

E-Campaign in Greek Elections: 2000-2004

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Abstract: - E-Campaign studies around the world reveal the growing significance that the web plays in the campaign strategy of political candidates and parties. This study investigates web use by candidates during their campaign in Greek national and local elections. A continuous project of studying the use of the web by parties, politicians, governmental and other political organizations in Greece is carried out by the Department of Public Relations and Communication of the TEI of Western Macedonia. This study covers the local municipal and prefecture elections of 2002, the national elections of 2004 and the elections for the European Parliament of 2004. Our e-campaign model focuses on two factors that seem to exert considerable influence on the decision of candidates to go online: the geographical region where the candidate's district is located and the candidate's party affiliation.

Key-Words: - e-Politics, Web campaign, Web candidates, e-Elections, Political communication

1 Introduction

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 [9], [19],[27] e-campaigning increased its usage in every electoral circle thereafter. Extensive studies on the USA covered Presidential and Congressional campaigns on the web ([2],[4],[5],[6],[7],[10],[11],[13],[20],[21],[22],[26],[30],[31],[34],[41],[42]). A number of electoral contests have also been studied in the United Kingdom (UK) ([25],[26],[40]). Beyond the USA and UK contexts, web campaigns studies have been conducted for Italy [28], Finland [3], Germany [17], Netherlands [38], and Australia [16]. Moreover, the use of the web by parties and politicians has been the focus of studies in the Netherlands [39], Russia and Ukraine [35], Denmark [24], and Japan [37]. Despite the increasing number of studies, the role of the web as a campaign tool remains relatively unknown. Internet compared to other media ranks at the medium end of the scale and is difficult to isolate its impact from other campaign strategies.

In Greece, elections 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.

The study of online politics, has only recently attracted the interest of researchers in Greece ([8],[23],[33],[43]). Kotsikopoulou's [23] study of Internet use by political parties covers the first trials by parties and politics to use the web as a medium. Kotsikopoulou 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 [23]. In this paper we investigate web candidates in an election cycle following the 2000 parliamentary elections. The research is covering four different electoral contests: the municipal and prefecture elections of 2002, the national elections of 2004 and the European Parliament Elections of 2004. By breaking down web candidates by type of electoral contest we intend to discern patterns and regularities in the use

of the web as a campaign tool. In analyzing the impact of web campaigns in Greek elections, one should bear in mind that at the time of the prefecture and municipal elections of October 2002 the households with internet connection in Greece were 14% while the average for European Union member-states was 43% [12]. Additionally at the time of the parliamentary elections the number of households with internet climbed to 18%. Certainly, this low percentage represents a small pool of voters and testifies to a “deficit” in web campaign appreciation by Greek politicians and voters alike.

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Election Contest	Year	HWI	WC
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 Candidates by Electoral Contests
 HWI= Households with internet connection at election year,
 WC= Web Candidates over Total Number of candidates

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

2. Methodology

Identifying web candidates for any election contest in Greece was not an easy task. Party web sites in the prefecture and municipal elections were not at all helpful in designating their candidates by municipality neither did they provide links to their officially designated candidates. Reversing the direction from the candidates to parties, the same pattern was observed with only a few candidates providing link access to their party websites. The situation was improved during the parliamentary elections of 2004, where the two major parties provided links to around 70% of their web candidates. The remaining 30% of the web candidates were collected from other sources.

In order to collect the web sites of candidates, we browsed well-known Greek political portals (www.e-kloges.gr, www.elections.gr, www.greelections.gr, www.greekelections.com) for candidate links and made use of a search engine (Google) using candidate names as keywords. All candidate-related web sites were included in the dataset irrespective of their quality or of the amount of information provided. In addition, sites were included regardless of the domain hosting them. Not included in the dataset were webpages of common format designed and utilized by parties for their respective candidates. Our decision was based on the fact that this practice does not constitute an e-campaign attempt by the candidate. The data were systematically collected and stored in the final week of each election campaign. We ended up with a sample of 113 (3.6%) web candidates out of a total of 3128 candidates running for municipal office; 30 (12.9%) web candidates out of a total of 233 candidates running for the prefecture office; and 236 web candidates out of a total of 725 candidates originating from the two major parties (ND and PASOK) running for a national parliamentary seat. In this work we present outcomes of e-campaign according to: i) geographic dimension ii) party affiliation and iii) web content analysis. The later is sub-divided into categories of political content analysis, multimedia usage, interactivity and professionalism in web design.

