4).

In the case of Ireland: the electoral system PR-STV in multimember constituencies - for an extensive account of it see (Gallagher, 2005) should favour centrifugal campaigns, with relatively low levels of campaign centralization. Moreover, despite Ireland being a parliamentary system campaigns are very much candidate focused, with strong competition at the interparty as well as at the intraparty level (Marsh, 2000).

Unfortunately, we have very little data on candidates' and parties' approach to electoral campaigning; even though a number of scholars have tried to clarify some components of electoral campaigns in the Irish context, (Farrell, 1994; Marsh, 2000; Marsh, 2004; Marsh, 2007) much is still unexplored and unexplained. We still have no data on how the internet has been used for electoral campaigns and what sort of impact it may have had. Irish parties made their debut online in 1998 and over ten years later, we still don't have any data on Irish parties in cyberspace. While the literature on campaigns and political communication has failed to devote attention to Ireland, the literature on Irish political parties- political entrepreneurs in general- has ignored cyberspace. Moreover, if TV has been a crucial medium for modern campaigns, the internet had not yet been employed as a fundamental tool in electoral campaigns before the 2007 general election. Therefore, this chapter seeks to partially fill such a gap and to produce not only a map of the 2007 cyber campaign, but also to present a critical analysis of it. Specifically, we will provide an overview of parties' activity in cyberspace, so that, on one hand, we will be able to include Ireland in the list of western democracies on which an investigation of cybercampaigning exists and compare the Irish experience to other cases. On the other hand, we will also get a better insight to the way campaigns are run in Ireland nowadays.

6.2 Electoral campaign in Ireland

Electoral campaigns have been regarded for a long time as unimportant in affecting voters' choices (Schmitt-Beck and Farrell 2002). In Europe at large, party identification was, for a long time, the key mobilizing element, therefore

scholars disregarded the study of campaigns, which were considered not to matter.

Ireland makes no exception to such a pattern, parties did not invest much in campaign preparation and political science scholars invested even less in their study before Mair's 1987 investigation of 1980s general elections. In this longitudinal study of campaigns in Ireland, Mair points out the systematic lack of organization and the little effort that parties had put in electoral campaigns from the 1940s to the late 1970s (Mair, 1987: 111). However, things have substantially changed and, from the 1980s on, not only have parties intensified their campaigning efforts, but also greater academic attention was paid to elections. Benoit and Marsh (Benoit and Marsh, 2003; Benoit and Marsh, 2008) investigated the effect of electoral expenses on voting building upon a growing international literature (Jacobson, 1978; Jacobson, 1980; Jacobson, 1985; Johnston, Pattie et al., 1989; Jacobson, 1990 Eagles, 1993; Cox and Thies, 2000; Eagles, 2004), they showed that electoral expenditure does help candidates in their attempt of winning votes. Both Farrell (1994) and Marsh (2004) pointed out how the electoral campaigns have changed and both identified the presence of some sort of innovative campaign tools, such as opinion polls and focus groups from the 1980s on. The use of professional consultants and the increase in numbers of parties' staff members and headquarters as well as a dramatic increase in mass media utilization and daily press conferences (Katz and Mair, 1992) suggest that Ireland has experienced some levels of professionalization.The limited literature on Irish electoral campaigns seems to suggest one rather universally accepted fact: pre-modern campaigning is still a crucial component of the campaign process. Indeed, Marsh argues that 'the local element remains a significant part- many would say a critical part-of the operation' (Marsh, 2004: 246) and Norris agrees by pointing out that local campaigns are still crucial in Ireland because of PR-STV (Norris, 2005: 10). Some scholars claim that Ireland fully entered the post-modern campaigning style for the first time in 2007 (Brandenburg and Zalinsky, 2008: 171). Yet, no data on Irish parties online have been presented either in 'paecetime', or at campaign time, and we are actually missing an important piece of the puzzle. Our investigation of the

implementation of post-modern features such as online campaigning will provide evidence allowing us better understanding of campaigns at large. Indeed, the balance between pre-modern, modern and post-modern campaigning tools is still very much unclear and an insight on cybercampaigning would very much clarify whether some 'post-modern stuff has arrived around here'.

This chapter seeks to estimate firstly the extent to which parties use the internet for campaigning activities, secondly, if any substantial differences exist at the inter party level and thirdly, if several trends found in the past ten years in a number of other electoral contexts are followed by Irish parties online. While looking at Irish parties in the run-up to the electoral campaign we will keep in mind the broad trends identified by Gibson and Ward (Gibson and Ward, 2009: 93) in reviewing studies of parties online in the past ten years. Specifically we will be looking for evidence of:

- Standardization: the tendency to emphasise information dissemination
- Conservativism: lack of implementation of interactive features. 'notably, the most celebrated instances of election campaign online have involved individual candidates rather than parties themselves' (ibidem)
- Targeting: the considerable use of the internet parties made in the past fifteen years, favoured the return to narrowcasting- typical of pre-modern campaign-, now with the support of new technologies (Norris,2005).[i]
- Virtual infrastructure: smaller parties 'might lose the hi-tech innovation battle' but they might keep having an active presence online.
- Controlled interactivity: the possibility of opinion exchange and interaction, where provided, are framed in such a way that the parties firmly control and structure the interaction.
- Resource generation: parties have implemented more and more tools to recruit funding and volunteers.

As such, the above listed trends will serve as a reference in evaluating Irish campaign and in translating our findings into meaningful generalizations. As pointed out in chapter 3, the study alternates, both in part II and in part III,

chapters providing causal inferences (chapter 4 and 7) with chapters(5 and 6) offering mainly descriptive inferences.

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of political parties' websites was performed through their observation over time. The longitudinal analysis helps us to understand whether there has been a change from 'peacetime' to actual campaign and it will give us an indication of the extent of such a change. Parties' websites were monitored and downloaded regularly in the months preceding the campaign. Through a comparison with data previously collected, we estimate the amount of variance in the use that parties make of their websites and web instruments at large. Data on the pre-electoral period date back to 2005 and were collected and clustered in terms of: information dissemination, interactive activities and levels of visibility. Data on cyber-campaign were observed over a period of six months in the run up to the May 2007 election; as said in chapter 4, we consider such a time frame as a reasonable point for the 'unofficial' electoral campaign to begin, and we expect campaign features to start appearing at some point during this time.

6.2.1 Irish parties' websites: a short history

The only study of parties' websites that accounted for the Irish case is the 2003 Norris's article-*Preaching to the converted*- but only four parties were included in the analysis at the time. Moreover, the results are presented by the author in an aggregate fashion, the study being a large cross national analysis of parties' websites. Therefore, if such a study gives us a fundamental overview of European parties at large, it does not tell us anything specific about variation in parties' website in the Irish context. The first version of an Irish party's website dates back to 1998 when Sinn Féin launched its site, followed the same year by Labour, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael; the Greens when online in 1999 and the Progressive Democrats only in 2001.

We started the collection and analysis of Irish party websites in late 2005; the first snapshot of parties' websites is captured in the next table, which presents the Irish political cyberspace as it was in December 2005. At

that time, studies on a number of other countries -- for instance: on the USA: (Margolis, Resnick et al., 1996; Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Gibson, Margolis et al., 2003); on Italy: (Gibson, Newell et al., 2000; Newell, 2001: ; Lusoli et al. 2007); on the UK: (Ward and Gibson, 1998; 1999; 2000b; 2000c; Ward, Gibson et al., 2005); on Denmark: (Nixon and Johansson, 1999) - had already been performed and the informative (versus interactive) nature of parties' websites had been already pointed out. The table below indeed seeks to capture what sort of activities were put in place, with particular focus on informative features versus interactive ones. In addition to that, table 6.2 comprises a number of web 2.0 features like blogs, wikis and online volunteering, which, back then, were absolutely innovative in the Irish cyberspace. At the time of the very first data collection, December 2005, parties were at peacetime, the next general election being scheduled for 2007 and the next local election for 2009. Therefore there were not immediate incentives to increase quality and functionality of parties' websites, but given the permanent campaign postulate, we could not exclude the possibility of finding some campaign related material online.

Table 6.2 Parties' website on December 2005

	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour	Progressive Democrats	Sinn Féin	Greens
History	1	1	1	1	1	1
Structure	0	1	1	1	1	1
Values/Ideology	1	1	1	1	1	1
Policies	1	1	1	1	1	1
Manifesto	0	1	0	0	1	1
Media releases	1	1	1	1	1	1
Documents	1	1	1	1	1	1
People who's	1	1	1	1	1	1
Leaders focus	1	1	0	1	1	0
FAQ	0	0	0	0	0	0
Email newsletter	1	1	1	0	1	0
RSS	1	0	0	0	1	0
Podcast	0	0	0	0	0	0
Survey/polls	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blog	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wiki	0	0	0	0	0	0
Donate	0	1	0	0	1	0
Join	1	1	1	1	1	1
Buy	0	0	0	0	1	0
Volunteer/offline	0	0	0	0	1	0
Women	1	0	0	0	0	0
Youth	1	1	0	1	0	0
Contact	1	1	1	1	0	1
Forums	0	0	0	0	0	0
Petitions	0	0	0	0	0	1

Unsurprisingly, by and large, the volume of information provided by parties' websites was already quite high. Information on the ideological orientation was provided by every party; other areas in which a high level of information was available pertain to the policies supported or implemented by all of them, their history, media releases and documents containing information related to their activities. The use of RSS was not widespread, but Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin were equipped with such a feature.

With regard to possibilities of interaction, the lack of basic interactive features was patent. The most striking element emerging from the above table is the absolute lack of interactivity of Irish parties' websites. In 2005, parties mostly preferred a unilateral relationship with internet users,

performing an informative function rather than exploiting the interactivity of the medium. There was no presence whatsoever of online chatrooms/forums and even the possibility of petitionioing online was offered only by the Green party. Every party, with the exception of Sinn Féin, posted politicians' addresses on the web, so that the only way for the electorate to interact online with them was to write an email. In terms of online visibility[ii], Sinn Féin seemed to have had a better developed networking strategy, which made the party almost three times more visible than its direct competitors with 172 websites linking in. Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, the Labour and the Green Party achieved relatively high levels of visibility with respectively 53, 61, 60 and 62 links in, whereas the Progressive Democrats seemed to be less well-known on the web, with only 32 websites linking in.

Another noteworthy element of the quality of Irish parties in cyberspace, is that, at the time, there was no significant difference among them (non parametric tests fail to detect any difference in both patterns of information provision and interactivity). Even in terms of graphics and navigability, there was no outstanding case, and all the Irish parties had static design and rather slow loading websites. Fine Gael, in particular, was characterized by a heavy amount of text and pictures on policies and campaign that made the navigability extremely slow and the website was reminiscent of a long party manifesto, with little room for interaction. There was, in all of them, a strong graphic emphasis on party leaders, depicted in the banners of the three major parties (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour) and Sinn Féin. By and large, parties emphasized the same things and they all provided users with the same features, no extraordinary innovative use of the web was made, no intensive use of internet capabilities was made.

Overall, informative features had been developed to a greater extent and with more sophistication than interactive ones- possibility of interaction was extremely limited- such a finding is in line with studies of other political contexts (for instance Gibson, 2001: ; Rommele, 2003: ; Ward and Gibson, 2003). had talked of many candidates and parties websites, launched for the 2001 British General election, as 'static electronic brochures', a definition that fits extremely well Irish parties' websites in 2005.

6.2.2 Parties' websites and pre-electoral campaign

Having given a short background to the cyber political scenario in Ireland, and established that political parties, in line with other European countries, mainly used the web to provide information rather that promoting exchange and interactivity; it is now time to come back to the core object of interest of this chapter. What was said about the 2005 status of Irish parties' websites will help us build expectations on the electoral campaign.

The web apathetic scenario depicted by the 2005 data indicate that parties were online for the same reason that Tops et al. (2000: 98) found to explain Dutch parties online in 1998 'if it does not do any good, it does not do any harm either'. In a similar fashion, talking of the 2001 British election Gibson et al. claim that 'parties still regard the Internet and email as supplementary campaign tools, just as they did in 1997, and it is interesting to note that since the election the efforts of some of the main parties have clearly been downscaled' (Gibson, Margolis et al., 2003: 65). Other scholars have come to the same conclusion by looking at parties in comparative perspective, concluding that 'European parties have been making tentative rather than rapid steps into cyberspace' (Zielmann and Rottger, 2009: 82). Such a situation was observed in Ireland in December 2005 as opposed to several countries whose investigation was conducted in the very early 2000s, indicating a very slow development in parties' activity online in the country. However, the pace of technological changes and the inevitable contamination coming from the global evolution of political communication are likely to have produced changes in Irish parties' websites in the run up to the 2007 campaign. In addition, it is reasonable to expect the lead-up to a general election to increase overall level of parties' online activity and the implementation of *ad hoc* campaign features (Conway and Dorner, 2004). Therefore, without putting forward any formal hypothesis, that the lack of previous data would make extremely tricky to test, we can expect, with a reasonable degree of confidence, to find some improvements in parties' activity in cyberspace.

Having collected longitudinal data we will now proceed to compare

websites over time, firstly with older observations (2005) and then, monthly, for the six months preceding the election. The first noteworthy element is that as the electoral campaign came closer, two parties launched a new version of their websites, between November 2006 and January 2007, and a third one, Fianna Fáil, followed this pattern in April 2007. Fine Gael was the first party to redesign their website, six months before the campaign; it launched its new site in December 2006 adding new features, improving the speed and making the navigability easier and more user-friendly. The index page of the new website contained less text, pictures and links but was clearer and much faster than before. Fine Gael's coalition partner; the Labour party, started on its new website in early January 2007; in this case the change was less dramatic than for Fine Gael in terms of visual impact of the homepage. The red in the new site was more dominant than before but there were no significant changes in terms of layout and navigability. Fianna Fáil's new website strongly focused on candidates and campaigns and radically differed from its previous version. In terms of navigability and accessibility the new website represented a big step forward, the site being much clearer and more catchy. Emphasis on visual features, with the dominant presence of videos, made the site very dynamic and the possibility of getting involved was given greater emphasis. The other parties did not launch their websites or dramatically change the graphics before the election.

In terms of static information Irish parties already performed fairly well in 2005, when they all provided a high level of information, even though Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael proved to be less informative than smaller parties. If until March 2007 there was never a decrease in terms of information provision, the appearance of the new Fianna Fáil website substantially modified the scenario in April. Unpredictably the new website provides less information than the old one; the new website being completely focused on the election. The only feature dramatically increased since 2005 was the possibility offered by almost every party website to make donations online. If in 2005 less than 50% of Irish parties allowed internet surfers to donate money online, fourteen months later, in February 2007, 72% of them were equipped to receive donations online. The overall level of information

provided did not vary either between December 2005 and the first half of 2006 or between November 2006 and April 2007; no statistically significant correlation was found between level of information and time period; the Fisher exact test indeed failed to detect any time related pattern. With regard to interactive features, the change was even less dramatic, basically no party made an effort to implement new channels of exchange of opinions. There were no novelties, no adoption of web 2.0 features. No substantial change was observed from 2005 to 2006, the quality of websites stayed the same (we do not present tables here, as variation was not observed). Basically, 2006 was a sort of sleepy time for political parties in cyberspace. Websites were regularly updated only in terms of events calendars, news and press releases, but there were no major changes, new features did not appear. Irish parties indeed kept looking like electronic brochures for long time, with the exception of Sinn Féin, which launched a number of spin off websites for the Northern Irish Assembly election in February 2007.

As pointed out in chapter 4, there is almost no literature on parties at 'peacetime', therefore the impression that Irish parties' websites were quite dormant for a long time, cannot really be evaluated in comparison with other contexts. However, the lack of variance seems to be a finding *per se*: up to the 2007 electoral campaign parties' websites kept being static collections of information, allowing for a very low level of interaction and they ultimately stayed the same, with no substantive over time change until the beginning of 2007. Significantly, the first party making a move and expanding its online dimension (with the creation of spin off sites) was Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin is the only party present in the Republic of Ireland and in the British electoral context at the same time, and it seems to have grasped the possible advantage of implementing online communication and activity before the other parties. Possibly, being exposed to a different political environment and political system has given it impetus to expand its online communication strategy.

Having observed long term inertia in web activities performed by political parties, the investigation of the campaign becomes even more

interesting. Has the campaign made a difference at all? Has it acted as the sparkling plug of online activity?

In order to address these questions, and to better target the information collection on the websites in the run-up of the election, we looked for some more specifically electoral features as: candidates' profiles, campaign calendar, mobilization of online volunteers and voting info, in order to test whether or not specific instruments had been added to campaign online.

The official campaign begins with the government polling order, and, what is conceived as the 'official' electoral campaign is a rather short amount of time, but campaigns begin substantially before the official order. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect the appearance of campaigning features on the parties' websites before the election is officially called: we estimate that a six month interval would give a reasonably good overview of the web activity taking place in the run up to the 2007 election. The implementation of voting info is a campaign activity, but it often appears in the months preceding the election. The other three items are more likely to be implemented once a date for the election has been established but they do not necessarily appear only in such a circumstance. Moreover, if campaigning really is permanent we expect parties to be organized for campaign activities well in advance. Therefore we will provide an account of the implementation of the aforementioned features from November 2006 until April 2007, when the election was officially called.

Table 6.3 Electoral activities online in the run-up to the election

	November	December	January	February	March	April
Volunteer online			Labour	Labour	Labour	Labour
Voting info	Fianna Fáil	Fianna Fáil	Fianna Fáil, Greens, Labour	Fianna Fáil, Greens, Labour	Fianna Fáil, Greens, Labour	Fianna Fáil, Labour
Campaign calendar		Fine Gael	Fine Gael	Fine Gael	Fine Gael	Fine Gael, Greens
Candidates' profile	Fine Gael, Greens	Fine Gael, Greens	Fine Gael, Greens, Labour	Fine Gael, Greens, Labour	Fine Gael, Greens, Labour	Fine Gael, Greens, Labour, Fianna Fáil

The above graphs depict in a very straightforward fashion the presence (or absence) of campaign related items over time. In November 2006 only two parties were offering profiles of candidates (Fine Gael and Greens), and Fianna Fáil had a link to voting registration information, but substantially, parties were not campaigning at all, at least in cyberspace. A considerable growth in terms of online activities was then registered in January and February when almost every party applied some sort of election related feature on its website, with the exception of Sinn Féin (which was though campaigning for the Stormont election, launching a number of spin off sites) and the Progressive Democrats. The majority of Irish parties eventually disclosed a definitive list of candidates on their websites in April, even though a list of candidates had been available online elsewhere long before April: http://www.politics.ie/wiki/index.php?title=Candidates_for_the_2007_Gener al_Election. However, web activity and promotion of candidates online was

relatively low and it did not substantially change much until April. Sinn Féin and The Progressive Democrats did not implement any campaign specific activity before the election was officially called. Only the Labour party opened a separate website dedicated to the electoral campaign and provided detailed information on the electoral programme and a good overview of campaign activities all over the country. No other party launched a spin off dedicated to the upcoming elections, and even Sinn Féin, at that stage, made only marginal use of the template developed for the election in Northern Ireland. Three parties out of seven provide voting info and guidelines on how to register to vote: Fianna Fáil (since November), Greens (March) and Labour (since January).

