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Mobilizing Effects of Online Campaigning

Swiss parties' activities in e-campaigning and how the use of ICT contributes in engaging the party base as voters and volunteer campaigners

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Abstract: Elections are a culminating point of political parties' communicative endeavors. Election campaigns afford considerable efforts and in light of restricted financial and personal resources should be carried out as efficiently and effectively as possible. This especially holds true for Swiss cantonal parties that largely carry out their campaigns on a voluntary basis. Based on a larger research project, this paper explores the relevance of online as opposed to more traditional campaigning with regard to the content and activity-oriented mobilization of the party base. The analysis is based on interviews with campaign managers, a survey among the party base and on a content analysis of party web sites. Contrary to many studies in the field, the discussion is not confined to an analysis of how parties engage in online campaigning, but also examines how particular communication channels, such as party web sites and social media are assessed and used by their members and supporters. On the supply-side of e-campaigning, results suggest that the sophistication of party web sites partly relates to the size and available resources of a given party, while the adoption of specific features rather relates to the type of party unit (youth vs. cantonal, local parties). On the demand side, research shows that the communicative preferences and behavior of younger members and supporters clearly differ from those of older age groups in that they are more open to online communication and campaigning. Members and supporters in fact use ICT (social networks, party web sites) to get involved as volunteer campaigners. Within the range of voluntary campaign activities, e-campaigning by now plays a subordinate role however. Still, results suggest that there is potential for parties to further mobilize their supporter base by providing adequate instruments such as online campaigning material.

Keywords: e-Campaigning, Political Parties, Party Web Sites, Social Media, Mobilization, Switzerland

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The Internet has become an important instrument in political campaigning for a broad range of political actors. Since the 1996 presidential campaign, online political marketing has irrevocably become part of the campaigning repertoire in the US and it was not long that political parties in other countries joined this trend. The question is therefore not whether, but how the Internet is being used in the context of election campaigning (Kamps 2007). Additional benefits

of engaging in online-communication are that parties can provide regular, target-specific as well as ad hoc information at less cost. Web sites, blogs and social networks provide political parties and candidates with new opportunities for self-promotion. By exploiting new communication formats, parties can freshen their campaign and potentially render themselves more attractive to new supporter groups. Furthermore, parties are not only offered new channels for establishing contact with their party base, but also for mobilizing them as volunteers in campaigning, e.g. as communication multipliers. This latter aspect is at the core of the present paper.

The following discussion examines how Swiss cantonal parties engaged in online campaigning during the elections for parliament in 2009/2010. The focus is on how the parties use information and communication technologies (ICT) to inform and engage the party base as voters and campaigning volunteers. The supply-side is contrasted by a demand-side of e-campaigning. The aim is to examine through which channels the members and supporters would like to be addressed by their parties, which channels they use as sources of information in the context of the elections and what role online communication plays in that respect. A closer analysis of the usage of party web sites and social networks by the party base is aimed at assessing whether specific forms of e-campaigning in fact are likely to have a mobilizing effect on members and supporters with regard to their engagement as multipliers in the campaign. In a final section, online campaigning activities by the party base are compared to other voluntary campaigning activities in order to draw some general conclusions on the relevance of ICT in the context of activity-oriented mobilization. In all areas of analysis, special attention is devoted to notable differences with regard to different age groups.

1. E-Parties in the Light of Current Research Discussions

There is a growing body of literature on the online activities of political parties and politicians (cf. Foot et al., 2009). Scholarly discussion on the use of the Internet by political parties often ties in to reflections on the democratic potential of the Internet for politics in general. Two major lines of argumentation have emerged over time (Lillecker et al., 2011 see also Anstead & Chadwick, 2009): The *equalization hypothesis* implies that the Internet has the potential of altering existing power relations, by offering the possibility of surpassing the need of having access to traditional media in order to exert political influence. The *normalization hypothesis* conversely suggests that existing power relations are reflected online (captured by the term "politics as usual", Margolis & Resnick, 2000) or even reinforced. Accordingly, research on political parties' use of the Internet has focused on differences in the adoption of ICT by smaller parties as opposed to major parties with regard to the mere web presence, the sophistication of web sites or the adoption of features or communication channels related to Web 2.0. Empirical evidence has been provided for both hypotheses, supporting the *ebb and flow thesis* (Lillecker et al., 2011) which suggests that parties innovate their web presences independent of size, while partly stressing different functions. Further potentially influential factors such as the media environment, the political environment, organizational capacity, ideology, age and status are discussed by Ward & Gibson (2009) with regard to political organizations in general. Their discussion of empirical evidence suggests that incentives to adopt ICT are "likely to be greatest among young, oppositional network-style organizations with a dispersed internet-literate and participatory support base" (ibid: 37). Research on party websites mainly focuses on their content and distinguishes different communicative functions such as information, mobilization, participation and presentation. With

