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Journal of Information Technology & Politics

ISSN: 1933-1681 (Print) 1933-169X (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/witp20

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To cite this article: Azi Lev-On (2012) YouTube Usage in Low-Visibility Political Campaigns, Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 9:2, 205-216, DOI: 10.1080/19331681.2011.645360

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2011.645360

Published online: 12 Apr 2012.

Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 9:205–216, 2012

ISSN: 1933-1681 print/1933-169X online
DOI: 10.1080/19331681.2011.645360

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ABSTRACT. Social networking platforms and video-sharing sites like YouTube generate hopes for a more participatory politics and stronger connections between citizens and representatives, particularly at the local level. This article examines these trajectories by analyzing the YouTube presence of candidates in municipal election campaigns, as well as public involvement in these campaigns.

KEYWORDS. Campaigning, Internet, political communication, social media, user-generated content, video, Web 2.0, YouTube

CAMPAIGNING ONLINE

This article is one piece in a series of studies by the author that analyze Internet usage in political campaigns, emphasizing the municipal level (Lev-On, 2011, forthcoming). The article analyzes the use of the video-sharing site YouTube by candidates running for heads of municipalities during the campaigns for elections held in November 2008.

The extensive penetration of the Internet and its significant political applications make Israel a promising research arena of online campaigning. The penetration rates of the Internet in Israel are high, and its general and political uses are prevalent. According to the semi-annual TIM survey, which measures exposure to the Internet and online usage patterns (June 2008), it is used by 74% of the population aged 13 and above. Its primary uses are information search (96%), news reading (89%), and also such activities including watching videos (73%) and shopping online (56%; Cohen, 2009). Social media sites, including YouTube and Facebook, enjoy massive exposure. According to another TIM survey from October 2008, YouTube exposure rates were 39.7%, which ranks it as the fourth most exposed site (right after Google and the leading Israel news portals Walla! and Ynet). Facebook was rated sixth with exposure rates of 29% (Cohen, 2008).

It is appropriate to study Israel when examining trends in online campaigning due to the extensive use of the Internet in Israeli national political campaigns. The recognition of the growing importance of the Internet as a medium

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Many thanks to Eliya David, Shilat Edri, Chen Sabag, and Keren Sereno for their assistance in data collection and in preparing the manuscript for publication, and for the useful comments of the reviewers.

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for political marketing is accompanied by the willingness to invest resources in parties' and candidates' online presence. In the general elections of 2009, almost all political parties used Web sites, and many were present on a variety of Internet platforms. However, there is still a feeling of reluctance to involve the public in campaigning, and sites most often function as "bulletin boards," transmitting information from parties to the public without many possibilities for engagement. Audiences visit parties' Web sites in small numbers (Caspi & Lev, 2009; Lev-On, 2011).

Studying the political usage of the Internet is especially interesting at the municipal level. Municipalities handle many issues that are of direct relevance to citizens' everyday lives (e.g., education, welfare, local infrastructure), and it is much more feasible (compared to national-level politics) to use the Internet in order to reach out to relevant population segments, consult them, and weigh-in their priorities in municipal decision-making processes. The campaigning season is a particularly good time to use the Internet in order to communicate with local constituencies. Local elections involve a significantly smaller number of voters than the general elections. Hence, the likelihood that they are decided on the basis of a small number of votes significantly increases. In such elections, it is likely that candidates use every tool at their disposal to get voters to the polls.

However, some variables related to the candidate, the characteristics of the political races, and the electorate may reduce the probabilities of Internet use in local campaigns. The lack of awareness of the benefits of Internet use as a political tool or hesitation from interaction with the public may lead candidates to prefer traditional forms of marketing. Some candidates may feel that they are sufficiently known to the public and that they are guaranteed success at the ballot box without opening a new marketing channel online (Herrnson, 2004; Kamarck, 2003; Lev-On, 2011; Strachan, 2003). Lack of Internet usage in an area or a specific sector may also negatively impact candidates' decisions about establishing online campaign presence (Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, & Hindman, 2007; Lev-On, 2011, forthcoming).

