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### Title

Beyond the Base? Political Parties, Citizen Activists, and Digital Media Use in the 2009 German Federal Election Campaign

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## Introduction

In western democracies, political parties provide one of the main links between the people and the government by providing organization and information. They provide organization by recruiting candidates to run for office, contesting elections, forming governments, coordinating policy across independent units of government, and providing accountability (Lawson, 1980; Sartori, 1976). Political parties also provide information because they organize around the basic political cleavages in society and mobilize voters to participate in elections. Therefore, the story of political parties is as much about organization as it is about political communication (Römmele, 2003). Depending on the technological possibilities, political parties have communicated with citizens in various ways during different stages of their development (Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Norris, 2000).

When digital media emerged, a big debate emerged as to whether the use of these communication tools would revitalize the linkage between parties and voters, which had been in decline. On the one hand, cyber-optimists thought that the use of digital media could reinvigorate democracy by strengthening ties between parties and citizens, and by allowing parties to mobilize disengaged voters (Browning, 1996; Budge, 1996; Grossman, 1995; Negroponete, 1995; Rheingold, 1993). On the other hand, cyber-pessimists believed digital media had the potential to diminish collective action, as well as the quality of debate and discourse (e.g., Lipow & Seyd, 1996; Lofgren & Smith, 2003). However, neither the cyber-optimists' nor the cyber-pessimists' arguments came to fruition. The empirical research that followed showed that parties did not take advantage of the opportunities digital communication technologies afforded. For the most part, party websites served as online brochures, and parties did little voter outreach online (Bimber & Davis, 2003; R. Gibson, Römmele, & Ward, 2003; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Xenos & Foot, 2008).

Did this change with the introduction of interactive media, such as social networking sites (SNS) in the Web 2.0 era? Are political parties able to mobilize beyond their base through the use of SNS in the Web 2.0 era? Using the 2009 GLES data, we answer this question by assessing the extent to which citizens see and share campaign information through SNS. In what follows, we discuss the optimism that surrounded the Web 1.0 era and the empirical findings that followed. Next, we move to a discussion of the Web 2.0 era and the possibilities interactive technologies portend for strengthening ties between parties and citizens. In a third step, we introduce the 2009 GLES and show the predictors for seeing and

sharing campaign information through SNS. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and their implications for the literature on parties and political participation.

### **Digital Media and Political Parties in the Web 1.0 Era**

At the turn of the twenty-first century many social scientists were hopeful that the introduction of digital media would reverse the long-term declines in civic and political engagement. The introduction of digital media changed the cost and structure of communication by increasing the speed with which information could be gathered and the overall volume of information people could access (Bimber, 2003). For these reasons, cyber-optimists believed that digital media use would strengthen democracy by enhancing two-way, targeted communication between parties and citizens. Parties and citizens could use digital media to identify and communicate with one another across time and space, thereby shrinking the distance between the government and people and expanding communication pluralism (Dertouzos, 1997; Grossman, 1995; Negroponte, 1995). Parties could also utilize digital communication platforms to inform and mobilize disengaged voters, thereby expanding their electoral base. For the most part, however, these hopes did not come to fruition.

These hopes did not come to fruition for a variety of reasons. First, political parties were more likely to adapt traditional campaigning to the online environment than they were to engage in online campaigning. Using survey data from party officials in the UK, Gibson and Ward (1998) found that although party officials believed it important to solicit feedback through their websites, they prioritized information dissemination and voter education. This attitude was reflected in their websites; although most websites included an email address to contact party officials directly, few encouraged policy-based feedback.

Similarly, in a study of the 2001 Australian federal election campaign, Gibson and Ward (2002) found that party officials ranked information dissemination as the most important aspect of their respective websites; although most sites contained e-mail links to senators, members of parliament, and party organizations, they did not include online opinion polls or opportunities to participate in bulletin boards or chat rooms. Parties in Germany also had a web presence of some kind, but they also fit the general pattern of using the Internet to disseminate information (R. Gibson, et al., 2003). In sum, most party websites served as online brochures; not as two-way communication platforms for interest mediation and online participation.

The second reason optimists' claims were overstated flows from the first. Because political parties were more likely to adapt traditional campaigning to the online environment than they were to engage in true online campaigning, they utilized their websites to strengthen ties with strong supporters, not to mobilize disengaged voters (Bimber & Davis, 2003; R. Gibson, et al., 2003; R. Gibson & Ward, 1998; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). As Gibson and Ward (1998) put it:

The parties' rather tepid attitude toward voter recruitment on the Internet is reflected in their Web sites. Fewer than half of the parties [in the UK] have membership forms on their sites, and only two make direct on-line membership possible. The other parties require the forms to be downloaded and mailed to them.... This direct evidence suggests that most parties do not view the Internet as prime territory for recruiting supporters (p. 23).