regard to mobilization these studies for instance assess, whether features that enable e-volunteering, allow for becoming a party member or donating money are existent. Relatively little seems to be known however, to what extent such features are actually being used. Studies on how e-campaigning and the use of specific online media affect political engagement or electoral outcomes are generally more limited and provide mixed evidence (cf. e.g. Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Towner & Dulio, 2011; Bouliane, 2009).

2. Object of Investigation, Data and Methodology

In Switzerland, cantonal elections are a relevant focus of interest for several reasons. Within the Swiss political system that is characterized by pronounced federal structures, the cantonal as well as the communal political level are assigned specific powers in various areas. Unlike other nations, these competences and the right of self-determination of the Swiss cantons are far-reaching (Vatter 2002: 17). The Swiss party system reveals a decentralized structure that is reflected in a large number of small and heterogeneous party units at the local level. Swiss parties receive few state subsidies and rely primarily on self-financing through member fees or donations (Linder, 2004). In that respect and also with regard to exerting their influence on society as a whole, national parties depend on the party units at subordinate political levels (Geser, 2011). Cantonal and local parties thus play an important role in establishing linkage to the party base.

As with many European parties, Swiss parties currently face the problem of an eroding party base (Ladner & Meuli, 2005) and an increase of volatile voters. The parties' self-presentation in elections therefore generally gains in importance. Accordingly, expenses reserved for campaigning make up a rather large part of the local and cantonal parties' budgets. On average a cantonal party's budget during the election year amounted to approximately a quarter million Swiss francs in 2007 (Gunzinger, 2008). In accordance to their financial resources, Swiss parties exhibit a rather low level of professionalization. Taking the percentage of paid party work as an indicator in that respect, earlier research shows that in 2001 only 45% of the cantonal parties actually had some paid staff while the other parties worked entirely on a voluntary basis (Ladner & Brändle, 2001 cit. in Gunzinger, 2008). Being able to mobilize party activists as volunteer campaigners is therefore essential, especially when taking into account, that the efforts related to campaigning are considerable. However, there is little empirically tested evidence on how elections are organized at the cantonal level, which members voluntarily engage in campaigning and how the distribution of tasks is established party internally. The same holds true for Swiss parties' use of the Internet in general (cf. Fraefel et al., 2010a) and its potential with regard to mobilizing the party base in particular.

The paper presents results from a larger research project aimed at examining the communicative structures and practices of Swiss parties in the context of election campaigns for cantonal parliaments. Among other research questions, the project sought to establish whether the way parties communicate with their support base matches the demands and preferences of their members and supporters and how communication contributes to mobilizing them for voluntarily engaging in the campaign. As a distinct part of the overall project, the research focused on the relevance of ICT as opposed to more traditional modes of communication in today's work of Swiss parties. The research was conducted during January 2009 and May 2011 and focused on the campaigns of the four major parties represented in national government, namely the Radical Democrats (FDP), Christian Democrats (CVP), Social Democrats (SP) and the Swiss People's Party

(SVP) as well as the Greens (GP) in three selected cantons which held elections at the time (Berne 2010, Aargau 2009 and Neuchâtel 2009). Research data was collected via 25 semi-structured interviews with party officials and campaign managers, a survey among 9472 party members and supporters (response: 1920 valid questionnaires), a content analysis of 55 party web sites across different party units (15 cantonal parties, 27 local parties, 13 cantonal youth sections) as well as a selective analysis of corresponding social network profiles.