In terms of global visibility on the web, measured through the number of sites linking to a given one[iii], Irish parties had improved since data collected in 2005. At that time of the first data point in December 2005, only Sinn Féin had more than 100 websites linking in, whereas in April 2007 almost every party was linked to that many other websites. Sinn Féin remained the party with the highest connectivity, having in April 2007, 414 sites on its direct network and it registered the biggest growth, from 172 to 414. Labour and Greens in 2005 had less than 70 websites linking in and in 2007 they had respectively 179 and 122. The two major parties registered an increase, especially Fianna Fáil starting with 61 in 2005- which stayed roughly the same in 2006- and having almost 160 in April 2007. The party average in 2006 was 73 websites linking in, whereas in 2007 the mean went up to 174; Irish parties at large decidedly increased their linking popularity online, but the increase has not been equal for each party. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael together have registered an increase of 141 links whereas Sinn Féin on its own has registered 242 new sites linked to itself.

With regard to interactive features and opportunities for online participation and involvement, data collected in 2005 show that the amount of interactive instruments put in place by Irish parties was extremely small. The space dedicated to surveys, online poll and forum was still very marginal in 2007, with no chart-rooms in November 2006 going up to two in February 2007. Surveys were never used by Irish parties between 2005 and May 2007.

A much bigger increase was registered with regard to blogs. Starting off with no blogs at all in 2005, no variation was registered one year later, but in January 2007 two out of seven parties had blogs (Labour and Greens).[iv] Sinn Féin had, since February, webpage links to MySpace, Bebo and YouTube. The links were established for the Northern Ireland assembly election, but they were then permanently kept there. However, on average, the level of interaction offered by parties' websites remained definitely small. Very few efforts were made to implement sessions of online discussion or exchange of opinion with the electorate; the use of web 2.0 features was a novelty to many parties and the few forms of interaction allowed were strictly controlled by the party.

Overall, some improvements were detected from the data collected in 2005/2006 and in the six months under analysis here; however, even between the end of 2006 and April 2007, websites seem to have evolved pretty slowly. The Progressive Democrats probably represent the most striking example of web apathy; no investment whatsoever was made on their website over time. No significant evolution in their web appearance took place, not only did the PDs make their online debut almost three years later than their competitors, but they kept being late in promoting any sort of change on their webpages[v].

With regard to parties' websites as a group, the Irish context appears fairly similar to the Italian scenario depicted in the early 2000s(Gibson, Newell et al., 2000; Newell, 2001; Lusoli, et al. 2007) where 'information provision and outward linkage to the web were the main aspects of all sites; conversely, voter and resource mobilization, and participation scored much lower across party websites' (Lusoli et al. 2007: 10).Parties websites in April 2007 had slightly improved since December 2005, but they were still substantially looking like electronic brochures.

6.2.3. Show time: the actual campaign

On the 29th April 2007 the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, called the election for the following 24th of May; a twenty five days long campaign started. The 2007 campaign was extremely rich and fairly intense, with the debate between the Taoiseach and Fianna Fáil leader Bertie Ahern and the Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny representing one of the most intense moments of the electoral challenge.

From the analysis of party websites in the last three weeks before the election, no striking findings emerged, but some changes were observed. As expected, parties uploaded their websites daily, at least the campaign calendar section and electoral appointments, achieving a level of 'freshness' that they never had before. The most noteworthy element was the appearance of links to representatives blogs on the Labour and Green parties' webpages. Also parties expanded the possibilities of diffusing their messages by adopting RSS and podcast features. Sinn Féin substantially modified its homepage, by adding an unambiguous reference to the election to their banner. Candidates' pictures and profiles, but not contact details, were made available on the website, and Gerry Adams appeared in streaming videos where he explained why people should vote for Sinn Féin. The website was highly focused on the election and electoral issues, as it was basically a replication of the Northern Irish election website, that we mentioned earlier[vi](sinnFéinassembley.ie). Sinn Féin was indubitably making up for some delay it had experienced in comparison to the other parties; the official campaign was actually the peak of Sinn Féin online activities. As with the Stormont Assembly in February, Sinn Féin started an intensive online form of campaigning right before the election. Overall, in the last three weeks before the election Sinn Féin was extremely active in cyberspace, intensifying their web based activity: posting videos, adding events calendars, candidates profiles and pictures. If that helped the party to win votes or not is not under analysis here, but the claim that 'parties which make minimal and/or last-minute preparations for a campaign are destined not to fight it terribly

effectively' (Bowler and Farrell, 1992: 11) might have actually applied to the Sinn Féin's rather poor electoral performance.

With regard to the other parties, there was some activity taking place. If, on one hand, every party (even the PDs at this stage) published a list of candidates on its website, there was still a fairly poor selection of campaign items; of the features of online campaigning represented graphically in figure 6.2, no party ever scored four out of four.

Figure 6.1 Electoral activities online in May 2007
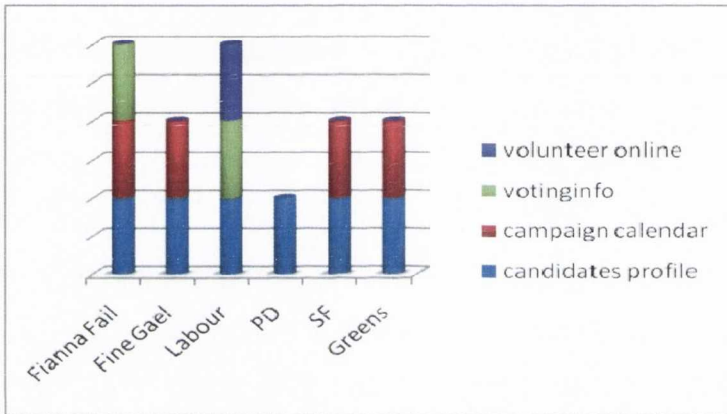
The next table gives an overview of parties' websites a couple of days before the election, in brackets the sign of change from 2005, if any.

Table 6.4 Parties' website in May 2007

	Fianna	Fine Gael	Labour	PD	SF	Greens
History	(-) 0	1	1	1	1	1
Structure	0	1	1	1	1	1
Policies	1	1	1	1	1	1
Manifesto	(+) 1	1	1	1	(+)1	1
Media releases	1	1	1	1	1	1
Speeches	1	1	1	1	1	1
People who's who	1	1	1	1	1	1
Leaders focus	(+) 0	1	(+) 1	1	1	0
FAQ	0	0	0	0	0	(+)1
Email newsletter	1	1	1	(+)1	1	0
RSS	1	(+) 1	(+) 1	0	1	0
Podcast	(+) 1	0	(+) 1	(+)1	(+) 1	(+)1
Survey/polls	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blog	0	0	(+) 1	0	0	(+)1
Wiki	0	0	0	0	0	(+)1
Donate	0	1	(+) 1	(+)1	(+) 1	(+)1
Join	1	1	1	1	(+) 1	1
Buy	0	0	0	0	(+) 1	0
Volunteer/offline	(+) 1	0	(+) 1	(+) 1	(+) 1	(+) 1
Contacting	1	1	1	1	0	1
Forums	0	0	0	0	0	0
Petitions	0	0	0	0	0	(-) 0

Statistically speaking there was some variation from data collected in 2005 on the overall websites. Indeed, by running a ttest of all the measured activities (with the exception of specific electoral activities)we found that the group means are significantly different, with 10.6 in December 2005 versus 13.1 in May 2007; such a difference was proved to be significant with the T test detecting a t= -2.875 statistically significant at 95% (p= 0.019).

When we then distinguished between informative features, The former being: history, structure, manifesto, policies, media releases, documents, people who is who, leaders focus, FAQ, Values/Ideology, RSS, and Podcast; and the latter being Survey polls, Blogs , Wikis, Donate, Join, Petition, Contact Politicians and email newsletter, and participatory ones, we got the following results. The activities we account for here are a smaller fraction of those we accounted for in chapter 4. With regard to information the difference is that here we are not including ancillary organizations and subgroups, as that will be dealt with in the next section, and that we did not

search here for conference info. With regard to interactive features we only account for those being present for at least one party either in 2005 or in 2007. That determined the category *participation* to be much smaller than in chapter 4.

For informative features the mean for 2005 and 2007 were significantly different (t= -2.71 p= 0.026) indicating an overall increase in online provision of information. When we look at variation in terms of interactive features the group means are also significantly different (t=-2.23 p=0.04). Therefore we can claim that variation, representing some sort of incremental increase in level of activity online definitely occurred between December 2005 and May 2007, with the appearance of a limited number of web 2.0 features and an increase of information transmission technology (podcasts and RSS). However, such a finding is hardly striking; considering the switch from 'peacetime' to campaign and that over eighteen months had passed between the first and the latest data point. We do not have a large number of longitudinal studies to compare our findings to, therefore we will just comment on what we observed and attempt an evaluation of our results on the basis of the broad trends we listed in section 6.2.

By and large, the campaign inspired some more activity online, with a few parties making little steps towards richer and more diversified websites, but overall we do agree with the claim that parties even during the campaign used the web 'to do old things in new ways rather than completely new things' (Newell, 2001b: 81). We witnessed some sort of improvements in parties online between December 2005 and the election in May 2007, with some parties launching new versions of their websites, enriching the number and type of informative features, with the introduction of syndication instruments and podcasts; they also made some minor improvements in terms of connectivity and networking by launching web 2.0 platforms in some cases. However, when it comes to participation and public involvement Irish parties kept performing very poorly. Substantially, the pace of change in terms of interactivity and participation was extremely slow.

That contrasts with the Irish public responding very well to cyber politics in the run-up to the election: indeed, at the time, a number of

websites and weblogs were dedicated to campaigning issues, involving a quite high number of users. Online discussion boards, forums and blogs were created in the three weeks before the elections. Thus the public gave clear signals of interest in cyberpolitics: the website www.pickyourparty.ie received, in only two weeks of presence online, 32.000 visitors, engaging with an online survey on party positions. Moreover data from the Election study 2007 show that by and large Irish citizens get some political information from the WWW, as we will show in Chapter 7, table 7.2[vii]. During the 2007 electoral campaign 'the internet could be said to have offered an alternative to the mainstream election coverage' (Brandenburg and Zalinsky, 2008: 184)

Such a scenario strengthens the claim that 'with regard to citizen engagement, perhaps we are looking in the wrong place. A number of alternative spaces, beyond party websites, were available on the Internet for those who wanted to follow the election' (Lusoli, 2007: 19) and the discussed platforms available online before the election seem to have been much more successful than party websites. Before summing up our findings and putting them in perspective with regard to the broad trends observed in the past ten years, we will take a look at online targeting and narrowcasting, these two features being potentially very relevant to the Irish electoral scenario.

6.3 Narrowcasting and targeting

At the beginning of this chapter we pointed out how the use of the internet for narrowcasting has been conceptualized in the literature as a possible important development of cyber campaigning (Norris, 2005). We also saw that 'targeting' is one of the broad trends observed in political parties' activity in cyberspace (Gibson and Ward, 2009). Therefore, to get a full picture of Irish parties online we have to look at how such a possibility translates into actual application. Moreover, in the scenario of political environment such as the Irish one, where door to door canvassing and pre-modern style tools seem to be still very significant, narrowcasting and targeting online could possibly represent the translation of pre-modern activities into cyberspace.

Potentially, targeting particular groups online and establishing thematic sections on their websites could save the parties some of the time, money and the energy that they put in place in the real word in order to deliver *ad hoc* messages to specific groups.

Newell (2001)dedicates some normative and empirical attention to this matter by identifying six possible categories of interest, in particular, six possible actors to whom parties might want to dedicate particular attention in their websites: 'youth', 'women', 'labour' 'marginal constituencies', 'issue oriented groups', 'identity based groups' . However, Newell's categories don't fit well the Irish scenario: if for 'marginal constituency', 'youth' and 'women', Ireland does not represent an exception, with regard to 'issue oriented group', 'labour' and 'identity based group', things become quite complicated already from a normative perspective. Indeed, three of the major Irish parties basically embody respectively labour related issues (Labour Party) issue oriented groups (Green party) and identity based group (Sinn Féinn). Sinn Féin appeals first and foremost to the Irish republican identity, the Green party represents a typical environmental group and the Labour party dedicates strong attention to labour related issues. Thus the use of Newell's categories would lose most of it significance in such a scenario; however it is sensible to observe whether Irish parties thought of targeting young people, women and marginal constituencies.

The first noteworthy element is that women and youth groups were present only on the websites of a few parties and that, by and large, there has never been particular emphasis on targeting such groups. Where Fine Gael and the Labour parties had, clear and distinguishable sections dedicated to youth and women since 2005, the other parties did not. Fianna Fáil, in its old website used to have a section dedicated to the youth group, but the website launched right before the election (April 07) dropped that feature. The Green party had what effectively was a youth section on a separate website, but, even finding the link to this was not a straightforward process, suggesting that no emphasis had been placed on this by the party. No particular attention was devoted to youth or women groups. Sinn Féin had neither a youth nor a women's section. The PDs had a youth section but not women one. By and

large, there was no discernible tailored message addressed to young people or women. Even Fine Gael and the Labour party, which had for a long time permanent sections dedicated to those groups, did not devote particular attention to them during the official campaign, keeping rather old posts on them and not addressing any specific electoral message to them. Newell (2001) hypothesises that marginal constituencies could be targeted through tailored websites, but this possibility in the Irish scenario was never translated into a practice. No party ever dedicated a section to what could be considered a marginal constituency; no identifiable attention was devoted to particular communities on the web.

Once again, we have to take into account that the 2007 election was the first real internet election in Ireland and parties might not have developed well planned online strategies in terms of narrowcasting. It might also be the case that candidates, rather than national parties, dedicate specific attention to given groups and issues at the constituency level, both online and offline. The next chapter will provide some controls for such a hypothesis.

In general, at the national party level, no evidence of parties using the web in order to target special groups was found. The next table shows how parties looked in April and May 2007 with regard to this issue.

Table 6.5. Narrowcasting on parties' websites in April and May 2007

	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour	PD	SF	Greens
Women	0	1	1	0	0	0
Youth	0	1	1	1	0	1
Marginal constituencies	0	0	0	0	0	0
Issue oriented groups	0	0	0	0	0	0
Identity based groups	0	0	0	0	0	0
Labour	0	0	0	0	0	0

At the party level there is a clear indication that cyber-campaigning did not focus on narrowcasting. Moreover, there were no detectable differences

between parties; as such no party had taken the lead in promoting the delivery of group specific messages on their websites.

6.4 Irish parties' websites over time: what to conclude?

In the previous sections we explored parties' websites over time, we also showed how parties developed and modified their online profiles in relation to the electoral cycle. We looked at a number of features and we paid particular attention to the way parties' websites changed in the run up to the 2007 general election.

The 2007 election provided us with a number of elements that are useful in order to evaluate the extent to which the internet played a role in the electoral campaign. According to Karlsen 'all the parties are online, they advertised heavily on other websites and use the net to follow news and keep an eye on their opponents' (2007: 21). Such a claim, about the Norwegian system, describes fairly well the Irish scenario too, and it basically tells all about parties in cyberspace. A number of elements suggest that the internet did not play a major role in the view of parties; the late and relatively low engagement with innovative web practices, the almost exclusively informative function performed by parties' websites and the very low level of narrowcasting online suggest that the potentialities of the internet- especially in terms of interactivity- had not been fully exploited between 2005 and 2007.

As we seek to compare our findings to what has been found elsewhere and to establish to what extent our own results are generalizable, we will look back at those general tendencies in parties' websites after over ten years of empirical investigation.

The first observed trend was *standardization*, such as the strong emphasis on informative features. The Irish case fits the trend well, we observed statistically significant growth in the implementation of such features over time. A pattern towards the implementation of more informative sites was common to every party. In terms of *conservatism*, second trend, our findings support the conclusions drawn elsewhere. Indeed, if conservatism is to be understood as lack of implementation of interactive

features, Irish parties are extremely conservative. We observed an increase in implementing participatory/interactive features over time by political parties, but the extent of change is clearly modest. Some parties obviously did a little better than others, but overall the message we get is pointing towards a consistent lack of interactivity. Where some forms of interactivity were observed, it was a case of controlled interactivity. We indeed have strong support for claim number five: 'the possibility of opinion exchange and interaction, where provided, are framed in such a way that the parties firmly control and structure the interaction'. The few opportunities for interaction offered by parties' websites indeed 'stay clear of offering unstructured discussion opportunities' (Gibson and Ward 2009: 94), as testified by the lack of chatrooms, message boards and online questions and answers sessions. Our data also provide a confirmation for the *resource generation* trend: over time Irish parties equipped their websites with more opportunities of volunteering and with platforms supporting online donations, by May 2007 the only party not supplying such a platform was Fianna Fáil.

With regard to the claim that *smaller parties are more proactive in cyberspace*, we do not have strong support for its falsification or for its confirmation; however we have observed over time that Sinn Féin was networking more than other parties. Whether that is due to the status of fringe party, rather than to any other reason is, however, open to debate. Moreover, the other small parties sent very diverse signals, from the absolute web apathy of the Progressive Democrats to the quite active behaviour of the Green party; therefore in this case deriving a pattern of large versus small parties won't probably make any substantial contribution.

Finally, on the last broad trend, *targeting*, we have on one hand the growth of RSS features, podcast and newsletters, which help in reaching the electorate, but, on the other hand, we found a manifest lack specialized sections. By and large, the practice of narrowcasting online has not spread among political parties; no strategic move towards tailoring specific groups has been made; therefore, in this case, we have no support that such a trend represents an established practice in Ireland.

By and large, a number of recurrent trends observed elsewhere apply to Ireland as well; being active online does not seem to be a major concern of Irish parties. However, before coming to any conclusion here, we have to take a closer look at the electorate, candidates' activity, candidates' opinions and the effect that cyberspace had on votes. The aforementioned elements will be dealt with in the next chapter and general conclusions on the campaign will be drawn in the conclusion section (chapter 8), here we will conclude by summing up some considerations on cyber parties in the electorate.

6.5. Party competition online

At the beginning of this chapter we pointed out how important the web could be for inter party competition and how much of an opportunity it may represent for parties to diffuse their message and communicate with the electorate. After having looked at parties over time, at different points of the electoral cycle and at a variation within the system we can now discuss some patterns in cyberparties in the electorate.

First of all, the electoral campaign stimulates some more online activity; we have seen through the longitudinal observation, and the t tests have confirmed, that some more activity was implemented as the election came closer. Even if relatively modest, we did observe some level of growth in online parties' activity. If on one hand, those changes are compatible with general technological development, and they only reflect adaptation to changes occurring in society at large, we saw that some campaign-related issues were integrated into parties' websites. Slowly but surely Irish parties' websites wore some smart clothes for the 2007 election. Changes were therefore due to both technological evolution, and the electoral environment. However they were not only minor changes but also they almost exclusively regarded information provision as opposed to exchange of opinions and multilateral communication.

