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Greek Parties and Web 2.0

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Abstract

Web 2.0 has transformed user involvement and has created more active, more engaged, more participative and more demanding users, citizens and voters. This work investigates party initiatives on the Web 2.0 over a period that covers the European Parliament Elections of 2009, the October 2009 Greek National Elections and the Greek Financial Crisis in spring of 2010. The use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn, Friendfeed, as well as Multimedia applications networking such as YouTube, Flickr and Second Life and Collaborative Media as Delicious are the foci of this work. Furthermore this study undertakes an in-depth analysis of the use of Facebook by the two leading Greek parties. The findings provide evidence that i) web 2.0 may have had an impact on the final result outcome ii) parties feel safe implementing a tight “top-down” campaign communication strategy without exploring all participatory features of web 2.0 tools iii) Web 2.0 tools used within the context of political crisis periods lead to a rise in the growth of “bottom up” campaigns by users, iv) Party Web 2.0 online activity and user participation to party activities follow opposite directions in a crisis period, as users significantly increase their participation and parties are prone to lower their online activity. Finally our study suggests an indicator based on quantitative features from Facebook that is more likely to be close to the expected outcome election result.

Early Web 1.0 Campaigns

The mid-1990s was the period when the web was “discovered” by politicians and parties around the world as a new medium that could be incorporated into their campaign strategy. From an early attempt in the US presidential elections of 1992

(Diamond, et. al 1993; Myers, 1993; Hacker, et. al., 1996) campaigning on the web by politicians has increased its usage in every electoral circle thereafter. The first attempts of politicians around the world to use the web have been the subject of investigation by many researchers. Such extensive studies on the USA covered Presidential and Congressional campaigns on the web (Bimber, 1998; Browning, 1996; Casey, 1996; Corrado and Firestone 1996; D' Alessio, 2000; Dulio, et al 1999; Farnsworth and Owen, 2001; Foot, et al 2003; Kaid and Bystrom 1998; Kern 1997; Klotz 1997; Margolis, et al 1999; Puopolo 2001; Rash, 1997; Schneider and Foot, 2002; Whillock 1997; Williams, et al 2002;). A number of electoral contests have also been studied in the United Kingdom (UK) (Yates and Perrone 1998; Margolis, et. al. 1999; Ward and Gibson 2003; Marcella, et. al. 2003). Beyond the USA and UK contexts, web campaigns studies have been conducted for Italy (Newell 2001), Finland (Carlson and Djupsund 2001), Germany (Gibson and Rommele 2003), Netherlands (Tops, et. al. 2000), Australia (Gibson and McAllister 2003) to name just a few cases from the many studies in the literature. Moreover, the use of the web by parties and politicians has been the focus of many studies around the world as in the Netherlands (Voerman 1998), Russia and Ukraine (Semetko and Krasnoboka 2003), Denmark (Lofgren 2000), and Japan (Tkatch-Kawasaki 2003), naming just a few cases from the long catalog. Regarding Greece the study of online politics, has also attracted the interest of researchers (Kotsikopoulou 2002; Demertzis and Armenakis 2003; Yannas and Lappas 2004; Yannas and Lappas 2005a; Yannas and Lappas 2005b; Demertzis,et. al. 2005; Lappas et. al. 2008).

Campaign websites at that period were mainly providing political and campaign information. The interactivity features and the interaction of the campaigner with their voters was a favourite subject in almost all web 1.0 campaign related studies. Blogs have provide a more interactive form of communication and became popular in political campaigns since the 2004 election cycle in the USA (Trammel, et. al. 2006). The adoption of the “web 2.0” term, created the “web 1.0” term for distinguishing the “old” web with limited interaction from the new web featuring the new interactive tools.

Thus, the main characteristic of the web1.0 campaigns signified that electoral campaigns were dominated by information provision material of the campaigner leaving limited space for citizen interaction and participation. On the one hand candidates and parties adopted new communication technologies in their campaigns to demonstrate that they had espoused technological developments and to project an image of a forward looking candidate or party. On the other hand evidence (Stromer-Galley, 2000) showed that candidates were actually trying to avoid interacting with voters. were not eager to interact with voters. The emergence of Web 2.0 enabled a qualitative shift in the flow of communication from one-way to two-way. Researchers could thus dwell upon the many new interactive tools of Web 2.0 to investigate the use of the new media by parties and candidates in their campaigns.

The emergence of Web 2.0 in party campaigns

The emergence of Web 2.0 tools allowed users to change roles from a passive audience of a web page to becoming actual contributors of web content. This dialogic feature brought people together providing opportunities for social networking and dialogic communication and soon a medium with the name “social media” was

coined. Wikis, Facebook, My Space, YouTube, Flickr and any web medium that users may contribute with content is referred to as social media. The massive content contribution by group of users held the promise for better citizen participation in politics enhancing the potential of e-democracy. Web 2.0 provides opportunities for individuals to become citizen-campaigners capable of assuming a more direct or organized role in a campaign ([Gibson, 2009](#)), elevating hopes for the growth of “bottom-up” campaigns. Initial studies of parties experimenting with web 2.0 ([Kalnes, 2009](#)) showed that although Web 2.0 offers a weak pluralizing effect in party communication, it enhanced participatory democracy by lowering the threshold for the involvement of the party grassroots and other sympathizers with the party.

The effect of web 2.0 in campaigning appears already in a number of studies ([Gibson and McAllister, 2009](#); [Jackson and Lilleker 2009](#); [Jaeger et.al. 2010](#); [Kalnes 2009](#); [Lilleker et. al 2010](#)), offering interesting findings on the use of web 2.0 in the political arena. [Gibson and McAllister \(2009\)](#) studied web 2.0 campaign in the Australian Federal Elections. Their findings demonstrated that online campaigning did attract votes and campaigns based on the older web 1.0 tools only seemed to be losing votes compared to the more technologically advanced counterpart campaigns. [Jaeger et.al. \(2010\)](#) compared the use of social networks in the 2008 campaigns for US president and Prime Minister of Canada. The effects of web 2.0 to parties have been investigated by [Kalnes \(2009\)](#) on the use of Web 2.0 by Norwegian Parties. According to Kalnes, Web 2.0 enhanced participatory democracy and party visibility in Web 2.0 roughly reflected party vote share. [Jackson and Lilleker \(2009\)](#) study of UK parties on Web 2.0 focused on the participatory architecture of political communication, introducing the term “web 1.5” to better fit the current approach by parties in using Web 2.0 tools as promotional and marketing tools in campaigns. [Lilleker et. al \(2010\)](#) study of Web 2.0 by the Liberal Democrat party in UK found a “weak interactivity” for the party.