Several restrictions shall briefly be discussed. Due to differing time frames in data collection and availability it was not possible to generate entirely corresponding samples of interviewees and party web sites. With regard to the survey among members and supporters it must be noted that respondents are not equally distributed with regard to age, the majority being over 50 years old.¹ It must also be kept in mind that participants are to be considered as being rather active already – 14% of the respondents in the sample for instance stood for elections themselves.

3. Results

3.1. Communicative Strategies in the Campaign Management of Swiss Parties

With regard to political parties as organisations with “fragmented and loosely linked structures” (Deeg & Weibler, 2005, p. 25) one can neither assume that all members are aware of what the party expects from them in the context of an election campaign, nor that all members and supporters are provided with the relevant information concerning the campaign. Party internal communication therefore fulfils two central functions: first, the content-oriented mobilization, i.e. informing the party base and second, the activity-oriented mobilization of members and supporters, i.e. inciting them to go to the votes and/or to actively participate in the campaign (Kamps, 2007, p. 170).

Based on the interviews we find that the efforts dedicated to party internal communication may differ depending on campaign managers’ assumptions on whether the party base will become engaged anyway or whether it affords repetitive calls and target-oriented information in order to reach participation. Besides informing the broader party base, the examined parties’ internal communication is mostly targeted at mobilizing members and supporters to vote for their party and to engage in viral political marketing in their personal environment. It is primarily the already active members who are expected to take over particular tasks in the campaign such as distributing flyers or being present at party stands.

The Internet potentially plays a role both as a source of information and as an instrument for supporting the party base to engage themselves as volunteers in the campaign. Based on the interviews with party officials and campaign managers the examined parties reveal quite similar approaches in designing their campaign communication. Parties make use of as broad a range of communication channels as possible in order to reach potential voters and the party base irrespectively. This is not least due to a lack of knowledge with regard to the use or preference of specific media or communication channels by their audience. Exclusive communication with the supporter base mainly takes place through the party press, (personal) letters and e-mails. Attempts towards target-specific communication are most observable with regard to the younger electorate and party base. Most campaign managers consider it necessary to provide at least a minimum

¹ This may also relate to data collection (questionnaire distributed via postal mail through party secretaries). The total number of respondents indicating their age is 1833 (-20: 0%, 20-29: 4%, 30-39: 8%, 50-59: 23%, 60-69: 28%, 70-79: 14%, 80+: 5%).

level of online communication in order to keep up with the assumed communicative demands of this target-group. To this end, the examined parties primarily use their official web site and to a lesser extent also video platforms and social networks.

3.2. The Supply Side of e-Campaigning

E-Campaigning via Party Web sites

Generally, the design and use of the examined party web sites is very heterogeneous, among organisations of one and the same party as well as among parties of a particular political level, thus reflecting the decentralised Swiss party system (see Fraefel et al., 2010a). Patterns in the use of websites are mostly observable with regard to different types of party units, less so with regard to party affiliations. The most important communicative function of all examined web sites is information. In that respect, media specific opportunities are not systematically exploited. Features that allow visitors to stay connected, e.g. via RSS feeds or by signing up for an e-newsletter or the party press are only partially integrated – mostly by the cantonal parties and their corresponding youth sections. Participative functions, such as public interaction between the parties and the visitors of their web sites are hardly integrated. Also, the design of the party web sites does not provide a lot of multi-media elements. It is primarily the cantonal youth parties that integrate such features rather consistently. These general trends towards top down information as opposed to rather few opportunities for interaction are also observable in other countries (cf. e.g. Schweitzer, 2011; Vaccari, 2008).

With regard to campaign communication in particular, the content analysis of the party web sites confirms the interviewees' assessment that online campaigning has gained in importance, but also reveals some deficiencies in this respect. The majority of homepages inform about the upcoming elections quite prominently (85%) and provide additional information on the candidates (78%). Conversely, 15% of the examined parties do not inform about the elections at all. It is mainly local parties and cantonal youth sections that do not engage in e-campaigning on their web sites. Interviews with local party representatives suggest that a lack of resources (personnel, time, know-how, tools) plays a role in that respect.