Findings in the U.S. and Germany echo this sentiment. Bimber and Davis (2003) found that candidates and parties in the 2000 U.S. presidential election utilized their websites to reinforce voter support, encourage supporters to donate money or volunteer their time, and to turn out to vote on election day. Similarly, Gibson et al. (2003) found that parties in Germany used e-newsletters to strengthen ties with party members, but did very little to recruit new members or activate disengaged voters. In sum, political parties conceptualized their audience as party members and strong partisans. Although some parties tried to reach undecided voters, they invested the most time in trying to reinforce supporters' opinions.

The third and final reason optimists' claims were overstated also flows from two previous points. Because most websites served as online brochures, and because most parties designed websites with strong supporters in mind, the people who were most likely to visit party websites already supported the campaign. Bimber and Davis (2003) illustrate this point using original survey data collected after the 2000 presidential election campaign. Their results show that people who visited national election sites were far more likely to affiliate with one of the major parties; while 92% of Democrats and Republicans visited these sites, only 8% of independents did so. Moreover, although the national election sites attracted people with similar ages, incomes, and levels of education and political knowledge, people selectively exposed themselves to candidate and party websites with which they agreed.

To summarize, the introduction of party websites in the 1990s strengthened ties between parties and their supporters, but did not mobilize disengaged voters. Parties did not design their websites in ways that appealed to undecided and disengaged voters; instead of moving to a more democratic, horizontal style of interactive communication, they maintained control over the flow of political communication from the elites to the voters. In addition, the people who were most likely to visit national election websites were also the most likely to have high levels of political interest and knowledge. Therefore, parties' websites reinforced the status quo by making the information-rich richer (Kuklinski, Luskin, & Bolland, 1991; Margolis & Resnick, 2000, p. 54).

### **Digital Media and Political Parties in the Web 2.0 Era**

As Althaus and Tewksbury (2000, p. 22) note, "the continuing evolution of Internet technology and consumption patterns ensures that any study of the general adult population's Internet use will be extremely time-bound." Much of the empirical work presented thus far was conducted before the advent of social media technologies in the mid-2000s. By 2004 the digital media landscape had changed considerably. Some social media were available, including Friendster, Flickr, MeetUp, and MySpace. By 2008, the list had expanded to include Facebook, Twitter, as well as many others.

These developments lead us to revisit cyber-optimists' claims about the potential for digital media tools to reinvigorate democracy by strengthening ties between parties and citizens, in addition to giving citizens new tools to mobilize undecided and disengaged voters. It is time to revisit these claims because the introduction of social media has created new opportunities and dynamics for parties and citizens to interact. In what follows we outline two major changes that make possible citizen-driven online campaigning, or the ability for party loyalists to share content with people who would otherwise not seek campaign information. These changes include the ability for users to co-produce content, and the shift from a top-down, hierarchical structure of communication to a horizontal and egalitarian communication structure.

## **From Consumption to Co-Production**

Although the term “Web 2.0” was coined in 2004 (O’Reilly, 2005), the shift from the Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 era was not characterized so much by a sharp delineation in time as it was a gradual change from the ability to consume content to the ability to co-produce content (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). The Web 2.0 environment blurs the boundaries between the user and the producer, such that any user can co-produce content by posting comments, uploading videos, and sharing information. As Cormode and Krishnamurthy’s (2008: np) observe, “The democratic nature of Web 2.0 is exemplified by creations of large number of niche groups (collections of friends) who can exchange content of any kind (text, audio, video) and tag, comment, and link to both intra-group and extra-group ‘pages.’” The result is a change in the way information is shared and produced, and this change has had large implications for electoral campaigns.

On the one hand, the ability for users to co-produce campaign communications changed the traditional top-down direction of political communication from parties and government to voters and citizens. During the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, for example, Obama enthusiasts had the ability to create their own videos and disseminate them online through their social networks. Perhaps the best-known example is Amber Lee Ettinger’s (a.k.a. Obama Girl’s) “I’ve Got a Crush on Obama” low-budget music video, which received more than 13 million YouTube views as of January 2009 (Stelter, 2009).

Although the video was an overnight sensation, it complicated matters for the Obama campaign, whose candidate was criticized for his lack of experience. Writing about the effect of the video on the Obama campaign, the *New York Times* noted, “The clip, showing Ms. Ettinger dancing in a bikini in front of a photo of Mr. Obama in the ocean, helped crystallize the view of the candidate as a pop culture figure and, to some, a sex symbol” (Stelter, 2009). This example, and others like it, helps demonstrate why campaigns were so reluctant early on to adopt more interactive technologies on their own websites; they did not want to lose control over their message. On the other hand, campaign managers also recognized that Web 2.0 technologies provided unprecedented opportunities for parties to reach undecided and disengaged voters. We address this issue in the following section.

## **From Online Brochures to Online Communities**

As mentioned above, most party websites in the Web 1.0 era served as online brochures; not as two-way communication platforms for interest mediation and online participation. The introduction of new social and participatory media in the mid-2000s, by contrast, had significant implications for the nature of electoral campaigns. It not only lowered the barriers for participation, it had the potential through its architecture to turn the power-structure of a whole campaign upside-down, challenging the notion of campaign headquarters having full control, being able to run a top-down campaign.

