Online political marketing in Greece: An evaluation of the 2007 national elections and two case studies

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings on the use of Web sites as a political marketing tool in the context of the 2007 Greek national elections. The questions guiding this research are how popular were online campaigns in terms of candidate use of Web sites and which trust and credibility-building Web site design cues were leveraged by candidates. This study also explored differences in online campaign practices both between Greek political parties and between the 2007 national Greek elections and the 2002 federal US elections.

The entire population of Greek candidates' Web sites ($n = 373$) was reviewed and evaluated against a framework that consisted of 58 Web site design features reflecting the potential of Web technologies for political marketing. Results indicate that only 18% of Greek candidates had a Web presence in 2007, and on average these online campaigns were quite limited in their implementations of practices such as volunteer recruitment, fundraising, and Web-exclusive activities. On average, these implementations led in certain areas, but more interestingly lagged the US in online political marketing activities such as the provision of electronic paraphernalia, a campaign calendar, a privacy policy, issues statements, and endorsements. Twenty-four Web site design features are recommended for candidates to remain at par within the online political marketing scene in Greece. Findings are complemented by two case studies of Web sites that demonstrate mature use of Web technologies in online political campaigning.

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1. Introduction

The political landscape in Greece has experienced significant change over the course of the last two decades. Due to a fragmented political scene in Greece (relative to more consolidated ones, e.g. the US displays two dominant parties) that consists of five major and more than a dozen minor parties, both candidates and parties seek to exploit every opportunity in reaching, informing, and influencing voters' opinions and voting intentions. In the end, the success of such influences is measured by whether the desired yield was realized, i.e. whether a vote was cast in favour of the candidate. This goal is achieved by two sets of elements related to a candidate's political campaign: (i) internal factors, which include the candidate, the party, campaign strategy and resources; and (ii) external factors, including the line-up of candidates, their organizations and competitiveness, the media coverage and the opinion polls (Bradshaw, 1995; Hamilton, 1995; Juholin, 2001; Kavanagh, 1997; Newman, 1994; Sweeney, 1995; Thurber, 1995).

Focusing on the internal factors, candidates are faced with an array of resources available in executing their respective campaign strategies. Technological advances offer new political campaign capabilities found in emerging media. In the past, the World Wide Web had not been an important factor in pre-election campaigning, as low Internet penetration (e.g. below 20% in Greece in 2004 (inferred from Kapsomenakis, 2005) during the previous elections in 2004) handicapped the effectiveness of online political campaigns. The 2007 parliamentary elections served as the pilot for the wider use of this medium in this context for the Hellenic Republic (hereafter, Greece). What becomes of primary importance is the ability of the Web to create the desired effects with respect to reaching and informing voters, and subsequently favourably influencing their perceptions of trust in and the credibility of the candidate, thus casting a vote in their favour (Kay 2007).

This research aims to paint a picture of the Greek political landscape regarding pre-election online political campaigns. More specifically, we examine the usage of personal candidate Web sites as a campaigning tool. The questions guiding this research in this context are: (i) How popular were online campaigns in terms of candidate use of Web sites during the 2007 Greek elections, (ii) Which

trust and credibility-building Web site design cues were leveraged by Greek political candidates in their 2007 pre-election online campaigns, (iii) Are there any differences between parties regarding the implementation of online campaigns during the 2007 parliamentary Greek elections, and (iv) How does the online political marketing activity of the 2007 parliamentary Greek elections compare to that of the 2002 United States elections (to be used a point of reference). The paper continues with a literature review of relevant factors that are perceived as shaping voters' intentions to support a candidate in the upcoming elections, as well as an identification of the Web design elements that may be leveraged in support of this goal (i.e. shape voters' perceptions of trust in and the credibility of a candidate). The focus is solely on the candidate web sites and not their party's sites for which a significant body of international literature already exists (for example, see Newell (2001) for Italy, Gibson, Rommele, and Ward (2003) for Germany,Conway and Dorner (2004) for New Zealand).

2. Literature review

This research does not delve into the issue of defining and differentiating between trust and credibility. This is an area that has long been in contention, as scholars have used the terms 'trust' and 'credibility' interchangeably (Jones 2004; Levi & Stoker 2000). For the purposes of our research, we will continue from the assumption derived from prior evidence (e.g. Hoopes 2001; Levi & Stoker 2000) that perceptions of trust in and the credibility of a candidate will have a favourable effect on a voter's intention to support the candidate at the upcoming elections. Building on this relationship, this section offers a review of literature related to the Web design elements responsible for stimulating such impressions.

The early work of Abels, White, and Hahn (1997) suggested that the appearance, content, linkage, special features, structure, and use of a Web site impact user perceptions. Fogg et al. (2001a, 2001b) further argued that items may have either a positive (i.e. real-world feel, ease of use, expertise, trustworthiness, and tailoring) or negative (commercial implications and amateurism) effect on perceptions of credibility.