Party web sites cannot only be used for informing the party base, but also for mobilizing them. While most parties promote membership on their web sites (78%) only a minority of them also promote donating money to the party or the campaign (40%). 36% of the web sites provide access to downloading signature lists used for enforcing popular votes that are regularly carried out in Switzerland on all political levels. Youth parties provide them slightly more often (46%) than cantonal (40%) or local parties (30%). Members and supporters who wanted to become active as multipliers in the examined election campaigns had access to campaign materials (digitized flyers, posters, election programs or e-cards) on 38% of the examined party web sites. Again we find significant differences between the different types of party units – it is mainly the cantonal parties that exploit these opportunities (73%), less so the local (30%) and youth parties (15%) ($\chi^2 .003$, $df 2$). However, across all types of parties, campaign material that can be distributed seamlessly has not often been propagated by the time of our research, only 9% of the analyzed web sites provided such opportunities. Interviews suggest that campaign managers do not necessarily expect the broad party base to actively participate in online campaigning, but rather provide campaign material for members who stand for election.

E-Campaigning via Social Media

On their web sites, only few of the examined cantonal and local parties promoted their other online activities. While 36% of the parties included in the content analysis had their own Facebook profile, only 9% drew attention to it – other social networks were not promoted at all. While a majority of the parties at the cantonal level were present on Facebook (cantonal parties 67%, youth sections 62%) this was rarely the case for parties at the local level (7%, $\chi^2 .000$, df 2).

The campaign managers' assessments of the use of e-campaigning on Facebook were quite heterogeneous (cf. Fraefel et al., 2010b). Most interviewees did not dare to draw any conclusions on the effectiveness of this campaigning instrument. A brief assessment of the party profiles reveals that there is hardly any interaction between the parties and the public. Only few people followed the parties on Facebook at the time of our research and neither visitors nor parties contributed much to the discussion. It may well be however that interaction rather takes place among individuals, that is with candidates or party representatives. How strongly the use of Facebook is propagated internally may differ even within a given party and seems to relate to how interested a party is in addressing new and especially younger voters. Some parties aspired that all candidates have their own profile while others entrusted this decision to the candidates themselves. Generally, the use of Facebook as a campaigning instrument in the cantonal 2009/2010 elections can be considered as experimental. Recent empirical studies suggest a continued trend towards e-campaigning via Facebook in national as well as cantonal elections, despite prevailing doubts about the mobilization potential of such endeavours (Koller, 2011a, b).

Another instrument for e-campaigning is videos, distributed either through the party web sites or via social networks such as Youtube and Dailymotion. At the time of data collection, all parties maintained at least one video channel, mostly provided by cantonal parties or cantonal youth sections ($\chi^2 .023$, df 2). Based on the interviews with campaign managers, video campaigning received uptake by the media in one of the examined cantons in particular, serving as an incentive to engage in this type of campaigning and as an explanation for observable spillover effects. In the canton of Neuchâtel, almost half of the parties included in the content analysis had their own video channel (43%) while this was considerably less the case in the canton of Berne (5%) or Aargau (15%) ($\chi^2 .015$, df 2).² This finding is confirmed when looking at how often videos were integrated on the parties' web sites (Neuchâtel 43%, Aargau 25%, Berne 19%, $\chi^2 .289$, df 2). Swiss parties thus reveal similar video campaigning strategies towards a media rather than an electoral arena, as campaigners in other countries (cf. Towner & Dulio, 2011).

3.3. The Recipient and Demand Side of E-Campaigning

Communicative Preferences of the Party Base in General

With regard to party communication in general, the survey among members and supporters of the examined parties shows that traditional communication channels by and indirect information on the parties still play an important role. Most participants in the study favored to be informed via the media or the party press. When asked how they would like to be informed or contacted by their party, articles, interviews and debates in the local press (85%), the party press (82%) and articles, interviews and debates on TV (75%) or the radio (70%) obtained the greatest approval.

² Whether a video channel has in fact been set up by the parties themselves, could not be established.

58% of the participants would “very much” or “rather” be informed and contacted via e-newsletters and more than half of them appreciate e-mail (52%) or personal letters (51%). 49% of the participants assess party stands positively as an opportunity for interpersonal communication, while information material distributed to the households gains less approval (38%). Looking at the party base on the whole, social networks as a communication channel are hardly popular (13%), phone calls and personal visits that can be considered as important campaigning instruments in the US are appreciated the least (9% and 7%).