Specific new Web 2.0 environments like Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, My Space and Second Life have attracted parties and politicians and their use in politics become the focus of research in a number of studies:

Facebook is often referenced by campaign staff members as a channel to reach young voters. First use of Facebook in election campaigns started in September 2006, as Facebook invited candidates for U.S. Senate and House of Representative elections ([Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008](#)) to participate in this network targeting younger-than-25 age voters. [Westling \(2007\)](#) considers Facebook an excellent tool for informing, mobilizing and organizing political supporters. Facebook adoption diffused rapidly in the US between 2006 and 2008 Congressional Elections generating interest among researchers for studying the Facebook phenomenon in these elections contests ([Robertson et. al. 2009](#), [Williams and Gullati 2007, 2009a, 2009b](#)). A number of studies have focused on Facebook usage in the US Presidential elections ([Robertson et. al 2009, 2010](#), [Small, 2008](#); [Williams and Gullati, 2008](#)). [Small \(2008\)](#) compared facebook usage between US and Canadian elections. [Sweetser and Lariscy \(2008\)](#) content analysis of Facebook wall comments in U.S. House and Senate races in 2006 midterm elections revealed that individuals who wrote on candidate walls perceived themselves to be on friendly terms with the candidates and their messages were overwhelmingly shallow, supportive and in positive tone. The use of Facebook in National Election Campaigns in Denmark was studied by [Andersen and Medaglia](#)

(2009), who contend that users view Facebook in election campaigns as a medium of information provision by the parties and as a means to gain social prestige.

Campaigning on YouTube was first used during 2006 and 2008 US elections (Church 2010, Gulati and Williams 2010; Klotz, 2010; Wallsten, 2010). Carlson and Strandberg's (2008) study on the effects of YouTube in 2007 Finnish national elections found that YouTube played a marginal role in the elections, provided a voice for certain minor electoral players and also allowed ordinary citizens to play a role in the elections by disseminating political information. Links to YouTube videos by Facebook walls is explored by Robertson et. al (2010) showing that neither Facebook nor YouTube can be viewed as an isolated political discourse environment, forming a multidimensional communication environment.

Twitter recently gained attention for its usage in political campaigns. Williams and Gullati (2010) studied the use of Twitter by members of Congress whereas Tumasjan et. al (2010) proposed a challenging approach to use the tweets for predicting election results in the context of German federal elections.

The effect of MySpace, another networking site, in elections has been less studied than Facebook and YouTube. Ancu and Cozma (2009) work on the 2008 US election revealed that voters are drawn to this source of political information mainly by the desire for social interaction with other like-minded supporters, followed by information seeking and entertainment.

“Second Life” and virtual worlds are the most unusual social networks that can be used in political campaigns. Candidates of US 2008 national elections had offices in Second Life (Graf, 2008).

Thus far, research has not reached conclusive results on the impact Web 2.0 technology has on elections. Findings point in the direction that the impact seems to be rather positive and citizen participation enabled by the use of this technology seems to be raising the prospects of e-democracy projects.

In this paper we explore the use of social media by parties during the April 09-June10 period in Greece. This period is loaded with campaign information, spanning two electoral campaigns (European Parliament Elections in June 09, National Elections in October 09) and the outbreak of the Greek Financial Crisis (Spring 10). This period afforded us the opportunity to compare the different online strategies of Greek parties regarding the three periods as well as examine user reaction patterns over these periods. The timing for studying the emergence of the new media in Greek politics is ideal given that during this period Greek parties undertook their first steps on Web 2.0 adding data and knowledge on the time-line of online campaigns in Greece created by previous studies (Kotsikopoulou 2002; Demertzis and Armenakis 2003; Yannas and Lappas 2004; Yannas and Lappas 2005a; Yannas and Lappas 2005b; Demertzis, et. al. 2005; Lappas et. al. 2008).

Web Campaign Patterns in Greek Elections

Kotsikopoulou (2002) credits the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) for being the first Greek party that featured a web page in the parliamentary elections

of 1996. Within a two-year period, all the other major parties followed suit. Internet did not become a part of the campaign strategy of candidates in Greece until the prefecture and municipal elections of 1998. At that time a very small number of candidates published only text material on the web. The use of the internet in political campaigns was more widespread in the 2000 parliamentary elections with 1 out of 6 members of the Greek Parliament (17%) going online and 16 out of the 35 parties (45%) running campaign web sites (Kotsikopoulou 2002: 200). In the prefecture and municipal elections of 2002, 14% or 1 out of 8 prefecture candidates and 3.6% or 1 out of 28 municipal candidates respectively engaged in a web campaign. In the 2004 national elections approximately 1 out of 3 candidates representing the two major parties was a web candidate (33%) (see Table 1). From the 2000 to the 2004 Parliamentary elections, the number of e-campaigning politicians doubled, underlying the importance of the web in politicians' campaign strategy. In analyzing the impact of web campaigns in Greek elections, one should bear in mind that in October 2002 the households with internet connection in Greece were 14% while the average for European Union member-states was 43% (Flash Eurobarometer 135, 2002). Additionally at the time of the parliamentary elections the number of households with internet rose to 18%. Certainly, this low percentage represented a small pool of voters and testifies to a "deficit" in web campaign appreciation by Greek politicians and voters alike at that time.

Elections in Greece are held every 5 years for European Parliament representatives and every 4 years for national and local elections respectively. In October 2002 local politicians entered contests for assuming office either at the prefecture level or at the level of municipalities. In the national elections of March 2004, politicians were campaigning in their prefectures for a seat in the Greek parliament. In the June 2004 elections, Greek parties nominated their 24-member ranked lists of candidates for the European Parliament elections.

Election Contest	Year	Households with internet connection at election year	Web Candidates over Total Number of candidates
Parliamentary Elections	2000	12%	1/6 th (17%)
Prefecture Elections	2002	14%	1/8 th (13%)
Municipal Elections	2002	14%	1/28 th (4%)
Parliamentary Elections	2004	18%	1/3 th (33%)
European Parliament Elections	2004	18%	0 (0%)

Table 1: Web 1.0 Candidates by Electoral Contests

Although the number of households that were connected to the Internet increased from the Parliamentary 2000 elections to the following 2002 Prefecture-Municipal elections, the number of e-campaigning politicians was proportionally larger at the 2000 elections. This reveals that the more important the election contest is, the more candidates campaign on the web. E-campaigning in the 2004 Parliamentary elections shows that the web was seriously considered as part of politicians' campaign strategy. In the European Parliament elections, candidates opted to promote their image through the web pages of their party, since their election depended on the 24-member ranked list of candidates put together by the party. Therefore in the European Parliament election, parties, rather than candidates carry out the election campaign.

The main characteristic of post-modern campaigns (Norris, 2000) is that politicians and parties are in a permanent campaign period, which reaches its peak just before the election. Parties in Greece may use the web as a permanent campaign tool, although the crucial election campaign period in Greek elections is very short and usually lasts less than a month. National elections although are supposed to be held every 4 years but the party in power reserves the right to call elections earlier than the four year interval. New Democracy, the 2004 national election party winner, decided to proceed with an early call for elections in order to gain a tactical advantage over the other parties in elections held in 2007 and 2009 respectively. In case of an early call for elections, the formal campaign period lasts exactly one month. This short campaign period affects also web campaigning. Most negatively affected are challengers for the seats as there is a very short time to prepare and launch a campaign site. On the contrary incumbents that may already operate a website have the relatively easier task of adjusting their site to the campaign. Extensive use of new technologies by incumbents is a common pattern found also in other studies ([Williams, Gulati, 2009b](#)) irrespective of the short campaign time exhibited in our case.