In Israel, voting in municipal elections is carried out under a two-ballot system: one for a candidate who competes for the head of the authority, the other for a party that runs for the municipal assembly. If only one contender submits his candidacy, he or she is declared the winner without an election. If no candidates reach 40% of the vote, a second round is held two weeks after the first round. The study discussed in this article looks at social media usage by candidates for heads of municipalities.

It seems that in the 2008 municipal elections, the Internet, YouTube included, aroused great interest, at least in major cities such as Tel Aviv-Yafo. For instance, journalist Gal Mor wrote on Ynet that "the Internet awakened the campaign in Tel Aviv. Heated discussions on blogs and talkbacks, videos on YouTube and Facebook, Google bombs and whatnot . . .," mainly due to the extensive use of the Internet by the campaign teams of contender for Mayor Dov Hanin and of his opponent Ron Huldai, the re-elected mayor (Mor, 2008). This study examines if and how YouTube was used, and if it facilitated citizen involvement and participation in local campaigns.

How do parties and candidates use the online tools at their disposal? With the rise of online campaign activity as well as the research on the subject, two main approaches concerning the differences between online and "traditional" political campaigning can be identified. Since the pioneering study of Margolis and Resnick (2000), numerous studies have supported their claim that despite the promises of new media, it brings "more of the same," or as they put it, reproduces patterns of "politics as usual." Indeed, studies have demonstrated that, with very few exceptions, the online campaign experience quite resembles the experience of traditional campaigning, and the vast majority of party or candidate campaign sites are characterized by top-down communication and very little interaction. Sites tend to be active mostly during the campaign season, and are otherwise "dormant" or even do not exist. Moreover, it appears that the parties do not shift a significant portion of their activities to the Internet, and the goal of their online activity is often to create an image of

up-to-dateness and professionalism (for a recent survey see Gibson & Ward, 2009).

However, with the rapid penetration of the Internet to many new layers of the population and the growth of the online "tool belt" available to campaigners, scholars have updated the "normalization" theory, claiming that indeed the Internet can update the patterns of political media campaigns, depending upon the environment of the relevant campaigns (Foot & Schneider, 2006; Xenos & Foot, 2005). It seems that the Internet usage in Obama's successful U.S. presidential campaign may be a landmark outlining this trend (for recent accounts see Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009; Stallings-Carpenter, 2010; for accounts of the "Americanization" of Israeli political campaigns, see Caspi & Lev, 2009, and more generally, Aronoff, 2000).

Gibson and Ward (2009) summarize the academic literature on online campaigns and argue that they tend to be characterized along several lines. Parties often do not want to "take risks" when it comes to their activity online. Therefore, they use their Web site mainly for information distribution, and secondarily make use of materials produced for the offline campaign. As such, they make a minimal and well-monitored use of interactive tools (see also Ward, Owen, Davis, & Taras, 2008). However, there is an awakening of Internet usage to reach out to different audiences, using a variety of platforms to tailor-deliver different messages to different constituencies. The Internet is also increasingly used for recruiting volunteers, members, and resources.

YOUTUBE AS A POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING ARENA

Why focus scholarly attention on political campaigning on YouTube? After looking at the following numbers, the answer to this question may seem fairly straightforward. Each contender to the U.S. presidential primaries in 2008 established a channel on YouTube, and seven candidates even announced their candidacy for the first time through this media channel (Grove, 2008; Gulati & Williams, 2010). Their campaign crews uploaded thousands of videos, which were viewed by tens of millions of users. In 2008 alone, YouTube users spent no less than 14.5 billion hours watching official videos of the Barack Obama campaign (see Gulati & Williams, 2010), and in total, no less than 35% of Americans watched online political videos that year (Smith & Rainie, 2008). Special attention was drawn to a limited number of homemade videos including "Obama Girl," which received millions of views,[1] and to new inclusive online formats, such as the debates organized collaboratively between YouTube and CNN. A study by the Center for Communication & Civic Engagement called this election "the first YouTube election" (Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, 2009).