3. E-Campaign Results

3.1 Geographical Distribution of Web Candidates

As Table 2 shows, most web candidates are concentrated in the capital prefecture of Attica, which includes the city of Athens and its suburbs as well as the city of Piraeus.

Prefecture	P	NM	MW	PMW	PW	PPW
Attika	3.8	91	67 (59%)	56.1	104 (44%)	36.1
Thessaloniki	1.0	43	11 (10%)	96.1	16 (7%)	66.1
All the Rest	6.1	766	35 (31%)	174.8	116 (49%)	52.8
Totals	10.9	900	113	96.8	236	46.3

Table 2: Geographical Distribution of Web Candidates

P=Population in millions, NM=Number of Municipalities MW=Municipal web candidates, PMW=Corresponding Population per web municipal candidate (in thousands) PW= Parliament Web Candidate, PPW= Corresponding Population per web parliamentary candidate (in thousands)

In the municipal elections, Attica is the leading region for e-campaigning. Part of the explanation rests on the fact that candidates in Attica due to population size and time constraints can not afford interpersonal communication the way candidates in other regions do. For them e-campaigning is considered an effective medium to reach out to voters. The web candidates per capita ratio in municipal elections in Attica is 1 web candidate for 56146 citizens while the country's ratio is 1 web candidate for 96812 citizens. In the parliamentary elections, the Attica region again leads in the web candidate per capita ratio, even though the percentage of web candidates in Attica falls behind the number for the rest of the country. In parliamentary elections the ratio drops to 1 web candidate for 36171 citizens. From the candidate's point of view, this drop designates that web use is related to the importance of the electoral contest. This finding is corroborated by the contrast in the country's ratio between municipal and parliamentary elections. The approximately 50% drop in the ratio underlines the importance of e-campaigning in the most significant contest, the parliamentary elections.

3.2 Party Affiliation of Web Candidates

Three findings are worth noting in Table 3. First New Democracy (ND) is the party with the greatest percentage of web winners, that is, candidates that performed successful e-campaign by winning the corresponding contest. Second, regarding the final outcome, e-campaigning is more successful in parliamentary elections than in municipal elections, considering that one out of two web candidates was a web winner. Third, independent candidates in municipal elections seem to benefit the most out of

e-campaigning. It is noteworthy that independent candidates lead party candidates in adopting web campaigns.

The centrality of the web in the strategy of the independent candidates is attested by taking a closer look at the second round contests of the 2002 Municipal Elections, pitting only candidates with against candidates without an e-campaign strategy. Independent candidates with e-campaign strategy were winners in 6 municipalities compared to independent candidates without a strategy, who were winners in only 3 municipalities. In addition, a focus on the Attica Prefecture demonstrates that candidates with e-campaign strategy, regardless of party affiliation, won in 13 out of 19 examined municipalities. If we were to take into consideration the effect of both party affiliation and geographical region together, it becomes very clear that independent web candidates running in the municipalities of the Attica Prefecture were by far the winners in 83% of the cases (winning 5 to 1 municipalities). Notwithstanding the small sample size of electoral contests, it is apparent that a web campaign strategy made a difference for independent web candidates in municipalities of the Athens prefecture.

3.3 Political Content by Web Candidates

Different models [18], [32] have been used to analyze content of political web sites. Researchers [10] use a 24-question format for evaluating web sites. Puopolo [30] undertakes a cross-sectional analysis of 60 web sites for the 2000 U.S. Senate race and compares a number of variables for Democrats and Republicans as well as for men and women. Like other web campaign studies, our model analyzes political content incorporating three more categories: use of multimedia techniques, interactivity, and professionalism in web design. In the present study, the political content of each web site includes the following material: the candidate's resume, political speeches, candidate's action program, press releases, press campaign coverage placed on the web site and negative statements against other candidate's positions or programs. Results indicated that the most popular category was the resume of the candidate. Approximately half of the web candidates mentioned their action program that would be carried out if elected and approximately one out of five candidates included political speeches, press releases, and related printed press campaign coverage extracted from the press and placed on the web candidates' site. Overall candidates did not engage in negative campaigning.

