

The Internet and the Political Marketing: an Analysis of How the Political Parties and Candidates Used the Internet During the 2006 Mexico's Presidential Campaign

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of the internet, specifically the World Wide Web (www) in a main area: what is exactly the use that the political parties gave to their Internet sites during the 2006 Mexico's presidential campaign? To respond this question, we made a content analysis of the political parties and their presidential candidates' web sites. The results show that information provision remains as the most important Website function for most of the parties and their candidates, and that they are not taking advantage of the interactive potential of Internet as communication tool. Results show also a 'digital divide' among big and small parties in their ability to use the Internet as a marketing tool.

Keywords: Internet, political marketing, Websites, content analysis.

1. Introduction

The communications' technological development has played a preponderant role in the development of political campaign strategies during the XXth Century [1]. As the put in motion of the television gave a new dimension to the political campaigns in the 60s, the rise of the Internet as a mass media in the 90s, has generated a new phase in the political communication with marketing intentions [2][3]. Some authors have argued that from the decade of the 90s has emerged, thanks to the internet, a new political campaigns era called "post-modern era" [2][3]. This has recently generated a big academic interest about the impact of the new information and communication technologies (TICs), as the internet or the e-mail in the political marketing during the electoral campaigns. However, that the real impact of the TICs in the electoral processes and in elections, is far to be clarified. Early researches have revealed interesting and contraries possibilities [4].

The point of debates has to do with powerful change in two areas: the political parties' communication and the rivalry between the political parties [4]. First, does the interactive nature of the internet allows more participative communication among political parties and their supporters?, second, the on-line communication has low costs, does it open the possibility to a equalitarian political parties system that gives a chance to smaller political parties to reach a greater audience?

1.1 Internet Contribution to Modern Style of Politics Election

At this "post-modern" phase, the elections campaigns are almost permanent and the potential voters are treated as consumers and the politics offers as commercial products [5].

Specifically, the internet may contribute into a change in the style of the politics election among the next impacts [5]:

- Through the immediate information delivery to the voters –because the absence of publishing on-line control, the political parties can send information directly to their supporters. Due to it, political parties does not have to worry about distortions in their messages; besides, they can provide a greater information amount and details through their web sites through bulletins, speeches, audio and video clips, campaign diaries and documents.
- Mobilizing and reaching to their supporters in an effective way –the internet and the e-mail provide the politician parties a new ways to communicate with their supporters. For those that have technology access, they argue that the TICs decreases the costs for participate and adhere to the organizations [6]. Political parties have admitted the Internet power to reach particular voters’ types through personalized e-mails, or personalizing their Websites to specific voters through the use of “cookies” (A cookie; is an information fragment that stores up in the hard drive of the visitor of a web site, after a request made by the web site server. This information can be recuperated later by the server in next visits [7]). There is an emphasis about the importance of the Internet to reach young voters, -the so called e generation-, that have grown beside the technology, but that are less prone to vote or join the traditional political organizations and political parties [8] [9].
- Creating an on-line dialogue with voters –the interactive characteristics of the web sites as the e-mail, the e-bulletins and the chats, increases the direct dialogue possibilities between the political parties and the voters. Nowadays, when voters are seen as consumers, the Web allows political parties to inquire their members/supporters opinion about their politics. It allows to create surveys and blogs on-line (Blog, is a periodically actualized Website that compiles documents chronologically even they are made by one or more authors, appearing first the most recent document, giving the author the freedom to publish whatever he considers. The term blog comes from web and log [10]). This permits an almost continual feedback [11] [12].
- Making “decentralized” electoral campaigns –at the inner of the political parties, the use of the TICs may avoid the inclination to centralize the campaigns. The low costs to build up web sites may be a useful platform for the political parties or local candidates to show their points of view to a greater audience, letting them to withdraw from the centralized campaigns [13][3].

1.2 The Mexican Political Party System at the 2006 Presidential Election

The Mexican political party system for the 2006 presidential campaign was formed by 8 political parties, 3 of them known as big political parties and 5 small political parties, the first of them are Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), the small political parties are Partido del Trabajo PT, Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), Partido Convergencia (PC), Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL) and Partido Alternativa Social (PAS). The PRI established an electoral alliance with the PVEM named “Alianza por México (Alliance for Mexico)”. Their presidential candidate was Roberto Madrazo-Pintado (RMP). The PRD also made an electoral alliance with 2 of the small political parties, PT and PC called “Por el Bien de Todos (For the wellness of all)”. They assumed as their presidential candidate Andrés-Manuel López-Obrador (AMLO). The rest of the political parties, PAN, PANAL and PAS, went by their own to the 2006 Presidential Process, with presidential candidates: Felipe Calderon (FC), Roberto Campa (RC) and Patricia Mercado (PM) respectively.