Even after the elections, the White House YouTube channel has been updated frequently with weekly presidential addresses, including conducting a virtual "town meeting" in which viewers uploaded videos with questions and the president answered some of the most popular ones (Sutter, 2009).

The vast use of YouTube during and after the campaigns makes it a fascinating and important arena for examining the political uses of new technologies (Gueorguieva, 2008). Indeed, a special issue of the *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* was recently devoted to the political uses of YouTube.

YouTube offers several significant benefits for politicians and their campaign staff. The site enables them to upload a practically unlimited amount of filmed materials at no cost, and without third-party mediation. Uploading videos is easy, fast, and can be done instantly in near-real time. Due to the enormous popularity of the site, its use may dramatically increase the exposure of the candidate to the relevant audiences, particularly to young voters.[2] At the time of writing, videos on YouTube interface well with search results in Google's search engine (Google owns YouTube), which may further contribute to high rates of exposure (Gueorguieva, 2008; Gulati & Williams, 2010; Klotz, 2010). All these benefits make YouTube both an important marketing channel and a significant study arena.

Alongside the significant advantages of YouTube as a campaigning channel, it is also important to recognize the challenges it introduces to campaigners. First and foremost, it is a collaborative site that is open to everyone, and anyone can open a channel and upload materials. As a result, the tight control of campaigners over the campaigns' messages may loosen. While each fan or supporter can upload a video, rate it, or comment on it, these opportunities are open to opponents as well, opening the door to sabotage of a painstakingly orchestrated campaign. In order to properly utilize this platform, manpower may be needed not only to upload the right materials at the right time, but also to monitor audience reaction and promptly respond (Gueorguieva, 2008).

A small number of studies have examined the uses of YouTube in U.S. political campaigns. A study that examined YouTube usage on 2008 Senate elections found that 44% of the popular videos were short campaign ads (up to 30 seconds) prepared originally for TV. Only a small percentage of the popular campaign videos was created by citizens, while the great majority was created by professional teams (Klotz, 2010). The author concludes that the 2008 campaigns introduced greater political usage of YouTube than the 2006 campaigns and also attracted more viewership. Still, according to the author, "The 2008 Senate campaign on YouTube provides little evidence to support the theory that democratized video editing, production, and distribution motivates new formats and producers of political communication. Rather, YouTube has broadened access to repurposed communication from campaign participants" (Klotz, 2010, p. 121).

A similar conclusion is reached by Gulati and Williams (2010), who analyzed the usage of YouTube in the campaigns for the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives in 2008. Although most candidates opened YouTube channels, the popular clips were mostly professionally produced for TV. Candidates with strong financial backing were more likely to open a channel on YouTube and upload more clips. Competitive races increased the probabilities of having a YouTube channel. Incumbents have posted more videos than new candidates, in many cases because their past public work was documented and later used in the campaign (Gulati & Williams, 2010).

In Israel, the venue of the current study, Caspi and Lev (2009) were the first to study YouTube usage in the general elections campaigns. The authors found that 22 of the 33 parties that competed for the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) had a channel on YouTube. Parties have uploaded a total of nearly one thousand videos, an average of 47.1 videos per party, viewed approximately 120,000 times, or about 120 views per video. The numbers of subscribers to parties' channels were in the double digits, except for the channels of the two big parties, Likud (257) and Kadima (151). The authors argue that there is an "implementation gap" of new media between parties that rush to adopt them for campaigning, and the public that makes little use of them.

Following up on the acceptance of new media among different constituencies, a relevant aspect for the current research is the gap between candidates competing for head of municipalities in the Jewish sector and in the Arab sector. According to Kaminski and Bar-Tal (1996), the relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel, in the pre- as well as the post-state periods (after 1948), are best captured by the label "separation," which is manifest (among other things) in the near-complete geographic self-segregation of members of both groups. The separation to geographically distinct municipal authorities enables a comparison of Internet usage in political campaigns by candidates running for heads of authorities with Jewish and Arab populations.