A Web site's credibility was then decomposed by Wathen and Burkell (2002) in three dimensions with respect to its surface, message, and content. These three dimensions parallel those proposed by Fogg et al. (2003), i.e. design, source, and information respectively. Items that fall under these three dimensions include: (i) information: focus, usefulness, accuracy, bias, tone of writing; (ii) design: design look, information design/structure, advertising; and (iii) source: motive, name recognition and reputation, credibility. Similarly, Flanagin and Metzger (2003) proposed that credibility is gauged along three closely-aligned dimensions: message (i.e. the perceived credibility of the information residing on a Web site), site (i.e. the perceived credibility of the Web site as a whole), and sponsor credibility (i.e. the perceived credibility of the individual whose Web site is represented). Hong (2006) continued on this path and argued that message and site (or structure, as referred to by Hong) features impact a Web site's credibility, with the former (e.g. testimonials, statistics, authorship, references, currency) being more important than the latter. Lastly, and focusing on what Flanagin and Metzger referred to as site credibility, Tombros, Ruthven, and Jose (2005) proposed a long list of design elements as relevant factors, each containing a number of features: text, structure, quality, non-textual items, physical properties, and counted mentions of page features.

While political campaigns have previously operated as offline mechanisms (e.g. through campaign offices, public speaking tours) and attempted to engage citizens through one-way media (e.g. di-

rect mail, posters, television, radio), the 2007 pre-election campaigns included a relatively new form of engagement by Greek standards found on candidates' Web sites. The scope of a candidate's Web site ranged from providing static information to engaging in real-time interactive political discussions (Foot, Schneider, & Xenos 2002). Communications tools, including e-mail, chat, newsgroups, and instant messaging, offer unparalleled synchronous and asynchronous communication between a candidate and potential voters. Coupled with these and other online-exclusive campaign strategies, a candidate's campaign is further strengthened by the electronic fulfilment of traditionally-offline initiatives such as the distribution of print materials and soliciting of sponsorship. This dual campaign delivery facilitated via a single medium offers significant economies of scale and may translate into an advantage, especially in the early ages of the Web's adoption in a political context.

As with any Web-enabled initiative, from e-Government to e-commerce, quality is an important predictor of initial adoption and continued use (Jie, Peiji, & Jiaming 2007; Wangpipatwong, Chutimaskul, & Papasratorn, 2005). Only a handful of resources exist to serve as guidelines in the development of a political candidate's online presence. These are discussed in more detail in the Methodology section, where the framework used in this study is discussed in detail.

3. Methodology

In this study five parties (and their respective candidates) were included: New Democracy (ND), Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), the Greek Communist Party (KKE), the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), formed by joining various left wing forces including SYN (Coalition of the Left, of Movements and Ecology) and Democratic Social Movement (DIKKI) and Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS). These five parties represent about 99.05% of the total votes counted in the national elections of 2004 and 94.8% in the European Parliament elections of 2004 (see Table 1). The same patterns were repeated in the 2007 elections with the five parties gathering almost 97% of the votes and all 300 parliament seats.

For this study, candidate lists provided by the parties were used, where possible, and checked against the official list provided by the Greek Supreme Court (Areios Pagos). The compiled list consisted of 2045 candidates split among the 5 parties (411 for ND, PASOK and KKE, 410 for SYRIZA and 402 for LAOS), which accounted for almost the entire population of candidates and those finally elected. The number of candidates from each prefecture depends on its population and, not surprisingly, most of the candidates were running in Athens. Those honorary candidates

Table 1
2004 National and European parliament elections and 2007 national elections.

Party	2004 National		2004 European		2007 National	
	%	MPs	%	Euro-MPs	%	MPs
ND	45.36	165	43.01	11	41.83	152
PASOK	40.55	117	34.03	8	38.10	102
KKE	5.90	12	9.48	3	8.15	22
SYN/SYRIZA	3.26	6	4.16	1	5.04	14
LAOS	2.19	0	4.12	1	3.80	10
DIKKI	1.79	0				

Source: Greek ministry of internal affairs.

nominated by each party that are not directly voted for, but elected based on their party's performance, were not included, as they do not need to organise a 'traditional' campaign.

The compiled list included information about the candidates' Web sites, with, most importantly, their Web address or Uniform Resource Locator (URL). The list was then complemented by Web sites found in three popular Greek directories. The directory of the Greek Parliament was also used to track those MPs that were running again and obtain demographic information. Next, the Google search engine was used to search for Greek pages using the candidates' full names; only the first 20 Web sites ('hits') returned from the search query were manually scanned, in order to find the Web sites of those candidates who had no record of having one. The majority of the Web sites found using Google featured in the first five Web sites returned, which suggests that using the first 20 Web sites was a good balance between the effort required to manually scan more than 1600 candidates and identifying candidates' Web sites. After all, if after such a search process a candidate's Web site did not emerge, then voters would have the same problem (if not greater) in finding them online too, thus a candidate's site would not achieve the desired effect regardless of its design. Still, as this was not an exercise to 'penalise' candidates, any Web sites that were found in an ad hoc manner while browsing election-related Web sites were also added.