Second, there was no evidence of inter party variation. No party can be identified as outstanding in implementing innovative technology. If one

had to name a party that did a little better over time, it had to be Sinn Féin; not only was it the first Irish party in cyberspace, but also it was the first one moving from web 1.0 to web 2.0.; as already observed here, that may be due to Sinn Féin being present in two electoral contexts and bringing to the Irish scenario web practices which are rather common in the UK, but quite innovative in Ireland. However, the pace of technological evolution seems to affect parties with no particular differences, and for the Irish case, the rhythm of adaptation seems to be quite slow. Therefore at the system level there are no major differences between parties and the process of standardization we talked about not only here but also in chapter 4 definitely took place in the Irish system. Moreover, we observed that the formulation 'informative but not interactive' describes well parties' websites in a number of European countries, and with regard to Ireland such a depiction is also found to be consistent over time. If online innovation is to be brought into politics, most likely the initial innovator won't be a political party.

ⁱSuch a claim indeed appears particularly relevant in a context, as the Irish one, where the importance of pre-modern-techniques is considered substantial.

ⁱⁱLevels of visibility were measured by looking at number of sites linking to the parties ones.

ⁱⁱⁱ Data are collected through Alexa.com, which gives number of links to any given URL.

^{iv}We saw in chapter 5 that there was only one Irish party with blogs in January 2009; the Labour party indeed kept links to representatives' blogs (bloggingforlabour) and supporters' blogs, where the Green party did not.

^vAs explained earlier, the Progressive Democrats voted to disband in November 2008. However, at the present [May, 2009] their website is still online and from time to time there are some traces of updates.

^{vi}Sinn Féin makes use of the same address and template for the 2009 European Parliament election [May and June 2009].

^{vii} The question on browsing online for news (On a scale from 0-7 where 0 means 'Never' and 7 means 'every day' how often do you browse online for news?) was not asked in 2002, therefore we cannot estimate the extent of the change.

Keeping up with the Murphys? Investigating candidates' cyber-campaigning[i]

Chapter 6 gave a theoretical account of electoral campaign and it provided an overview of how the campaign was run online at the party level. This chapter seeks to provide a solid explanatory theory of cyber campaigning at the candidates level. Therefore a model will be provided and its explanatory power will be evaluated in the light of findings observed in other national electoral contexts.

Findings on this level will add to our knowledge of cyber campaigns but also to the broader debate on how electoral campaigning is changing. The chapter will firstly provide an overview of cyber-campaigning and a review of the few explanatory theories produced to date. Then, we will introduce the model and discuss the contribution that it brings to the literature. We argue that the chapter will add an innovative explanation for the existence of candidates' websites. Candidates' website have been analysed for the first time in Ireland and an explanation for the factors that are accountable for their existence will be provided. The analysis of this phenomenon and its discussion will inform the final part of the chapter.

Intro

In chapter 6 we looked at parties' websites, how they change over time and in relation to the electoral cycle. However, in order to produce a complete account of cyber campaigning and evaluate its impact we have to combine previous findings with the analysis of cyber campaigning at the candidate level, the competition between candidates being still predominant in the Irish electoral context. Speculations on whether such a preponderant role is due to PR-STV, to other factors or to a combination of elements, goes beyond the purpose of this section. Certainly the tendency towards a more localized campaign has been pointed out in other electoral contexts (Pattie, Johnston et

al., 1995; Ward, 2003) and as we saw in chapter 6 the local dimension is considered crucial in Ireland (Benoit and Marsh, 2003: ; Marsh, 2004). The importance of the local level will be considered here in order to give an account of the way cyber-campaign took shape. Thus, in elaborating an explanatory model for the existence of candidates' websites, emphasis will be placed on the constituency level, which is believed to be a key factor accounting for the presence or absence of a candidate in cyberspace, and for the possible effect of cyber-campaign on winning votes. The key question that this chapter seeks to answer is:

What explains the implementation of cyber-campaigning in the form of candidates' websites?

The literature so far has mainly focused on the party level and we gave a broad account of parties online in the run up to the election, but recent studies (Gibson and McAllister, 2006; Zittel, 2007; Gibson, Lusoli et al., 2008; Gibson and McAllister, 2008) have highlighted how the candidate level should be given greater attention. This chapter therefore aims to provide new information able to fill such a gap. In the broader context of political behaviour online, there is not enough attention paid to the candidate level. The assumption that political parties have to be considered as unitary actors, which is fundamental in many sub-fields of political science, on this occasion, ought to be challenged. Investigation at the candidate level, with a relatively high number of observations allows for the use of more sophisticated econometric techniques which should be able to provide us with more robust explanations. In practical terms then, having a big number of observations enhances the explanatory power of the model, so that dealing with hundreds of candidates rather than with six parties will provide twofold advantages. On one hand, it will provide an insight into the electoral campaign that complements what was seen in chapter 6, by integrating the party side with the candidates' one. On the other hand it will contribute to a growing literature by providing original tests for a number of hypotheses that have not yet been explored.

The reason why candidates decide to establish their presence online, regardless of their webpages on the party's websites, has to be framed in the electoral context as well as in the communication environment and systemic constraints also have to be taken into account. Thus, what we saw in the previous chapter still applies here and PR-STV will be considered as a crucial element in providing an account of how and why candidates go online.

7.1 The Irish 2007 Cyber-campaign

Ireland represents a fascinating case study for the uptake of internet technologies by political candidates; Marsh has argued that 'Irish elections are certainly not prime examples of the post-modern, post-fordist era' (2004: 262) and traditional door-to-door campaigning by candidates and teams of assistants remains highly significant. Indeed, sixty per cent of the population reported that contact was made with their homes by either candidates or volunteers representing candidates in the 2007 election campaign (INES, 2009). The pervasiveness of traditional campaigning techniques in Irish politics may mean that online campaigning instruments are seen as more of a luxury than in other contexts, and our data shows that only a third of candidates launched personal campaign sites in the run up to the election. On the other hand, candidates in Irish elections face significant pressure to distinguish themselves from their party colleagues, as in most constituencies several candidates face opponents from within their own party. Online campaigning represents a relatively efficient way to mark oneself apart from other candidates. Several candidates employed social networking sites; launching Bebo, Facebook and MySpace profiles where other users could view the candidates' blogs and commentaries, upload comments or register as 'friends'. In this section we present some data from the 2007 Irish module of the Comparative Candidate Studies Project on the candidates' use of the ICT campaigning tools during the 2007 campaign period.[ii] We use this data to present a snapshot of the types of web-activities undertaken by candidates in the 2007 campaign. For our explanatory analysis of factors influencing the

likelihood of cyber-campaigning, we employ data gathered for all candidates participating in the election. The survey contained a set of questions dedicated to the investigation of the forms of internet presence that candidates decided to establish during the campaign. Table 7.1 below summarizes the responses to these questions. Candidates were firstly asked whether they had a web presence during the campaign, without specifying what sort of page this was (i.e. a party-related page, an independent web page, a blog etc.), or who was in charge of maintaining it. The first descriptive finding is that 70% of the candidates were present online during the campaign, either on their parties' web pages and/or with their own personal pages.

Candidates were then offered a number of different options of possible forms of online presence and asked to indicate which ones they had employed during the campaign. More than half of the sampled candidates advertised web pages and email addresses on their campaign literature. Emails were used by 44% of the sample to organise activities and/or distribute information. The figures on interactive features provided by the candidates are quite low, indicating that a top-down form of communication is mostly preferred to a more interactive approach, which could fully exploit the internet's potential for voter engagement. This finding is in line with what we saw with regard to parties and it is also in line with previous studies that have indicated that politicians tend to be disinclined to employ the user-generated features of the internet,(Coleman, 1999: ; Gibson and Ward, 1999: ; Gibson and Ward, 2000: ; Benoit and Laver, 2006) fearing that these instruments hand agenda control during the campaign over to outside (and potentially hostile) actors. Indeed, only 9% of candidates sampled stated that they had participated in two-way online 'chats' with voters. Blogs, however, are a relatively popular tool with 25% of sampled candidates stating that they had one, which is a high level of use for blogs when compared to figures from other countries. For instance in Germany, in 2005, only 10% of candidates were found to have employed blogs as reported by Zittel (2007) Less popular among candidates is the practice of posting video on the web; two party leaders (Pat Rabbitte of Labour and Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin) posted videos in support of their party, but this application does not appear to be widely used by ordinary candidates.

Table 7.1. Percentages of candidates' online activities

	Yes	No
Did you have an online presence during the campaign?	70%	30%
I advertised my web page and/or email address on campaign	64%	36%
I used email lists to distribute information and organise activities	44%	56%
I used a blog during my campaign	25%	75%
I posted a personal campaign video on the web	12%	88%
I conducted a number of online chats with voters	9%	91%

Source: Comparative Candidate Studies Project, Irish General Election 2007. N= 188

Overall, the picture emerging from the candidates' point of view indicates a relatively high level of use of at least some form of online campaign instrument. Only a small proportion of candidates, however, used highly interactive or user-generated features – with most preferring to use the internet as a tool for information provision. It is also evident that there is significant variation among candidates with regard to their use of the internet during the campaign. It is this variance that we seek to explain in the analytic component of the chapter. Before doing so we will take a look at data on the electorate and the internet, so that we will get an insight of both candidates and voters.

Statistics from the 2007 Irish National Election Study (INES), displayed in table 7.2, suggest that the internet is by far the least-preferred medium used to gather political information. Traditional media outlets such as newspapers, television and radio still predominate as sources of political information. On the other hand, over 30% of respondents reported that they consult the internet at least once a week as a source of political information.

Table 7.2 % Frequencies of consultation of media for political news by Irish citizens

	Never							Always
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Newspapers	2	2	3	6	5	9	8	64
TV	7	7	7	11	10	8	7	41
Radio	14	4	5	5	6	10	6	49
Internet	69	7	4	3	3	3	2	5

Source: INES 2007.The question was: About how often do you consult each of the following for news on political events in any given week?

This figure represents the maximum potential audience for cyber-campaigns in Ireland in 2007. However, the numbers consulting candidate and party sites were probably far lower than this figure as such sites have been found to attract far less internet traffic than general news sites in other contexts[iii].

7.2 How and why do candidates go online?

In this section we outline the factors considered to be important in explaining candidates' online presence derived from previous studies in this area, and discuss our measurement of the activities of opposing candidates in some detail. The models developed in the literature so far refer to a small number of empirical studies, so that a comprehensive account of the reasons why candidates would decide to set up an online presence simply does not exist. Nonetheless, there are several patterns that have been noted in previous studies and these patterns and their underlying causes are discussed here.

It is logical to believe that, in marginal constituencies, candidates would use any campaign medium that could potentially allow them to win the electoral race, even if that medium could only swing a small number of votes (Gallagher, 2005; Gibson and McAllister, 2006; 2008). As such, a hypothesis commonly tested in the literature is that candidates in more marginal constituencies should be more likely to launch personal campaign websites. Findings with regard to this hypothesis have been somewhat mixed, however. For example, Gibson and McAllister found that 'the marginality of the

constituency has no effect on whether a candidate has a website' in the 2004 Australian federal election campaign and Jackson (2003) found no effect for marginality on cyber-campaigning in the UK. On the other hand, Ward and Lusoli (2005) and Zittel (2007) found that marginality played a role in explaining candidates' web presence in the UK and Germany respectively, with candidates in marginal constituencies being more likely to launch a site in non-marginal constituencies. Finally, in a recent comparative paper, it was found that that marginality has a significant impact in the UK and a non-significant impact in Australia (Gibson, Lusoli et al., 2008). We test this hypothesis in the Irish case at the candidate level, assessing whether candidates are more likely to establish campaign websites when their chances of winning a seat are marginal.

Party affiliation is also a crucial factor to consider when seeking to explain candidates' online campaigns. Gibson et al. (2008) claim that party culture and the levels of demand among party memberships for online content can influence candidates' decisions to go online. There are also more practical reasons why party affiliation might matter, candidates might seek resources from their parties with regards to web design templates or consultations, and members of smaller parties may feel that the web offers them a better chance of publicising their campaigns compared to the mainstream media. The impact of party affiliation on whether a candidate establishes an online presence is a complicated issue, however, and one which requires clear elaboration at the empirical level. Party affiliation may represent something different from party support, and we need to control for both elements. Gibson and McAllister's analysis (2006) includes an index of party support (at the candidate level) separate from party affiliation, with both being controlled for in the analysis. We follow this approach, measuring party support in terms of resources allocated by the party to each candidate while controlling for the candidates' party affiliation. As well as the party affiliation of each candidate, we also investigate whether levels of intra-party competition influence candidates' decisions to go online during the campaign. The Irish electoral system often pits numerous candidates from the same party against each other in a given constituency. Moreover, if parties provide every

candidate with some space on the party website, the only way for a candidate to distinguish themselves from their party competitors online is to launch an independent webpage. The theoretical intuition here is that, *ceteris paribus*, as the level of intra-party competition increases, candidates should be more likely to conduct a cyber-campaign.

The characteristics of the electorate in terms of socio-economic status and demographics are also believed to exercise an influence on the candidates' decision to establish an online presence as more wealthy areas are likely to have higher levels of internet access and usage among voters (Gibson, Lusoli et al., 2008). We take a very specific measure at the constituency-level with regard to new media technologies. We examine whether the proportion of homes with internet access in a constituency has any bearing on whether candidates launch a personal website. Our expectation here is that candidates, if they are aware of internet diffusion levels within the constituency, may be more likely to launch campaign websites in constituencies with larger audience for online political advertising.

It has also been pointed out that the candidates themselves explain their internet presence on the basis of their own individual-level attributes, for instance young candidates are expected to be more prone to establish an online presence compared to older candidates. However the socio-economic profile of candidates has been proved non-significant in previous studies (Gibson and McAllister, 2006; 2008). Rather than focusing on candidates' demographic characteristics, we look at the resources that are available to them with regard to both monetary and political factors. While establishing a web presence is not necessarily an expensive undertaking (web domains can be registered for as little as 25 euro with a range of companies) our expectation is that campaigns with larger budgets are more likely to establish web domains and employ experts to update and maintain their sites. A further commonly measured resource is the incumbency status of the candidate, with incumbents often held to be more likely to have developed an online identity than non-incumbents due to the resource advantages accruing to office holders. Finally, the political experience of a candidate generally might influence the decision to establish a web presence –as pointed out by Gibson

and McAllister (*ibidem*) - therefore we control for the number of years the candidates have spent as parliamentarians.

In summary there are both empirical observations and theoretically coherent reasons to believe that the following factors should be accounted as powerful explanation of candidates' online presence: marginality, party affiliation, intra-party competition, party support, incumbency, individual-level political resources and constituency characteristics. Measures seeking to examine the predictive power of all of these explanations are included in the analytical model.

7.2.1 The 'me-too' effect

Apart from the above-described explanations of candidates' decision to campaign online this study examines the influence of the online activities of a candidates' rivals. We argue that, the higher the proportion of a candidate's opponents using ICT campaign tools, the more likely it is that a candidate should establish an online presence of some sort. The explanation underlying this proposition is relatively straightforward, and has been discussed in previous investigations (Ward, Gibson et al., 2003). Firstly, having a campaign website is not only a tool for the direct winning of votes; rather it may also be useful as a signal of certain traits of a candidate/campaign. For instance, having a website may serve to indicate that a candidate is aware of and able to use cutting-edge technologies and that their campaign organisation is credible, professionalised, and modern in orientation. In a situation where candidate websites are very unusual, their use may not be necessary for a candidate to signal these credentials. However, as candidate campaign websites become more common, those candidates not possessing a website may come to feel greater pressure to launch one, rather than look less modern, professional etc. than their opponents. This generates what Selnow (1998) describes as a 'me too' effect at the candidate level. Therefore providing a control for the proportion of direct opponents of a candidate who are cyber-campaigning could add an important piece to the overall puzzle.

However the effect of such an explanation has not yet been investigated empirically at the candidate level, as such we lay out our approach to its measurement in some detail.

The *me too* effect has been described as potentially one of the fundamental reasons why parties go online (Selnow, 1998; Gibson, Nixon et al., 2003; Ward, Gibson et al. 2003). However the possible effect of such an explanation has not yet been investigated empirically at the candidate level. Such a variable represents a control for whether direct opponents in the constituency have a website or not; the lower the percentage of opponents with a personal website, the lower the incentive to get one, and vice versa. The idea here is to measure the ratio of web-campaigners to non-web-campaigners among each candidate's opponents in their constituency.

The measure obtained is a figure at the constituency level that assumes different values for candidates with a website and candidates without one. The measure generated is a proportion, varying between 0 (no opponents have a website) and 1 (all opponents have a website).

The measure is calculated as follows[iv]:

$$Oj/O$$

Where, for each candidate, Oj is the number of opposing candidates with a personal campaign website in their constituency and O is the total number of opposing candidates in their constituency.

7.3 Some Data

7.3.1 Candidate web-campaigning

The dependent variable in this part of the study is a dichotomous variable coded '1' when a candidate launched a personal campaign website and '0' when no such website was launched. This data was generated during the official campaign period for the 2007 election. Candidates' websites were identified by looking at online directories (such as mycandidate.ie) and by

employing Google searches with the candidates' names and surnames as search strings.

A significant proportion of candidates launched personalised campaign websites.

Over the entire population of 470 candidates, 152 had personal websites (a third of the population), a far smaller number than those having some representation on their party's webpages as all of the biggest parties: Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Green party and the Labour party had spaces dedicated to individual candidates on the party websites.

Table 7.3 details the distribution of candidates who launched personal campaign websites grouped by political party – we see that Fianna Fáil had the highest proportion of candidates with personalised campaign websites, and Sinn Féin had by far the lowest proportion. The partisan patterns of candidate campaigns are discussed in detail in the analysis section.

Table 7.3 Frequencies of candidates' personal webpages by party

Party:	%Yes	%No
Fianna Fáil	53	47
Labour	36	64
Greens	34	66
Fine Gael	29	71
Progressive Democrats	23	77
Sinn Féin	5	95
Independents	31	69

7.3.2 Expenditure Data

The public availability of detailed data on campaign spending in Irish elections is still a relatively new development in Irish politics. The 2007 general election was the third to have taken place since the introduction of the Electoral Acts (1997, 2001, 2002) and only the second under which the full provisions of the act with regard to disclosure of and upper bounds on expenditure have applied. (SIPO, 2007). The reported expenditure is broken down into expenses incurred by the candidate's election agent and expenditure incurred by the party's national agent on the candidate.

Spending is measured over a common period; defined by the 1997 legislation as the period between the official dissolution of government and the day of the election (Benoit and Marsh, 2008). Spending limits are imposed on both candidates and parties, depending on the size of the constituency – spending cannot exceed €30,150, €37,650, €45,200 for 3, 4 and 5 seat constituencies respectively (SIPO, 2007). While these limits are set relatively low they do not impose an artificial 'low-ceiling' which every candidate spends. Rather, there is meaningful variation in candidate expenditure – with the median candidate in the 2007 elections spending €16,693 in total and an inter-quartile range of €3,213 to €22,942.