When comparing the communication preferences of the members and supporters of different age groups we find some notable differences. 70% of the party base aged up to 29 years “rather” or “very much” appreciates being informed and contacted via social networks, while a minority of 30% of the 30-40 years old, 15% of the 45-59 years old and 6% of the 60 years and elder does so as well ($\chi^2 .000$, df 3). The approval of other online communication channels, namely e-newsletter and personal e-mail also diminishes with age, however less accentuated ($\chi^2 .000$, df 3). The youngest age group is also slightly more open to more direct communication channels, such as party stands and phone calls (see figure 1). The finding on social networks confirms results from European surveys on media usage in the context of politics (TNS Opinion & Social, 2011).

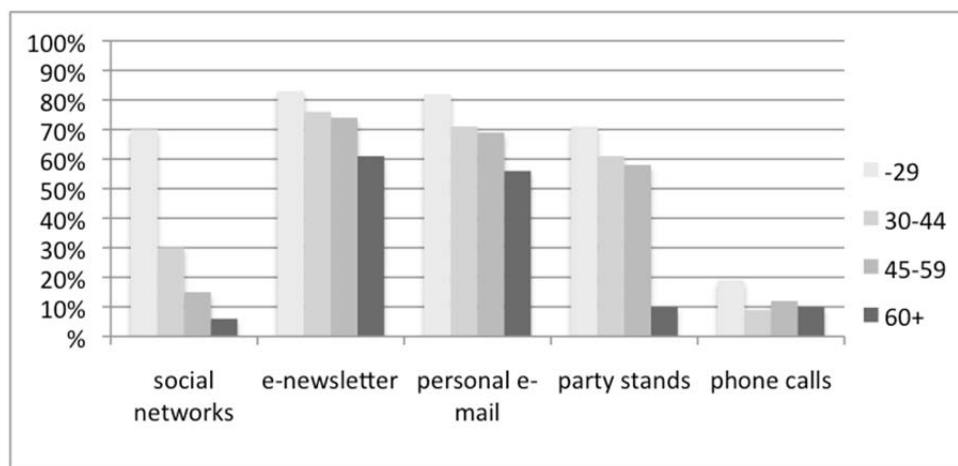


Figure 1: Preference of communication channels according to age groups

Mobilizing the Party Base as Voters through different information channels

In the survey, members and supporters of the examined parties were asked what kind of channels they use to inform themselves before cantonal elections and popular votes. The results show some analogies with the preferred information and communication channels in general: The media and local newspapers in particular are important sources of information (88%, 78%). Even though receiving information material to the household is not particularly appreciated (see above), this campaigning instrument receives considerable attention (75%). Further important sources of information are discussions with friends and family (62%). Party web sites (29%), interpersonal communication at party stands and events (22%) or direct information from the party office (8%) received comparably less attention. Again, we find some notable differences with regard to differing age groups however: While most communication channels are almost equally important to members and supporters of all ages (media in general, discussions with friends and family, e-mail and events), party web sites are a rather important source of information for the younger electorate, while they pay less attention to the local press ($\chi^2 .000$, df 3) (see figure 2).