Note that some factors could have, in fact, encouraged a significant usage of the Internet in the Arab-Palestinian sector in the municipal campaigns, over and above its potential usage in the Jewish sector. The number of candidates per municipality was slightly higher in the non-Jewish municipalities vs. Jewish municipalities (4 vs. 3.7 on average), i.e., increased competition. Also, the municipal elections in the non-Jewish sector are characterized by significantly higher voting rates than that of the Jewish sector (Mustafa, 2005), i.e., heightened public interest. In the current elections, turnout rates were 83.5% in the Arab population vs. 45.8% among the Jewish population.

But in spite of that, comparing Internet usage among candidates competing in Jewish and Arab municipalities shows a deep usage divide. Among the 213 candidates competing in the non-Jewish municipalities, only eight candidates, less than five percent, had a Web site, compared to 191 (50.1%) of the Jewish candidates. YouTube usage was similarly negligible. The absence of Internet use in the Arab-Palestinian sector is an interesting phenomenon that cannot be explained by access differences alone. This phenomenon requires a separate explanation, which may take into account variables such as the unique social structure in the Arab-Palestinian sector in Israel as well negative personal attitudes towards technology (see Lev-On, forthcoming). Thus, the rest of the analysis in this article refers to municipal races in authorities with Jewish populations, where Internet and, in particular, YouTube usage were much more evident.

This study is the first to examine YouTube usage at the municipal level. The elections that are held throughout the country in numerous municipalities enable us to examine and analyze Web campaigning at a "higher" resolution than by studying campaigns for the general elections, which take place in Israel in a single district (the entire country). Studying municipal campaigns also enables researchers to get a full picture of YouTube political usage, which results from a large number of "micro-decisions" by many candidates, not just a small number of decisions taken by the large parties' image consultants. As a result, researchers may discern differences in the geographic, socio-economic, and cultural landscapes that affect candidates' decisions to use the Internet.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The study focuses on three main research areas:

A. The extent of YouTube usage by candidates
B. The difference in YouTube usage according to strategic variables (associated with particular races) and socio-demographic variables of the population
C. Audience involvement in YouTube municipal campaigning

My hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: Candidates will make significant use of YouTube. This hypothesis is based on the 50% usage of Web sites in municipal elections in a related study (Lev-On, 2011). YouTube is particularly valuable in municipal elections, where contestants typically have meager resources. Due to the low costs of production and distribution of materials, YouTube could be an excellent campaigning platform at the municipal level.
- H2: Incumbents running for re-election will make use of YouTube significantly less than non-incumbents. This hypothesis is based on the fact that incumbents may be already familiar to the public, as their details and portrait appear on municipal publications, billboards, the municipal Web site, and more. In contrast, newcomers are likely to be less known, and therefore will make greater use of YouTube to reach potential voters (for findings in this vein see Herrnson, 2004; Herrnson et al., 2007; Kamarck, 2003, especially pp. 87–88; Lev-On, 2011).[3]
- H3: The more competitive the elections, the more candidates make use of YouTube. This hypothesis is based upon the assumption that the more competitive the elections are, the more extensively YouTube will be used due to the greater the incentives to use every tool at contenders' disposal to garner voters to the polls (see Gulati & Williams, 2010; Herrnson, 2004; Herrnson et al., 2007; Kamarck, 2003; Lev-On, 2011).
- H4: The higher the number of eligible voters, the greater the usage of YouTube will be by contenders. The hypothesis is based on the assumption that as the voting population grows, more effort would be required to reach eligible voters, and in addition to more traditional methods,

greater use would be made of YouTube and other Internet tools to reach out to constituencies (Lev-On, 2011).