Given the restricted period during which campaign expenses are recorded it is probable that the measure fails to capture spending as part of longer term campaigns or even 'permanent campaigns'. While this is a concern, we would argue that it is unlikely that those candidates who spend heavily on organisation and campaigning outside of the official campaign period would suddenly stop spending during this period. Rather, it is probable that patterns of spending during the electoral period are broadly reflective of the patterns of spending generally, even though they may only represent a small proportion of overall spending for some candidates (Benoit and Marsh, 2003).

7.3.3 Marginality and intra-party competition

Any empirical analysis of cyber-campaigning has to deal with the concept of marginality. Given the peculiar characteristics of the PR-STV electoral system, the operationalization of marginality is particularly difficult. In single-member districts marginality is generally established on the basis of the difference in the share of vote between the first and the second most voted-for candidates; if such a difference is less than 10% the constituency is considered marginal. In the Irish case, however, it is more appropriate to measure marginality at the candidate level.

Our measure of marginality was based on Gallagher's observation that

'if a candidate won above 0.65 of a quota they had a good chance of election, if they won 0.5–0.65 they had an even chance, if they won less than 0.5 they had little chance' (Gallagher, 2002: 112). Given this assertion, we took the midpoint of Gallaher's 'marginal' category (.575) and measured the absolute distance of each candidate from that point. As the distance increases, candidates increasingly become either 'safe' with a surplus of votes, or 'no hopers' with a very small vote share. As the distance decreases, candidates approach the marginal position of having an even chance of being voted in. The expected relationship here is therefore a negative one, as our measure increases (i.e. the candidate becomes less marginal); the likelihood of a candidate having a website should decrease. Obviously, this measure gives an *a posteriori* account of marginality, while the theoretical account of the role of marginality refers to a candidate's perception of their marginality in the run-up to the election. However, we would argue that data from the 2007 election is more reflective of the true marginality of a given candidate in that election than data from the previous election.

We also seek to measure the amount of intra-party competition that each candidate was subject to in the election. In order to do so we measure, for each candidate, the number of candidates from the same party running in their constituency. To control for variations in constituency size, we divide this figure by the district magnitude of the constituency. The intuition behind this approach is that a candidate faces a higher level of intra-party competition when they have two party colleagues running in a three seat constituency than when they have two party colleagues running in a five seat constituency. As this measure increases, the level of intra-party competition faced by the candidate increases.

7.3.4 Constituency and Candidate Characteristics

Data on the constituency characteristics are taken from the Central Statistics Office and they are based on the Census 2006, therefore they represent a fairly fresh snapshot of the Irish society, and they offer an

overview at the electoral constituency level. Thus we have a precise measure of the socio economic status of each constituency as well as accurate figures of internet penetration. The measure of internet penetration is given by number of internet connections (broadband and other) over the number of inhabitants in the constituency. Data on candidates' party affiliation, incumbency status and years spent in the Dail (Irish parliament), were gathered from publicly-available sources (SIPO, Houses of Oireachtas, electionsireland.org and mycandidate.ie) by the authors. Years in the Dail as national public representatives is used as a measure of legislative and political experience.

7.4 Empirical analysis

The causal model predicting the likelihood of a candidate having a campaign website is tested using a logistic regression specification. The unit of analysis is an individual candidate in the 2007 Irish general election. The analysis of the changes in probability of a candidate having a website at different levels of the independent variables is implemented with the qsim command in the clarify package in STATA.[v] The theoretical account above indicated that the marginality of the electoral race, candidates' political affiliations, intra-party competition levels in a candidate's constituency, candidates' levels of monetary resources and political experience, the characteristics of the constituency in terms of internet usage, as well as the activities of direct competitors should all exert some influence over a candidate's decision to campaign online. Combining these factors, we evaluate the following causal model of a candidates' probability of campaigning online:

$$pj = \frac{1}{1 + e - z}$$

Where:

$z = \beta_0 + \beta X_1 + \beta X_2 + \beta X_3 + \beta X_4 + \beta X_5 + \beta X_6 + \beta X_7 + \beta X_8 + \beta X_9$

pj= Probability of having a campaign website

X_1= incumbency
X_2 =marginality
X_3= party affiliation
X_4 =campaign expenses (candidate)
X_5 =campaign expenses (party)
X_6= candidate political resources
X_7 =technological profile of the electorate
X_8= level of intraparty competition
X_9 =me too effect

The logistic regression output detailed in table 7.4 indicates that a number of variables play a statistically significant role in determining the likelihood of a candidate cyber-campaigning. Candidate spending, party spending, party affiliation (though not for all parties) and the ratio of opponents in the constituency with a campaign website (that is, the 'me too' variable) are all found to be statistically significant predictors of a candidate having a personal website in the Irish 2007 election campaign. None of marginality, incumbency, political experience of candidates, and levels of intraparty competition were significant predictors.

Table 7.4. Predictors of candidates' website presence

Logistic regression		
	Coeff.	*Robust SE*
Technological profile of the electorate	1.12	1.84
Candidate expenses	.090***	.018
Party expenses	.006**	.002
Incumbency	.211	.411
Fianna Fáil	.929*	.521
Fine Gael	-.329	.498
Sinn Féin	-2.62**	.861
Green Party	.391**	.493
PDs	-1.39	.559
Independents	.444	.494
Years in the Dáil	-.031	.024
Marginality	.307	.622
Me too effect	4.77***	.772
Constant	-4.42	.985
N: 448		
Nagelkerke R2: .40		

Note: Significant at p ***<0.01, p^{**} < 0.05, p^* < 0.1.

Logistic regression estimates showing coefficients of independent variables predicting websites presence. Variables were coded as follows: Length of Dáil membership (years), Candidates' expenses (thousands of euros) Party expenses (thousands of euros), Incumbency (1, 0), Me too and Intraparty competition (see data section) Technological Profile of the electorate (ratio household with internet access over total household in the constituency) Marginality (see data section). For party membership, the excluded category is Labour Party candidates.

7.4.1 Candidate Resources

The candidate expenses is positively signed and statistically significant at the 99% level; the more a candidate spends the more likely he/she is to have a personal website. Therefore, candidates with more personal financial resources at their disposal appear to be more likely to make use of online campaign as one of the instruments they put in place to win votes. Party expenses are significant at .05, showing that the higher the party budget per candidate the higher his/her chances of getting a website. Looking at the distribution of party expenses, we can see that the amount of money spent by parties is much lower than candidate spending, with a mean of approximately 1500 euros compared to a mean of approximately 15000 mean of candidates' expenses. Moreover the variation across parties is not as high as in the case of

candidates' expenses; the latter having a distribution distinguishable from a normal distribution. Party expenses though seem to affect the likelihood of a positive outcome, having a personal website.

However, the variables which account for the political experience of the candidates, their incumbency status and the number of years spent in the Dail, are not statistically significant predictors of their likelihood to launch a web campaign. As such, we find mixed support for the contention that better-resourced candidates are more likely to campaign online, it seems that monetary resources are more important in the Irish case than levels of political experience or seniority.

7.4.2 Symbolic and Strategic Considerations.

The 'me too' variable is significant at the 99% level and is positively signed. Therefore, the intuition that this factor would play a role in explaining cyber-campaigning is supported by empirical analysis. Candidates appear to look at each other's behaviour with regard to online campaigning, and once a certain number of candidates in a constituency have websites, the remaining candidates take measures to avoid falling behind. Logistic coefficients are not self-explanatory, but we can estimate shifts in the probability due to changes in one of the independent variables, *ceteris paribus*. We estimated the changes in the probability of a positive outcome produced by setting the 'me too' variable at different levels, while holding the other variables at their mean values. The results are displayed in table 7.5 below. When this variable is set to its observed minimum of 0 (that is, no opponents in the constituency launch a personal website) and the other variables are set at their means, the likelihood of a candidate launching a site is 7%. When the 'me too' variable is set at its observed maximum of .81 (that is 81% of opponents launched in the constituency launched a website), the likelihood of a candidate launching a site jumps to 89%. When the 'me too' variable is set at its observed mean (.31) the probability of a candidate setting up a website is 27%.

Table 7.5. Probability of website presence as '*Me too*' varies

	Probability of positive outcome	Shift
Me too is at its minimum	.07 (.020)	
Me too is at μ-σ	.12 (.024)	+5%
Me too is at its mean	.27 (.027)	+15%
Me too is at μ+σ	.48 (.042)	+21%
Me too is at its maximum	.89 (.047)	+41%

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. μ = variable mean. σ = variable standard deviation.

The marginality variable produces a coefficient with a large standard error and the coefficient is positively signed, contrary to our expectation that the relationship between our measure of marginality (which decreases in value as the candidates become more marginal) and the probability of a candidate going online would be negative in direction. However, the coefficient for this variable cannot be distinguished from random error. With regard to our measure of intra-party competition; the coefficient was positively signed, in line with our theoretical proposition that higher levels of intra-party competition would lead to greater incentives for politicians to campaign online. However, as was the case with marginality, the standard error associated with this coefficient was too large to assert that the relationship is distinguishable from random error with any reasonable degree of confidence.

The technological profile of the electorate does not appear to be significant either. That may be due to the lack of relationship between the demand and the supply side. In other words, there may be a sort of disjuncture between candidates, who seem to launch their presence in cyber space as a result of strategic considerations, and voters in the constituency. We will further investigate such a scenario in the section dedicated to the effects of cyber campaigning on electoral gains.

Collectively, these findings indicate that, in the Irish context at least, the choice to cyber-campaign is better explained by symbolic than strategic considerations. Neither the closeness of the electoral race, nor the level of intra-party competition faced by a candidate, nor the proportion of homes with internet access in a candidate's constituency provide robust predictors of the likelihood of a candidate launching a campaign website. However, the

activities of other candidates, irrespective of their party affiliation, are a good predictor, with candidates being significantly more likely to launch websites in constituencies where a high proportion of their opponents have done so.

Table 7.6 reports shifts in the probability of a having a website, setting the significant variables (apart from party affiliation) at their minimum, maximum, mean and mean+/- one standard deviations of each variable's observed values. Party affiliation is considered and analysed in the next section. Table 7.6 gives an impression of the combined effects of candidate monetary resources and the presence of other candidates with campaign websites in their constituency on a candidate's likelihood of having a campaign website.

Table 7.6. Probability of website presence as expenditure and 'me too' vary

|	Probability of
Party expenses, Candidate expenses, Me too	.02 (.009)
Party expenses, Candidate expenses, Me too	.05 (.017)
Party expenses, Candidate expenses, Me too	.25 (.027)
Party expenses, Candidate expenses, Me too	.68 (.038)
Party expenses, Candidate expenses, Me too	.92 (.20)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. μ = variable mean. σ = variable standard deviation.

We can see that the probability of a candidate campaigning online is extremely low (2%) if they have a limited campaign budget and face few candidates with an online presence in their constituency. On the contrary, when all those factors are set at their maximum levels, the probability of a candidate setting up a campaign page is extremely high (92%) with a shift of 90 percentage points, though we note that there is a 20% standard error associated with this estimate, while the other estimates have standard errors under 5%. The shift in probability from one standard deviation below the mean for these variables to one above is less dramatic, but striking nonetheless, going from 5% to 68% In other words, when these values are set relatively high – a candidate is over 60% more likely to launch a campaign website than when they are set relatively low.

7.4.3 Party Affiliation

In line with previous findings from the UK and Australia, we find that both party affiliation and party support play a role in explaining the likelihood of a candidate launching a campaign website. A detailed account is provided in figure 1 below, where the levels of probability of a candidate campaigning online are shown by party. As discussed above, the predicted probability also depends upon the levels of campaign budget (party and candidate) and the proportion of the candidates' opponents in the constituency having a website, so these variables are set to their minimum, maximum, mean and mean+/- one standard deviations of each variable's observed values to facilitate comparative analysis.

Figure 7.1 Likelihood of candidates to launch a campaign website by party as the significant predictors vary. (Significant predictors: Party Expenses, Candidates Expenses, 'Me too' effect)

Mean values: FF (.50), FG(.23), Labour(.29), Green(.37), SF(.03), PDs(.10)
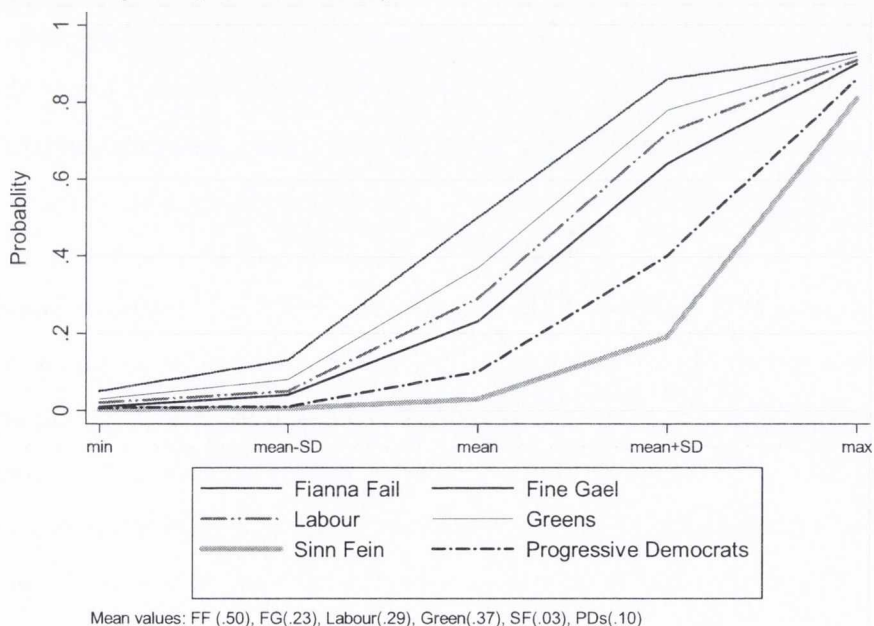
We can clearly see that there is significant variation among party groups, with Fianna Fáil candidates being the most likely group to set up a campaign website. When party and candidate spending and levels of opposition web-campaigning are set to their mean, Fianna Fáil candidates (with a probability of .5) are just more than twice as likely to cyber-campaign

as Fine Gael candidates (.23). Labour candidates (.29) are somewhat more likely than Fine Gael candidates to campaign online. Therefore, talking of a general trend among mainstream (as opposed to smaller) parties would not be correct; as the three largest parties appear to demonstrate distinctive patterns of behaviour. The same applies to fringe parties: when party and candidate spending and levels of opposition web-campaigning are set to their mean, Green Party candidates (.37) are more than twelve times more likely than Sinn Féin candidates (.03) to set up a campaign website. Nonetheless, the two parties with the lowest levels of probabilities (Sinn Féin and the Progressive Democrats) are among the smaller parties in the Irish legislature. [vi]

Candidates from Sinn Féin are by far the least likely party members to have a personal website. This is not a straightforward finding to explain without further research; however, it is in line with the historical tradition of the party, with candidates typically being extremely loyal to the party and not keen to emphasise the role of the individual over the party. Furthermore, given the peculiar history of the party, and its past associations with extra-constitutional violence, it seems to be a general party policy not to disclose personal information on members to mass media generally, and the low numbers of candidates with personal websites may reflect this policy.

Finally, a particularly interesting finding is the relatively high propensity of independent candidates to launch campaigning sites.[vii] With a value of .37 when relevant conditioning variables are set at their mean values, independents are more likely than candidates from any party, other than Fianna Fáil, to set up a campaign website. Several factors may help to explain this finding. Firstly, independents play an unusually significant role in Irish politics (Weeks, 2008), and currently hold more than 5% of seats in the lower chamber of parliament. As such, independents are often serious candidates, with a good chance of winning a seat. Secondly, our measure possibly captures a higher proportion of online activity for independents than for party members. As discussed above, the main parties all provided candidate information on their party websites, whereas independents, by definition, do not belong to parties and therefore do not feature on party websites. In Figure 7.1 we show patterns of likelihood of cyber-campaigning by party. The

significant predictors, party expenses, candidates' expenses and me too effect, are reported at their minimum, maximum, mean and mean +/- one standard deviation.

Overall, Fianna Fáil candidates are more likely than candidates from any other party to have a personal campaign website, *ceteris paribus*. The party with the smallest number of candidates online was Sinn Féin. In terms of left-right ideological position, Ireland represents an exception *per se,* as the left/right cleavage has very little explanatory power in Irish politics (Mair and Weeks, 2005). Therefore, we did not expect to find a clear pattern distinguishing left wing parties from right wing ones. Such a pattern does not exist according to our findings nor does there seem to be consistent differentiation between fringe and mainstream parties.

7.5 Determinants of cyber-campaigning

Examining the relationship between resources and cyber-campaigning sheds light on the potential transformative effect of the internet on political life – will fringe political actors exploit the flexibility and relatively low cost of the internet to a greater extent than more established groups? Or will usage of the internet simply mirror politics as usual, with established groups and better-resourced actors having a more professionalised web-presence than their marginalised counterparts?

Our findings in this regard for the Irish case indicated that, in general, better resourced candidates are indeed more likely to campaign online. This undermines the notion that ICT, which is low cost and facilitates new host-user dynamics, would invert existing political power structures. The type of resource that matters most in this regard are monetary resources and campaign budgets generally offer a good indicator of web activity, with big budget campaigns being more likely to launch a candidate website. This would support the claim that as the internet becomes more of a mass medium, offline equilibria are eventually reflected in the online world (Margolis and Resnick, 2000). Secondly, such studies allow us to assess the

character of web-campaigning; is it motivated principally by strategic concerns such as constituency marginality and intra-party competition? Is it restricted to constituencies where web-usage is very high? Is it determined by the activities of competitors, with candidates not wishing to be seen as out-dated when competing with internet-savvy opponents? With the ever-growing penetration of the internet into every-day life, and the continual refinement of online campaigning strategies, cyber-campaigning may become a mainstream, vote-winning technique in future elections in Ireland and across a host of representative democracies. Indeed, given the enormous potential benefits accruing from a well-organised online campaign, it is difficult to imagine that this will not eventually be the case. Nonetheless, the research presented here indicates that neither the marginality of a campaign, nor the degree of intra-party competition faced by candidates, nor the levels of internet penetration in a candidate's constituency are significant predictors of the likelihood of that candidate launching a campaign website. These factors are indicators of the strategic calculus associated with cyber-campaigning, where campaign websites are viewed strictly as vote-winning tools. Our findings indicate that, in the Irish context, such considerations are not central to a candidate's decision to cyber-campaign. Despite the indications from empirical research that cyber-campaigning is an effective tool when it comes to winning votes, candidates do not seem to demonstrate awareness of this potential. It would appear that cyber-campaigning in Ireland is better explained in terms of 'keeping up with the Murphys' than as a conscious vote-winning strategy. This finding may be unique to Ireland, where traditional campaign practices continue to play an unusually large role in campaign strategies and in voter calculus; however, our approach is easily replicable for future studies in alternative political contexts.

---

[i] This chapter is adapted: Maria Laura Sudulich and Matthew Wall, Keeping up with the Murphys? Candidate cyber-campaigning in the 2007 Irish general election, Parliamentary Affairs, Vol. 62, N.3, July 2009, 456-475.