Although the early call for elections cannot be activated in elections for the local government and the European parliament, the short campaign period pattern can be observed in both of them. In European parliament elections as well as in local government elections, most of the party candidates usually have very short time for campaigning as party support is given in most cases just a few weeks before the day of election. On the contrary, independent candidates in local government elections have the advantage of more preparation time for their campaigns as the decision to run is made months ago. For many years, the two major parties relied on their existing large pool of voters in local communities to win local elections. People were more likely to vote for their party candidate. Thus party candidates were decided based on party strategies against other parties and not against independent candidates. Independent candidates are usually financially disadvantaged candidates, less likely to have a campaign web site ([Gibson et. al., 2003](#)). In the 2002 Greek local government elections, however, the web made an impact on the final outcome for independent candidates. (Yannas, Lappas, 2005). Local government elections of 2006 revealed that local communities were more likely to vote for their favorite persons than for their favorite party and the nominated party candidate. The surprising positive results for independent candidates in the 2002 local elections had considerable impact on the party election strategy which moved towards supporting independent candidates with the potential of winning elections instead of nominating their own party candidate in the corresponding communities. One could argue that in the 2002 local elections, the web partially played the role of the “equalizer” between the rich in political resources and political support party candidate and the resource poor lacking political support independent candidate.

Methodology-Research Questions

We will explore the use of web 2.0 tools in a period, which is politically very interesting as in short time great political events were calling for campaigning. The start of our study period finds the ND party being the governmental party after winning 2004 and 2007 national elections. At that time the socialist party of PASOK was the challenger party for winning European Parliament elections on Jun 2009. The

initial 2011 national election schedule was cancelled from ND's early call for elections on September 2009. Table 2 shows the results of the two election contests. ND and PASOK are the parties that monopolize the role of governmental party since the first elections after fall of the dictatorship in 1974, casting together more than 80% of the popular vote. Thus Greek elections become a race of two for leadership and the race of smaller parties to gain seats in the National and European parliament, as well as in local governments.

Parties	7 th Jun 2009 European Parliament Elections Results	Seats	4 th Oct 2009 National Election Results	Seats
PASOK (Socialist Party)	36.64%	8	43.92%	160
ND (Conservative Party)	32.29%	8	33.48%	91
KKE (Communist Party)	8.35%	2	7.54%	21
LAOS (Extreme Right Party)	7.15%	1	5.63%	15
SYRIZA (Coalition of Left Parties)	4.70%	2	4.60%	13
OIKOLOGOI PRASINOI (Green Environment Party)	3.49%	1	2.53%	0
Other Fringe Parties	7,38%		2.20%	0
Totals		24		300

Table 2: Election Results on 2009 European and National Elections

The PASOK party having won the Oct 2009 national elections became the governmental party since then. The rise PASOK in government found themselves against serious financial problems, which gradually created serious problems for the country to borrow money from markets. This created the Greek Financial Crisis with serious effects in EU and for the first time creating problems to the EU regarding the stability of the Euro currency. The Greek financial crisis gradually started in early 2010. On 23rd of April PM Papandreou announced that Greece is requesting the help provided by the EU and the Internationally Monetary Fund (IMF). Papandreou announcement follows the 5th-7th Mai period, when the parliament voted to approve the help with massive protests taking place outside the parliament.

We will explore the following research questions:

How active were parties on social media? What social media widely have been used? Which parties are more active on social media? A number of social media are monitored to provide us answers to the above questions.

From party perspective, how parties explored the new social media over the three political facts? How a severe financial crisis affects the way of social media campaigning? Are now parties more likely to allow more citizen participation in their campaigns?

From citizen perspective, Web 2.0 provided the hopes to voters that they may be more active participators to party campaigns. How users have used this opportunity to participate in party campaigns? What is the impact of the crisis to user participation in party campaigning? Does the crisis provide an opportunity to users to activate bottom-up campaigns? Election periods or crisis periods offer more citizen engagement to parties?

To explore the above questions we will analyze the use of Facebook, which was the most frequently used social medium by the two leading parties. A quantitative content analysis is employed to study the wall comments of parties and the wall comments of individuals in parties Facebook sites. Thus, wall postings from the parties and from individuals are the focus of our analysis. Six indicators are created to quantify a number of party activities, user participation to party activities and user activities. Party activities will be further explored according to the party employed Facebook communication strategy and the provided type of content on Facebook.

Web 2.0 usage by Greek Parties

All parliamentary parties in Greece are well established on the web by operating a website, having gained considerable experience in online communication through their website. Web 2.0 offered Greek parties the chance to differentiate themselves in online campaigns and deliver electoral benefits. Major parties are more likely to incorporate the latest technology and features in their campaign strategies (Foot, Schneider, 2006). Adopting new technology features in communication strategies is constrained by institutional inertia and build-in resistance of parties for large changes. According to Kalnes (2009) parties can be expected to change their communication strategy only concurrent with changes in the environment that is relevant for gaining votes. Thus, the adoption of Web 2.0 technologies by Greek parties is related to whether each party believes that there exists an adequate pool of voters using a specific web 2.0 technology or feature that is worthwhile. Online campaigning in Greece was also affected by the innovative example of the Obama online campaign, which attained unprecedented success through the utilization of the web as a primary vehicle for his political campaign (Carpenter, 2010).

In our study we searched for web 2.0 tools used by parties. Table 3 shows that Facebook is the only web 2.0 tool that was adopted by all parliamentary parties. However, only PASOK, ND and SYRIZA maintained a wall with party posts on it. KKE and LAOS provided a wall for posts by individuals, without party participation in the posts. We will further analyze the use of Facebook by parties in the next section.

Parties	Blog	YouTube Profile	Facebook	Twitter	MySpace	Hi-5	Flickr	Delicious	Friendfeed	Second Life	LinkedIn
PASOK	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Groups	Groups	Yes	Yes	Yes		Unofficial
ND	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Groups	Yes	Yes	Yes		
KKE	Unofficial		Yes			Groups					
SYRIZA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Groups	Yes		Yes		
LAOS			Yes			Groups	Unofficial				

Table 3: Web 2.0 tools adopted by Greek Parties

Looking at Table 3, one may consider that Hi-5 is an important medium for online campaigning, which targets the young voters as all parties appear having Hi-5 groups. Taking a closer examination at the Hi-5 groups one notices that these groups were formed in 2008 by individuals or by party youth organizations, had low activity in 2008 and have had minimal, if any, activity afterwards. So these groups didn't play any role during the election periods under examination.

Which party was the web 2.0 leader in political communication? PASOK, ND and surprisingly the smaller party of SYRIZA were the three leaders in the adoption of web 2.0 technologies in campaigning. The communist party (KKE) and the extreme right-wing party of LAOS took a rather cautious approach towards the new media, which fits well with their conservative predispositions on constitutional reforms. The two major parties, PASOK and ND, receiving the overwhelming percentage (over 80%) of the popular vote, crafted their online communication strategy observing what the opponent party was doing online and trying to equalize any potential communication advantage accruing to the opponent.