The PAN, born in 1939 as opposite political party to the political party in the government (PRI), won the 2000 Presidential election with Vicente Fox as their candidate. In the 2006 Presidential Electoral Process they obtained their second triumph with the actual Mexican President, Felipe Calderón (FC); at this time, the results of the election generated a big controversy, making necessary the intervention of the electoral court to solve the conflict, confirming Felipe Calderón as the Mexican President.

The (PRI) was born in 1946 as a rename to former Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM), party which was the party formed by the leaders of the Mexican revolution of 1910. It has a central wing ideology. The PRI suffers their first defeat in a presidential election in year 2000 presidential election, after being as the political party in the government for more than 70 years.

The (PRD) is located at the left wing; it is a young political party, born in 1988, nevertheless the 2006 electoral process gave them a big advance situating them as the second place in the electoral preferences.

The PT surges as a left wing party in 1993, having their first participation as a recognized and registered political party at the 1994 electoral process. In the 2006 electoral process, the PT participated in alliance with the PRD, designating AMLO as their Presidential candidate.

The (PVEM) born in 1993 as a central wing party concerned by ecological issues, their first electoral process were the 1994 elections. For the 2006 elections, they participate in alliance with the PRI having as their Presidential candidate Roberto Madrazo. The PC was born 1999 in the social democracy wing, under the name of Convergencia por la Democracia (Convergence for Democracy); they have participated in 2 Presidential elections, 2000 and 2006, in both cases as a member of an electoral alliance. In 2006 presidential election, AMLO was their Presidential candidate. The PANAL is integrated mainly by elementary school teachers of the largest Mexican Union; surges in 2005, participating the next year in the Presidential election. The PAS political party surges under the social democracy wing in 2005. As consequence they have their first participation in the 2006 electoral process, having a woman (Patricia Mercado) as their presidential candidate.

The Table 1 shows the official results of the 2006 Mexican presidential election. There was clearly such a small difference among first and second place that it led to a difficult post-election situation. In September 5, 2006, Felipe Calderón was declared President Elect by the Federal Electoral Tribunal after a highly controversial post-electoral process.

Table 1: 2006 Mexican Presidential Election Results

	PAN	PRI/PVEM ALIANZA POR MÉXICO	PRD/PT/PC POR EL BIEN DE TODOS	PANAL	PAS
Votes	15,000,284	9,301,441	14,756,350	401,804	1,128,850
Percentage	35.89%	22.26%	35.31%	0.96%	2.70%

2. Objectives

This paper analyzes the use of Internet Websites by political parties and candidates in the last Mexican presidential election through Website data content analysis. Besides, with the data gathered, an analysis and interpretation of the implications to the Mexican political parties system is made. The interpretation goes in the way of similar researches around the world [14]. The analysis of the Mexican case is important for several reasons: a) however the low internet penetration in Mexico, the 2006 statistics shows a 26% of Internet users in Mexico among people from 12 to 64 years old. Besides, academic research on this subject for Mexico is almost none up to date.

2.1 Research Questions

Following from the previous discussion, this article explores a basic question about the political parties, the political candidates and the cyberspace: What are they doing in their web sites to communicate with their potential audience?

Gibson and Ward have identified five political Website' functions [16]: (1) information provision, (2) political campaigns development, (3) resources generation, (4) nets development, and (5) participative promotion. The reasoning is:

1. Information provision. The Web offers to the organizations the capacity to store up extensive information that people and interested groups, as the mass media, can access immediately. All the empirical studies from the political parties Websites supports the thesis that these Websites are being used as secure files storage of essential information [17][18][197][20][21][22].
2. Political campaign development. Besides being useful to disseminate educative material about history and the organization structure, the Web also offers to the political parties, innovative tools for professional political campaigns styles [3][23] Now that the wide web connection is more accessible, political parties can submit more sophisticated multimedia material to their supporters. The 24/7 internet access (24 hours a day, seven days a week) and its instantaneous set up ability, allows continuous news distribution and rapid strategies attacks against opponents. The multimedia format looks like attractive for the younger electors, a segment that is highly looked for by political parties [24][25]. Finally the Web's interactivity allows political parties to obtain more detailed information from their voters through the opinion fathoming and the cookies use, and through e-mails and personalized Websites.
3. Resources generation. The bidirectional communication Web's ability and its global reach provide political parties with new ways to membership and funds collect. Different North American political candidates' reports significant funds gain through the Internet (PoliticsOnline.com, 2000). But not only the biggest North American political parties are utilizing this, European human rights groups also reports a successfully funds collect through the internet [26].
4. Nets generation. The Internet's hypertext and hypermedia ability signifies that may provide instantaneous links between organizations. These links may be inside to political parties, as the candidates' links and their political party board of directors, and also to external groups that coincide with the party's philosophy.
5. Participative promotion. Probably one of the most important novelties that the Web offers to the political organizations is the ability to expand the interaction with their political party membership and their supporters. Through Websites and e-mail, the individuals may contact the political party for feedback on their political thoughts, action plan and strategies, or candidates and political parties' leaders' live "discussion" through online chat rooms. The Swedish Social Democrat Party is one of the political parties that have more experience in this. During the 1998 election, promoted more than 70 chat rooms online with its prominent people, 11 open discussion areas, and hired people to answer every email received individually.

3 Methodology

From the aforesaid, main question of this study has to be with the determination of which Websites, -of which political parties-, have accomplished the five functions specified in the previous section and how can be compared the Internet quantitative and the qualitative presence between small and big political parties during the 2006 Mexican presidential elections. To accomplish this, a content analysis of the political parties and the presidential candidates' web sites method was chosen.

3.1 Content Analysis of Websites

For the content analysis of the Websites the method proposed by Gibson and Ward was used [16]. The political parties and candidates' Websites available with an official registration were analyzed. The outline proposed by Gibson and Ward [16], categorized common characteristics founded at Websites as the hypertext links, e-mail contacts and online membership in a scale that measures each one of the aforesaid items and described functions. Additionally, a separate index that measures certain Websites' aesthetic and style characteristics was compiled. (All analysis system details are available on request from the authors. For reasons of space, they are not included here).

3.2 Website Functions

The content analysis technique was used to evaluate the Web sites' operation. The relative importance of the Websites' different functions was measured: votes' increment, membership's increment, information providing to the people, information providing to the mass media, feedback to their membership, and feedback to their supporters.

3.3 An Equalized Competence Between Political Parties

To establish if the Internet offered to the small political parties and their candidate's useful advantages to communicate their messages, a content analysis technique was also used. The quality of their Websites was compared to the big political parties' Websites by measuring the style and capacity in the information sending. To measure the "effectiveness" that a Website shows is a subjective work. Perhaps, the subjectivity may be decreased specifying some of the generic factors that improve the user's access and navigation experience. On the other hand, there exist certain Websites' elements or tools as the images use, navigation frames and multimedia material that contribute to the global sophisticated aesthetic of web site. In spite of that here, again, the beauty of the Website is an observer judgement; a Website that only contains poor quality text elements or back screens and images, certainly will be classified or considered by the most of the users as a "primitive" web site.

4 Results

4.1 Website Functions

The questionnaire data as reported in Table 2 revealed information dissemination to the public to be the most important function of the Website for most parties. Parties seem not be aware of the interactive power of Internet, or these forms of communication were not considered of importance. Big parties provide more information on an average, than small parties. The results shown in Table 3 for candidates personal Websites show a similar pattern with those of the corresponding parties, but even for information provision, figures are far from impressive for an average of 6.625 out of 13 for parties' Websites and 7.2 for candidates' Websites. While raw scores show minimal activity on resource generation, it should be noted that fund raising laws in Mexico are very restrictive. One of the most important features of Internet is its interactive potential. Content analysis looked at the openness of a site in terms of the number of e-mail addresses listed, the extent of feedback solicited by e-mail and any online polls/surveys, and finally the opportunities for online participation such as bulletin boards or chat rooms. The results reveal that while most parties sprinkle their sites with e-mail addresses they do not tend to venture into the latter more interactive methods of communication. Networking measures assessed the number of hypertext links within a Website. Here again, a significant difference between big and small parties and their candidates' Websites shows. Campaigning measures deal with the use of the Web as a campaign tool. The content analysis looked at whether parties used their sites for negative attacks on their opponents, credit claiming for their policies/achievements, and

whether they targeted information to particular categories of voters. The large parties were the only ones who devoted significant space to attacking their rivals, and here again; a digital divide among big and small parties shows up.