The above sampling procedure was successful in covering the vast majority of the relevant population. The resulting list was then cleansed by removing politicians' Web sites that had not been updated to include information about the 2007 elections. The final Web site list consisted of 373 Web sites (ND = 187, PASOK = 161, KKE = 1, SYRIZA = 10 and LAOS = 14), i.e. 18.23% of the candidates of the selected parties had a Web site. It should be noted that only personal Web sites were included in the final list; for example, pages hosted at the parties' Web sites were not included. It is also interesting to note that only about 32% (or 121) of the 373 Web sites evaluated in this study were included in the lists provided by the parties themselves. Assuming the parties did not know of their candidates' Web sites one can only hypothesize that this was either due to information management issues or due to the parties not considering the Web as a primary campaigning channel.

To answer the second research question (i.e. which trust and credibility-building website design cues were leveraged by Greek political candidates in their 2007 pre-election online campaigns), we content analysed the candidates' Web sites by adapting a framework emerging out of several works (e.g. Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet, 2002) in the area of evaluating Web sites in the context of political marketing, and proposed by Foot et al. (2002). Reviewing the categories and respective item pools, the only changes made were within the scale used to measure the level of activities pertaining to the "comparison and documentation on candidate Web sites" (Foot et al., 2002). For this scale, the last six items (i.e. features) pertaining to the disclosure of campaign finances were removed, because this is not publicly practised in Greece, and are therefore inappropriate for use in the context of the national Greek elections. The six removed items were: Discuss Campaign Finance Issue, Present Campaign Finance Data, Identify Campaign Contributors, Report Campaign Expenditures, Report Personal Financial Statement, and Link to FEC Report. Although such reporting is not performed for the general public, elected candidates are still required by law to submit an account of the campaign budget for auditing. It is also important to note that campaign-related expenditure is determined by law, based on the size of the electoral sector in which the campaign is undertaken.

Measurement began the day the election campaign was officially over (i.e. 15/9/2007) and lasted for two weeks. Data was gathered by three Greek-speaking gatherers, who were provided with training, detailed guidelines, and a sample evaluation by the two authors, both being scholars in Human-Computer Interaction, Usability, and e-Business. It should also be noted that the data gatherers were graduate students in e-Business with an interest in Human-Computer Interaction and Web Design. The evaluations were based on checking whether the framework's categories and their corresponding features (for example a biography section) existed or not. If a feature existed, then an entry of '1' was made, while an entry of '0' would indicate the feature was not present. This binary benchmarking works well for features that can be clearly identified, even though it does not provide a scale of the quality of that feature. For example, one biographical note may include a few lines about the candidate, while another has a very detailed section on the candidate's background. Still in both cases an entry of '1' was made. This became more complex when more difficult to benchmark features (e.g. "is the site easy to navigate?") were in question. As such questions can be very subjective and questions interpreted in different ways we checked the data for consistency to identify any bias among the data gatherers. Systematic and sampling checks were also applied. For example, in Fig. 1 we plot the frequency for each range of normalised evaluations received by the three data gatherers. Web sites that had a normalised score over 1 were considered better than the 'average', which is an indication of how well the site conformed to the framework. The site with the highest score was that of the President of PASOK, Georgios Papandreou, which may serve as a proxy for the resources that were invested in its development.

To answer the third research question, i.e. are there any differences between parties regarding the implementation of online campaigns during the 2007 parliamentary Greek elections, usage frequencies will be calculated for each of the framework's features and party candidate sites scores will be compared.

Lastly, this study builds on Foot et al.'s (2002) study of the US. online campaign activity. Since the 2002 Internet penetration rate in the US was 58% (Internet World Stats, 2007a), and that of Greece's is currently estimated, through extrapolation, at 47% (Clickz, 2007; Internet World Stats 2007b), it would be of interest to compare the online political marketing activity of the 2007 parliamentary Greek elections relative to that of the 2002 United States elections. Data reported regarding the US online campaign activity is from Foot et al.'s (2002) study. Of course, methodologically comparing the Greek online political campaigns to the US ones poses a number of challenges. For example, the two political systems are very different, while the size of the electoral sectors in each case dictates different strategies. In addition, the US data dates back to 2002, when Internet penetration and the maturity of relevant user skills were different from those in Greece in

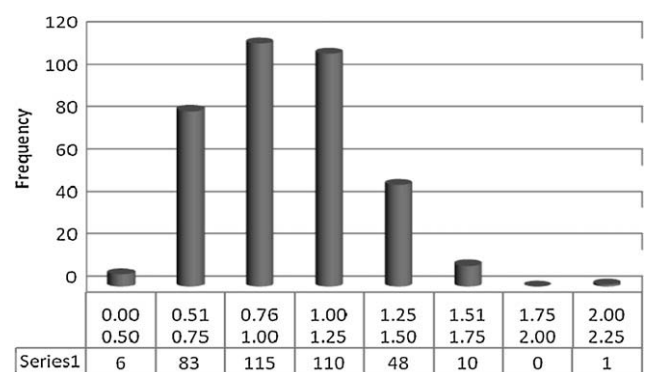|	0.00 0.50	0.51 0.75	0.76 1.00	1.00 1.25	1.25 1.50	1.51 1.75	1.75 2.00	2.00 2.25
Series1	6	83	115	110	48	10	0	1

Fig. 1. Frequency of website score ranges grouped by their normalised evaluations. *Source*: Based on analysis of 373 candidate Web sites, September 2007.