Facebook was the new medium that parties seemed to experiment more in their online campaign strategy, making worthwhile further analysis of this medium. Blogging, YouTube, Twitter and Flickr, Friendfeed and Delicious were the rest of Web 2.0 tools available for experimentation by political parties. MySpace was only adopted by SYRIZA, whereas virtual campaigning by using “second life” was rarely used as a political campaign tool by Greek parties.

At this stage there is no evidence that the use of Web 2.0 technologies had an impact on the final election outcome. Any potential benefit gained from better online campaigning by SYRIZA against other small parties, has been counterbalanced by leadership and coordination problems inflicting the party which is made up of various factions representing various ideological positions.

Analysis of Facebook Campaign by Greek Parties

Greek parties ignored Facebook as a new tool for communication till 2008. The communist party of KKE was the first party to create a Facebook site in January 2008, which was though not officially operated by the party and did not feature party official posts on the wall, leaving the posts to individuals. The socialist party of PASOK is the first party that actually adopted Facebook in its communication strategy when it started in spring 2008 a Facebook site with party posts consisting mainly of leader photos and party historical videos. George Papandreou, the leader of PASOK, is reputed as one of the champions of the use of the new technologies and the internet in political communication in Greece. Thus it came as no surprise that his party was the pioneer of Facebook communication in Greek politics. At the same time, Papandreou was also operating a personal Facebook site, which featured common posts from the PASOK Facebook site. One year later (April 2009) and a few months prior to the European Parliamentary elections of June 2009, the party in power, New Democracy, also adopted Facebook in its communication strategy. Karamanlis, the leader of ND party till the national elections of October 2009 was also on a Facebook site which was operated by a party supporter. Meanwhile the SYRIZA party was on Facebook by January 2009. The rest of parliamentary parties adopted a wait and see approach towards Facebook and left initiatives to group supporters. In December 2009 and following the 2009 national elections, the communist party KKE joined by its youth party organization announced a Facebook site that has been officially operating by the party.

The “friends” feature and the relation of the number of friends to parties is studied in Canadian and US election (Small, 2008) as well as in German politics (Zeh, 2010). Facebook content of the walls and user activity is studied by [Robertson et. al \(2009, 2010b\)](#). The number of Facebook supporters may represent the effect of some

indicator that captures the underlying enthusiasm and intensity of support for the campaigner (Williams, Gullati 2008), exhibited by community members who are more enthusiastic about their choice are more likely to publicize their support. As shown in Table 4, the current number of Facebook “friends” is in agreement with the strength of parties in Parliament and gives credence to the point raised above by Williams and Gullati. .

Parties	Facebook "Friends" on Sep 2010
PASOK	33597
ND	14096
KKE	797
KKE-youth	2562
SYRIZA	1700
LAOS	825

Table 4: Number of “friends” for each party Facebook site.

PASOK, ND and SYRIZA Facebook sites are using three walls: one wall is dedicated to party posts, a second is dedicated to other individual posts and the third wall merges the other two walls into one (Figure 1). The two major parties vying for capturing the government will be the focus of our analysis in our quest to answer the question whether Facebook made any marginal impact to the election result or whether the outcome of the election result could have been predicted by Facebook indicators. Our approach leaves only the SYRIZA party out of the analysis, as the KKE and LAOS parties didn’t have a wall for party posts allowing only individuals to post.

Facebook walls provide us with interesting data. “Likes” and “Comments” are two Facebook features used for responding to a party or individual post



Figure 1: “Walls”, “Likes” and “Comment” Features on PASOK Facebook.

Extending Williams and Gullati’s (2008) approach which uses the number of friends as a quantitative indicator that may capture the underlying enthusiasm, we created and used the following quantitative indicators for capturing related campaign patterns:

- Indicator 1: Number of Party Posts over a Period of analysis (PP).
- Indicator 2: Number of “Likes” of Party Posts over a Period of analysis (LoPP).
- Indicator 3: Average Number of “Likes” on a Party Post over a Period of analysis (AvL).
- Indicator 4: Number of “Comment” on Party Posts over a Period of analysis (CoPP).
- Indicator 5: Average Number of “Comments” a Party Post receives over a Period of analysis (AvC)
- Indicator 6: Number of User’s Posts on Party’s Wall over a Period of analysis (UP).

Indicators 3 and 5 are derived by LoPP/PP and CoPP/PP respectively for a period of analysis. The period of analysis is a month in order to include the three time-intervals.

We will analyze Facebook wall content from three angles: *party activity, user participation to party activities, user initiated posting activities.*

The Party Activity Perspective

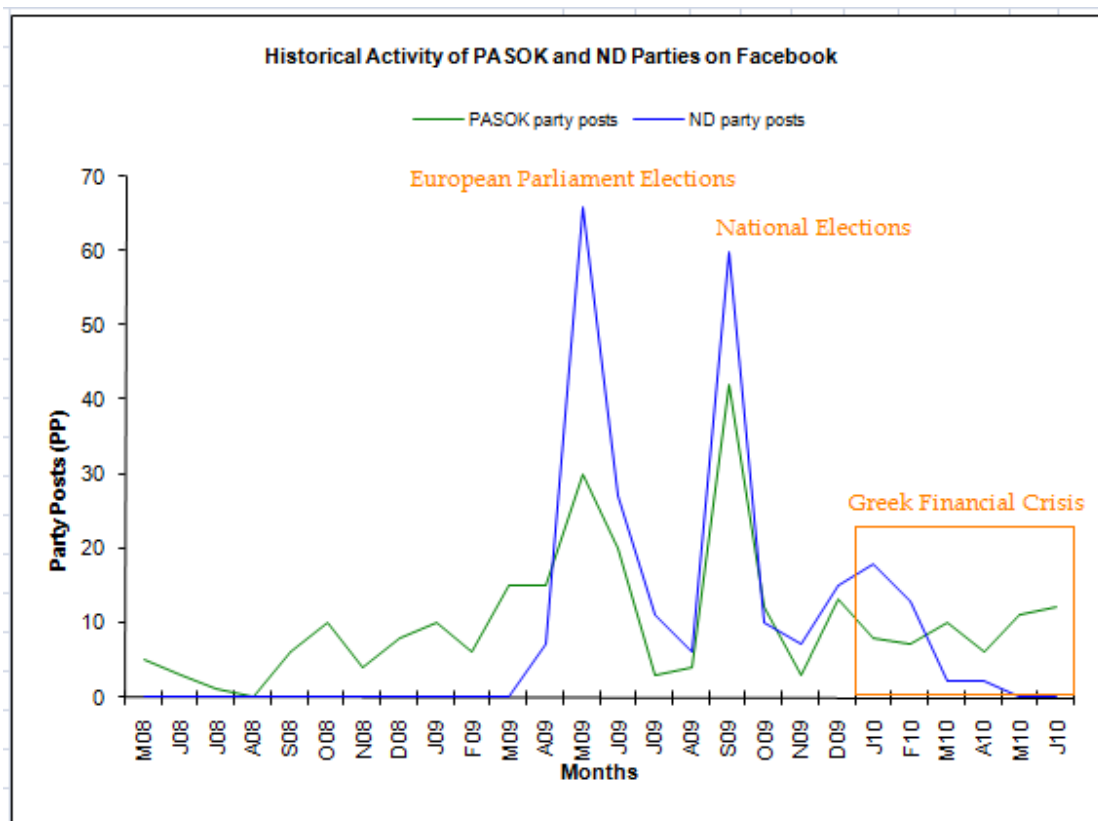


Figure 2: Party Posts per month on Facebook.