Howard Dean’s 2003-2004 primary campaign for the U.S. presidency is one of the most notable examples. During the primary campaign, Dean’s use of internet-based technologies propelled him from an unknown governor of a small northeastern state to the front-runner for the Democratic nomination. Unlike campaigns in the Web 1.0 era, Dean empowered supporters to give feedback, to self-organize through Meetup.com, and to recruit others to the cause. The provision of these tools were critical in personalizing relationships with supporters and developing a sense of joint-ownership of the Dean candidacy (Trippi, 2004). Although Dean’s bid for the Democratic nomination was unsuccessful, his campaign

provided important lessons as to how candidates and parties could harness internet-based technologies to raise money and mobilize support.

In his 2007-2008 bid for the U.S. presidency, Democrat Barack Obama refined and expanded Dean's model. In February 2007, the Obama campaign launched its own social media site, *MyBO*. Through *MyBO*, supporters could organize events, set up fundraising sites, and engage in get out the vote (GOTV) efforts on behalf of the candidate (Harfoush, 2009). By Election Day, *MyBO* had more than 2 million users who had organized 200,000 events offline, created 35,000 groups, and raised \$30 million (Lutz, 2009). In addition, the Obama campaign maintained accounts and pages on 38 social media sites, through which the campaign reached new audiences, and encouraged wider participation (Harfoush, 2009).

Similar innovations have occurred outside the U.S.. In a study of the 2007 Australian federal election, Gibson and McAllister (2011) show that parties and candidates are much more committed to the use of Web 2.0 technologies than they were in the 2004 election. In 2007, for example, the Liberal prime minister used YouTube to announce new measures to address climate change. He also utilized MySpace's Australian impact site, which included information and videos about candidates in the campaign. Similarly, the Labor Party established the *Kevin07* website in an effort to raise money, increase off-line activism, and encourage supporters to spread the campaign's message online. Most importantly, how parties used Web 2.0 technologies had electoral consequences. While the use of Web 1.0 technologies had no effect on the vote, Green candidates' use of Web 2.0 technologies increased their vote share (Gibson & McAllister, 2011).

Just as the Dean campaign influenced candidate and party behavior in the 2007 Australian federal election, the Obama campaign influenced candidate and party behavior in the 2010 UK general election. Although use of Web 2.0 technologies was not as pervasive in the UK as it was in the U.S., the major parties redesigned their websites to include videos, areas designed to mobilize activists, and more opportunities to communicate with party officials (Lilleker & Jackson, 2010). Some of the parties also incorporated publicly visible site members' areas, where they could create their own profiles and upload content. The parties also embraced the use of social media to interact with supporters, though the Labor party was much more extensive in its use than was the Conservative Party (Lilleker & Jackson, 2010).

## **From Party-Driven to Citizen-Driven Campaigning**

Web 2.0 technologies are appealing to parties and citizens alike because they provide new possibilities for citizens to identify and communicate with one another, as well as to establish and sustain loose, voluntary networks of communication and association across time and space at little cost (Bennett, Breunig, & Givens, 2008; Bimber, 2003). Social media also afford individuals the same communication methods once exclusive to formal organizations, and they allow activists to organize and disseminate information independently of traditional bureaucratic institutions. Finally, the ability for users to share campaign information through social media make passive or incidental exposure to campaign information through social media possible. Said another way, users no longer have to pursue political information actively.

To illustrate how political parties are adapting to the Web 2.0 environment, we differentiate between "party-driven campaigning" and "citizen-driven campaigning." Whereas party-driven campaigning is initiated and conducted by party organizations, citizen-driven campaigning is initiated and conducted by citizens to bolster support for their preferred party. To bolster support for their party of choice, citizens take the initiative to

share information with their friends and family about the campaign, often through SNS. These behaviors, are more self-directed, spontaneous, and socially embedded than they are driven by organizations.

The term “citizen-driven campaigning” is not necessarily new; for many years citizens have tried to influence how others vote offline through political discussion, for example. However, the term refers specifically to the participatory practices Web 2.0 technologies afford. When people engage in citizen-driven campaigning, citizens themselves take the initiative to engage in a political campaign by sharing information with their family and friends and, in effect, mobilizing others to participate. The result is a more self-directed, spontaneous, and socially embedded layer of political action during a campaign rather than an institutionally- or organizationally-driven layer (see also Gibson, 2009). In contrast, party-driven campaigning is initiated and conducted by party organizations rather than by citizens, who may or may not be party members.

Some evidence to support the emergence of citizen-driven campaigning in the Web 2.0 era comes from a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012). According to their research, many people share political information with their family and friends through social media. Among people who used social media during the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign season, for example, 28% “liked” or promoted political material; 35% encouraged people to vote; 34% posted their own commentary on political issues; 33% reposted campaign information posted by someone else; 31% encourages other people to take action on a political issue; 28% posted links to political stories for others to read; and 20% followed elected candidates for office and elected officials. Relatedly, many people are exposed to political messages that their friends and family members share through social networks. In another study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Smith and Duggan (2012) find that 40% of people who are registered to vote have had other people recommend election-related online videos through SNS. The need to tap into these networks to mobilize undecided and disengaged voters is precisely what political parties are beginning to learn.