2007. Despite the above limitations a comparison can yield useful insights by examining the similarities and differences between the two sets of findings.

4. Results

4.1. Basic features on candidate sites

Basic candidate site features are defined as those that "reflect information that has traditionally been provided in printed campaign brochures" (Foot et al., 2002). Kamar (1999) described site sections such as a biography and issue positions as brochure-ware. In the last month of the campaign season for the 2007 national elections in Greece, a vast majority of candidate Web sites included most of these basic features (see Table 2): an email address for the campaign (100%), candidate biography (95%), party affiliation (94%), issues section (70%), and an e-mail list sign-up (57%). Additional features categorized as 'basic' for candidate Web sites, but found in far fewer sites, included the ability to view a calendar of future campaign events (19%), obtain information about making campaign donations (1%), obtain information about voter registration (0%), and the ability to indicate an interest in being a campaign volunteer (0%).

When comparing candidate Web sites between political parties in Greece, site features are consistently provided or ignored; candidates offer a biographical section, an issues section, mention their party affiliation, provide an e-mail list sign-up, and offer an e-mail address for the campaign. At the same time, candidates ignore the provision of information about making donations, an option to recruit volunteers, information regarding voter registration, and a privacy policy; a campaign calendar is also provided at a consistently low representation between all party candidates.

Interestingly, when comparing the online political marketing sphere of Greece and the US, the following observations are made regarding basic site features: Greek candidates appear to be significantly more active than their US counterparts in providing an email address for the campaign (100% vs. 77%), mentioning their party affiliation (94% vs. 40%), and offering the ability for visitors to sign-up to an e-mail list (57% vs. 35%). On the other hand, Greek candidate sites appear to lag significantly relative to those of US political candidates in the provision of information about making donations (only 1% vs. 77%), option to sign-up as a volunteer (0% vs. 62%), and also fall short in providing a campaign calendar (19% vs. 29%), voter registration information (0% vs. 26%), and providing a privacy policy (0% vs. 17%). The comparison highlights a major difference in how political campaigning is undertaken in Greece versus the US, in that in the latter case the supporters' active participation is encouraged. In Greece voluntary help may be sought at a party level, but it is not common for candidates to publicly request active support.

4.2. Online campaigning: adapting traditional practice

The Greek political marketing environment has traditionally leveraged both direct (i.e. face-to-face) and mediated (e.g. print and broadcast media) interactions, but with the 2007 national elections has begun to more actively exploit the World Wide Web for reaching out to voters. In the midst of this transition, it is interesting to examine the way that traditional political marketing activities are being adapted to the Web. Three sets of activities in terms of popularity emerge out of this analysis (for complete list, see Table 3). First, the majority of political candidates adapted three traditional campaigning techniques to the Web, including the posting of campaign event photographs (73%), inviting visitors to e-mail the campaign (91%), and providing contact information for the campaign (72%). Second, about one half of the candidates used the WWW to distribute video campaign advertisements (41%), distribute news and press releases (58%), and offer speech texts (51%). Lastly, the online activities that were not implemented by either the minority or none of the candidates include political endorsements (1%), the ability to receive campaign contributions online (1%), information about contributors (0%), encouraging site visitors to write letters to newspaper editors in support of the candidate's campaign (3%) and promoting the distribution of campaign materials to offline venues (e.g. posting news articles or audio files for visitors to send to local newspapers or radio stations) (1%).

While the three activity groups by popularity described above hold true for most candidates, the following observations can be made regarding differences between party candidates. First, LAOS

Table 2
Basic features on candidates' sites (highlighting those scoring over 50%).

Category/feature	ND (n = 187)	PASOK (n = 161)	KKE (n = 1)	SYRIZA (n = 10)	LAOS (n = 14)	TOTAL (n = 373)
Email address for campaign	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Biographical section	95%	95%	100%	100%	86%	95%
Party affiliation mentioned	92%	96%	0%	90%	93%	94%
Issues section	66%	71%	100%	100%	71%	70%
Email list sign-up	56%	61%	100%	40%	43%	57%
Campaign calendar	18%	23%	0%	10%	7%	19%
Volunteer sign-up	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Information about making donations	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Voter registration information	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Privacy policy	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Based on analysis of 373 candidate Web sites, September 2007.

Table 3
Online campaigning: adapting traditional practices.