- H5: YouTube will be used more in authorities with a young population, populations with high income and education, and authorities located in the center of Israel, compared to peripheral authorities, and authorities with older, less affluent, and less educated populations. This hypothesis is based on studies that show that education and income are positively correlated with Internet access and usage, age is negatively correlated, and residents of municipalities in central geographic locations are more connected to the Internet than residents of peripheral municipalities (Lev-On & Lissitsa, 2010; Mizrahi, Bar, Hezronov, & Oron, 2005). These environmental characteristics may also impact candidates' decisions to upload videos to YouTube.
- H6: YouTube audience involvement will be negligible. This hypothesis is based on the low involvement of the audience found in studies of Web site and social media usage in the general elections in Israel (Caspi & Lev, 2009). It is hypothesized that audience involvement in low-level elections will be consistent with its involvement patterns in the general elections. Still, as this is the first study to analyze YouTube usage in municipal campaigns, there are no further studies to support this trajectory.

METHOD

Immediately after receiving the names of candidates from the national supervisor of elections at the Ministry of Interior Affairs, searches for candidates' YouTube videos were conducted numerous times during the campaigns. Searches were conducted and taken from the first 500 results of Google (using multiple variations of candidates' names; for example, "Dov Hanin," "Hanin Dov," "Hanin Tel-Aviv," and the like, for the candidate Dov Hanin who competed in Tel-Aviv). In addition, searches were made on YouTube's internal search engine, and when locating campaign videos, the channels that uploaded them were inspected in order to learn if there were additional campaigning materials. We also looked to related videos that YouTube suggested for further viewing. These searches were made in parallel by four research assistants. References to YouTube materials were also sought on contenders' Web sites, which were analyzed in a parallel study (Lev-On, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, only videos that were uploaded as a part of an organized campaigning effort were included in the analysis. Clips of incumbent mayors' actions unrelated to the campaign (for example, visits to local hospitals and schools), past media appearances of contestants (obvious cases were videos that were uploaded long before the campaign started), and interviews with candidates in local news sites and debates between them sponsored by local organizations and uploaded to YouTube were all excluded from the analysis. To be excluded from the analysis, agreement between all four research assistants needed to be reached.

To study audience involvement, the following parameters were examined: the number of views a YouTube clip received, the number of rates, and the number of comments.

Beyond checking the presence or absence of a channel on YouTube and the number of videos, this study analyzes which variables may predict candidates' YouTube presence. Thus, data were gathered about the authorities in which elections took place: how peripheral they were; the number of eligible voters; and the socio-economic status, the age distribution, the education, and the income of the population.

In terms of the electoral competition, it was checked whether the candidate is an incumbent, and if not, if the candidate was running against an incumbent or a newcomer (where the current head was not running for re-election and the seat was open). Additional measures included the number of candidates and the degree of competitiveness of the elections, where the percentage of the votes was gained by the winner, and the gap between him and the runner-up, were used as proxies.[4]

The study also used telephone interviews with candidates or their contact persons, since

sometimes videos could not be located as they were not promoted well, or at all, in search engines, and interviews may have been the only way to learn about them. Phone calls were made shortly after the elections, when the details were still fresh in the interviewees' memory; no calls were made prior to the election, in order not to affect candidates' decisions for opening a channel on YouTube or uploading videos. Interviews were conducted with 217 of the 381 candidates (57%) or their contact persons. The interviews did not ask about the content of the videos, and were made only to double-check; the interviews were made in addition to the searches conducted through Google, YouTube, and candidates' campaign sites, and their place in the research design was secondary.

FINDINGS

General Data

The municipal elections that took place in November 2008 were held at 156 municipalities. This study analyzes YouTube usage in the 103 elections that took place in the Jewish authorities, involving 381 candidates. Of the 381 candidates (3.7 candidates per municipality), 90 were incumbents, 243 were new candidates who competed against incumbents, and 48 were new candidates who competed at 13 localities where the incumbent candidate did not run for re-election. Municipalities included in the analysis below have about 4.3 million eligible voters, and the percentage of valid votes out of the total number of eligible voters was 1.97 million (45.8%).