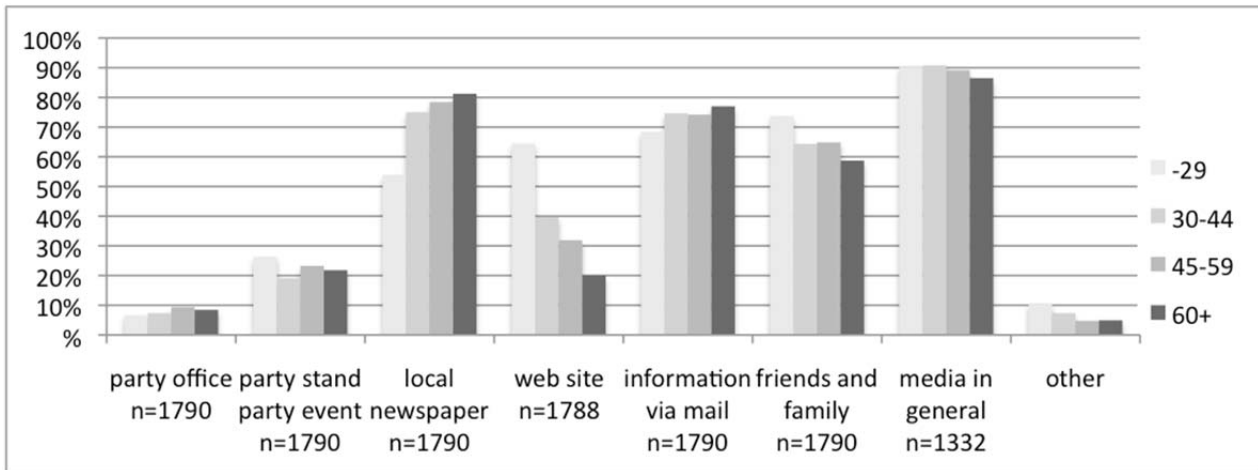


Figure 2: Sources of information on elections according to age groups

Even though the members and supporters do not equally consult party web sites for informing themselves on the elections, the party base across all age groups considers it “very” or “rather important” that their party disposes a “professional” Internet presence (very: 58%, rather: 35%, n=1628). What can be derived from this is that e-campaigning is not least a question of image and not necessarily one of designing communication effectively, at least not equally for all age groups.

Mobilizing the Party Base as Multipliers in Campaigning through Party Web Sites

In accordance to the findings above, the party base on the whole frequents the parties’ web sites differently, depending on the level of the party units. A majority of the members and supporters who participated in the survey visited their cantonal party’s website at least once a year (58%) while this was less the case for web sites at the local level (districts 50% and communal level 33%). Systematic differences in the use of this communication channel by users of different age groups are again notable: the younger the surveyed persons are, the bigger is the proportion of those who actually use the web sites and also, the bigger is the proportion of visitors who use the web site regularly ($\chi^2 .000$, df 12)(see figure 3).

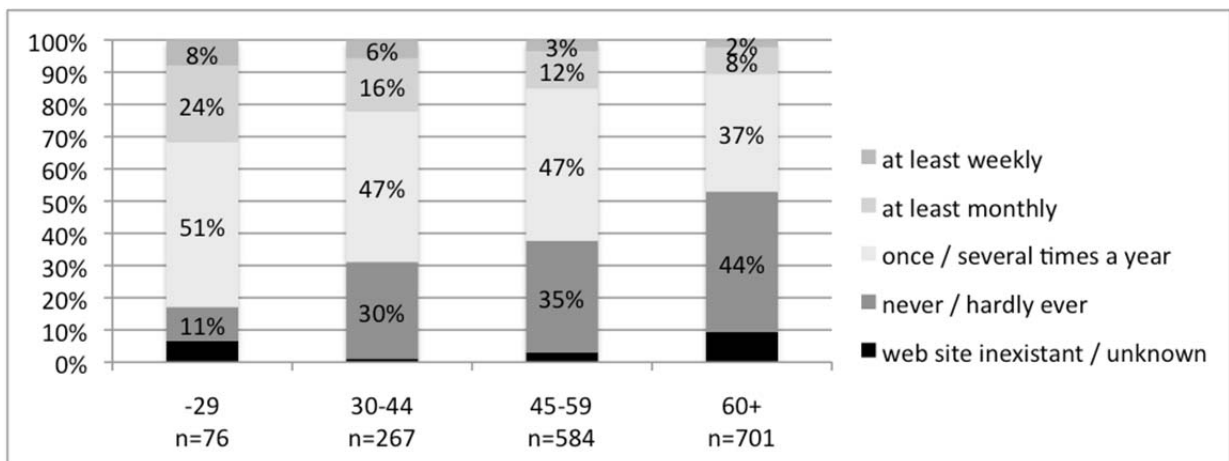


Figure 3: Use of cantonal party websites according to age groups

In the survey the members and supporters were also asked what motivates them to visit the parties’ web sites (see figure 4). Information on elections and popular votes is clearly the most frequent type of usage (81%), followed by information on the party in general (68%), on party

events and dates (60%), contact information (45%) and information on party representatives (42%). Besides informing, party web sites actually seem to have a mobilizing effect with regard to viral political campaigning. 30% of the members and supporters accessed party web sites for downloading signature lists that are provided for engaging the electorate in petitions or popular votes. 16% used the website for downloading or disseminating campaign material. Even though these rates are not particularly high, they are notable, when taking into account that such opportunities must not necessarily be opened up by all parties as the content analysis has shown (see above). A smaller interest for other content and formats of communication that are not a widespread among the party web sites (donation, audios/videos, forums) is also observable.