[ii] This survey was carried out over a 2-3 month period immediately following the Irish general election, which took place on 24 May 2007. Copies of the survey were distributed by post to all candidates who registered for the election. The respondents broadly corresponded to the population's properties in terms of the gender and incumbency ratios. With regard to party affiliation, both Sinn Féin and the Progressive Democrats comprise small groups of respondents (12 and 9 respectively) as a result of having smaller numbers of candidates than the other parties as well as lower than average response rates.

[iii] For example, Gibson et al. (2006) found that the proportion of the population who had viewed candidate and party sites were significantly lower (2% and 5% respectively) than those who had followed the campaign online (approximately 12%) in the 2004 Australian federal elections.

[iv] For a given candidate, this measure is calculated using the following formulae:

$N_j-1/N-1$ for candidates with a website
$N_j/N-1$ for candidates without a website

Where N_j is the number of candidates with a personal campaign website in the constituency and N is the total number of candidates in the constituency.

[v] F. Wolfe, 2002. 'QSIM: Stata module to produce variables for clarify routines', Statistical Software ComponentsS427801, Boston College Department of Economics, revised 23 Apr 2003.

[vi] Indeed, in period following the 2007 election the Progressive Democrats were disbanded due to their winning only 2 seats.

[vii] As independents do not represent a unified group, they are not represented in figure 1.

Chapter VIII

Conclusions

In this final chapter we outline the findings of this investigation and we address their relevance in the literature. While discussing the contribution that this investigation brings to the literature we also pose a number of challenging questions for further research.

The chapter will evaluate the combination of our finding in part II and III, by relating them to the debate on the democratizing potential of the internet. Also, we will produce a discussion of our findings in relation to democracy. This chapter will also discuss the subsequent steps that should be taken to clarify questions that are still open in this area; and we will elaborate the theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues that are emerging for both scholars and practitioners in rapidly changing technological and political environments

Intro

Studying the internet requires flexibility and the implementation of multiple and diverse research approaches. The pace of technological change is so fast that most of our data are outdated by the time we are able to diffuse them. If, on one hand, the literature developed in the past ten years, has to some respects reached a number of stable findings and conclusions, on the other hand its findings are constantly challenged by technological evolution and political change. The internet acts as a multiplier of complications and *caveats* for research designs willing to investigate it. On the other hand, it allows for some degrees of flexibility in collecting data, and it has the advantage of providing them, almost cost free, and of stimulating the implementation of innovative measures and researches.

This investigation dealt with the aforementioned *caveats* and advantages by combining a number of techniques and research tools. Part II

and part III are substantially different in their goals, their units of analysis and methodological specifications, even though they both seek to clarify how political parties make use of the internet. Both parts alternate descriptive/exploratory components (Chapter 5 in Part II and Chapter 6 in part III) and explanatory ones (chapter 4 in Part II and Chapter 7 in part III). In the methodology chapter we provided an account of how and why we selected our variables (dependents and independents), we explained the constraints within which we acted, we motivated the combination of different approaches and clarified the distinction between peacetime and campaign. We remark here, once again, that the trends we looked at in the two analytical components of the dissertation are different elements of the same phenomenon: political parties in cyberspace.

We choose to look at parties at different times of the election cycle and we adopted different methodologies depending on our research goals. In chapters 4 we used a comparative sample to explore the relationship between party characteristics and parties' websites at 'peacetime'. This study is innovative in its empirical and methodological specifications and it has been designed to be easily replicable in other research environments. In chapter 5 we used the same sample to investigate Web 2.0 applications in use by political parties, but our approach was less structured and more exploratory. We were looking ahead to some extent here, describing a technology that seems to be most likely to be at the centre of the future development of online political communication. However, we still need to better understand what implications Web 2.0 applications will have going forward.

In chapter 6, we presented a longitudinal analysis of parties' websites in Ireland, producing one of the few (Lusoli, 2007; Schweitzer, 2008) over time investigation of parties online. Chapter 7 looked at the determinants of cyber-campaigning at the candidates level. There, we implemented a structured research design and analytical techniques, introducing several novelties with regard to the model and the measurements employed.

We will now look in some details at the conclusions that we reached in part II and in part III.

Chapter VIII

8.1 Parties online at peacetime

In part II of this dissertation we looked at political parties online at 'peacetime' in four national contexts. Our goal in chapter 4 was so investigate the relationship between parties' characteristics and parties' websites, therefore explain inter-party variation. In chapter 5 we explored the extent to which the set of explanatory variables employed in chapter 4 could provide an explanation for patterns of variance in adoption of Web 2.0 platforms by parties.

We built on previous literature on parties on the 'digital age' (Gibson and Ward, 1998, 1999; 2009; Gibson, Newell et al., 2000 ; Gibson and Rommele, 2001; Newell, 2001 ; Cunha, Martin et al., 2003: ; Gibson, Römmele et al., 2003a; 2003b; Gibson, Margolis et al., 2003; Gibson, Nixon et al., 2003; Ward and Gibson, 2003, Conway and Dorner, 2004; Gibson, 2004; Carlson and Strandberg, 2005; Ward and Lusoli, 2005, Ward, Gibson et al., 2005; Semetko, 2006; De Landtsheer, 2007; Vaccari, 2007; Cardoso, 2008; Padró-Solanet and Cardenal, 2008; Vaccari, 2008a; 2008b) and we tested some of the theoretical assumptions put forward in that literature, but which were not systematically tested before (Lofgren and Smith, 2003, Nixon, Ward et al., 2003; Padró-Solanet and Cardenal, 2008).

We specifically looked at the impact of party ideology, internal level of democracy and resources in determining the quality and status of parties' websites when no election is taking place. We investigated the mentioned variables in relation to the informative side of parties' websites, the interactive side and finally to the overall status of parties' websites. In so doing, we made use of a very parsimonious model (compatibly with the low number of observations), which introduced several improved measures of party characteristics and websites' interactivity.

Indeed, we value the introduction of more precise measures as one of the main contribution of chapter 4. In looking at party characteristics, we produce empirical measures for levels of party internal democracy, ideological position on the left right axis and electoral size as a proxy of resources. With regard to levels of party democracy we revisited Janda's (1980) coding

scheme, slightly modifying it. Such a coding frame was employed only to the extent that involves non-judgmental scores, to produce an index of diffusion of power and therefore level of democracy within each party under analysis. The advantages of this choice are twofold, first the score attributed to each dimension derives from objective reading of party constitutions and rulebooks and is not exposed to the inaccuracy of judgmental scores; second, it is easily replicable and applicable to other parties in different political systems. In operationalizing our index of internal party democracy we departed from the assumption that parties are intrinsically oligarchic entities (Michels, 1915) to actually estimate whether variation exists in level of democratic openness of internal procedures, and we found level of variation testifying that parties substantially differ from one other and the extent to which such a difference may play a role in cyberspace is worth being further investigated.

With regard to the left right dimension, previous studies of parties in cyberspace have made use of a simple binary measure (Gibson and Römmele, 2001; Vaccari, 2008b). The measure we employed, based on expert surveys, captures much more of the variation on this dimension, by placing parties' positions on a 21 point scale.

In relation to the dependent variables, we firstly used widely employed indexes so that our findings are comparable to previous ones, and we then challenged the operationalization of participation by introducing the notion of *immediate* interaction/participation. In so doing, we attempted to identify, among participatory activities, those that allow for non-mediated and real-time interaction between the party and internet users. If on one hand, we restricted the number of participatory items, and possibly, their variation; on the other hand we isolated activities which are participatory and interactive beyond a reasonable doubt.

The introduction of such a measure brought more complexity into the model and pointed out the necessity of carefully evaluating our findings. We indeed found consistent evidence of large and leftist parties being keener to introduce participatory features. Such finding applies to 'general' participatory activity as well as to 'immediate' ones; however the explanatory power of the other variables tested in the model varied depending on the type of

dependent variable in use. Indeed, with regard to the impact of party internal democracy on online opportunities for participation we found mixed evidence, in terms of overall participation, such a factor appear to play a role, but when it comes to *immediate* participation its effect fades away. Such a lack of solidity on the other explanatory variables (with regard to the effect of country specific elements and party internal democracy) suggests that in future studies we should pay more attention to the way we define and operationalize participatory activity online. It may be the case that our conceptual and empirical definitions and operationalizations are introducing some form bias that we can control for, by better refining the dependent variables. We obviously did not solve such a problem, but we pointed out that it represents a key component in improving the study of political actors online.

Even though the additive indexes in use in the literature are somewhat imprecise, they are to date the most common technique to measure websites. However, they are problematic measures that often vary from study to study. We made us of different indexes, in chapter 4 and chapter 6, depending on the research strategy we choose for each goal. However, we expressed our measurement and results in percentages so that their comparison with future and, to some extent previous studies,[i] should result much easier.

We also found consistent evidence of websites going towards a process of standardization, as pointed out by a number of studies (Vaccari, 2007; Bastien and Greffet, 2009; Gibson and Ward, 2009). Especially with regard to information provision, there is very little variance observed at the inter- as well as at the intra- systemic level. European parties follow a global trend towards providing the same typology of information; obviously content and form vary, but substantially parties' websites look pretty much the same in terms of levels of information provided. The variation occurs with regard to participation, on which future studies of parties online should focus. Indeed the model we tested performs much better when applied to participatory actives only. The set of explanatory variables we tested was originally put forward (Nixon, Ward et al., 2003) to provide an account of parties' websites

at large, but, given the process of standardization in informative features, it should be further explored mainly in terms of participation/interactivity.

In line with what has been observed by a number of previous study (Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Newell, 2001; Lusoli, Ward et al., 2002; Gibson, Rommele et al., 2003a; Gibson, Margolis et al., 2003; Norris, 2003; Vaccari, 2007 Bastien and Greffet, 2009; Gibson and Ward, 2009) we found that interactivity and participation are promoted to a smaller extent than dissemination of information. The same scenario was also found in chapter 6, by looking at Irish parties online over time. As such, the low level of interactivity of parties' websites is a constant of every study engaging with the subject. Parties' websites over time, and in different national contexts, present more and better developed informative features than participatory ones. Public engagement seems to occupy a relatively low position in the scale of parties' priorities in cyberspace.

However, some degrees of variation between parties have been observed here and further research should focus on explaining to a greater extent such variation. Interaction and participation require a distinct effort on the party side, and we should seek a greater understanding of what parties are willing and capable of making such an effort, if any at all.

Having set our analysis at peacetime obviously affects our research design as well as our findings. We looked at parties when no campaigns were taking place at least in the next six months ahead. Therefore the analysis was run when no intense or extraordinary activity was happening; as such our analysis looked at a time where parties were running their 'business as usual'. That has implication for the evaluation of our results in comparison to previous studies. Indeed, we have to keep in mind that the great majority of previous studies in the field were based on the study of parties cyber-campaigning. Our findings towards normalization may be somehow influenced by the fact that poorly resourced actors mobilize their resources mostly in the run up to an election. When Ward, Gibson et al. (2003: 24) asked whether small parties would have been able to narrow the gap at peacetime, they may have been asking the wrong question. We found that small actors fall definitely behind bigger actors at peacetime, and that may

exactly because they do not have enough resources to keep their level of online activity high all the time. It may indeed be the case that only when there is a call for mobilization poorly resourced actors can afford to stretch their resources. Further study of parties' websites at peacetime may clarify if this is the case. On one hand, we did expect lower variation when no elector incentive motivates parties (and candidates) to higher levels of competition. Therefore, finding that there is actually low inter-party variation in terms of provision of information was more than expected. It does, however, fit the patterns outlined by Gibson and Ward in their review article (2009) on the status of parties' website after over 10 years of study. As such, our results are both in line with expectations and with the literature. Arguably, the level of interest that those finding disclose is *per se* not extraordinary. However, they offer a contribution with regard to, at least, two debates. Firstly, low levels of activity outside campaign seem to signify that the internet *per se* is not changing much in terms of political competitions. When no electoral incentives are present the medium alone does not increase the offer of information nor incentive to participate. Secondly, we have seen that standardization exist with regard to what we called web 1.0 features, but there is no homogeneity in terms of web 2.0 features. As such, we could argue that on top of peacetime/campaign dynamics research should focus on possible discrepancies between web 1.0 and web 2.0.

Indeed, the study of political actors online can further develop by refining and expanding the investigation of Web 2.0 applications. In this regard, how scholars will go about that becomes a crucial issue. In chapter 5 attempted to test the explanatory power of the independent variables in use in chapter 4 on Web 2.0 platforms. We selected three applications that are very different from each other, so that we could somehow cover the wide range of possibilities introduced by Web 2.0, even though our study was very exploratory in its own nature. We found that, across types of applications, the only stable characteristic of parties that have 'gone Web 2.0' is resources. Big parties appear to be more up to date; they seem to have understood quicker than their smaller counterparts the importance of Web 2.0. Is this due to strategic or symbolic considerations? Is it the sign of faith in multilateral

communication and exchange of opinion? Or, is it purely calculus? Is it arisen by the fear of being regarded as technologically outdated?

We found that the implementation of web 2.0 instruments, at least at this stage, seems to be driven by a resources based logic, better resourced actors adopted more web 2.0 tools. However, we have not tested the quality or the traffic taking place though those channels. Nor we would be able to say whether within a very short amount of time things can change and how. It may be the case that major parties are just quicker at positioning themselves into web 2.0 but there may be a prompt reaction from smaller actors. We have not looked at the actual networks created by web 2.0 tools; therefore we are only in the position of commenting of what we have observed and calling for further research.   From the analysis we performed here we cannot answer any of these questions, which, however, we regard as crucial for further studies. From what we found in part three of the dissertation we could attempt, however, to give some preliminary answers to some of the questions posed here. Therefore, we will now sum up what found in part III and we will return to the potential of Web 2.0 in the final section of this chapter.

8.2 The Cyberspace oddity

In part III of the dissertation we dealt with parties and candidates online in the run up to the 2007 general election in Ireland. We explored the reasons why Ireland should not be considered an exceptional case anymore, but we also pointed out a number of characteristics typical of the Irish system, as the strong pre-modern connotation of political campaigns.

Both, the Irish module of the Candidates Study and data on the Irish voter from the Irish National Election Study suggest that campaigns are still heavily marked by the use of pre-modern campaign tools. In the run up to the election, 57% of the electorate was visited at home by a candidate and equally, 57% was visited by a party worker, with this figures being substantially equal to those surveyed for the 2002 election. We also saw that candidates themselves attribute great value to direct contact with the

electorate and previous studies have pointed out the importance of pre-modern campaigns tools in Ireland (Marsh, 2004). We lack substantial data on parties' headquarters and campaign strategy, so that an evaluation of what sort of balance exists between pre-modern, modern and post-modern campaign styles would be rather inaccurate. However, a number of indicators suggest that, in parties and candidates' opinions, face to face contact with electors still occupies a great deal of campaign activities. Moreover, as we observed in chapter 6 the level of online campaigning by parties was moderate, to say the least. If, on one hand, we did observe over time variation and significant change as the election came closer, on the other hand, we found no outstanding use of the web by any political party. We noticed how 'conservative' the use that parties made of their website during the campaign was, and we did not find any attempt of targeting particular groups of voters online. One third of candidates running for election launched a personal website, and even if we have no previous data to estimate the magnitude of the change, we assume that such a figure represents an increase. Yet, we did not observe any viral spread of the internet phenomenon among candidates. We also showed, in chapter 7, that launching a websites seems to be motivated by symbolic considerations rather than strategic ones. Indeed we value the empirical proof of the 'me too' effect (Selnow, 1998) taking place at the candidate level as one of the major contributions of this research.

All of the above would suggest that there should be no 'net gain' in such a campaign environment. Parties appear not to invest much in maintaining and improving the quality of their websites, candidates are incentivized to launch personal websites mainly when they feel the pressure of opponents doing so, but they not appear to be looking at the demand side. Candidates appear to be unaware of (or uninterested in) the possible demand for cyber campaigning coming from their constituencies. Essentially, neither parties nor candidates seem to expect any substantial advantage coming from cyberspace. However, against all the odds, the 'net gain' takes place, provoking the cyberspace oddity, as shown by Sudulich and Wall (2010). In an environment where everything seemed to be hostile to any possible

advantage coming from the internet, we observed a tangible positive effect of having a personal website on winning votes (ibidem).. Other scholars before, had observed the same effect (D'Alessio, 1997; Gibson and McAllister, 2006; 2008) and manifested their scepticism about their own findings; it may be the case that the 'net gain' might be actually capturing a direct effect of cyber-campaigning on vote. If that is the case, we would favour the 'crystallisation' hypothesis put forward by D'Alessio (1997), whose plausibility is compatible with the rather small size of the electorate looking at parties and candidates websites. On the other hand, we cannot prove that the 'net gain' is a direct effect beyond a reasonable doubt.

Even though the explanation of whether cyber-campaign wins vote was not a concern of our investigation, we do regard that a primary matter of concern in the literature and we look at it as one of our references in evaluating our own findings. As said on multiple occasions in the previous chapters, resources (of a party and of a candidate) are not solely a financial matter. Campaign expenditure explains much of winning votes and a broad literature has tested that in a variety of electoral contexts (Jacobson, 1978; Jacobson, 1990; Pattie, Johnston et al., 1995 Forrest, 1997; Forrest, Johnston et al., 1999; Cox and Thies, 2000; Benoit and Marsh, 2003; Benoit and Marsh, 2008). However, resources are not explicable in terms of money only; we saw how Gibson and McAllister (2006) differentiate between party affiliation and party support, and in chapter 4 we used a proxy to determined whether parties were scarcely resourced or not. A more precise measure of resources is needed for both peacetime and campaign studies. In chapter 7 we were able to measure campaign resources through the electoral returns, but the matter is much more problematic when parties and candidates expenses are not accountable to any agency. As such measuring resources at peacetime has been proved to be a much more challenging task that would need a more precise measure.

Our journey through parties online and candidates cyber-campaigning has brought some light to the rather dark relationship between political actors and new technology in Ireland. Part III of this study has indeed dealt with lack of previous research, and it now represents the first data collection and

analysis on Irish parties and candidates online. We now know that, despite the internet being the least preferred medium for political information, it has developed an audience in the country. We also know that Irish parties, especially when there is no electoral pressure, don't invest much in developing a distinctive profile online. Irish parties, in line with a number of other political systems, provide information on themselves but don't encourage dialogue much. They have, by and large, been very late at adopting new technologies, and they seem to be slow at taking the challenge coming from Web 2.0 applications.

8.3 Politics as usual, it seems

This investigation has informed us on a number of dimensions of the behaviour of political parties and their candidates online. We have learnt how parties at 'peacetime' are slightly reluctant to open up spaces for interaction with users, and how they keep privileging their websites as media of disclosing information, which is also in line with the tendency of privileging informative features over participatory ones even when campaigning (chapter 6). We also proved, by looking at a number of different parties, how ideology seems to play a role in determining levels of interactivity put in place: left-wing parties are more likely to provide their websites with interactive features, *ceteris paribus*. We found that such a claim is not only theoretically coherent but also empirically validated. We also found consistent evidence of large parties being much more inclined to perform interaction with users, and to have recognized the value of Web 2.0 platforms. In part III of the investigation we saw how resources and symbolic considerations determine the likelihood of candidates cyber-campaigning. If we combine these two elements, even keeping in mind the differences in the two object of studies, we appreciate how resources and symbolic considerations seem to play a role in determining political 'actors behaviours online. As such, normalization seems to be one of the mayor underlining dimensions of the research produced here. Better resourced actors, no matter if parties or single

candidates, and regardless of the timeframe (campaign or peacetime) are better at using the internet, they have greater incentives, richer products and they better capture newest technologies.