The type of contents as described before (Table 1) have a significant impact on the online campaign strategy, given that national elections constitute the most important electoral contest. PASOK follows this pattern as the number of posts in national

elections is higher than those of the European elections. The reverse pattern is observed in ND due to the late adoption of Facebook in party's communication strategy that may have resulted either from an over-enthusiastic use of the medium or from the party's concern to make up for their previous absence in Facebook by posting a lot of messages and information on their wall.

An impressive finding (see Figure 2) is that both parties have diminished their posting activities during the severe 2010 Greek financial crisis. While electoral campaigns increase the number of posts on Facebook due to the fact that each party's campaigning strategy is geared towards gaining a marginal advantage over the opponent party, in periods of severe crisis party posting activity on Facebook is considerably lowered. Noteworthy is also the fact that the party of ND abstained from uploading postings on the Facebook for about 3 months (Figure 3).

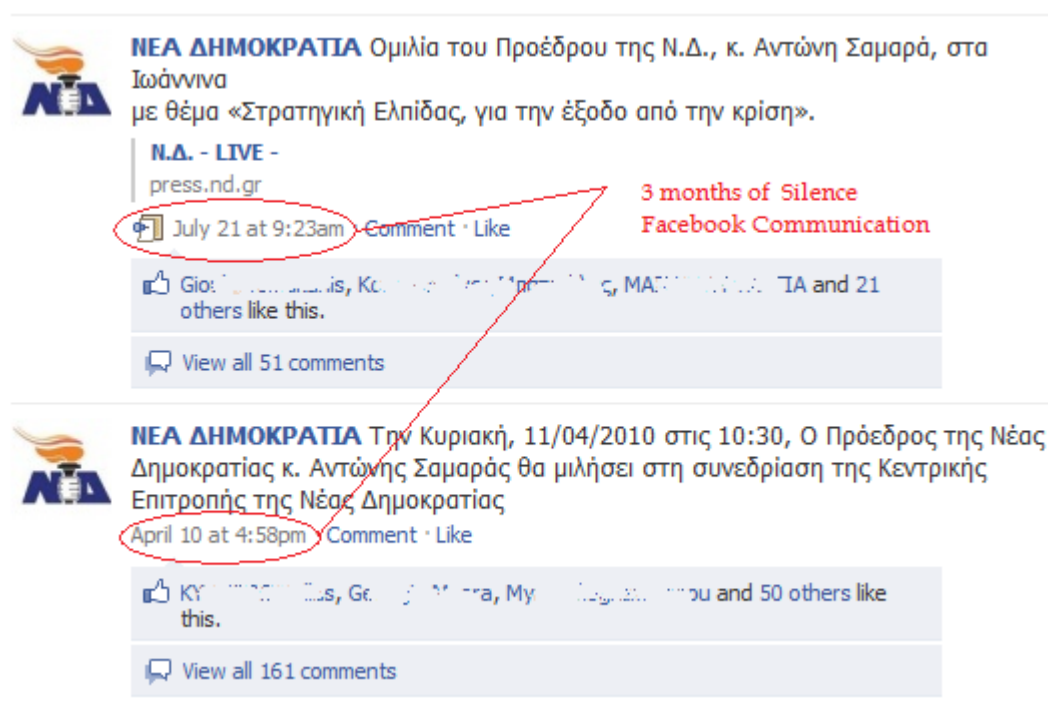


Figure 3: Facebook Communication Strategy at Crisis Period

Further analyzing the type of activities identified in posts on Facebook walls, PASOK had a more diversified profile of activities providing YouTube videos (43% of posts), uploading Videos (14%), and broadcasting events live on Party's WebTv (12%). On the contrary, the type of ND activities were fewer and of inferior quality with posting photos from party events being the dominant type of activity (63%), followed by links to party website (18%) and Video uploads (7%). The digital campaign of Obama was designed in order for online tactics to be translated into offline mobilization (Gibson, 2009). The present study demonstrates that both parties were eager to mobilize people for joining the leader in public talks. The socialist party of PASOK devoted more effort to mobilizing people making use of their live webTV party channel through Facebook.

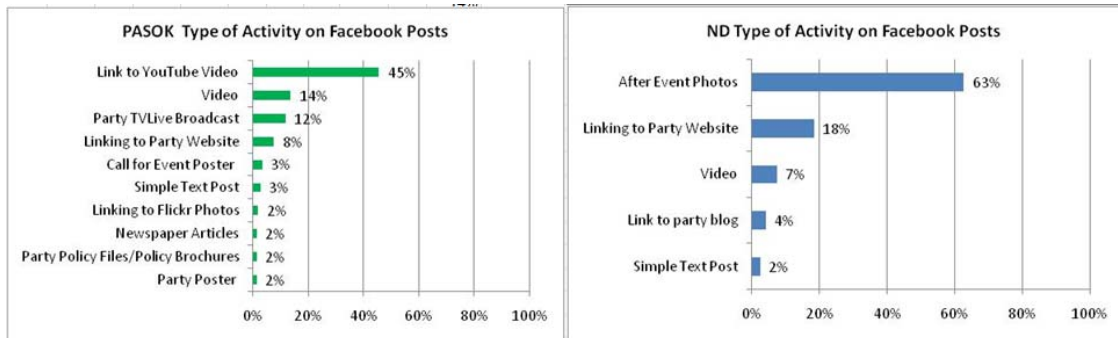


Figure 4: Parties Type of Activities on their Facebook posts

Analyzing the foreground policy of party posts conclusions can be derived for the strategy of the party in online campaigning. Both parties follow a leader promotional strategy as the leader of PASOK appears in 66% of the party posts and the leader of ND appears in 81% of the posts, 61% of which derive from the leader's role in party functions. Again, PASOK exhibits a more diverse type of policies on party's posts, whereas ND heavily relies on leader photos. As a consequence (see Figures 4 and 5), the quality of the Facebook campaign of the two parties was not the same. PASOK campaign fits well to Robinson et. al (2010) multidimensional communicational environment, whereas ND campaign is overloaded with leader photos.