Let us draw a brief summary at this point. Web 2.0, has lowered the barriers for citizens to get informed about and involved in politics. New participatory mechanisms have emerged for non-party members who are interested in campaigns. These participatory behaviors are self-directed rather than elite-directed. The exponential spread of blogs, social media sites, and other forms of Internet-based political communications may signal a tendency for party members who do not participate in organizationally-directed campaigning to engage in citizen-driven campaigning on their own time and at their own convenience. Remarkably, new phenomena such as these are spreading at a time when the trend for citizens’ involvement in many of the conventional, party-guided campaign activities is down (Norris, 2002). In the following section we will briefly introduce the data and methodology before we identify who engages in citizen-driven online campaigning and whether the story on online participation has changed.

## **Data and Methods**

To identify who engages in citizen-driven online campaigning, as well as ascertain whether the story on web participation has changed, we turn to the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) Online Tracking Component for 2009.<sup>1</sup> Germany is an interesting case to study for two different reasons. First, the national political environment has systemic and cultural traits that might lead German parties to use social media more so than parties in other

established democracies. Germany has a multi-party system operating within a federal system with a fairly high frequency of elections. As such, candidates and parties should have considerable incentives to exploit innovative communication modes. In addition, the German broadcast system is insulated from party political influence. Consequently, political parties have little ability to set the media's agenda. Thus, unlike broadcast media outlets, digital media give parties the opportunity to select issues they want to emphasize. Second, and this takes the focus on the individual level, recent trends in "offline" party politics in Germany, as in other European democracies, are alarming: the ongoing decline in party membership as an important vehicle of mobilizing voters and bringing the party's message across challenges political parties in campaigns.

### **Dependent Variable**

In the Web 1.0 era, political parties did not take advantage of the interactive features afforded to them. Instead, they established websites that appealed to party supporters. In the Web 2.0 era, however, political parties established pages on SNS and posted information about the campaign. Moreover, SNS allow users to share campaign information with their social network. As a result, people who otherwise do not follow the election campaign may be exposed to political messages inadvertently through their news feed.

In the first part of our empirical analysis, therefore, we examine which types of people are more likely to see campaign information through SNS. Our dependent variable is *seeing campaign information online through social media*. To measure whether people saw campaign information online, the GLES asked: "Did you see information on the campaign or the parties on one of the social media sites? Which one(s)?"<sup>2</sup> (Gibson 2009; Römmele & Einwiller 2012). This measure resulted in seven questions, one for each SNS. Using these seven questions, we constructed a dichotomous variable that differentiated between people who did not see campaign information on any SNS (coded 0) and people who saw campaign information on at least one site (coded 1).

### **Independent Variables**

We have three main independent variables. The first variable is *party membership*.<sup>3</sup> A growing body of literature suggests that party activists can be quite important both in communicating political ideas to the public and in mobilizing voters in election campaigns (Denver & Hands, 1997; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992). Therefore, we believe party members should be more likely to see campaign information through social media. The second variable is *partisan strength* (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).<sup>4</sup> As mentioned earlier, the number of people who are party members has declined over time. As van Biezen et al. (2012: 40) put it: "party membership levels have now fallen to such a low level that membership itself no longer offers a meaningful indicator of party organizational capacity." Therefore, partisan strength captures people who may feel strongly tied to a party but who are not official members. We also expect that people who are strong partisans will be more likely to see campaign information online. Descriptive statistics for these variables, as well as the control variables described below, are included in Table 1.



Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables				
Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age	1.82	1.39	0	4
Education	1.00	0.85	0	3
Income	3.81	1.96	0	11
Male	0.51	0.50	0	1
Campaign interest	2.38	1.06	0	4
Party membership	0.04	0.20	0	1
Partisan strength	2.66	0.52	0	3
<i>Source:</i> 2009 German Longitudinal Election Studies Online Tracking Survey				