As we saw in chapter 5, at the time of data collection, there was a certain amount of variation in levels of Web 2.0 adoption by parties, and we found that, of all the variables we used, only the proxy for resources was significant. Therefore, the online behaviour of political actors seems to vary depending on their resources (as proven to be the case for candidates) and on the considerations on the symbolic value of technology. We have no way of measuring the latter within parties, and this is possibly one of the key challenges for further research. We witnessed, in the past few years, the growth of internet use for discussing political issues (blogs), forming and informing opinions (Voting Advice Applications) and we saw that parties have been making a rather conservative use of the medium, which is potentially revolutionary in its capabilities. Parties seem to fear the potential of the internet and they seem to put in place forms of online interaction which give them the lead of the game; Web 2.0 applications, on the other hand, eschew the very concept of leading the game. Will the fear of losing control win over the fear of being regarded as out to date?

All these questions ought to be dealt with in the very near future, and parties will have to react, no matter how, to the continuous technological changes, that modify social and political communication. Variation in such a reaction and tangible effects (on electoral outcome) of such variation have already been given some attention (Gibson and McAllister, 2008) and will become primary elements for further research

We made clear in the introductory part of this study that our evaluation of the democratic implication of the internet would take place within the frame of representative institutions, specifically political parties as representative entities. In approaching the investigation of political parties online, we also clarified that the analysis would test the effect of party characteristics on parties online behaviour. Even though we accept that technology can be one of the channels of party change (Panebianco, 1988), we see, in Gibson and Ward's words, 'in respect of political parties, its [the

internet] impact depends partly on existing power structures, the balance of resources and philosophical outlook' (1999: 364) the way to look at parties 'websites. Our analysis provided some empirical support for such a claim, which, ten years later, seems still to depict correctly the way parties use the internet. By no mean the internet has revolutionized parties, and our findings support what previously noted with regard to parties' use of the web as democratic intermediary , namely that they 'are mostly interested in the technology as a mean to continue performing their existing function, only to a better level' (Gibson, Rommele et al., 2004: 198). We empirically tested a number of hypotheses that point towards no dramatic change in party behaviour in the digital age. The internet is and remains a medium in parties' hands, it never was, and it probably never will be a goal on its own. The internet *per se* does not produce any transformation in parties' behaviour. The cyber-party (Margetts, 2006) remains, in our opinion, an ideal type that most likely will stay in the hyperuranium.

By and large, parties are conservative in their approach to the web, they don't favour any democratic channel of real time online involvement. They do not seem to take full advantage of the technology, and as this is still the case after over ten years of research in Europe (Gibson and Ward, 1998), such a trend seems to be a conscious choice. From our analysis of parties' websites, we cannot conclude anything different from what Nixon and Johansonn observed ten years ago, namely that 'there are missed opportunities for extending discursive democracy in the digital context' (1999: 148). Therefore our conclusions with regard to political parties on the internet fall closer to the rather pessimistic side with those who don't see nor expect any revolutionary democratic change in party life thanks to the technology (Bastien and Greffet, 2009; Gibson and Ward, 1999; Gibson at al. 2004). Indeed, our findings tend to agree with a number of other investigations of a similar sort in concluding that parties' websites are informative but not engaging and we have to rethink Norris's enthusiastic view (2003: 43) of European parties as better placed than America ones in opening opportunities for interaction and bottom-up exchange of opinions.

8.4. Peacetime and campaign

This dissertation looked at two different time-frames, peacetime and campaigns. It is time now to merge the findings of each component and address their combined validity. When looking at peacetime we intended to minimize the effects of electoral systems and laws; obviously electoral systems do not account entirely for systemic variation. Indeed we did find some significant differences between countries and even though a pattern towards overall standardization was identified, we cannot rule out the possibility that country variables actually play a role in determining how parties behave online. We also saw, in part III, that Irish parties evolved rather slowly and in part II that they do not seem to have grasped the potential of web 2.0 tools. This joint consideration seem to suggest, firstly that Irish parties fall behind in their adoption of new technology, secondly that some systemic characteristic are probably responsible for that. The different components of our design seem to cross validate such a finding. Detectable differences exist between different party system and they apply to both campaign and peacetime. Another cross validated findings is that information is the most implemented function in parties' websites, again both at peacetime and in the run up to a campaign. In the previous section we focused on how normalization seems to be also detected in different sections of this research.   We intended to test the validity of the normalization thesis against the possibility of an 'equalization' of cyberspace, and we found substantial evidence of normalization taking place in the political systems under analysis. Contrary to the what has been found by other scholars in earlier research (Gibson, Margolis, et al. 2003: 50) "party systems in more 'party-centred' countries, such as the UK and Italy, offer slightly more resistance to 'normalization', with minor parties keeping better pace with design sophistication and publicity for their sites" we found substantial support for the normalization thesis. We observed systematic better performances of large parties in implementing participation and interaction as well as Web 2.0 applications. Bigger parties, in our experience, are better at understanding the importance of Web 2.0 features; they implement more

participatory and generally richer websites. Therefore, we provide support for the hypothesis that better resourced actors bring their advantage with them in cyberspace (Margolis and Resnick, 2000: 208); although the question of resources though remains open. What sort of resources? Are purely financial resources making the difference? Or is it instead, as we would hypothesize, a combination of material resources with the capacity of better understanding the advantages that the technology would bring? The Obama campaign has recently shown how the internet itself could multiply resources, and the Obama team achieved an unprecedented levels of online fundraising, in the range of 500 million dollars (Vaccari, 2009) proving what many political actors in Europe are still missing: the internet itself is a producer of resources. Offline resources seems to be still playing a major role in online politics as political actors treat and use the internet as a traditional communication medium, missing much of its potential.   The literature has been pointing out such a trend for a long time at the party level as well as at the candidate one (Gibson, Römmele et al., 2003); political actors approach the use of the internet in a conservative way, many parties' websites are still only a little more than electronic brochures.. If that applies certainly to parties at peacetime, in chapter 6 we found that such a definition fitted well the 2007 Irish campaign as well.

Overall, we think our research has benefited from combining a peacetime component with a campaign one. A number of trends - normalization, country differences, consrvativism – were found to apply to both periods, therefore their validity gains higher levels of significance. We are left now with the evaluation that those findings may have in relation to the contested democratic potential of the internet. Here, we found no sign of parties engaging at a high level with the democratic potential of the internet and no evidence for an equalization of cyberspace, therefore no democratic surplus seems to have been delivered by the internet to date. However, before delivering any concluding message on this, we will evaluate our findings in the broader literature of internet studies and place our contribution in the general frame of democratic theories.

8.5 The democratic surplus

As we saw in chapter 1, the internet was long expected to deliver a democratic surplus. Even by taking a rather sceptical view of the medium's potential, there have been some serious expectations in the medium being able to a) reengage the public at large and young people in particular and b) to better connect political actors and the public and c) do this in a more 'representative' way, by improving the communicative competitiveness of smaller parties.

As said in the previous section, the direct connection between political parties and the electorate is somewhat undermined by the lack of parties' investment in interactivity. Therefore, to date no major accomplishments have been identified with regard to parties and their relationship to the public. The internet has also been proved (Norris and Curtice, 2008) to be used for political purposes by those who are already interested in politics, and the mobilizing potential of the internet is still debatable (Lusoli, Ward et al., 2006: Vissers and Hooghe, 2007). As mobilization seems to be media specific (Vissers, Hooghe et al., 2009) research is moving towards a more specialized sort of investigation by identifying characteristics typical of the internet and focusing on their potential.

Recent research has opened up new scenarios for political involvement online, by looking at the potential effect of unsolicited political emails (Krueger, 2006; 2009) and involuntary exposure to political information online (Cantijoch, 2009). Indeed, if research wants to keep up with the pace of technological change, a number of previously neglected phenomena have to be included in the range of objects of analysis. Therefore, if no positive evidence of better connection between political actors and the public has yet emerged from the study of political parties online, the internet's recent developments have brought about new possibilities and forms of involvement.

The Athenian as well as the Town Council paradigms of online participation makes very little sense nowadays. The technology per se won't create any more participation or any virtual public sphere. Our findings points

towards the perpetration of 'offline' equilibria, we could not find any sign of equalization between bigger and smaller actors. Nor we could prove parties to be patently keen on engaging with voters, surfers or members in any meaningful exchange of views. On the contrary, arenas for interaction and multilateral communication are relegated to secondary position, at peacetime as during campaign. Candidates seem to look at one other and use the web instrument not to look outdated, but as we saw from the opinion they expressed in the candidates survey, they do not really see the web as an effective vote-winning instrument.[ii] Even if, we have to acknowledge that Web 2.0 has definitely delivered new opportunities and we do sympathize with the claim that 'democratic benefits do appear to be associated with the use of Web 2.0 tools, in this dissertation we have found some discouraging patterns of web 2.0 adoption, pointing towards normalization. The enthusiasm generated by the Obama campaign could indded easily fade away in different electoral context; after all one must remember that even in e-politics, context is king' (Gibson, 2009: 1).

Our concluding remarks are indeed to be placed in the rather sceptical side, even though on the thoretical ground, we do have to consider that Web 2.0 cpuld still make a difference. Not only do Web 2.0 platforms 'share a facility for promoting the role of ordinary voters in the production, management and even message development of a political campaign' (Gibson, 2009: 5), but they also facilitate the involuntary acquisition of political information. The accuracy this sort of political information can be doubted, but the process of transmission is something unknown, that we need to carefully evaluate. On one hand, politics on Web 2.0 platforms may enlarge number of people informed interested and engaged in politics, by transforming the way political interest raises. If technology can make information universally accessible and this reduction in political inequality (Dahl, 1989) combined with the speed and form of information transmission provided by Web 2.0 technologies, could raise new expectations on the technology actually delivering a democratic return. On the other hand, the quality of information and the impact that it may have remains to be seen and embed a number of *caveats*. Is it really the case that political information

spread through Web 2.0 technologies enhances political engagement? What conditions may facilitate such a process taking place?

The Obama campaign has actually produced unprecedented engagement and involvement, especially of young voters, and even though the peculiarities of such momentum may not be replicable in other contexts, its value to political engagement represents a turning point. Whether or not the combination of Web 2.0 technology and Obama effect can produce changes in a context as dominated by party politics as the European one remains to be seen. Even if we accept that politics, and especially political campaigns, have gone through a process of Americanization, we don't see any predetermined pattern of European politics following the exact same practices as American politics. We will have to estimate and evaluate how resources and symbolic considerations, which were proved to be so important throughout this study, will affect the implementation of Web 2.0 by political parties. One of the first books published on the topic opens with a quotation from Peter Mendelson, who said 'representative government is being complemented by more direct forms of involvement , from the internet to referenda' (Gibson and Ward; 2000c: 1) and our approach here also privileged the idea that the internet represent a plus value to representative democracy not a substitute.

As pointed out at the very beginning of this study political parties shape most political action, and any radical form of reengagement in politics cannot be brought about by technology alone, it will rather result from the use political actors decide to make of this technology. By looking at variation across parties and across systems we aimed to take distance from the rather dogmatic assumption that parties are inevitably subject to the iron law of oligarchy, and the variation encountered in or empirical analysis seems to support the idea that parties differ from one other.   Whether internal democracy and a responsive relationship with the electorate are party's valuable goal per se, or not is not for us to say, but the internet may actually facilitate political actors in pursuing these goals. Overall, we substantially agree with Bimber and Davis in their conclusion that "the internet does not automatically support tendencies towards either centralization or

decentralization" (Bimber and Davis, 2003: 171), and we found solid evidence of 'normalization' that discourages any blind faith in the internet potential of reinventing democracy. However most of the pessimism diffused at the turn of the millennium has to be reconsidered in the light of the democratic implications of Web 2.0, which poses new challenges and provides new opportunities for political actors and citizens alike.

---

[i] Chapter 4 represent a peacetime study, whereas most of the previous literature is based on campaign studies.
[ii] Even it seems that such a vote-winning dynamic may be actually taking place (Sudulich and Wall, 2010).

Appendix A

Indexes in use to measure dependent variables:
Chapter4:

Information provision:
1. *Organizational history*
2. *Organizational structure,*
3. *Values/Ideology,*
4. *Policies,*
5. *Documents,*
6. *Newsletters,*
7. *People/Who is who,*
8. *Leader focus,*
9. *Calendar/Events,*
10. *Conference info,*
11. *FAQ,*
12. *Groups/Ancillary Organizations page*

Participation:
1. *Information gathering*
2. *Information gathering*
3. *Talking about politics with friends*
4. *Trying to influence other's opinion*
5. *Advertising*
6. *Leafleting*
7. *Contacting*
8. *Petitioning*
9. *Dialogue*
10. *Donating*
11. *Joining associate*
12. *Joining full*
13. *Campaigning*
14. *Membership section*

Whole website

Sum of *Information provision and Participation: total of 26 items*

Chapter 6
Overall website. **Parties' website December 2005**

1. *History*
2. *Structure*
3. *Values/Ideology*
4. *Policies*
5. *Manifesto*
6. *Media releases*
7. *Documents*
8. *People who's who*
9. *Leaders focus*
10. *FAQ*
11. *Email newsletter*
12. *RSS*
13. *Podcast*
14. *Survey/polls*
15. *Blog*
16. *Wiki*
17. *Donate*
18. *Join*
19. *Buy*
20. *Volunteer/offline*
21. *Women*
22. *Youth*
23. *Contact politicians by email*
24. *Forums*
25. *Petitions*

Note:
The above list of features differs from the following one- showing the status of websites in May 2007 – in its inclusion of ancillary organizations' paces.
In Chapter 6, section 6.3 (table 6.4) ancillary organizations are indeed analysed separately.

Overall website. Parties in May 2007

1. History
2. Structure
3. Policies
4. Manifesto
5. Media releases
6. Speeches
7. People who's who
8. Leaders focus
9. FAQ
10. Email newsletter
11. RSS
12. Podcast
13. Survey/polls
14. Blog
15. Wiki
16. Donate
17. Join
18. Buy
19. Volunteer/offline
20. Contacting politicians by email
21. Forums
22. Petitions

Bibliography

Aldrich, J. H. (1995). Why parties?: The origin and transformation of political parties in America, University of Chicago Press.

Anstead, N and Chadwick, A (2008) 'Parties, Election Campaigning and the Internet: Toward A Comparative Institutional Approach' in A. Chadwick & P. Howard (Eds.), *Handbook of Internet Politics*. New York: Routledg

Barber, B. (1984). "Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age (Berkeley." University of California.

Barber, B. R. (1998). "Three scenarios for the future of technology and strong democracy." Political Science Quarterly: 573-589.

Bastien, F. and Greffet, F. (2009). The impact of context features over the development of party websites : A comparative analysis of France and Canada in election campaign. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Session, Lisbon, 14-19 April.

Benkler, Y. (2007). The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom, Yale University Press.

Bennett WL(2007). Changing Citizenship in the Digital Age, in *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. Edited by W. Lance Bennett. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MITPress, 2008. 1–24

Benoit, K. (2009). "Irish Political Parties and Policy Stances on European Integration." Irish Political Studies 24(4).

Benoit, K. and M. Laver (2006). Party policy in modern democracies, Routledge.

Benoit, K. and M. Marsh (2003). "For a Few Euros More: Campaign Spending Effects in the Irish Local Elections of 1999." Party Politics 9(5): 561-582.

Benoit, K. and M. Marsh (2008). "The Campaign Value of Incumbency: A New Solution to the Puzzle of Less Effective Incumbent Spending." American Journal of Political Science 52(4): 874-890.

Bentivegna, S. (2006). Campagne Elettorali in Rete, Laterza, Roma.

Bille, L. (2001). "Democratizing a Democratic Procedure: Myth or Reality?: Candidate Selection in Western European Parties, 1960-1990." Party Politics 7(3): 363-380.

Bimber, B. (1998a). "The Internet and political mobilization: Research note on the 1996 election season." Social Science Computer Review 16(4): 391-401.

Bimber, B. (1998b). "The Internet and political transformation: populism, community, and accelerated pluralism." Polity 31(1).

Bimber, B. A. and R. Davis (2003). Campaigning online: The Internet in US elections, Oxford University Press, USA.

Birdsall, W. F. (2007). "Web 2.0 as a social movement." Webology 4(2).

Blumler, J. G. and D. Kavanagh (1999). "The third age of political communication: Influences and features." Political Communication 16(3): 209-230.

Blyth, M. and R. Katz (2005). "From catch-all politics to cartelisation: The political economy of the cartel party." West European Politics 28(1): 33-60.

Bomse, A. L. (2000). "Dependence of Cyberspace, The." Duke Law Journal 50: 1717.

Bowers-Brown, J. (2003). "A marriage made in cyberspace?" Political parties and the Internet: Net gain? 98-119. Routledge.

Bowler, S. and D. M. Farrell (1992). "The study of election campaigning." Electoral Strategies and Political Marketing: 1-23.

Brandenburg, H. (2003). "Pathologies of the Virtual Public Sphere." Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Session, Edinburgh, 28 March-2 April, 2003.

Brandenburg, H. and Z. Zalinsky (2008). The media and the campaign. How Ireland voted 2007, 167-186. Gallagher, M. and Marsh M. (eds), Palgrave McMilland.

Browning, G. (2001). Electronic democracy: Using the Internet to transform American politics, Information Today, Inc.

Budge, I. (1996). The new challenge of direct democracy, Polity Press Cambridge, MA.

Burke, E. (1990 [1770]). Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents. Library of Economics and Liberty. Indianapolis, IN.

Burnheim, J. (1989). Is Democracy Possible?: The Alternative to Electoral Politics, University of California Press.

Cantijoch Marta, Reinforcement and Mobilization: The influence of the Internet on different types of political participation. Paper presented at the workshop 'Citizen Politics: Are The New Media Reshaping Engagement?, Barcelona, 28-30 May 2009.

Campo Dominguez, E. (2008). Blogs parlamentarios del Congreso en España. Observatorio para la sociedad, Divulaciòn OCS at www.cibersociedad.net/recursos/art_div.php?id= 182.

Cardoso, A. (2008). "A Comunicação Política na Internet. Análise dos websites dos Partidos Políticos em Itália." Observatorio 7: 180-204.

Carlson, T. and K. Strandberg (2005). "The 2004 European parliament election on the web: Finnish actor strategies and voter responses." Information Polity 10(3): 189-204.

Carlson, T. and K. Strandberg (2007). "The European Parliament election in a candidate-centered electoral system." The Internet and National Elections: A Comparative Study of Web Campaigning: 29-42, Randy Kluver, (ed). Routledge.