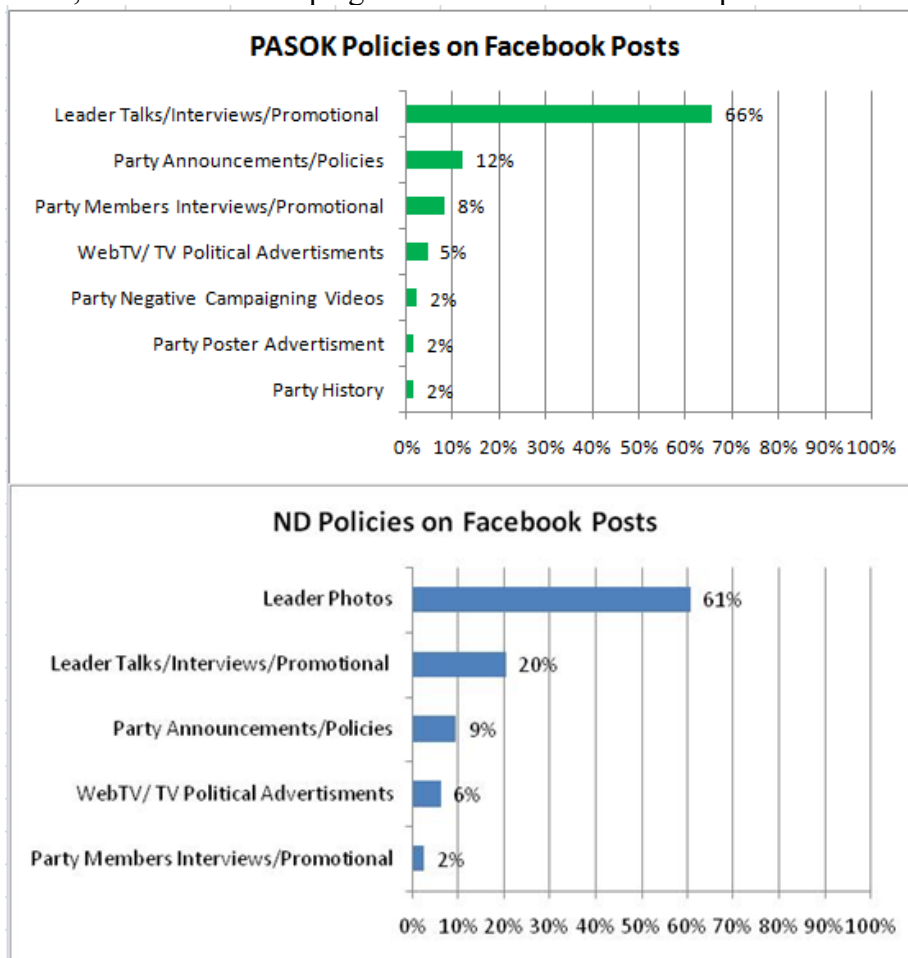


Figure 5: Parties Policy of Posts on Facebook

Both parties allow limited space for promotion of other party members showing how a tool that enhances e-democracy like the party Facebook wall cannot be made available to the rest of party members. An example of this austere top down structure in Facebook party walls is the fact that in the course of the European Parliament elections both parties offered to their candidate’s only one post in order to address themselves to voters.

The User Participation to Party Activities Perspective

A user may participate to a party post by using the “like” and “comment” features. The “comment” feature may also initiate a dialogue between users, where parties almost never participate. The “Likes of Party Posts (LoPP)” may be seen as an indication of user participation performed by clicking the like feature for endorsing the party post. The LoPP counts the total number of “likes” the party received on all its posts over the one month period of analysis. The question is whether this index may be a quantitative indicator that captures the underlying enthusiasm of voters. The “Likes of Party Posts (LoPP)” indicator (see Figure 6) demonstrates that in European Parliament elections ND gained a considerable larger number of “likes” than PASOK, without registering any impact on the final outcome as ND lost the elections in a close contest. Although PASOK and ND received close number of “likes” in the National Elections, PASOK won the electoral contest by a large margin. One should therefore be cautious trying to decipher the impact of the LoPP indicator on the outcome result. During the financial crisis, user participation seems to be lowered, but this occurs because the number of party posts (see Figure 2) has been descending. Thus, this indicator may lead to the false conclusion of lower user activity during crisis periods..

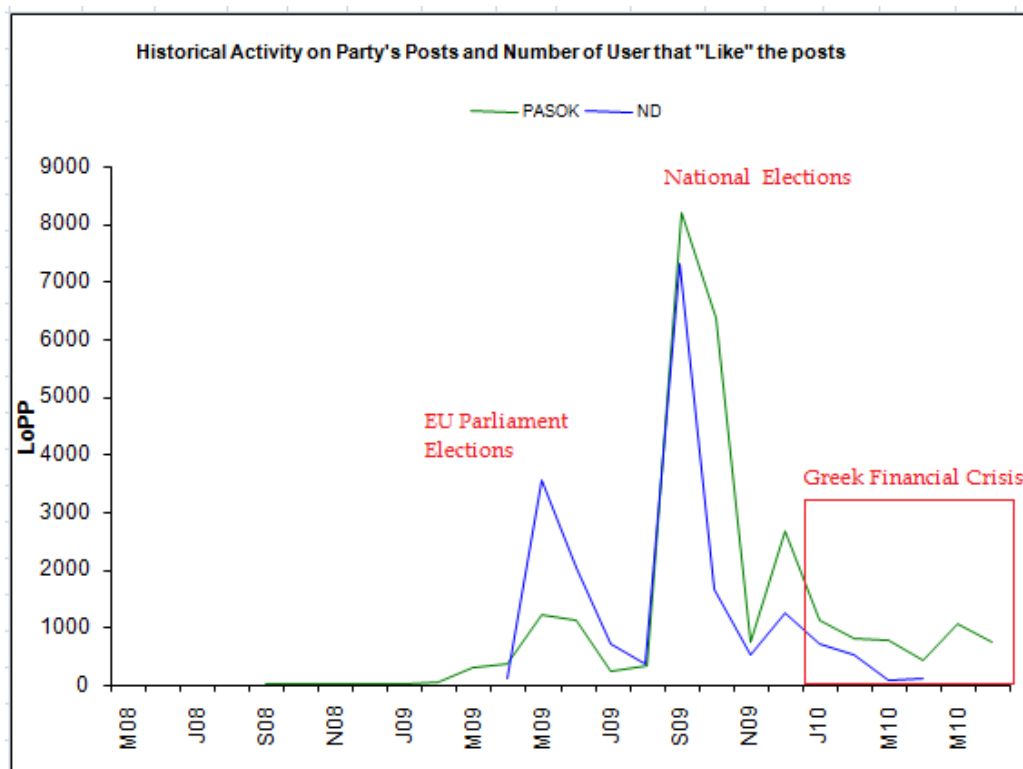


Figure 6: The Monthly Number of “Likes” that Party Received by Users

The average “likes” on party posts seems to be a quantitative indicator that better reflects the underlying enthusiasm of voters (see Figure 7). The AvL indicator fits well to the election outcomes as:

- posts by both parties received almost the same number of likes in the EU elections, approximating the election outcome where PASOK and ND fought a close contest capturing the same number of seats
- the average number of likes that the PASOK post received during the national elections was considerably higher than the number of likes received by the ND post, indicating a trend favoring PASOK’s win as it really happened.