## Control Variables

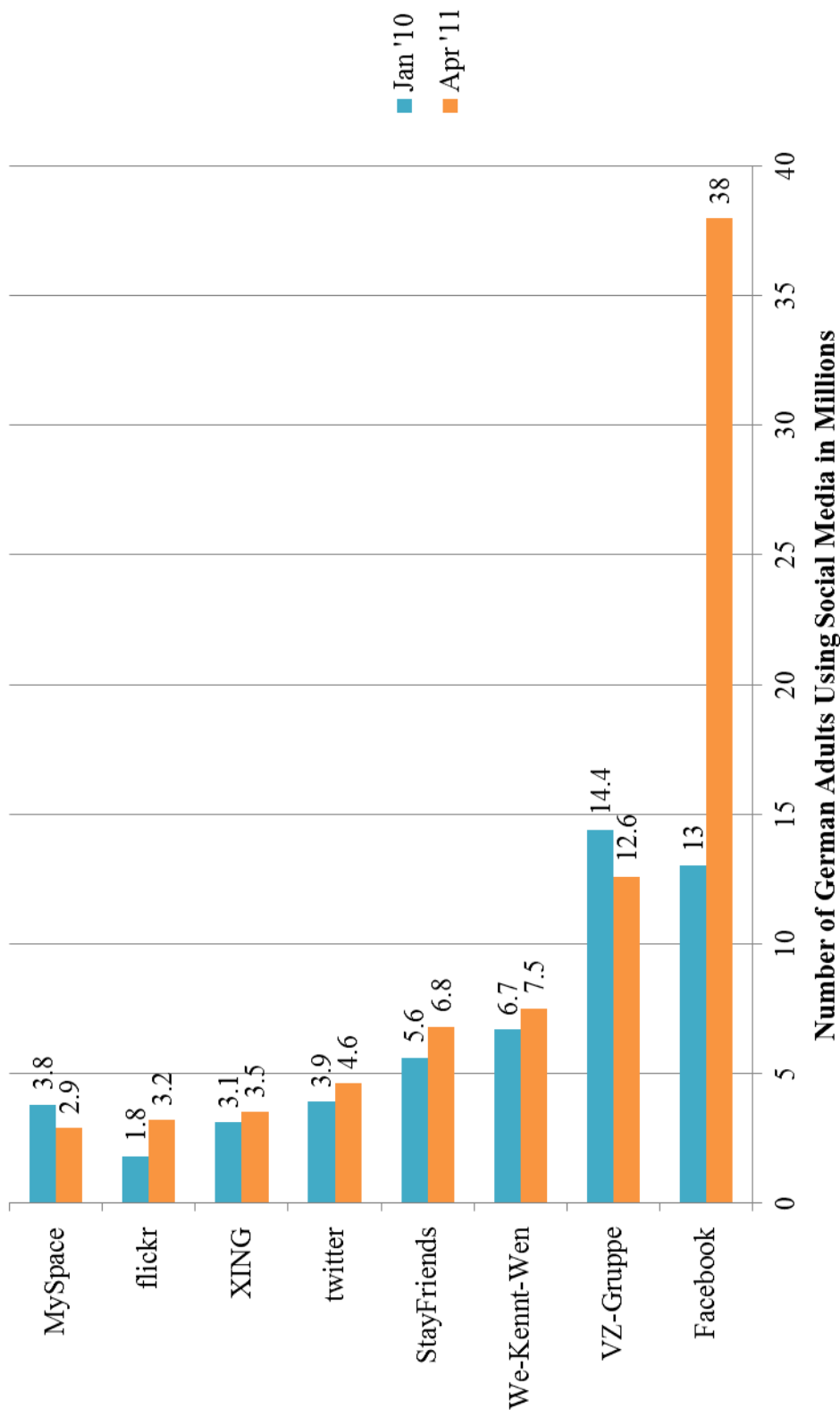
We also controlled for variables known to be related to other forms of political behavior (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). These variables include *age*, *education*, *income*, *gender*, and *campaign interest*. The GLES measured age in cohorts ranging from 18 to 29 years (coded 0), 30 to 39 years (coded 1), 40 to 49 years (coded 2), 50 to 59 years (coded 3), and 60 years and older (coded 5). The GLES asked participants to indicate their level of education on a six-point scale, which we coded as follows: “finished school without degree” (0); “lowest degree” (1); “middle degree” (3); “high school” (4); “high school or advanced high school” (4); and “still a student” (5).<sup>5</sup> Income was measured on an 11-point scale, ranging from “under 400 Euro” (coded 0) to over 11,000 Euro (coded 11). Gender was a dichotomous variable coded “1” for male. Finally, the GLES asked participants to indicate their level of interest in the election campaign on a 4-point scale, ranging from “very interested” to “not at all interested.” We reserve coded this variable, such that higher scores indicate more interest in the campaign.

## Results and Discussion

We begin with an overview of the extent to which parties and citizens used SNS in 2009. Before the 2009 German Federal Election campaign, political parties and candidates studied Obama’s 2008 strategy extensively (Bertelsmann-Stiftung, 2011). All major parties and candidates established pages on the most prominent SNS, including Facebook and XING. The German electorate was also on SNS in 2009, as Figure 1 (below) shows.

However, the parties did not have many followers or “fans.” In 2009, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) only had 15,000 followers, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) 3,800, and the Green Party 28,000. Said another way, while 13 million German citizens were already using Facebook in 2009—and more than 14 million citizens were on the VZ-sites (with some overlap, of course)—political parties only had 46,800 followers. This discrepancy leads us to our first research question: Who actually saw the parties’ messages, as well as campaign information in general, through social media?

**Figure 1. Use of Social Media in Germany in Millions for January 2010 and April 2011**



## Receiving Campaign Information Online

Descriptive statistics show that the percentage of people who saw information through social media is quite high at 19%. Next, to determine which types of people were more likely to see campaign information on SNS than others, we estimated a logistic regression model with “seeing campaign information through social media” as the dependent variable. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Model Predicting Seeing Campaign Information Online through Social Networking Sites			
	Coef.	Std. Err.	<i>p</i>
Age	-0.67***	0.09	0.000
Education	0.14	0.13	0.270
Income	0.07	0.05	0.172
Male	-0.06	0.21	0.771
Campaign interest	0.40***	0.12	0.001
Party membership	0.94*	0.39	0.016
Partisan strength	0.55**	0.22	0.010
Constant	-3.56***	0.73	0.000
Pseudo $R^2 = 0.16$			
LR $\chi^2(8) = 120.61***$			
N = 763			
Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients. Data retrieved from the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Studies Online Tracking Survey. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$ .			