Category/feature	ND (n = 187)	PASOK (n = 161)	KKE (n = 1)	SYRIZA (n = 10)	LAOS (n = 14)	TOTAL (n = 373)
Invitation to email the campaign	90%	92%	100%	90%	93%	91%
Photographs of campaign events	77%	73%	100%	40%	43%	73%
Telephone number or address for campaign	76%	68%	100%	50%	71%	72%
Campaign news	53%	65%	100%	50%	43%	58%
Speech texts	50%	55%	0%	60%	21%	51%
Campaign ads	41%	45%	100%	0%	14%	41%
Encourage letters to the editor	2%	4%	0%	0%	0%	3%
System to make online contributions	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Offline distribution of campaign materials	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Endorsements	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Information about contributors	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Based on analysis of 373 candidate Web sites, September 2007.

candidate sites were significantly below average in all activities except in the provision of non-email, alternate campaign contact information (e.g. telephone, mailing address). Second, SYPIZA candidate sites performed mostly on a par with the aggregate activity reported, but fell behind in the provision of campaign video advertisements and photographs from events, encouraging visitors to submit letters to newspaper editors in support of their candidates, and lastly in the provision of telephone and mailing address information for the campaign.

Interestingly, when comparing the online political marketing sphere of Greece and the US, the following observations are made regarding the enablement of traditional practices online: Greek candidates appear to be far more active than their US counterparts in posting campaign video advertisements and event photographs (41% & 73% vs. 21% & 46% respectively), posting speech texts (51% vs. 9%), encouraging people to email the campaign (91% vs. 33%). On the other hand, Greek candidate sites appear to lag significantly relative to US candidates sites in posting campaign news (58% vs. 76%), endorsements (1% vs. 24%), and supporting the submission of contributions online (1% vs. 55%).

4.3. Adopting Web-exclusive campaign practices

The previous section examined traditional offline campaign practices that were adapted to the Web in the recently held 2007 parliamentary elections in Greece. Next, this section explores the use of Web-exclusive campaign activities by Greek political candidates. As shown in Table 4, Web-exclusive campaign activities are still at an infancy stage among the candidates of all parties. However, the following observations can be made and they are described below.

First, LAOS candidates led the rest of the pack in providing users with the ability to search the site based on keywords, the availability of electronic paraphernalia (e.g. screensavers, desktop backgrounds, bumper stickers to paste into email signatures), a feature allowing visitors to post comments, and the use of pop-up windows to draw visitors' attention to specific information. It should be noted that many of LAOS (and other parties') candidate sites were not developed independently but rather leveraged the platform provided by Blogger.com, a template-driven Web log (or 'blog') service provider. Blogger.com's templates include a built-in search engine feature.

Second, LAOS candidates lagged in the use of an interactive campaign calendar, providing visitors with the ability to send links from the candidate site to others via email, hosting online polls to gauge visitors' opinions, offering content in languages other than

Greek, and facilitating the writing and submission via email of letters to editors of newspapers in support of the candidate.

Third, ND candidate sites lagged significantly in the provision of a site-specific search engine, and supporting the posting of comments by visitors. Lastly, the least popular features in the context of Web-exclusive campaign practices include the ability to individualize the site's content, hosting online live campaign events, supporting the site's accessibility for persons with disabilities, or soliciting visitors' Web messaging handles and/or mobile phone numbers.

When comparing the online political marketing spheres of Greece and the US in the context of Web-exclusive practices Greek candidates appear to be far more active than their US counterparts in all areas, except for the provision of Web toolkits (e.g. support for downloading PDF readers, multimedia players) (5% vs. 13%), the availability of electronic paraphernalia (3% vs. 11%), and, not surprisingly, multi-lingual support (4% vs. 8%). What was surprising, however, was the observation that only 8% of the US candidates' Web sites offered multi-lingual support, where the political scene consists of a significantly more ethnically diverse voter population.

4.4. Linking strategies

The inherent value of the World Wide Web is the interconnectedness of nodes and corresponding information sets. In the context of political marketing, this Web is of critical importance as it enables site visitors to reach related Web sites, thus becoming more informed and empowered with respect to their upcoming voting decision. Table 5 reports on the degree to which candidates' Web sites linked to other Web sites. These links are categorized by the nature of the entity a candidate's Web site is linked to. While the volume of such links is also important, this study measured and reports on the simple presence of links (i.e. either present or absent). For example, a single link from a candidate's site to their affiliated party would be scored as 'present'.

From the data it became apparent that the vast majority of candidate sites linked to other politics-related Web sites. Furthermore, the following observations can be made. First, SYRIZA candidate sites led the others in providing users with the ability to link to other politics-related Web sites, but did not link to individual citizens' or opponents' sites. Second, the majority of candidate sites linked to other government and/or political party sites. Third, a large minority of candidate sites linked to civic or advocacy groups, press organizations, and to local or community sites. Lastly,

Table 4
Adopting Web-exclusive campaign practices.