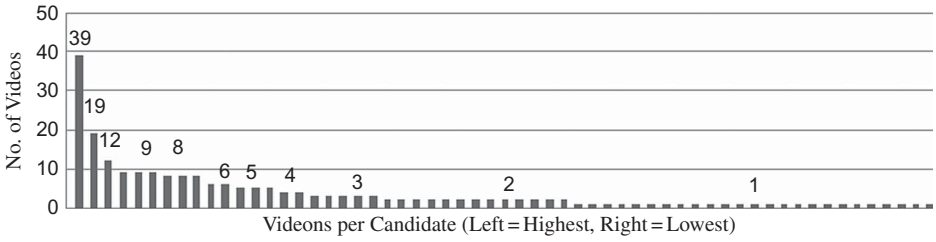
Of the 90 incumbents, 72 (80%) were re-elected. A second round of elections was held at 13 authorities. The average percentage of votes received by candidates was as follows: incumbents – 53.2%, new candidates who competed against incumbents – 17.3%, new candidates who competed in open-seat races – 27.1%.

Of the 381 contenders, 63 (16.5%) uploaded YouTube videos. A total of 226 campaign videos were located—an average of 3.59 per candidate. Note (Figure 1) that the distribution of campaign videos among candidates is highly unequal; the three candidates with the highest YouTube presence uploaded 70 videos, and the top 14 candidates (22.2%) uploaded 148 videos (65.5% of the videos) combined.

The relatively low presence of candidates on YouTube clips refutes the first hypothesis (H1). Note that candidates who had no YouTube clips received 26.8% of the vote in their municipalities, while candidates who had some YouTube presence received 28% of the vote. However, these differences were not significant. Note also that 84% of candidates who were on YouTube also had a Web site, while only 43% who had no YouTube presence had a site, so the presence in various Internet spaces seems to be related.

Next, YouTube usage was compared between incumbents (15.6% of whom uploaded videos), contenders competing against incumbents (16%), and new candidates competing in open-seat races (20.8%). However, the differences are not statistically significant. Therefore the second hypothesis (H2) about differential usage of YouTube by incumbents and new contenders is also rejected.

FIGURE 1. The distribution of YouTube campaign videos among candidates.



The Impact of Strategic Factors on YouTube Usage

Next, the impact of a number of variables that were labeled "strategic," i.e., the number of eligible voters, number of candidates, the gap between winner and runner-up, and the percentage of votes that the winner received (both approximations of the competitiveness of the elections), were examined. Table 1 compares the mean values of strategic variables across candidates with and without YouTube presence.

The differences between the strategic variables were significant, but generally small, with the exception of the number of eligible voters. Candidates with videos competed in authorities with more eligible voters, (marginally) more candidates, and greater competitiveness (lower percentage of votes of winning, a smaller gap between the winner and runner-up) than candidates with no videos. These results lend a qualified support for hypotheses H3 and H4.

The Impact of Socio-Economic Factors on YouTube Usage

Next, candidates with and without Web sites were compared on a cross-section of a number of socio-economic variables. According to Table 2, candidates with a YouTube presence typically run in municipalities where the percentage of residents ages 20–29 is slightly lower (in contrast to the corresponding hypothesis, H5; for similar findings regarding Web site usage, see Lev-On, 2011), and percentage of residents in ages 30–44 is slightly higher, than the municipalities where candidates without a YouTube presence compete. In addition, candidates with a YouTube presence come from the authorities that are less peripheral, with higher

TABLE 1. Means of Strategic Variables among Candidates with and without YouTube Presence

Strategic variable	Candidates without YouTube presence	Candidates with YouTube presence
Eligible voters	38136**	90828**
Number of candidates	4.2*	4.6*
Vote share of winner	53.2*	49*
Gap between winner and runner-up	26.1*	20.7*

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

TABLE 2. Means of Socio-Economic Variables among Candidates with and without YouTube Presence