Table 2 shows that people who are younger and more interested in campaigns are more likely to see campaign information on SNS, as are people who are party members, and strong partisans. There is no effect for education, income, or gender. Said another way, these results show that parties are able to reach beyond their base through SNS; they reach out to younger party members as well as non-party members who strongly identify with the party.<sup>6</sup>

To make better sense of these results, we estimated predicted probabilities using Clarify (King, Tomz, & Jason, 2000). Unlike regression analyses, which can only tell us about the sign and significance of each independent variable, predicted probabilities allow us to interpret the magnitude of each predictor’s effect on the likelihood of seeing campaign information through SNS. We calculated the predicted probability of seeing campaign information through SNS going from the minimum to maximum values of each of these variables, holding all other variables to their means. Party membership is defined at its minimum when it equals 0 and its maximum when it equals 1, thus separating those who are party members from non-party members. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Model Predicting Sharing Campaign Information Online through Social Networking Sites			
	Coef.	Std. Err.	<i>p</i>
Age	-0.27	0.18	0.134
Education	-0.13	0.27	0.639
Income	0.07	0.10	0.458
Male	-0.24	0.42	0.566
Campaign interest	0.26	0.25	0.281
Party membership	1.98***	0.55	0.000
Partisan strength	-0.23	0.44	0.604
Exposure to parties' messages through SNS	3.27***	0.57	0.000
Constant	-4.74***	1.48	0.001
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = 0.34			
LR $\chi^2(8) = 92.97***$			
N = 763			
Unstandardized regression coefficients. Data retrieved from the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Studies Online Tracking Survey. Significance levels: * <i>p</i> < 0.05, ** <i>p</i> < .01, *** <i>p</i> < .001.			

Beginning with age, the probability of seeing campaign information through SNS for the oldest group (0.04) and the youngest group (0.38) is substantively large (-0.34)—the largest effect size observed for this set of variables.

To flesh out the relationship between age and seeing campaign information on SNS, we also calculated the predicted probability of seeing campaign information through SNS for all age groups (results not displayed). The results show that the probability of seeing campaign information online decreases as age increases. For people age 18 to 29 years, the probability of seeing campaign information through SNS is 0.38; for those 30 to 39 years, 0.24; for those 40 to 49 years, 0.14; for those 50 to 59 years, 0.08; and for those 60 plus years, 0.04.

Moving on to education and income, people who have the maximum level of educational attainment are about .07 more likely to see campaign information through SNS than are those who have the minimum level of education. Similarly, people who earn the maximum amount of income are about 0.11 more likely to see campaign information through SNS than are those who earn the minimum amount of income.

Campaign interest and party membership constitute the second largest effect sizes for this set of variables. Individuals who are very interested in the campaign are about 0.17 more likely to see campaign information through SNS than are people who are not interested in the campaign. Party members are also much more likely to see campaign information online (0.30) than are those who do not belong to a political party (0.14)—a difference of 0.16. Finally, people who identify strongly with a political party are more likely to see campaign information through SNS (0.17) compared to those who do not identify with a political party

(0.04), a difference of 0.13. This suggests that people who identify strongly with a political party, but who are not party members, also see campaign information on social media sites.

Overall, the results suggest that younger party members who are very interested in election campaigns are significantly more likely to see campaign information messages online through social media. In addition, people who do not belong to political parties, but who score high on measures of partisan strength, are more likely to see campaign information through social media. This finding is consistent with the descriptive statistics we presented earlier: While only 2.4% of the electorate belongs to a political party, 19% of the electorate sees campaign information online. It follows, therefore, that most of the people who receive campaign information online are not party members. These findings are important in light of other studies, which show that parties are more likely to target older populations who are better educated and wealthier (Römmele & Einwiller, 2012). Moreover, they suggest that if parties want to reach engage younger voters—i.e., to reach beyond their traditional base of older party members who are more educated and earn more money—they need to need to have a strong presence on social media sites.

### Citizen-Driven Online Campaigning

Next, we examine which types of people are more likely to share campaign information through SNS, i.e. to engage in citizen-driven online campaigning. To do so, we estimate a second logistic regression model in which the dependent variable is *sharing or posting campaign information through social media*. To measure whether people shared or posted campaign information online, the GLES asked: “Did you post information about the parties or the campaign on a social media site? Which one(s)?”<sup>7</sup> (Gibson 2009; Römmele & Einwiller 2012). This measure resulted in seven questions, one for each SNS. Using these seven questions, we constructed a dichotomous variable that differentiated between people who did not post campaign information on any SNS (coded 0) and people who posted campaign information on at least one site (coded 1). The data show that 4 percent of the German electorate posted campaign information in their respective social networks. We present the results in Table 4.