Category/feature	ND (*n* = 187)	PASOK (*n* = 161)	KKE (*n* = 1)	SYRIZA (*n* = 10)	LAOS (*n* = 14)	TOTAL (*n* = 373)
Site-specific search engine	28%	46%	0%	0%	57%	36%
Multimedia content	21%	22%	0%	10%	21%	21%
Interactive campaign calendar	18%	23%	0%	10%	7%	19%
Visitor comments	6%	14%	0%	10%	50%	12%
Interactive polls	10%	6%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Send links	9%	8%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Web toolkits	4%	5%	0%	10%	7%	5%
Pop-up windows	5%	4%	0%	10%	14%	5%
Other languages	4%	4%	0%	0%	0%	4%
Facilitate letters to editor	2%	4%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Electronic paraphernalia	3%	2%	0%	10%	7%	3%
Accessible to persons with disabilities	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Ability to individualize site content	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Online events	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Solicit user's Web messaging handle	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Based on analysis of 373 candidate Web sites, September 2007.

Table 5
Linking strategies of candidates.

Type of link	ND ($n = 187$)	PASOK ($n = 161$)	KKE ($n = 1$)	SYRIZA ($n = 10$)	LAOS ($n = 14$)	TOTAL ($n = 373$)
Political parties	60%	73%	100%	80%	57%	66%
Government sites	57%	57%	100%	50%	29%	56%
Civic or advocacy groups	33%	45%	100%	70%	36%	39%
Local or Community sites	34%	34%	100%	60%	21%	34%
Press organizations	23%	26%	100%	50%	43%	26%
Portals	10%	12%	0%	40%	14%	12%
Other candidates' sites	3%	3%	0%	20%	14%	4%
Opponents' sites	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Individual citizen sites	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%

Source: Based on analysis of 373 candidate Web sites, September 2007.

candidate sites are slightly active in linking to portals, other same-party candidates' sites, individual citizen sites, and opponents' sites.

When comparing the online political marketing sphere of Greece and the US, in the context of linking strategies Greek candidates appear to be far more active than their US counterparts in most areas, including linking to government sites (56% vs. 32%), political parties (66% vs. 30%), civic or advocacy groups (39% vs. 25%), press organizations (26% vs. 17%), local or community sites (34% vs. 6%), and portals (12% vs. 3%). A comparable level of linking activity was observed with respect to other candidate sites (4% vs. 5%), individual citizen sites (1% vs. 2%), and opponents' sites (2% vs. 1%).

4.5. Documentation and comparison of issue positions

The previous section reported on the linking activity between a candidate's Web site and another politics-related Web site. While linking is an enabling mechanism for enhancing the information supply to voters, offering clear information within a candidate's site during a campaign can also help visitors become more informed voters without expending extra effort. For example, information on who is sending the messages received by visitors, where the candidate stands on various campaign platform issues and why, is of great value to site visitors. Yet, only these three activities are undertaken by a slight majority of candidates, while more advanced documentation related activities are found sporadically. Foot et al.'s (2002) study referenced such advanced documentation activities suggested as 'Best Practices' of Internet campaigning by the Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet (2002). As shown in Table 6, only 22% of candidate sites referenced an independent publication in support of claims made in the issue statements; and only 6% of candidate sites compared the candidate's positions with those of his/her opponent. The least pursued activities in this area include providing visitors with statements identifying shared values or interests between the candidate and other political figures or groups (1%), and discussing campaign finance information or sharing related issues (0%).

Reviewing the relative activity between parties, SYRIZA candidate sites again led the way in documenting activities, followed by LAOS. The leading (by voter support) parties, lagged behind (be-

tween 1% and 41%) SYRIZA and LAOS in the three most frequently found documentation activities, i.e. including site sponsorship identifiers, issues statements, and providing a rationale for positions.

When comparing the online political marketing sphere of Greece and the US, in the context of online documentation and comparison activities Greek candidates appear to be far less active than their US counterparts in most areas, including presenting statements on issues (68% vs. 83%), providing a rationale for positions on issues (55% vs. 72%), comparing the candidate's positions on issues to other political groups (4% vs. 10%), suggesting shared values between the candidate and others (1% vs. 13%), and discussing issues or sharing information regarding campaign finances (0% vs. 0–10%; US range for finance-related activities). On the other hand, Greek candidate sites identified site sponsorship (53% vs. 49%), and supported statements on issues with references (22% vs. 6%) more frequently than the US candidates' sites did.

5. Case studies

In this section, two case studies of candidate Web sites are presented. The two Web sites were selected based on the overall experience offered to the visitors. The first Web site was that that of ND's MP and Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, Sofia Kalantzakou (http://www.sofiakalantzakou.gr), while the second was that of Michalis Chrisochoidis MP of PASOK (http://www.chrisochoidis.gr).