Socio-demographic variable	Candidates without YouTube presence	Candidates with YouTube presence
% of residents ages 20–29 in the population (2006 data)	15.5*	14.6*
% of residents ages 30–44 in the population (2006 data)	19.3*	20.4*
Socio-demographic cluster[6]	6.1	6.5
Peripherality level[7]	3.3*	3.8*
Peripherality cluster	6.1**	6.9**
Age median	28.9	29.9
% students (ages 20–29)	17.4*	20.4*
% high-school graduates (ages 17–18)	56.4	59
Avg. income, in NIS	3285	3513
% population earning minimum wage	41.9	40
% population earning double the average wage	10.5*	12.5*

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

percentages of students and of residents earning double the average wage, than the authorities where candidates without a YouTube presence are contending. These findings provide limited support to the relevant hypothesis (H5). Still, note that not in all the criteria that were compared were there significant differences between candidates with and without a YouTube presence. Note also that the differences, even when significant, are quite weak.

Public Involvement in YouTube Campaign Videos

Last, public involvement in the campaigns was measured. The average views per campaign video were rather slim, approximately 350 until Election Day. One video stood out: Called "It's Not My city,"[5] this was a video by celebrities who supported Dov Hanin, the opposition candidate in Tel Aviv, that protested the lack of parking and the building of high-rise buildings all over the city (Hanin was also the candidate with the largest number of video clips, 39, with most uploaded by his supporters). Until Election Day, this clip was watched about 16,000 times. Note that if this video is excluded from analysis, than the average number of views per video until the election goes down to around 250. The vast majority of clip views were in the low three-digit number of hits (between 100–300), and some were even in the double-digit zone.

Out of the 226 videos that were located, 130 were rated, and the average number of ratings per clip was 3.7. Only 75 videos were commented on; the average number of comments per clip was 2.5. It seems that, as a whole, these findings support H6, and demonstrate a low involvement of the public in the YouTube activities of candidates.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

With the extensive penetration and use of the Internet as a political and marketing tool, it is important to explore and document its use not only in national politics, but at the municipal level as well. Both the dynamics and granularity of decision-making in the municipal context presents an opportunity for new insights into the use of online media such as YouTube in political campaigning. The study's narrow scope illuminates a scholarship area that has not been fully examined up until this point.

This article focuses on YouTube—one platform for online campaigning that is unique for its visibility and rich video experience, among other things. While there are hopes that YouTube and similar platforms will change the dynamics of campaigning, reach audiences, and involve them, data from its actual usage by candidates and audiences at the municipal level suggest otherwise and, at least for now, bring some fresh skepticism on the ability to use YouTube as a platform for a more participatory and interactive local politics.

The municipal arena is an intriguing environment in which to study online campaigning. Local campaigns are not affluent with resources, they address a relatively small number of voters concentrated in a relatively small geographic area, and only thousands or tens of thousands of people can vote per municipality. Due to the low number of voters, there might well be a situation where the margin between victory and defeat is slim—a situation where any tool through which voters can be reached and influenced may be valuable. While door-to-door canvassing techniques as well as parlor meetings are still important in such settings, the Internet can be very useful as well, and campaigning through Web sites, social media platforms, and in particular YouTube may very well be the differentiating factor between success or defeat at the polls.

The article examines the actual scope and character of YouTube usage in municipal campaigns, and socio-economic and strategic variables that may predict YouTube usage, as well as audience involvement. The main findings signify that candidates are not investing significant effort in YouTube as a campaign channel, and that there appears to be little audience involvement. Only one-sixth of the contestants in the Jewish sector established sites, and only a slim number of the candidates uploaded ten videos or more. Public involvement (views, ratings, comments) was rather slim, and it seems that interaction between candidates and constituencies through YouTube is still a remote vision.

This article might be understood to revisit the findings presented by Gulati and Williams (2010), in a fresh context and at a different scale of political action. The findings support the well-developed academic skepticism of the hype of social media in e-participation. It may be the case that, in spite of their touted potential, services such as YouTube nonetheless require significant resources to be used successfully in the context of a municipal campaign.