Table 4. Effects of Changes in Predictors on the Predicted Probability of Seeing Campaign Information through Social Networking Sites

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Age	0.38 (0.04)	0.04 (0.01)	-0.34
Education	0.12 (0.03)	0.19 (0.04)	0.07
Income	0.12 (0.02)	0.23 (0.07)	0.11
Campaign interest	0.06 (0.02)	0.23 (0.03)	0.17
Party membership	0.14 (0.02)	0.30 (0.08)	0.16
Partisan strength	0.04 (0.03)	0.17 (0.02)	0.13

*Notes:* Entries are predicted probabilities at specified levels of the key predictor variable, holding all other variables at their means. Minimum = the predictor is set at its minimum value. Maximum = the predictor is set at its maximum value. Standard errors in parentheses. Data retrieved from the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Studies Online Tracking Survey.

Table 4 shows that people who are party members and people who see campaign information on their SNS are more likely to post campaign information on their SNS. There is no effect for age, education, income, gender, interest, or partisan strength. Again, we have the same effect described earlier: While only 2.4% of citizens are party members, 4% of the electorate engages in citizen-driven campaigning.<sup>8</sup>

Once again, we estimate predicted probabilities to interpret the magnitude of each predictor's effect on the probability of posting campaign information on social media sites. The results are displayed in Table 5.

	<i>Minimum</i>		<i>Maximum</i>		<i>Difference</i>
Age	0.02 (0.04)		0.01 (0.02)		-0.01
Education	0.02 (0.01)		0.01 (0.00)		-0.01
Income	0.01 (0.00)		0.02 (0.02)		0.01
Campaign interest	0.01 (0.01)		0.02 (0.01)		0.01
Party membership	0.01 (0.00)		0.07 (0.04)		0.06
Partisan strength	0.04 (0.05)		0.01 (0.01)		-0.03
See campaign information via SNS	0.01 (0.00)		0.13 (0.04)		0.12
<i>Notes:</i> Entries are predicted probabilities at specified levels of the key predictor variable, holding all other variables at their means. Minimum = the predictor is set at its minimum value. Maximum = the predictor is set at its maximum value. Standard errors in parentheses. Data retrieved from the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Studies Online Tracking Survey.					

We begin with our key variables of interest: party membership and seeing campaign information on social media sites. Compared to non-party members, party members are about 0.06 times more likely to post campaign information on social media sites. Moreover, compared to people who do not see campaign information on social media sites, people who do are about 0.12 times more likely to post campaign information on their respective social media sites. The differences for age, education, income, campaign interest, and partisan strength are minimal. Overall, these results suggest that when parties post campaign information online, they make possible citizen-driven campaigning. By posting information online, they make it easy for people to mobilize other people embedded in their social networks who might otherwise not be exposed to campaign information.

## Conclusion

This paper had two main goals. The first goal was to investigate who sees campaign information and parties' messages through social media sites. We found that 19% of the German electorate sees campaign-related information through social networking sites. We also found that younger party members who are interested in campaigns are significantly more likely to these messages, as are people who identify strongly with one of the political parties. These findings show that when parties disseminate campaign information online,

they not only reach younger party members, but they also reach non-party members who score high on measures of partisan strength. This finding in and of itself represents a significant departure from the “rich get richer” story from the Web 1.0 era.

Our second goal was two-fold. First, we wanted to identify what percentage of the electorate engages in citizen-driven online campaigning, defined as sharing or posting campaign information on social media sites, as campaign information online, i.e., citizen-driven online campaigning. Second, we wanted to determine which people are more likely to engage in citizen-driven online campaigning than others. We found that while only 2.4% of the electorate belongs to a political party, 4% engage in citizen-driven online campaigning. Moreover, the people who share campaign information through social media sharing campaign information via SNS tend to be party members who saw campaign-related information through their own respective social networks; age, education, income, gender, campaign interest, and partisan strength do not predict this kind of activity.

These findings are striking in light previous research on the strategies parties use to mobilize voters. Parties have scarce resources. Therefore, they are more likely to target some groups more than others, including: 1) people they already know; 2) people embedded in large social networks; 3) people whose actions are the most efficacious; and 4) people who are likely to respond to mobilization efforts (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). During the Web 1.0 era, parties utilized their websites to encourage supporters to donate money, to turn out to vote on election day, and to engage in offline campaigning by, for example, phone banking or knocking on doors (Bimber & Davis, 2003). Moreover, the types of people who engaged in offline campaigning tended to be older, better educated, and wealthier (Römmele & Einwiller, 2012).

In the Web 2.0 era, by contrast, parties are using social media to reach younger party members, irrespective of their educational attainment and earning potential. As a result, parties are broadening their base. By disseminating information through social media, parties are also making it easier for party members who see campaign information online to mobilize their family and friends. Overall, these results provide preliminary evidence that the “rich get richer” story from the Web 1.0 era does not hold in the Web 2.0 era.