Parties	Municipal Web Candidates	% of web winners	Prefectural Web Candidates	% of web winners	Parliamentary Web Candidates	% of web winners
ND ^{***}	13	62%	8	75%	101	62%
PASOK ^{***}	20	45%	5	20%	135	50%
KKE ^{***}	3	0%	1	0%	0	0%
SYN ^{***}	6	17%	2	17%	5	60%
INDEPENDENT w/out party support	39	31%	4	25%		
INDEPENDENT with party support ^{**}	16	19%	5	20%		
PASOK and SYN ^{**}	11	55%	3	33%		
Other Party Alliances [*]	5	0%	2	0%	2	0%
Totals	113	35%	10	33%	243	54%

Note: ^{*} *Other Party Alliances* include web candidates affiliated with DIKKI, LAOS, KKE and DIKKI, ND and SYN, and PASOK together with SYN and DIKKI. ^{**} Referred only to municipal and prefecture elections ^{***} Current members of the national parliament

Table 3: Candidates with Websites by Party Affiliation

3.4 Multimedia usage by Web Candidates

Through the inclusion of multimedia techniques we intend to document the degree to which multimedia techniques are prevalent in the area of Greek political campaigning. Multimedia features are considered by some candidates to add to the attractiveness of their web site. Besides text, web sites may include photos, audio files, video files or introductory video clips before entering the main web site. Regarding campaign web sites the audio and video files may cover aspects of campaign activities of the candidate. Therefore these files may be also considered as multimedia political content available to the public. The overall conclusion is that the web candidates underutilized the use of multimedia techniques. Not even a photograph album appeared as a standard feature of the candidates. This is surprising given that candidates like to present warm human encounters between themselves and members of their constituencies. The only exception was the independent candidates in municipal elections, who utilized some of the available multimedia features. This is probably due to the fact that independents cannot afford traditional media channels that are prohibitive in cost and are more available to party candidates.

3.5 Interactivity by Web Candidates

Interactivity is a much-discussed concept among web researchers [1], [15], [29], [36]. Interactivity is a distinctive feature that sets the web apart from other media [14]. Interactivity facilitates a two-way communication between the source and site visitors. Therefore interactivity is an important feature of political campaigns.

E-mail is the most frequent form of interaction between the candidates and their voters. However approximately half of the candidates did not interact at all. This is another indication of under-utilization of the medium, leaving out an important feature of communication. The other interactivity features like discussion forums, live chats, guest books, or other public forms of interaction with the voters were very limited in numbers. Web candidates did not frequently use other indicators of interactivity.

3.6 Professionalism by Web Candidates

Professionalism in web campaign is included in our study in order to explore whether politicians have been drawn to this new medium as a result of their excitement to try something new or out of their appreciation of the added value that the web brings to their campaign. To estimate the importance that politicians attach to professional concerns, we screened to see whether web candidates a) employed web experts, b) provided important campaign information or limited themselves to publishing a single web page with just a photo and a resume, and c) maintained an active web site after the election. Professionalism findings revealed that the overwhelming majority of web candidates had a website instead of a single web-page and the majority of web candidates maintained their website alive after the election time. The majority of the web candidates did not make any reference to the web designer.

4. Conclusion

E-campaigning in Greece, was only recently added to the politicians' campaign strategies, as a medium to reach voters. This medium was more explored by

politicians running campaigns in the prefecture of Attica. Use of the Internet as a campaign tool is related to the importance that is attached to the electoral contest. The national parliament election is the most important contest attracting one third of the candidates of the two major parties. European Parliament elections seem not to offer a fertile ground for web candidates as parties have the upper hand in nominating candidates and parties' electoral strength determines the election of candidates as European members of parliament. Independent candidates in municipal elections are more likely to use the web than other parties' candidates. Regarding web content, important features of interactivity for establishing a communication platform with the voters were under-utilized. However, there was an improvement in the quality of web contents from one election cycle to another.

Overall, the potential of the web hasn't been fully explored by web candidates. Internet's use as a campaign tool is marginal in European Parliament elections and grows in importance among party candidates originating from the two major parties in national elections and among independent candidates in municipal elections. In terms of geographic distribution, e-campaigning is concentrated in the Attica Prefecture, where web candidates for parliamentary elections attach greater importance to the use of the web than their counterparts for municipal elections. Independent candidates in municipalities of the Athens prefecture seem to take advantage of the web in their campaigns.

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