Carlson, T. and K. Strandberg (2008). "Riding the Web 2.0 Wave: Candidates on YouTube in the 2007 Finnish National Elections." Journal of Information Technology & Politics 5(2): 159-174.

Carty, R. K. and M. Eagles (1999). "Do local campaigns matter? Campaign spending, the local canvass and party support in Canada." Electoral Studies 18(1): 69-87.

Castles, F. and P. Mair (1984). "Left-Right Political Scales: Some 'Expert." Judgements', European Journal of Political Research 12: 73-88.

Chadwick, A. (2006). Internet politics: States, citizens, and new communication technologies, Oxford University Press, USA.

Chadwick, A. (2009). "Article: Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of Informational Exuberance." ISJLP 5: 9-141.

Chen, P., R. K. Gibson, et al. (2006). Electronic Democracy?: The Impact of New Communications Technologies on Australian Democracy, Australian National University.

Cnudde, C. F. and D. E. Neubauer (1969). Empirical democratic theory, Markham Pub. Co.

Coakley, J. and M. Gallagher (2005). Politics in the Republic of Ireland, Routledge.

Cole, G. D. H. (1920). Social theory, Frederick A. Stokes Company.

Coleman, S. (1999). "Cutting Out the Middle Man. From Virtual Representation to Direct Deliberation'." Digital Democracy. Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age. London and New York: Routledge,

Coleman, S. (2001). "Online campaigning." Parliamentary Affairs 54(4): 679-688.

Condorcet, M. (1785). "Foundations of Social Choice and Political Theory (translation by I. McLean and F. Hewitt)." Brookfield, VT: Edward Elgar.

Conway, M. and D. Dorner (2004). "An evaluation of New Zealand political party Websites." Information Research 9(4): 9-4.

Cox, G. W. (1990). "Centripetal and centrifugal incentives in electoral systems." American Journal of Political Science: 903-935.

Cox, G. W. and M. F. Thies (2000). "How Much Does Money Matter?:" Buying" Votes in Japan, 1967-1990." Comparative Political Studies 33(1): 37.

Crotty, W. J. (1970). "A perspective for the comparative analysis of political parties." Comparative Political Studies 3(3): 267-296.

Cunha, C., I. Martin, et al. (2003). "Southern European parties and party systems, and the new ICTs." Political Parties and the Internet: Net Gain?Routledge.

Dahl, R. A. (1989). Democracy and its Critics, Yale University Press.

Dahl, R. A. (1998). On democracy, Yale University Press.

Dahl, R. A., I. Shapiro, et al. (2003). The democracy sourcebook, The MIT Press.

Dahlberg, L. (2001). "The Internet and democratic discourse: Exploring the prospects of online deliberative forums extending the public sphere." Information, Communication & Society 4(4): 615-633.

D'Alessio, D. (1997). "Use of the World Wide Web in the 1996 US election." Electoral Studies 16(4): 489-500.

Dalton, R. J. (1985). "Political parties and political representation: Party supporters and party elites in nine nations." Comparative Political Studies 18(3): 267.

Dalton, R. J. and M. P. Wattenberg (2000). Parties Without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies, Oxford University Press.

De Landtsheer, C. (2007). The top ten of Europe: How to predict the 2004 European elections by the quality of websites. Paper presented at the 4th ECPR General Conference. Pisa, Italy, 6-8 September 2007.

Denzin, N. (2009). The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods, Aldine De Gruyter.

Downs, A. (1957). "An economic theory of political action in a democracy." The Journal of Political Economy: 135-150.

Drezner, D. W. and H. Farrell (2004). The power and politics of blogs. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, September 2-5.

Duverger, M. (1954). Political parties, Methuen.

Eagles, M. (1993). "Money and votes in Canada: campaign spending and Parliamentary election outcomes, 1984 and 1988." Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques: 432-449.

Eagles, M. (2004). "The Effectiveness of Local Campaign Spending in the 1993 and 1997 Federal Elections in Canada." Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique 37(01): 117-136.

Epstein, L. D. (1980). Political parties in Western democracies, Transaction Publishers.

Etzioni, A. (1995). The spirit of community: Rights, responsibilities, and the communitarian agenda, Fontana.

Farrell, D. (2006). "Political parties in a changing campaign environment." Handbook of Party Politics: 122–133.

Farrell, D. M. (1994). "Ireland: Centralization, Professionalization and Competitive Pressures." How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies: 216–41.

Farrell, D. M. (2005). Campaign modernization and the West European party. Political Parties in the New Europe: Political and Analytical Challenges: 63–83.

Farrell, D. M. (2006). "Political Parties in a Changing Campaign Environment."" Handbook of Party Politics: 122–133.

Farrell, D. M. and P. Webb (2000). "Political parties as campaign organizations." Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: 102-28.

Farrell, D. M. and R. Schmitt-Beck (2002). Do political campaigns matter? Routledge.

Finley, M. I. (1985). Democracy ancient and modern, Rutgers University Press.

Foot, K. A. and S. M. Schneider (2002). "Online Action in Campaign 2000: An Exploratory Analysis of the US Political Web Sphere." Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 46(2): 222-244.

Ford, C. R. (2009). Mass Media and the Blogging Revolution. Midwest Political Science Association. Chcago IL.

Forrest, J. (1997). "The effects of local campaign spending on the geography of the flow-of-the-vote at the 1991 New South Wales state election." Australian Geographer 28(2): 229-240.

Forrest, J., R. J. Johnston, et al. (1999). "The effectiveness of constituency campaign spending in Australian state elections during times of electoral volatility: the New South Wales case, 1988-95." Environment and Planning, 31: 1119-1128.

Francoli, M. and S. Ward (2008). "21st century soapboxes? MPs and their blogs." Information Polity 13(1): 21-39.

Gallagher, M. (2002). Stability and turnout. How Ireland Voted 2002. 88-118, Gallagher M and Marsh Me (eds). Palgrave Macmillan.

Gallagher, M. (2005). "Ireland: the discreet charm of PR-STV." The Politics of Electoral Systems: 511–535.

Gallagher, M. (2008). The Election as Horse Race: Betting and the Election. How Ireland voted 2007, 148-166. M. G. a. M. Marsh, Palgrave Macmillan.

Gallagher, M. and M. Marsh (1988). Candidate selection in comparative perspective, Sage Publications.

Gallagher, M. and M. Marsh (2002). Days of blue loyalty: the politics of membership of the Fine Gael party, PSAI Press.

Gallagher, M. and P. D. M. Marsh (2008). How Ireland Voted 2007: The Full Story of Ireland's General Election, Palgrave Macmillan.

Gallagher, M., M. Laver, et al. (2005). Representative Government in Modern Europe: Institutions, Parties, and Governments. McGraw Hill.

Gallagher, M., M. Marsh, et al. (2002). How Ireland Voted 2002, Gallagher M and Marsh Me (eds). Palgrave Macmillan.

Gallie, W. B. (1955). Essentially contested concepts, Harrison & Sons, Ltd.

George, C. (2003). "The Internet and the Narrow Tailoring Dilemma for" Asian" Democracies." The Communication Review 6(3): 247-268.

Gibson, R. (2001). "Elections online: Assessing Internet voting in light of the Arizona Democratic primary." Political Science Quarterly: 561-583.

Gibson, R. (2004). "Web campaigning from a global perspective." Asia-Pacific Review 11(1): 95-126.

Gibson, R. (2008). 'New Media and the Revitalisation of Politics'. Revitalising Politics Conference, London Nov 5-6 2008. London.

Gibson, R. and A. Rommele (2001). "Changing Campaign Communications: A Party-Centered Theory of Professionalized Campaigning." The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 6(4): 31.

Gibson, R. and A. Rommele (2003). "Regional web campaigning in the 2002 German Federal Election." Paper Presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Philadelphia, PA.

Gibson, R. and A. Rommele (2007). Political Communication. In Comparative Politics, 473-492. D. Caramani (eds). Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Gibson, R. and R. Harmel (1998). "Party Families and Democratic Performance: Extraparliamentary vs. Parliamentary Group Power." Political Studies 46(3): 633-650.

Gibson, R. and S. Ward (1999). "Party democracy on-line: UK parties and new ICTs." Information, Communication & Society 2(3): 340-367.

Gibson, R. and S. Ward (2000a). "A proposed methodology for studying the function and effectiveness of party and candidate web sites." Social Science Computer Review 18(3): 301-319.

Gibson, R. and S. Ward (2000b). "An outsider's medium? The European elections and UK party competition on the Internet." Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties 10(1): 173-191.

Gibson, R. and S. Ward (2003). "Australian parties' use of the World Wide Web at the state and territory level." Political parties and the Internet: net gain? 139-160. Routledge.

Gibson, R. and S. Ward (2009). "Parties in the Digital Age—A Review Article." Representation 45(1): 87-100.

Gibson, R. K. and A. Rommele (2005). "Down Periscope': The Search for High-Tech Campaigning at the Local Level in the 2002 German Federal Election." Journal of E-Goverment 2(3): 85-112.

Gibson, R. K. and A. Rommele (2009). "Measuring the Professionalization of Political Campaigning." Party Politics 15(3): 265-293.

Gibson, R. K. and I. McAllister (2006). "Does Cyber-Campaigning Win Votes? Online Communication in the 2004 Australian Election." Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties 16(3): 243-263.

Gibson, R. K. and I. McAllister (2008). "Online Campaigning in the 2007 Australian Election: Did the Web Deliver Votes?" Paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Boston Massachusetts, August 28-31.

Gibson, R. K. and S. J. Ward (1998). "UK Political Parties and the Internet:" Politics as Usual" in the New Media?" The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 3(3): 14.

Gibson, R. K. and S. Ward (2000c). Reinvigorating Democracy?: British Politics and the Internet, Ashgate Pub Ltd.

Gibson, R. K. and S. Ward (2002). "Virtual Campaigning: Australian Parties and the Impact of the Internet." Australian Journal of Political Science 37(1): 99-129.

Gibson, R. K., A. Römmele, et al. (2003a). "German parties and internet campaigning in the 2002 Federal Election." German Politics 12(1): 79-108.

Gibson, R. K., A. Rommele, et al. (2004). Electronic democracy: mobilisation, organisation and participation via new ICTs, Routledge.

Gibson, R. K., J. L. Newell, et al. (2000). "New Parties, New Media: Italian Party Politics and the Internet." South European Society and Politics 5(1): 123-136.

Gibson, R. K., M. Margolis, et al. (2003). "Election Campaigning on the WWW in the USA and UK: A Comparative Analysis." Party Politics 9(1): 47-75.

Gibson, R. K., P. Nixon, et al. (2003). Political parties and the Internet: net gain?, Routledge.

Gibson, R. K., W. Lusoli, et al. (2008). "Nationalizing and Normalizing the Local? A Comparative Analysis of Online Candidate Campaigning in Australia and Britain." Journal of Information Technology & Politics 4(4): 15-30.

Gibson, R., A. Rommele, et al. (2003b). "Parties and campaigning on the WWW." Special Issue of Party Politics 9(1).

Gibson, R., S. Ward, et al. (2003). "The Internet and Political Campaigning: the new medium comes of age?" Representation 39(3): 166-180.

Gibson, W. (1984). "Neuromancer. 1984." New York: Ace.

Graham, K. (1986). The battle of democracy, Wheatsheaf Books Brighton, Sussex.

Green, D. P. and J. S. Krasno (1990). "Rebuttal to Jacobson's" New Evidence for Old Arguments"." American Journal of Political Science: 363-372.

Grossman, L. K. (1995). The electronic republic: Reshaping democracy in the information age, Viking Penguin.

Gueorguieva, V. (2008). "Voters, MySpace, and YouTube: The Impact of Alternative Communication Channels on the 2006 Election Cycle and Beyond." Social Science Computer Review 26(3): 288-300.

Gulati, G. J. J. and C. B. Williams (2007). "Closing the gap, raising the bar: Candidate web site communication in the 2006 campaigns for congress." Social Science Computer Review 25(4): 443.

Habermas, J. (1987). The Theory of Communicative Action, Beacon Press.

Hacker, K. L. and J. Van Dijk (2001). Digital democracy: Issues of theory and practice, Sage Publications, Inc. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA.

Hague, B. N. and B. Loader (1999). Digital democracy: Discourse and decision making in the information age, Routledge.

Hallin, D. C. and P. Mancini (2004). Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics, Cambridge Univ Pr.

Harmel, R. and K. Janda (1982). Parties and their environments: limits to reform?, Longman.

Harmel, R. and K. Janda (1994). "An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change." Journal of Theoretical Politics 6(3): 259-287.

Hay, C., G. Stoker, et al. (2008). Revitalising Politics: Have we Lost the Plot?

Hazan, R. and G. Rahat (2006). "Candidate Selection: Methods and Consequences." Handbook of Party Politics: 109-122.

Henry, D. D. W. a. F. (2004). The power and politics of blogs. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, September 2-5.

Hooghe M, Stolle D., Mahéo V.A., and Vissers S. (2010). Why can't a Student be more like an Average Person? Sampling and Attrition Effects in Social Science Field and Laboratory Experimentsm Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, 629(1), 2010,

Howard, P. N. (2003). "Digitizing the social contract: Producing American political culture in the age of new media." The Communication Review 6(3): 213-245.

Hüsing, T. and H. Selhofer (2002). "The digital divide index–a measure of social inequalities in the adoption of ICT." the Proceedings of ECIS, 2002.

Hyland, J. L. (1995). Democratic Theory: The Philosophical Foundations, Manchester Univ Pr.

IDEA, Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2004). Voter Turnout in Western Europe Since 1945: A Regional Report, 2004.

Ignazi, P. (2005). "The Extreme Right." South European Society and Politics 10(2): 333-349.

INES, Irish National Election Study. (2009). Irish National Election Study online at www.tcd.ie/ines.

Jackman, R. W. (1985). "Cross-national statistical research and the study of comparative politics." American Journal of Political Science: 161-182.

Jackson, N. (2003). "MPs and web technologies: An untapped opportunity?" Journal of Public Affairs 3(2).

Jackson, N. (2006). Dipping their big toe into the blogosphere: The use of weblogs by the political parties in the 2005 general election, Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Jackson, N. (2007). Political parties, the Internet and the 2005 General Election: third time lucky? Internet Research, Vol. 17, Issue 3, pp.249-271.

Jackson, N. A. and D. G. Lilleker (2009). "MPs and E-representation: Me, MySpace and I." British Politics 4(2): 236-264.

Jacobson, G. C. (1978). "The effects of campaign spending in congressional elections." The American political science review: 469-491.

Jacobson, G. C. (1980). Money in congressional elections, Yale University Press.

Jacobson, G. C. (1985). "Party Organization and Distribution of Campaign Resources: Republicans and Democrats in 1982." Political Science Quarterly: 603-625.

Jacobson, G. C. (1990). "The effects of campaign spending in House elections: New evidence for old arguments." American Journal of Political Science: 334-362.

Jacoby, W. G. (1999). "Levels of measurement and political research: An optimistic view." American Journal of Political Science: 271-301.

Janda, K. (1980). Political parties: A cross-national survey, Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan.

Janda, K., R. Harmel, et al. (1995). "Changes in party identity: evidence from party manifestos." Party Politics 1(2): 171-196.

Jankowski, N. W., K. Foot, et al. (2005). "The Web and the 2004 EP election: Comparing political actor Web sites in 11 EU Member States." Information Polity 10(3): 165-176.

Johnston, R. J., C. J. Pattie, et al. (1989). "The impact of constituency spending on the result of the 1987 British general election." Electoral Studies 8(2): 143-55.

Kalnes, Ø. (2008). Norwegian Parties and Web 2.0. Paper presented at the Politics Web 2.0 Conference, The New Political Communication Unit, Royal Holloway, London, April 17-18 2008.

Kampen, J. K. and K. Snijkers (2003). "E-democracy: a critical evaluation of the ultimate e-dream." Social Science Computer Review 21(4): 491-496.

Karlsen, R. (2009). "Campaign Communication and the Internet: Party Strategy in the 2005 Norwegian Election Campaign." Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties 19(2): 183-202.

Katz, R. and P. Mair (1995). Three Faces of Party Organization: Adaptation and Change. The European Policy Research Unit EPRU Working Papers.

Katz, R. S. (2001). "The Problem of Candidate Selection and Models of Party Democracy." Party Politics 7(3): 277-296.

Katz, R. S. and P. Mair (1992). Party Organizations: A Data Handbook on Party Organizations in Western Democracies, 1960–1990, London: Sage.

Katz, R. S. and P. Mair (1994). How parties organize: change and adaptation in party organizations in western democracies, Sage Publications Ltd.

Katz, R. S. and P. Mair (1995). "Changing models of party organization and party democracy: The emergence of the cartel party." Party Politics 1(1): 5-28.

Kedzie, C. Democracy and network interconnectivity [en línia].

Key, V. O. (1947). Politics, parties and pressure groups, Thomas Y. Crowell company.

King, G., R. O. Keohane, et al. (1994). Designing social inquiry, Princeton University Press.

Kirchheimer, O. (1966). "The transformation of the Western European party systems." Political parties and political development: 177-200.

Klotz, R. (1997). "Positive spin: Senate campaigning on the web." PS: Political Science and Politics 30(3): 482-486.

Krueger, B. S. (2006). "A comparison of conventional and Internet political mobilization." American Politics Research 34(6): 759.

Krueger, B. S. (2009). Opt in or Tune Out: Online Mobilization and Political Participation. Paper presented at the workshop 'Citizen Politics: Are The New Media Reshaping Engagement?, Barcelona, 28-30 May 2009.

Laffin, M., E. Shaw, et al. (2007). "The New Sub-National Politics of the British Labour Party." Party Politics 13(1): 88.

Laver, M. and W. B. Hunt (1992). Policy and party competition, Routledge.

LeDuc, L. (2001). "Democratizing Party Leadership Selection." Party Politics 7(3): 323-341.

Leiner, B. M., V. G. Cerf, et al. (1999). A brief history of the Internet. Internet Society (ISOC), available at: http://www.iicm.tugraz.at/thesis/cguetl_diss/literatur/Kapitel02/References/ Leiner_et_al._2000/brief.html?timestamp=1197467969844.

Lenhart, A. a. F., S. (2009, February 12). 2009, Twitter and status updating. R. Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Lijphart, A. (1971). "Comparative politics and the comparative method." The American Political Science Review: 682-693.

Lilleker, D. G. and N. Jackson (2008). Politicians and Web 2.0: the current bandwagon or changing the mindset? Paper presented at the Politics Web 2.0 Conference, The New Political Communication Unit, Royal Holloway, London, April 17-18 2008.

Lilleker, D. G. and Lees-Marshment J., (2005).Political marketing: a comparative perspective, Manchester University Press.

Lofgren, K. and C. Smith (2003). " Political parties and democracy in the information age." Political parties and the Internet: net gain?: 39-52.

Lundell, K. (2004). "Determinants of Candidate Selection: The Degree of Centralization in Comparative Perspective." Party Politics 10(1): 25-47.

Lusoli, W. (2004). "Electronic democracy: the making of a revolution."Unpublished manuscript.