Additionally, the AvL indicator better reflects the disappointment of users during the crisis period as they were less willing to like party posts than before

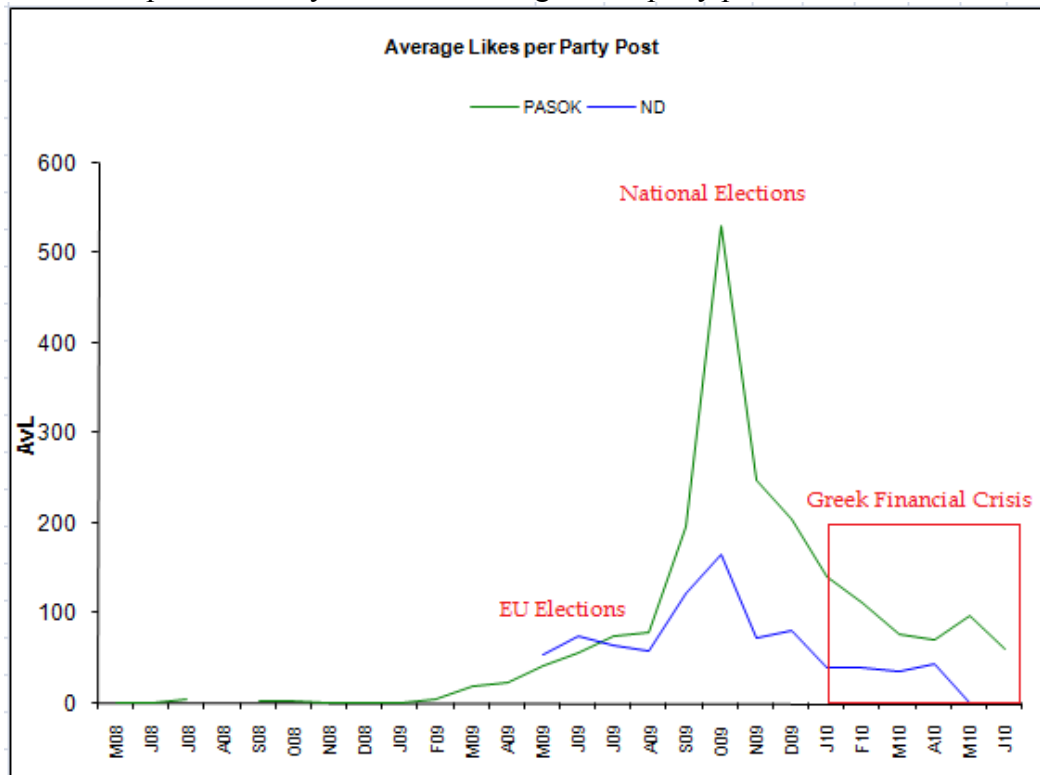


Figure 7: The Average Number of “Likes” per post, in a month period for Parties in Facebook

The next two indicators, indicators CoPP and AvC, related to the “comment” feature of Facebook, reveal an interesting user participatory pattern with users more likely to comment on posts of parties exercising power. When ND held power (till October 2009) it received both more comments and had larger average comments per party post. Likewise, when PASOK assumed power it attracted more total comments and more average comments per post.

Andersen and Medaglia (2009) found that Facebook users who decide to link with the party have had already established connections with the party through the traditional offline channels such as previous employment or membership to the political party. A similar pattern is evident in the present study as users participating in comments on party posts are somehow connected to the party. Moreover, it became obvious that there were “gatekeepers” in both parties whose function was to constantly initiate positive comments on their party posts and “gate-provokers” who constantly

provoked with negative comments the opponent party's posts. Last, there were many common users taking advantage of the Facebook sites of both parties.

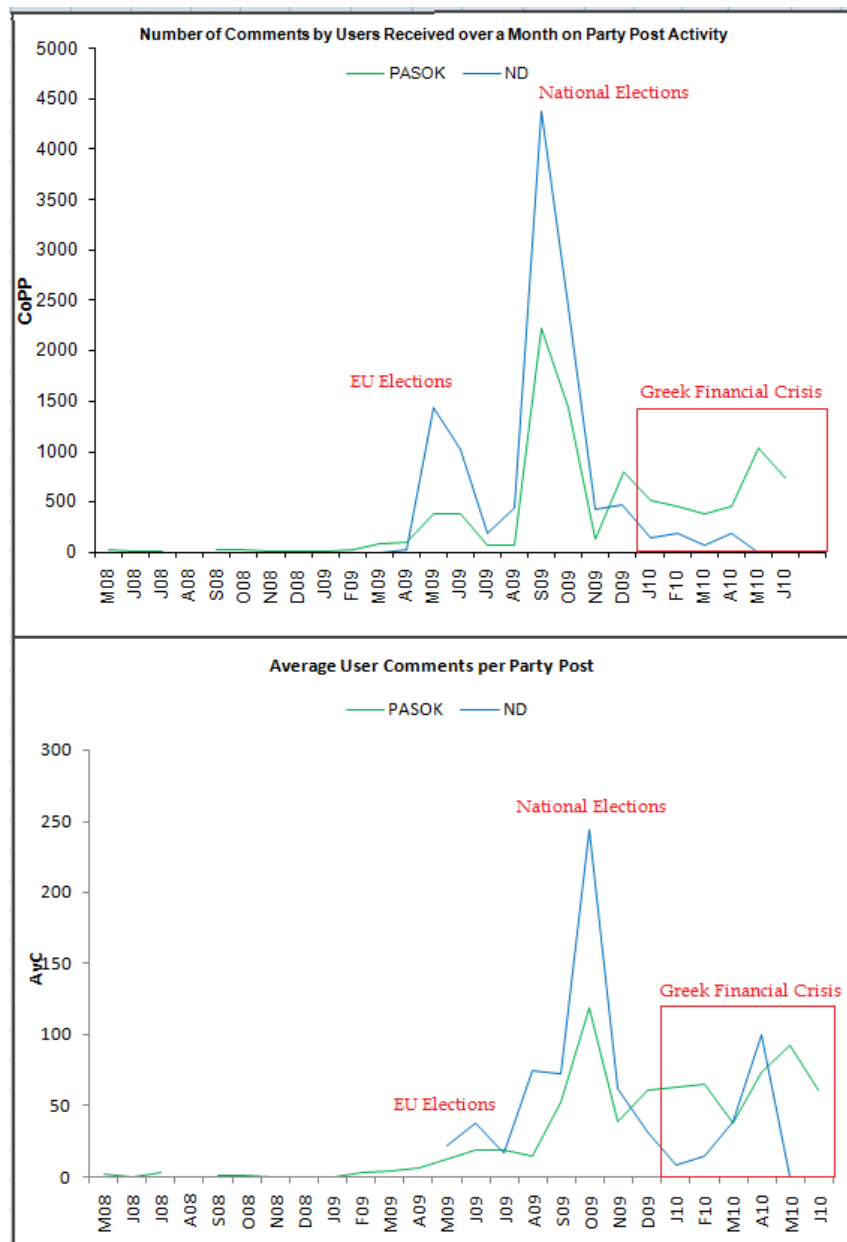


Figure 8: User Participation Activity through the use of the “comment” Feature in Party Facebook sites.