Significant differences were found among candidates with and without a YouTube presence, in the cross-section of strategic variables. Candidates with a presence on YouTube competed in municipalities with more eligible voters, more candidates, and more intense competition (lower percentage of votes of winning, a smaller gap between the winner and the runner-up) than candidates without a YouTube presence. Significant, but rather weak, differences were also found in the cross-sections among candidates with and without a YouTube presence, including several socio-demographic variables, such as peripherality and some criteria of age, education, and income of the constituency.

The picture that emerges from the study is consistent with previous findings about the lack of interactivity in political campaign websites, MK (Member of the Knesset) parliamentary sites (Haleva-Amir, 2011), and Web sites of municipalities (Purian, 2011). The findings shed a critical light on the possibilities of interactive political usage of the Internet, and comprehensive public engagement online. It is during election campaigns that candidates have clear incentives, more so than after the elections, not only to send messages to constituencies, but also to hear back and possibly to adjust their platform accordingly. The fact that this does not occur, even when technology allows for it, demonstrates that there is still a long way to go for the full realization of more participatory and bidirectional democracy through advanced online platforms.

Still, although only a small percentage of candidates uploaded videos, some candidates used it quite extensively, albeit somewhat infrequently. While usage is low overall in municipal elections, there were individual spikes of heavy use and attention (notably the case of Dov Hanin), which needs to be explained further. Some early adopters demonstrate that social media can be intensely used at the municipal level as well, albeit in certain circumstances, and possibly depending on variables such as the environment of the authority or even the personality of the contender.

Future studies should compare the findings of this study with Internet usage, and particularly social media usage in low-visibility political campaigns. It will be interesting to see if the broad penetration of social media platforms, such as Facebook (that became much more prominent in the year following the elections), will be translated into greater political usage by candidates and constituencies, and more interaction between them.

It will also be useful to integrate current and future findings into a theory of uses of candidates and audiences and their gratifications from new media. Such a theory can explain how candidates perceive the Internet as an arena for campaigning, what the perceived opportunities and costs are, what the actual uses of the Internet (and of social media in particular) are, and how their expected impact is perceived.

NOTES

1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU

2. The site was ranked third in Alexa when data for this study were collected. See also Madden (2009), and YouTube's own fact sheet at http://www.youtube.com/t/fact_sheet.

3. Gulati and Williams (2010) found that incumbents have uploaded more YouTube videos than new candidates in the U.S. senate elections. However, in the elections they studied, unlike the elections studied here, candidates invest considerable sums of money, and also there are considerable quantities of filmed materials collected during the incumbent's term in office. Since municipal candidates do not have substantial budgets or massive film archives, we do not expect to see a similar phenomenon here.

4. Data about socio-economic status, age median, education (percentage of students among residents in the age group 20–29, percentage of high school graduates among residents ages 17–18), and income (average income, percentage of residents earning minimum wage, percentage of residents earning twice or more than the average wage) are based on Israeli CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics) data published in March 2008 on

the Web site of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, http://www.moin.gov.il/Apps/PubWebSite/publications.nsf/All/5FCD19CFBECFBC18C2257427002FF5DC/FILE/Publications.pdf?OpenElement. The district, and the percentages of residents ages 20–29 and 30–44 in the population, were taken from the CBS Website, http://www1.cbs.gov.il/publications/local_authorities2006/excel/p_libud.xls. Data about how peripheral the authority was were also taken from the CBS Web site, http://www.cbs.gov.il/hodaot2008n/24_08_160b.pdf. The numbers of eligible voters were taken from messages posted by the elections supervisor in the Israeli Ministry of Interior Affairs. Details of incumbents were downloaded from the Web site of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and from the site of the center of the local authorities in Israel, http://www.iula.org.il. Unfortunately, data on other parameters that can be of relevance, such as Internet connectivity rates and population religiosity in different locations across the country, are not available.

5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAZ0jos3dyg

6. The socio-economic index ranges from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest).

7. The peripherality index was constructed by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), and takes into account the distance of the municipality from Tel-Aviv district, which is the economic and business center of Israel; and the potential accessibility index, which uses the distance between the municipality and other municipalities, as well as the size of population, and functions as a proxy to a variety of economic parameters.

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