Lusoli, W. (2005a). "A second-order medium? The Internet as a source of electoral information in 25 European countries." Information Polity 10(3): 247-265.

Lusoli, W. (2005a). "The Internet and the European Parliament elections: Theoretical perspectives, empirical investigations and proposals for research." Information Polity 10(3): 153-163.

Lusoli, W. (2005b). "The Internet and the European Parliament elections: Theoretical perspectives, empirical investigations and proposals for research." Information Polity 10(3): 153-163.

Lusoli, W. and J. Ward (2005a). "" Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows": The Internet and the 2004 European Parliament Election in Britain." The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 10(4): 71-97.

Lusoli, W. and S. Ward (2005b). "Logging on or switching off? The public and the Internet at the 2005 general election." Spinning the Web: Online Campaigning During the: 13-21.

Lusoli, W., & Jankowski, N. W. (2005). "The World Wide Web and the 2004 European Parliament Election." Information Polity, 10 ((3/4)): 247-265.

Lusoli, W., Gibson, R. K. & Ward, S. (2007). "Italian elections online: ten years on."In Newell J.L. (eds), The 2006 Italian Election. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Lusoli, W., S. Ward, et al. (2002). "Political organisations and online mobilisation: different media-same outcomes?" New Review of Information Networking 8: 89-108.

Lusoli, W., S. Ward, et al. (2006). "(Re) connecting Politics? Parliament, the Public and the Internet." Parliamentary Affairs 59(1): 24-42.

Lusoli, W. & Ward, S. (2004). Digital Rank-and-File: Party Activists' Perceptions and Use of the Internet. British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 6(4), 453-470. The version cited in chapter 2 is the one prepared for the 2003 APSA annual conference.

Macpherson, C. B. (1977). The life and times of liberal democracy, Oxford University Press New York.

Macpherson, C. B. (2001). "Democratic theory: Essays in retrieval." Democracy: A Reader: 253.

Mair, P. (1987). The changing Irish party system: organisation, ideology and electoral competition, Burns & Oates.

Mair, P. and I. van Biezen (2001). "Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies." Party Politics 7(1): 5-21.

Mair, P. and L. Weeks (2005). The party system. Politics in the Republic of Ireland. J. G. Coakley, M.

Mancini, P. (1999). "New frontiers in political professionalism." Political Communication 16(3): 231-245.

Margetts, H. (2006). "Cyber parties." Handbook of Party Politics: 528–35.

Margolis, M. (2007). E-government and democratic politics. E-Government in Europe. Re-booting the state. P. Nixon and V. Koutrakou, Routledge.

Margolis, M. and D. Resnick (2000). Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace" revolution", Sage Pubns.

Margolis, M., D. Resnick, et al. (1996). "Campaigning on the Internet: Parties and Candidates on the World Wide Web in the 1996 Primary Season." The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 2(1): 59-78.

Marsh, M. (1998). "Testing the Second-Order Election Model after Four European Elections." British Journal of Political Science 28(04): 591-607.

Marsh, M. (2000). "Candidate centered but party wrapped: Campaigning in Ireland under STV." Elections in Australia, Ireland and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote: 114-30.

Marsh, M. (2004). "None of that post-modern stuff around here: Grassroots campaigning in the 2002 Irish General Election." Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties 14(1): 245-267.

Marsh, M. (2005). Parties and Society. Politics in the Republic of Ireland. J. G. Coakley, M.

Marsh, M. (2007). "Candidates or Parties?: Objects of Electoral Choice in Ireland." Party Politics 13(4): 501-528.

Marsh, M. and P. Mitchell (1999). "Office, Votes, and Then Policy: Hard Choices for Political Parties in the Republic of Ireland, 1981-1992." Policy, office, or votes: 36-62.

Michels, R. (1915). Political Parties. A Sociological Study of the Emergence of Leadership, the Psychology of Power, and the Oligarchic Tendencies of Organization, New York: Dover Publications.

Milbrath, L. W. (1965). "Political Participation in the States." Comparative State Politics, Little Brown, Boston.

Miller W.L. and Makie M. (1973). The electoral cycle and the asymmetry of government and opposition popularity: an alternative model of the relationship between economic conditions and political popularity, Political studies, Vol. 21, Issue 3, pp. 263-279.

Mocan, R., G. Badescu, et al. (2003). "The democratising potential of the Internet and political parties in Romania." Political Parties and the Internet: Net Gain? Routledge.

Moore, R. K. (1999). "Democracy and cyberspace." Digital democracy: Discourse and decision making in the information age: 39-62, Hague, B. and Loader B. (eds). Routledge.

Morris, D. (1999). Vote. com, Renaissance Books.

Morris, D. (2000). "Direct democracy and the internet." Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review 34: 1033-1053.

Moschovitis, C. J. P., H. Poole, et al. (1999). History of the Internet: A Chronology, 1843 to 2001 and Beyond, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Mosco, V. (2004). The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace, MIT Press Cambridge, MA, USA.

Mosco, V. and D. Foster (2001). "Cyberspace and the End of Politics." Journal of Communication Inquiry 25(3): 218-236.

Mossberger, K. and R. S. McNeal (2007). Digital citizenship: The Internet, society, and participation, The MIT Press.

Mossberger, K., C. J. Tolbert, et al. (2003). Virtual inequality: Beyond the digital divide, Georgetown University Press.

Murphy, G. (2002). "The Background to the Election." How Ireland Voted 2002. 1-22. Palgrave Macmillan.

Naisbitt, J. (1984). Megatrends: Ten new directions transforming our lives, Warner Books New York.

Negrine R. (2007). The professionalization of political communication. Changing Media changing Europe, Chicago University Press.

Negroponte, N. (1995). Total digital, Bertelsmann.

Newell, J. L. (2001). "Italian Political Parties on the Web." The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 6(4): 60-87.

Nixon, P. and H. Johansson (1999). "Transparency through technology: the internet and political parties." In Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age.

Nixon, P., S. Ward, et al. (2003). "Conclusions: The Net Change." Political Parties and the Internet: Net Gain: 234–243.

Noam, E. M. (2005). "Why the Internet is bad for democracy." Communications of the ACM 48(10): 57-58.

Norris, P. and Curtice, J. (2004). If you build a political website, will they come? Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, September 2-5.

Norris, P. (2000). A Virtuous Circle? New York: Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2001). Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide, Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2003). "Preaching to the Converted?: Pluralism, Participation and Party Websites." Party Politics 9(1): 21-45.

Norris, P. (2004). Building Knowledge Society. The renewal of Democratic Practices in Knowledge Societies. U. W. Report.

Norris, P. (2005). Developments in party communications. National Democratic Institute for International, Affairs, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

Norris, P. and J. Curtice (2008). "Getting the Message Out: A Two-Step Model of the Role of the Internet in Campaign Communication Flows During the 2005 British General Election." Journal of Information Technology & Politics 4(4): 3-13.

O'Reilly, T. (2005). "What is Web 2.0." Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software 30: 2005.

Oates, S., D. M. Owen, et al. (2006). The internet and politics: citizens, voters and activists, Routledge.

OECD, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2007). Participative Web and User created Content, Web 2.0, Wikis and Social Networking. OECD.

Padró-Solanet, A. and Cardenal A. S. (2008). "Partidos y política en Internet: Un análisis de los websites de los partidos políticos catalanes." Revista de los Estudios de Derecho y Ciencia Política de la UOC 6.

Palda, F. and K. Palda (1998). "The impact of campaign expenditures on political competition in the French legislative elections of 1993." Public choice 94(1): 157-174.

Panebianco, A. (1988). Political parties: organization and power, Cambridge University Press.

Pasquino, G. (2008). "The 2008 Italian National Elections: Berlusconi's Third Victory." South European Society &# 38; Politics 13(3): 345-362.

Pateman, C. (1970). Participation and democratic theory.

Pattie, C. J., R. J. Johnston, et al. (1995). "Winning the local vote: The effectiveness of constituency campaign spending in Great Britain, 1983-1992." American Political Science Review: 969-983.

Pickerill, J. (2004). "Rethinking political participation: Experiments in Internet activism in Australia and Britain." Routledge ECPR Studies in European Political Science, 33: 170-193.

Pitkin, H. F. (2004). "Representation and Democracy: Uneasy Alliance." Scandinavian Political Studies 27(3): 335-342.

Pole, A. (2009). Campaigns and Elections and the 2008 Presidential Election. paper presented at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Political Science Association, 2-5 April, 2009, . Chicago, IL.

Przeworski, A. (1999). "Minimalist conception of democracy: a defence" Democracy's value: 23.

Puopolo, S. (2001). "The Web and US senatorial campaigns 2000." American Behavioral Scientist 44(12): 2030.

Raab, C. D. and C. Bellamy (2004). "Electronic Democracy and the Mixed Polity." Electronic Democracy: Mobilisation, Organisation and Participation via New ICTs, London and New York: Routledge: 17-42.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1951). "The comparative method in social anthropology." Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland: 15-22.

Rahat, G. and R. Y. Hazan (2001). "Candidate Selection Methods: An Analytical Framework." Party Politics 7(3): 297-322.

Reif, K. and H. Schmitt (1980). "Nine Second Order National Elections-A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results." European Journal of Political Research 8(1): 3-44.

Rheingold, H. (1993). The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World, Addison-Wesley Longman Publishing Co., Inc. Boston, MA, USA.

Rommele, A. (2003). "Political parties, party communication and new information and communication technologies." Party Politics 9(1): 7.

Rousseau, J. J. (1968[1762]). The social contract, Penguin Group USA.

Salmond, R. (2008). RooTube: YouTube advertising in the 2007 Australian election campaign. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA, August 28-31, 2008.

Sartori, G. (1987). "The theory of democracy revisited." New Jersey.

Sartori, G. (2005). Parties and party systems: A framework for analysis, ECPR Press.

Scammell, M. (1997). "The wisdom of the war room: US campaigning and Americanization." Research Paper, The Joan Shorenstein Centre, Press Politics.

Scarrow, S. E. (2000). "Parties without Members? Party Organization in a Changing Electoral Environment." Parties Without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: 79–101.

Scarrow, S. E. (2006). The nineteenth-century origins of modern political parties: The unwanted emergence of party based politics. Handbook of Party Politics. R. a. C. Katz, W, SAGE.

Schattschneider, E. E. (1942). Political Parties, Holt, Riehart and Winston.

Schifferes, S., Ward, Stephen & Wainer Lusoli (2007). " What ís the Story? Online News Consumption in the 2005 UK Election."

Schlesinger, J. (1984). "On the Theory of Party Organization." Journal of Politics 46(2): 369-400.

Schmitt, H. (2005). "The European Parliament Elections of June 2004: Still Second-Order?" West European Politics 28(3): 650-679.

Schmitt-Beck, R. and D. M. Farrell (2002). " Studying political campaigns and their effects." Do political campaigns matter?: campaign effects in elections and referendums: 1.

Schumpeter, J. A. (1994). Capitalism, socialism, and democracy, Routledge.

Schweitzer, E. J. (2005). "Election Campaigning Online: German Party Websites in the 2002 National Elections." European Journal of Communication 20(3): 327-351.

Schweitzer, E. J. (2008). "Innovation or Normalization in E-Campaigning?: A Longitudinal Content and Structural Analysis of German Party Websites in the 2002 and 2005 National Elections." European Journal of Communication 23(4): 449-470.

Selnow, G. W. (1998). Electronic whistle-stops: The impact of the Internet on American politics, Praeger Publishers.

Semetko, H. A. (2006). Parties in the media age. Handbook of Party Politics. R. a. C. Katz, W, SAGE: 515-527.

Shuen, A. (2008). Web 2.0: A strategy guide, O'Reilly Media, Inc.

Sinnott, R. (1995). Irish voters decide: Voting behaviour in elections and referendums since 1918, Manchester University Press.

Sinnott, R. (2005). "The rules of the electoral game." In Politics in the Republic of Ireland105-34, Coakley J. and Gallagher M. (eds)PSAI Press.

SIPO, Standards in Public Office (2007). Dáil General Election 24 May 2007, Report on disclosure of donations and election expenses at Dáil general election of 2007.

Sudulich M.L. and Wall M. (2010). 'Every little helps'. Cyber-campaigning in the 2007 Irish General Election, Journal of Information Technology and Politics, Volume 7, issue4.

Strom, K. (1985). "Party Goals and Government Performance in Parliamentary Democracies." American Political Science Review 79(3): 738-54.

Sundar, S. S., S. Kalyanaraman, et al. (2003). "Explicating Web Site Interactivity: Impression Formation Effects in Political Campaign Sites." Communication Research 30(1): 30.

Suroweicki, J. (2004). "The wisdom of crowds." London: Little, Brown.

Swanson, D. L. and P. Mancini (1996). Politics, media, and modern democracy: An international study of innovations in electoral campaigning and their consequences, Praeger Publishers.

Tolbert, C. J. and A. Hamilton (2009). Youth, Online Engagement, and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election.

Tops, P. W., G. Voerman, et al. (2000). " Political websites during the 1998 Parliamentary Elections in the Netherlands." Democratic Governance and New Technology: Technologically Mediated Innovations in Political Practice in Western Europe: 88-100, Hoff. J., Horrocks, i. and Tops P.W. (eds). Routledge.

Trechsel A. and Mair P.(2009). When parties position themselves. Political parties in policy space across Europe , Internet&Politics section, ECPR General Conference, Potsdam, September 2009.

Trippi, J. (2004). The revolution will not be televised: Democracy, the Internet, and the overthrow of everything, William Morrow.

Urbinati, N. (2008). Representative democracy: principles and genealogy, University of Chicago Press.

Vaccari, C. (2007). "Informative but not Engaging. Italian Parties Online Communication in the 2006 Elections."Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference Pisa, 6-8 September, 2007.

Vaccari, C. (2008a). "Research Note: Italian Parties' Websites in the 2006 Elections." European Journal of Communication 23(1): 69.

Vaccari, C. (2008b). "Surfing to the Elysee: The Internet in the 2007 French Elections." French Politics 6(1): 1.

Vaccari, C. (2009). "Technology is a Commodity. The Internet in the 2008 United States Presidential Election". Paper presented at the workshop 'Citizen Politics: Are The New Media Reshaping Engagement?, Barcelona, 28-30 May 2009.

Van de Donk, W. e. a. (2004). Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements, Routledge.

Vedel, T. (2006). "The Idea of Electronic Democracy: Origins, Visions and Questions." Parliamentary Affairs 59(2): 226-235.

Vissers, S. and M. Hooghe (2007). The Role of Party Websites during Electoral Campaigns., InterMob paper vol: 8. Centre for Political Reserach

Vissers, S., M. Hooghe, et al. (2009). The Impact of Online and Offline mobilization on Participation Modes. Paper presented at the workshop 'Citizen Politics: Are The New Media Reshaping Engagement?, Barcelona, 28-30 May 2009.

Wall Matthew et al. (2009). Picking your party online – An investigation of Ireland's first online voting advice application, Information Polity Volume 14, Number 3 / 2009, pp. 203-218.

Wallsten, K. (2005). Political Blogs and the Bloggers Who Blog Them: An Analysis of the Who, What and Why of Political Blogging. Paper Presented at the Midwestern Political Science Association Annual Meeting Chicago, Illinois, April 7-9, 2005.

Wallsten, P. (2004). "No Disputing It: Blogs Are Major Players." The New York Times.

Ward, I. (2003). "Localizing the National': The Rediscovery and Reshaping of Local Campaigning in Australia." Party Politics 9(5): 583.

Ward, S. and R. Gibson (2003a). "Online and on message? Candidate web sites in the 2001 general election." British Journal of Politics and International Relations 5(2): 188-205.

Ward, S. and T. Vedel (2006). "Introduction: The potential of the Internet revisited." Parliamentary Affairs 59(2): 210-225.

Ward, S. and W. Lusoli (2005). "'From weird to wired': MPs, the internet and representative politics in the UK." The Journal of Legislative Studies 11(1): 57-81.

Ward, S., R. Gibson, et al. (2003b). "Parties and the Internet: An overview." Political parties and the Internet: Net gain: 11–38.

Ward, S., R. Gibson, et al. (2003c). "Online Participation and Mobilisation in Britain: Hype, Hope and Reality." Parliamentary Affairs 56(4): 652-668.

Ward, S., R. K. Gibson, et al. (2005). Parties and the Virtual Campaign: The 2005 Election Online.

Weeks, L. (2008). "We don't like (to) party: Explaining the significance of Independents in Irish political life." Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Dublin, Trinity College.

Weiner, M. (1987). "Empirical democratic theory." Competitive elections in developing countries: 3-34.

Whillock, R. K. (1998). "Digital Democracy: The'96 Presidential Campaign." The 1996 presidential campaign: a communication perspective: 179-197, Denton R.E., (ed). Praegers Series in Political Communication.

White, J. K. (2006). What is a political party? Handbook of party politics. R. a. C. Katz, W, SAGE: 5-16.

Williams, A., Trammell, K.D., Postelnicu, M.C., Landerville, K.D. and Martin, J.D. (2005). "Blogging and hyperlinking: use of the Web to enhance viability during the 2004 US campaign." Journalism Studies 6(2): 177-186.

Williams, B. and G. Gulati (2008a). "The political impact of Facebook: Evidence from the 2006 midterm elections and 2008 nomination contest." Politics and Technology Review,(1): 11-21.

Williams, C. a. G. G. (2008b). The Internet as a Grassroots Organizing Tool: Exploring the Role of Social Networks in the 2008 Presidential Nomination Contest. Presented at the Harvard Networks in Political Science Conference.

Williams, C. a. G. G. (2008c). What is a Social Network Worth? Facebook and Vote Share in the 2008 Presidential Primaries. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA, August 28-31, 2008.

Williams, C. B. (2009). Congressional Candidates' Use of YouTube in 2008: Its Frequency and Rationale. Online at: http://blogsandwikis.bentley.edu/politechmedia/?cat=11

Williams, C. B. a. G. J. (2009). Facebook Grows Up: An Empirical Assessment of its Role in the 2008 Congressional Elections. Paper presented at the 2009 annnual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. Chicago, Illinois, April 2, 2009.

Williams, C. B. and G. J. Gulati (2006). The evolution of online campaigning in congressional elections, 2000-2004. Online at http://blogsandwikis.bentley.edu/politechmedia/?cat=11

Williams, C. B. and G. J. Gulati (2007). Social networks in political campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 midterm elections. Online at: http://blogsandwikis.bentley.edu/politechmedia/?cat=11

Williamson, A. (2009). MPs Online: connecting with constituents: a study into how MPs use digital media to communicate with their constituents M. H. Society, Hansard Society.

Zielmann, S. and U. Rottger (2009). "Characteristics and Developments of Political Party Web Campaigns in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States between 1997 and 2007." Political Campaigning on the Web: 69-92, Baringhorst S. (ed). Media Upheavals.

Zittel, T. (2007). "Lost in Technology? Political Parties and Online-Campaigning in Mixed Member Electoral Systems."Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference Pisa, 6-8 September, 2007. A slightly revised version of this paper is published in the Journal of Information Technology and Politics, Vol. 6, Issue 3&4, July 2009, pp. 289-311.