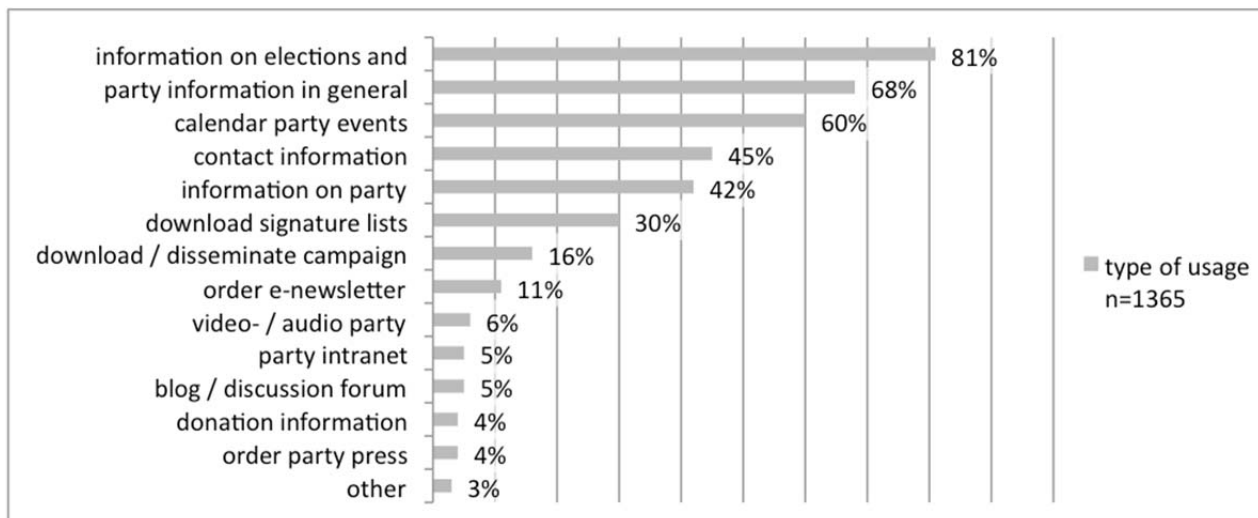


Figure 4: Usage of party web sites by the party base

Even though Swiss cantonal and local parties primarily use their web sites to provide information and integrate rather few features that promote interactivity or serve a multimedia design, the party base generally assesses their parties' web sites positively. As expected, cantonal parties' web sites are rated slightly better than those on the subordinate party levels. A majority of around four fifths of the members and supporters who visit the websites sporadically or regularly assesses their quality as "good" or "very good". Critical assessments are primarily provided by younger users: among all up to 29 years old who rated the cantonal parties' web sites, 34% had a "bad" or "very bad" impression (30-44: 15%, 45-59: 10%, 60+: 14%, χ^2 .000, df 9).

Mobilizing the Party Base as Multipliers in Campaigning through Social Media

Campaign managers of Swiss cantonal and local parties do not necessarily pursue a social media campaigning strategy and there is some uncertainty with regard to the cost-benefit ratio of engaging in communicating through social networks.

Among those members and supporters who explicitly appreciated being contacted or informed via social networks (n=245) only around a third (34%) were also reached through this channel by their party. The match between demand and supply is clearly better for other communication channels tested in the study. As has been shown however, the broad party base that with regard to the participants in our study is older in age, are not particularly interested in communication via social networks and also cannot necessarily be reached through this channel. Overall, 23% of the questioned supporter base actually has a personal profile in at least one social network, mostly on Facebook (n=1826). As expected, the rates are considerably higher in the youngest age group than

in the others (85%, 30-44: 40%, 45-59: 25%, 60+: 8%). In the survey, respondents were also asked whether and how they use social networks in the context of party politics.