Table 2: Functions of Party's Website – Content Analysis

	Information provision	Resource generation	Participation (Feedback and interaction)	Networking	Campaign (push and pull)
PAN	12	1	5	22	8
PRI	3	0	1	16	3
PRD	10	0	0	19	3
PT	1	0	0	4	1
PVEM	9	0	0	9	1
PSD	9	0	4	9	5
PANAL	3	0	2	7	3
PC	6	0	0	6	1
Overall mean scores	6.625	0.125	1.5	11.5	3.125
Score range	1-13	0-9	0-7	0-uncensored	0-13

Notes: A full breakdown of the scores and tables for individual functions are available on request from the authors. For reasons of space, they are not included here.

Table 3: Functions of Candidate's Website – Content Analysis

	Information provision	Resource generation	Participation (Feedback and interaction)	Networking	Campaign (push and pull)
FC	9	0	4	12	5
AMLO	10	0	0	14	3
RMP	7	0	0	5	3
RC ^(*)	0	0	0	0	0
PM	8	0	0	3	1
Overall mean scores	7.2	0	0.8	6.8	2.4
Score range	1-13	0-9	0-7	0-uncensored	0-13

Notes: A full breakdown of the scores and tables for individual functions are available on request from the authors. For reasons of space, they are not included here.

(*) Candidate RC has not a Website

4.2 Website Style and Delivery

Table 4: Web Site Style and Delivery. Party's Websites

Measure	PAN	PRI	PRD	PT	PVEM	PSD	PANAL	PC
Glitz index								
Homepage	3	3	3	1	3	2	2	2
Multimedia	2	1	2	0	0	0	2	0
Total score	5	4	5	1	3	2	4	2
Access								
In principle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Home page Kb	362	244	456	48	424	484	168	272
Navigability	1	2	1	0	2	0	2	0
Freshness	6	4	5	2	2	5	2	2

As Tables 4 and 5 shows, there was little here to suggest that parties had thought extensively about site design. Most of the small parties don't even have multimedia elements in their Websites, and most of the Websites of big and small parties and their candidates' show minimal navigability, they lack of internal search engines and site maps.

Only big parties and their candidates' made use of audio or video elements and mostly these related to short-term conference activities. Overall, big parties (PAN, PRI and PRD) stood out, largely because they kept their sites fresh, updating them every few days.

Table 5: Web Site Style and Delivery. Candidate's Websites

Measure	FC	AMLO.	RMP	RC ^(*)	PM
Glitz index					
Homepage	3	2	1	0	2
Multimedia	3	2	1	0	0
Total score	6	4	2	0	2
Access					
In principle	0	0	0	0	0
Home page Kb	372	272	120	0	192
Navigability	1	1	0	0	0
Freshness	5	6	4	0	2

Notes: (*) Candidate RC does not have a Website

5 Conclusions

Despite the great potential of the Internet as a political marketing tool, it would appear that the parties have failed to seize the initiative. Websites fail to take advantage of the full potential of Internet to act as interactive getaway to pull the voters. Further, minor parties have failed to use Internet as a leveraging communication tool and because of this; a stark divide has emerged between the major and minor parties' sites. E-democracy may be developed through the work of different actors in the Internet: political party's websites, candidates websites, potential voters blogs, e-mail campaigning from official parties and from interest groups, material posted in the Web in different types of Websites (video broadcasting sites like YouTube, or personal pages Websites like, Myspace, Facebook or the like to mention a few) making it difficult to prove correct or wrong the technological determinist arguments for e-democracy. As far as e-democracy coming from parties and candidates Website development our findings cast doubt over the technological determinist arguments for e-democracy. Nevertheless, it is important to state that more research is needed to prove this over the time as small parties can develop enough expertise in the future to level the playground when it comes to develop effective Websites. On the other hand, clearly, a higher level of Internet surfers is required for active online political marketing developing. As results show, "Web wars" between parties in Mexico has begun, but it can be predicted that it will develop their full potential on the elections to come.

Researching the use of the Internet as a marketing tool is a highly complex task. This study focused only on Website content analysis; but is easy to notice that there is much more on the Internet regarding online political marketing. More extensive research must be done developing surveys to understand the importance of Websites from the point of view of the users. It is also needed to research on the impact of the "non-official" Websites (personal pages, Web blogs, and other forms of online political communication as e-mailing campaign or the use of broadcast pages as youtube.com to develop political campaign) to get a broader knowledge of the actual use of the Internet as a political marketing tool.

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