Both Web sites were well-laid out and easy to navigate. The main navigation panel revolved around the key thematic areas that most of the candidate Web sites in this study feature. For example, in both cases the first menu item linked to the candidate's biographical note, which presented key facts about their personal life and political career. Also, as both Kalantzakou and Chrisochoidis were MPs in 2004 the main menus had a section related to their parliamentary activities. Moreover, both menus had a section containing their views and opinions. In Kalantzakou's case, speeches and articles were housed under 'Public statements', while two external links pointed to the party's achievements while in power and their programme for the next four years. In Chrisochoidis' case, there was a section about the candidate's position on important is-

Table 6
Comparison and documentation on candidate Web sites.

Feature	ND ($n = 187$)	PASOK ($n = 161$)	KKE ($n = 1$)	SYRIZA ($n = 10$)	LAOS ($n = 14$)	TOTAL($n = 373$)
Present issue statements	63%	70%	100%	90%	86%	68%
Provide rationale for positions	49%	58%	100%	90%	57%	55%
Site sponsorship identifier	50%	57%	0%	60%	64%	53%
Cite References in issue statements	25%	20%	100%	20%	7%	22%
Compare positions to opponent	1%	12%	0%	10%	7%	6%
Compare positions to other group	1%	7%	0%	0%	7%	4%
Identify shared values with others	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%

Source: Based on analysis of 373 candidate Web sites, September 2007.

sues, which effectively led to listings of press articles filtered by keywords. This is very similar to tags used in blogs. From an information management point of view one may have expected that such a section would have hosted the candidate's statements on the fundamental principals on the issues mentioned. Still, the adopted approach works well, because over time it keeps each section current as more content is added. Chrisochoidis' Web site menu had press articles listed under the last item labelled 'Press Office'. In this section, transcripts of speeches and interviews, statements and a photo gallery were also found. This was rather unusual as the common practice was to have these as separate items in the main menu. Finally, Chrisochoidis' menu had a listing of all Towns in his electoral prefecture with listing of the activities in each one of them. Kalantzakou's Web site also included a Google map of her prefecture, albeit this did not offer optimal value as it was not connected to the rest of the Web site in any meaningful way. This link was included in a secondary menu alongside the gallery link and a link pointing to useful Web addresses. Interestingly, neither of the two Web sites included a 'contacts' item in the main menu. For the Kalantzakou Web site, this was found on the top right corner in a third menu that also included a link to the home page, a statement about the election, a link to the gallery and an interactive calendar. These items could have been integrated in the main menu, avoiding duplications and making navigation easier. It would also have saved valuable space consumed by yet another group of links. Chrisochoidis' Web site included its own calendar, listing his activities and public and media appearances.

The above overview covers most of the features listed as basic features of candidate sites and those listed under online campaigning and how traditional practice can be adapted. Clearly presented, comprehensive information should be the primary goal of all Web sites, especially those that scored significantly lower than the average. Once this primary goal has been achieved then politicians could look at adding further features and generating greater value for their site visitors. Utilising applications and online services like YouTube or blogs in order to appear 'trendy' to voters can easily backfire as it may send the wrong messages. For example, visiting a Web site that attempts to portray the candidate as someone embracing technology, only to find that his or her blog has a few posts made in the past few days can alienate voters who may feel that the candidate's practice is deceptive (Fig. 2).

From a technological point of view, both Web sites were based on existing content management solutions, which provided the framework on which the Web sites were developed. Such an approach provides useful features like printing and referring to articles, RSS exporting and social bookmarking out-of-the-box without the development team having to add these from scratch. As many such software packages are available, several even for free, they could lead to a significant reduction in the cost and time needed to develop bespoke Web sites. In fact, many candidates opted to use free services like Blogger.com or resources provided by their party. The latter can work well for both sides as the party can help maintain a minimum level of quality by advising and informing candidates' strategies. On the other hand, candidates would not have to deal with the practicalities of setting up their own Web site, if they do not have one already. This could potentially save a significant amount of funds that could then be diverted towards other campaigning activities.

Multimedia usage could have been better utilised as it is restricted mainly to photo-galleries and a video clip hosted by You-Tube and linked from Kalantzakou's home page. The pre- and post- election periods are ideal for gathering more audiovisual content (for example, speeches in campaign gatherings) which could have enhanced the visitor's experience and communicated the candidate's messages better.

The content's presentation in both cases is effective as both Web sites followed a grid layout. Colour selections followed their parties' colours, with Kalantzakou's Web site using various shades of blue and Chrisochoidis' Web site shades of green and orange. One positive attribute of Kalantzakou's Web site is the ability to change the width of the content and the font sizes used, which enhances the site's usability and accessibility.

Finally, the element that makes Chrisochoidis' Web site stand out is the members' area, which provides various services to those registered. For example, it is possible to invite the candidate to a political gathering, communicate with other supporters in one's area or simply refer the Web site to other users via email. This feature may have been a valuable tool in encouraging volunteering within the larger electoral prefectures, although it is questionable how effective it could have been in smaller areas where personal contact may be the preferred means of communication. Both candidates provide email forms and the full contact details of their offices for those interested in visiting them in person.

Fig. 2. Screenshots of the home pages of the Web sites used as case studies.

6. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper we have evaluated the entire population of Web sites for the political candidates running for office in the Greek 2007 parliamentary elections. The findings began by offering insight into the political sphere in Greece. Specifically, it was discovered that 18.23% of Greek candidates had a Web site extending their campaigning online. Although a minority, this is a significant mass that is likely to push other candidates to online campaigning (i.e. "me too" political marketing strategy). This trend will also be partly in response to a likely growing expectation by voters to find information about candidates online now that almost one in five candidates are already on the Web.

Examining the trust and credibility-building Web site design cues leveraged by Greek candidates resulted in the identification of norms and oversights. While not all Web site design and campaign features are expected to be implemented by all candidates, the following list is a recommended short list (24 of identified 58) of features, a 'must have' of sorts, for any new entrants in online campaigning:

- *Basic features*: email address for the campaign, candidate biography, party affiliation, issues section, e-mail list sign-up, a calendar of future campaign events, and a privacy policy (although such policies are currently not commonly found).
- *Adapted traditional campaigning techniques online*: posting of campaign event photographs, inviting visitors to e-mail the campaign, providing contact information for the campaign, distributing video campaign advertisements, distributing news and press releases, and offering speech texts.
- *Adopting Web-exclusive campaign practices*: a site-specific search engine, electronic paraphernalia, and posting of visitor comments (note: despite their popularity, the authors feel that pop-ups should not be considered a 'Best Practice' given the usability and accessibility issues that arise from their use).
- *Linking strategies*: link to government and/or political party sites, civic or advocacy groups, press organizations, local or community sites, and other politics-related Web sites.
- *Documentation and comparison of issue positions*: including site sponsorship identifiers, issues statements, and providing a rationale for positions.

In terms of the relative implementations of online campaigns by the various parties, it was found that there was an overall consistency regarding which features were incorporated and which ones were not. While no trends emerged, all parties demonstrated at times either improved or hindered performance with respect to various aspects of online campaigning.

Lastly, when comparing the online campaigning sphere of the 2007 Greek elections to those of the US in 2002, clear differences were found in the way candidates leveraged the WWW for reaching and influencing voters. Instead of discussing the areas that were addressed well by the Greek candidates, we include a short list of features that appeared to lag in terms of relative implementation (i.e. provided less frequently in Greece than in the US):

- *Basic*: a campaign calendar and a privacy policy.
- *Adapted*: campaign news and endorsements.
- *Adopting web-exclusive campaign practices*: electronic paraphernalia and Web toolkits.
- *Documentation and comparison of issue positions*: including site sponsorship identifiers, issues statements, and providing a rationale for positions.

While privacy concerns may not be as prevalent in Greece as they are currently in the US, the inclusion of a privacy policy is likely to be a growing expectation. Similarly, endorsements are not a common practice in the Greek political sphere, but may become of growing importance as candidates will continue to seek advantage over their competitors and current/other means of differentiation become less effective in influencing voters. Similar to a privacy policy, Web toolkits may become of growing importance as both Internet penetration rates continue to grow and emerging media are increasingly used. Another difference observed between the two political contexts is the financial disclosure of the campaigns. While law governs explicitly the budget and expenditures of Greek political candidates, political candidates are neither permitted to fundraise from private citizens nor are they expected to report publicly the sources and costs of their campaigns to the general public. This is in contrast to the US political setting, where candidates perform both of these activities. A plausible explanation for this difference may lie in the disproportionate budgets that candidates in the two countries are in need of to effectively engage citizens and influence public opinion regarding their respective ability to hold office. Lastly, documentation practices have lagged overall in Greece, while linking strategies have been more effective in the Greek political sphere when benchmarking against the US in 2002. Interestingly, the status of the 2007 Greek e-political marketing arena can be summarised very well by the findings of Jackson (2003) who studied how and why UK MPs use their web sites: "The e-marketing of MPs is led by a few pioneers, with the rest gradually following behind. Although the numbers of MPs with websites has steadily increased in the past few years, numbers are still very poor. Moreover, for many the motive for creating a website appears to have been either the 2001 General Election or because they do not wish to be left behind as others come online. The vast majority of MPs view their website as primarily a one-way communication tool, rather than creating two-way communication between MPs and constituents. Overwhelmingly, MPs' websites are 'shovelware' using them to provide existing functions more efficiently, rather than developing new uses for the technology."

To help illustrate what a Web site looks like and which features it includes when it is effective in the context of online political campaigning, two case studies were included in the above report. In summary, our findings point to two further observations: (i) although there is a number of examples of candidates who actively engage in political marketing and make effective use of the Web technologies, for the majority of candidates there is room for improvement; and (ii) political parties should pay more attention to and be more proactive in supporting their candidates. It makes sense from the point of view of both the political campaigning involved, but also in terms of resources needed for the campaigns.

Future research should examine the voters' perceptions of the effectiveness of candidates' Web sites in building trust between them. It should also examine what the politicians themselves consider important when it comes to online campaigning, the key benefits they believe they will attain by campaigning online and what they consider the major obstacles in achieving them to be.

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