A majority of 57% of the party base that has a social network profile does not use it in the context of their party affiliation (n=413). 28% of them however use it for political persuasion in the elections and popular votes and thus engage themselves as voluntary e-campaigners (candidates: 56%, non-candidates: 16%). Another 23% uses social networks for an exchange with other members and supporters (candidates: 32%, non-candidates: 19%) and 10% use it for coordinating dates and events (candidates: 16%, non-candidates: 7%). Members who stood for election obviously used their profile more actively than non-candidates. Still, political engagement via social media also plays at least some role for other party members and supporters.

3.4. Relevance of Potential Multiplication Effects in E-Campaigning

When seeking to assess the role of e-campaigning especially with regard to mobilizing members and supporters as volunteers in the campaign it is worth comparing this type of campaigning activity to more traditional opportunities for supporting one's own party. As could be expected, the members who stood for election are generally more active than the non-candidates (see table 1). While 41% of the candidates engage in some sort of e-campaigning, other activities, such as being present at party stands (76%) or distributing flyers (77%) still play a greater role. Among the other members and supporters, e-campaigning by now plays a subordinate role with 6% of them engaging in this kind of activity.

Table 1: Campaigning activities of candidates and non-candidates

campaigning activity (all activities listed here: (χ^2 .000, df 1)	% of candidates n=259	% of non-candidates n=1625
engaging in campaigning committee, action group	51%	8%
presence at party stand	76%	13%
distributing posters, flyers	77%	24%
discussions with family, friends	78%	57%
online campaigning	41%	6%
donating to campaign	52%	38%

When looking at what motivates the party base to engage themselves as volunteer campaigners during elections we find that communicative mobilization by the parties generally is an important factor in that respect. 65% of the participants responded that their motivation was incited by personally being asked to become active, 45% answered that a general call by the party worked as motivation. This finding is confirmed when looking at those respondents who were not active, but stated that under other conditions they were willing to engage themselves (n=153). 48% of them would participate if they were addressed personally, for 49% of them such an engagement would need to be realized in a limited time frame and with little effort. 22% would want to perform this activity from home and 14% would expect that their party provide them with campaigning material. These latter affordances could potentially be met or supported by using ICT in a target- and goal oriented way. This includes providing forms of collaboration that do not underlie

temporal or spatial restrictions. It also includes providing adequate instruments for voluntary e-campaigning. Similar to interpersonal discussions with friends and family, political viral marketing through the Internet can be considered as a low-threshold activity that may contribute to mobilizing further groups of potential voters and communication multipliers.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to analyse in what ways Swiss cantonal parties engage in e-campaigning via party web sites and social media and to contrast their communicative endeavors online with the communicative preferences and behavior of younger as opposed to older members and supporters of the party. With regard to the supply side of e-campaigning the results provide some support for the *ebb and flow thesis*: While a distinction between cantonal parties as opposed to local parties and youth sections rather confirms the *normalization hypothesis* in that resources may play a role with regard to the sophistication of web sites, it is in particular the youth sections' web sites that adopt interactive and multi-medial features. Specific opportunities offered through the Internet such as providing different forms of campaign material for viral political marketing are partially, but not systematically exploited. Campaign managers assess online campaigning to be important with regard to addressing younger voters, without having any information on the communicative preferences of their party base. They engage in campaign communication through a broad range of communication channels. Within this range, traditional channels such as the party press, posters, newspaper advertisements, party stands, postcards and flyers still play a prominent role from the supply- as well as the demand-side of communication. The survey among members and supporters reveal, that online communication channels such as e-mail, e-newsletters and particularly social networks are indeed more important to the younger party base. They visit party web sites more frequently and consider them an important source of information on elections, however also assess their quality more critically. Since party internal communication works as a strong motivational factor for members and supporters to become active in the campaign it seems important that the parties' communicative endeavors relate to the communicative behavior of their addressees. With regard to online communication there is certainly room for improvement, especially with a view to future party members and supporters. Younger party members and supporters are generally also more likely to engage as online communication multipliers in the campaign, for instance via social media. While e-campaigning as a voluntary campaign activity by now plays a smaller role than more traditional activities, the results suggest that there is a mobilizing potential in that respect, which parties could better exploit by providing adequate instruments. With regard to the mobilization potential of different communication channels it must be kept in mind however that the survey addressed members and supporters who can be considered as being already politically active and thus, the results cannot necessarily be transferred to the electorate at large.

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