Another aspect seems worth mentioning: one of the fears campaign managers have is losing control of the message through the use of interactive online platforms. As already elaborated upon, the architecture of Web 2.0 weakens the hierarchical structure of campaigns to some extent. Our results show, however, that younger party members are serving as intermediaries between the party organizations and a larger electoral base. In other words, the same people who are most likely to see campaign information online are also the ones who are most likely to share it. If they see these messages on party’s SNS pages, it is likely that no substantive change in content occurs when party members share these messages with their family and friends.

Against this background, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Party-oriented participation is likely to further decline in the next few years while citizen-driven campaigning should increase. Hence, parties have to think of ways to activate younger citizens and include online participatory mechanisms in the overall campaign strategy. Nevertheless, parties could benefit from reaching out to the online world to increase support for the party organization in the electorate, as well as to make the internal culture of the party organization more democratic.

By saying all that, however, one should not forget that social media are a brand new player in the political arena who has not proven to be a sustainable source for political support so far. There is a fair chance that the social media scene turns out to be too dependent on short-term trends to serve as a reliable sounding board. Moreover, the online community has developed stances toward certain political issues like internal security and consumer

protection that are not necessarily shared by the majority of the population. Hence, the dynamics of agenda setting and opinion making within the social media requires further research in order to estimate their value for professionalized campaigning.

Nevertheless, the ability for party members to mobilize their family and friends through social media may have important implications for democracy. According to Prior (2007), in the 1960s people watched television for entertainment but had little control over the programs to which they were exposed. As a result, television viewing exposed viewers to news programming routinely. In contrast, emergence of a high-choice media environment—with cable television in the 1980s and the Internet in the 1990s—facilitated selective exposure to political information, such that people who have a high preference for entertainment become less knowledgeable about, and less likely to participate in, politics. When party members share campaign information through social media sites, however, campaign information may reach people who would not otherwise seek political information and therefore shrink the gap between those who have a preference for news versus entertainment. More research on this point is needed.

Overall, these results provide preliminary evidence that the “rich get richer” story from the Web 1.0 era does not hold in the Web 2.0 era. We know from previous studies that only 4% of the electorate engaging in party-driven campaigning offline by, for example, phone banking or knocking on doors. Moreover, the types of people who engage in these activities are much more likely to be older, more educated, and wealthier (Römmele & Einwiller, 2012). In contrast, our findings show that parties are campaigning in a different way in the Web 2.0 era than they did in the Web 1.0 era. As a result, parties are reaching younger party members who are interested in politics. In addition to mobilizing younger party members through social media, parties are also making it easier for party members who see campaign information online to engage in citizen-driven campaigning. Thus, these results provide preliminary evidence that unlike in the Web 1.0 era, parties are making use of interactive features SNS afford.



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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the panel and cross-section, see <http://www.gles.eu/design-8.en.htm>

<sup>2</sup> The German question wording was as follows: “Haben Sie auf einer dieser Seiten Beiträge über die Parteien oder den Wahlkampf gesehen? Welche Seiten waren das? (Facebook/studiVZ, scheulerVZ, meinVZ/myspace/Wer kennt wen/Lokalist/en/Xing/Twitter)”

<sup>3</sup> To measure party membership, the GLES asked: “Nun noch ein paar Fragen zu Ihrer Person. Sind Sie persönlich in einer oder mehreren der folgenden Organisationen Mitglied?”

<sup>4</sup> To measure strength of party identification, the GLES asked: “Wie stark oder wie schwach neigen Sie - alles zusammengefasst - dieser Partei zu?” People with the highest level of partisan strength were coded as 3.

<sup>5</sup> The exact question wording was as follows: “Welchen Schulabschluss haben Sie? (1) Schule beendet ohne Abschluss; (2) Hauptschulabschluss, Volksschulabschluss; (3) Realschulabschluss, Mittlere Reife, Fachschulreife oder Abschluss der polytechnischen Oberschule; (4) Fachhochschulreife (Abschluss einer Fachhochschule, etc.); (5) Abitur bzw. erweiterte Oberschule mit Abschluss 12. Klasse (Hochschulreife); and (6) bin noch Schüler.

<sup>6</sup> To ensure that age was not the key variable driving these results, we also estimated the model using stepwise logistic regression. We found that even when we control for age, education, income, and gender in the first block, campaign interest, party membership, and partisan strength remain significant. In fact, the significance for partisan strength increases from  $p < .05$  to  $p < .01$  in the stepwise logistic regression. Otherwise, the results are substantively the same.

<sup>7</sup> The question wording in German was: “Haben Sie auf einer dieser Seiten {selbst} Beiträge über die Parteien und den Wahlkampf eingestellt? Welche waren das? (Facebook/studiVZ, scheulerVZ, meinVZ/myspace/Wer kennt wen/Lokalist/en/Xing/Twitter)”

<sup>8</sup> We also estimated this model using stepwise logistic regression. In block one, we included: age, education, income and gender. In block two, we included: campaign interest, party membership, and partisan strength. In the third block, we included seeing campaign information through social media. The results are substantively the same. Therefore, we decided to present the regular logistic regression model.