The User Initiating Posting Activities Perspective

Greek parties offered a wall for individuals to leave their posts. This allowed users to act as citizen-campaigners (Gibson, 2009). However there was no party feedback in any of the user posts, indicating that parties do not fully explore the Web 2.0 features for engaging into dialogue with voters. Candidates using Facebook in

campaigning rarely respond to the posted messages (Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008). The use of Facebook in political campaigns does not employ the two-way symmetrical relationship building model, a main dialogic feature of Facebook prevalent in other than political campaign type of communication.

An interesting research question is whether users initiate bottom up campaigns in times of crisis. Greek parties have followed divergent online campaign strategies during election and crisis periods. The question is whether users become more active during crisis periods than election periods by the mere fact that their heightened anxiety levels force them to exert more pressures and place more demands on the political system. The UP indicator will explore this hypothesis.

Indeed users seem to be more active citizen campaigners during crisis periods (Figure 9) driving a wedge with the communication strategy of the party in power. Again, the party in power always attracts more posts from citizens, perhaps signaling users' desire to be heard and be part of decisions taken by the party in power.

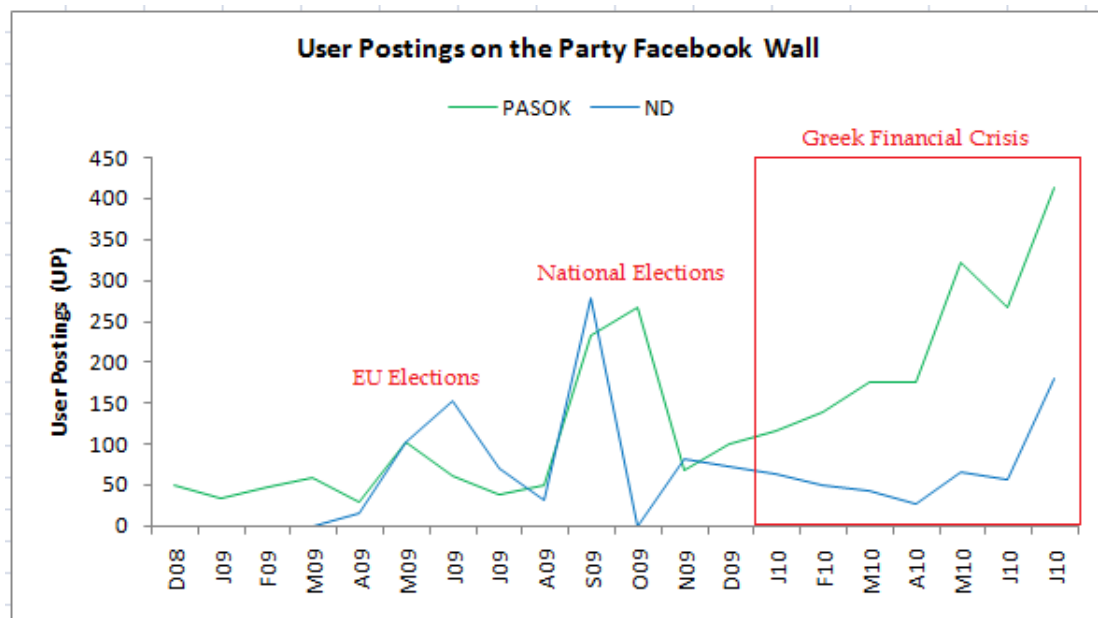


Figure 9: User Activity by Posting on Parties' Walls

Conclusions

Adopting new technologies in communication strategies may be far from easy for political parties as effective exploration of the medium is required in order to gain (or at least not to lose) any small benefits from the Web 2.0 communication strategy. The analysis of Facebook revealed that PASOK run a more effective online campaign than their opponent of ND, creating a multidimensional communication environment with pluralistic features. The online tactic of ND in Facebook amounted to presenting a leader photo-gallery campaign. The Facebook campaigns of both parties seemed to be heavily leader-centered, leaving almost no space to showcase the activities of other party members.

To make sense of the Facebook environment confronting currently the Greek parties, it is useful to think of it as resembling two bulletin boards. In the first board the operation is in the hands of the party and citizens are given the option to comment on any announcement. In the second board on the other hand, the public is free to place anything, express feelings and positions but the party may choose to ignore the content of this board without providing any public feedback to a citizen post. Thus, Facebook provides another top-down political environment for communication where the communication initiated by the party is one-way with glimpses of feedback from citizens (“like”, “comments”). Similarly, communication initiated by citizens seems to be falling on deaf ears with party staff remaining aloof without providing feedback. In both cases, the dialogic feature of Facebook is rendered redundant.

The adoption of Facebook by the two major Greek parties resembles more an in-between Web 2.0 and Web 1.0 model, like the hybrid “Web 1.5” model (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, Kalnes 2009), where parties incorporate some of the Web 2.0 features but retain firm control of the user or networking effects. This effort to retain firm control of the user was more obvious during the crisis period where parties not only didn’t follow users’ demand for dialogue expressed by posts to the party in power, but also chose to either keep a low Facebook activity (PASOK) or even remain inactive for long periods (ND). The findings of the present study confirm Andersen and Medaglia’s (2009) observation that the Facebook environment does not introduce significant changes in the way politics traditionally works. Despite the participatory features provided in the Facebook environment, citizens conform to a more passive and consumer-oriented role. In times of crisis, however, citizens seek, as the bulk volume of posts shows, interaction with parties only to be disappointed by the parties aloof and unresponsive attitude.

The present study confirms that the citizen-campaigning effect (Gibson, 2009) may be more evident in crisis periods and periods that call for political changes than in election campaign periods. During elections most of the users participate in a positive and enthusiastic manner. Crisis periods are more amenable to generating “bottom-up” campaigns. Parties however, seem reluctant to increase their online communication responding to increases in citizen participation on their Facebook sites. Parties are trying rather to retain their control by employing a tight “top-down” communication strategy, without responding or engaging with users’ initiatives. The battle between “top down” and “bottom up” campaigns is more pronounced during crisis periods. However, it is still premature to draw final conclusions as the crisis is still unfolding. Future e-participation research stands to benefit from the massive amounts of material that are posted by ever increasing numbers of online users.

Another interesting pattern revealed in this study is the willingness of users to comment more on the posts of the party in power than to participate with comments to the opponent party’s posts. A case can be made that “bottom up” campaigns may be more likely to grow around parties holding power than around other parties.

Finally one interesting finding from our study is the AvL indicator, which seems to be closer to election outcome results. This indicator may provide some information of the dynamic of the party as perceived by Facebook users.

Social media increasingly provide massive amounts of information during campaigns from users, groups and social communities. This information is semi-structured and social media centered following the organization of information of the specific social media. The challenge in future research is to exploit this mass of semi-structured information provided by social media in order to formalize the structure behind the parties' communities and discover campaign patterns, trends, and dynamics. This task calls for interdisciplinary research as social network analysis, web mining and artificial intelligence are some other related fields that may well provide the tools for the exploration of information.

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