Party.Politics.Ph: Internet Campaigning in the Philippines*

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Abstract: *This article is an initial assessment of Internet utilization by political parties in the Philippines. The phenomenal growth in the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the country is not lost to political parties, candidates, and campaign managers. Online websites offer an opportunity for political parties to strengthen linkages with citizens and voters through information provision, transparency, interactivity, and networking. The article conducted a content analysis of the websites of five mainstream political parties and twelve party list organizations represented in the 14th Congress. It appraised the online presence of these parties and assessed the level of use of the Internet as a tool for internal party administration, online electoral campaigns, voters' participation and organization.*

Key words: *elections, information and communication technologies (ICTs), Internet, online campaigning, party website, political parties, Philippine politics*

Introduction

The introduction of the Internet and other Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the 1990s opened a range of possibilities for political parties to re-engage the public (Ward et al. 2003). The rapid pace of technological innovations in recent years has spurred the growth of the Internet usage for political purposes worldwide. With emergence of cyberspace as a new arena for electoral campaigns, political party websites can contribute "towards expanding communication pluralism as well as

opportunities for citizens to participate within parties, thereby strengthening representative party government" (Norris 2003: 22).

Citizen participation is the critical foundation upon which democracy is built. Ideally, political parties are vehicles for enabling citizens to engage and reconnect with the institutions and processes of democracy. Citizenship is nurtured on values, knowledge, and practice. Parties can perform an integral function in citizen and voters education activities as part of their constituency building activities. However, in most developing and democratizing societies such as the Philippines, weak citizen-party linkages have transformed political parties into personality-based organizations—largely organized around dominant local political clans and warlords anchored on clientelistic, parochial, and personal inducements.

The emergence of the Internet has the potential to supplant such traditional social and political networks. Already, the opportunities for "person-to-person-to-person" networking offered by web pages, blogs, message boards, online social networking sites, and viral marketing are not lost to political parties, candidates and campaign managers. The Internet also provides an opportunity for social reformers to introduce party politics and election campaigns based on issues, platforms, and ideologies. This essay is an exploration of Internet utilization by political parties in the Philippines. This study seeks to address the question: *how can the Internet facilitate democratic linkage in a developing society?* Specifically, it will appraise the online presence of Philippine political parties, and assess the level of use of the Internet as a tool for internal party administration, online electoral campaigns, voters' participation and organization. Consequently, it will conduct a content analysis of the websites of five mainstream political parties and twelve party list organizations currently represented in the 14th Congress.

Parameters of the Study

This study is a modest contribution to the emerging literature on Internet Party Research that draws on the various fields of party change, political marketing, electoral campaigning and studies on the information society

(Ward et al. 2003). Thus far, the bulk of the existing literature focuses on the North American or North European experience. While political party utilization of ICTs such as the Internet in the Philippines is still at its incipient stage, this study would like to describe the current landscape of Internet use by some Philippine political parties.

This study conducted a content analysis of 14 Philippine political party websites from September 2007 to April 2008. A second round of analysis was done on June 2009 to include three (3) newly-seated party list organizations proclaimed eligible for house seats by the Supreme Court. It applied two criteria in selecting the party websites that were included in the sample: first, the political party must maintain a permanent official website (not a free website or blog); and second, the party must have at least one member elected in either chamber of the 14th Congress. Consequently, political parties with no official website and no incumbent representation in Congress were excluded from the study.

The websites were classified according to the type of political parties that maintain them: *mainstream political parties* or *party list organizations*. For purposes of this study, *mainstream political parties* are defined as *"national political parties that have regularly contested seats in the Senate or district seats in the House of Representatives."* On the other hand, party list organizations are *"sectoral political parties that primarily contest the proportional representation (PR) seats in the House of Representatives."*

In addition to the two criteria mentioned above, the party websites were also tested for their online visibility, based on their presence in major indices for online presence. The major indices refer to sites that are initially consulted in the Internet when seeking information about the respective political parties. These indices include the most popular search engines (Google and Yahoo); online encyclopedia (Wikipedia); and the official websites of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Lastly, a search-engine count was undertaken to determine the number of links or "backpointers" into the sites.

The websites sampled for content analysis in this study include the following:

Mainstream Political Parties

1. Nacionalista Party (NP) – Oldest political party founded by Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña in 1907. [http://www.nacionalistaparty.com/]
2. Liberal Party (LP) – Second oldest political party founded by President Manuel Roxas in 1946. [http://www.liberalparty.ph/]
3. Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) – Organized in 1992 as a vehicle for the presidential campaign of Marcos-ally Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco. [http://npcparty.org/]
4. Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) – Formed in 1997 to support the presidential candidacy of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Coalesced with Lakas NUCD-UMDP when Arroyo opted to run for Vice President in 1998. Revived in the 2004 elections. [http://www.kampi.ph/]
5. Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PDSP) – Formerly an underground social democratic party (organized in 1973) that struggled against the Marcos dictatorship. Legally registered as an electoral party in 1990. [http://pdsp.net/site1/]

Party List Organizations

1. Advocacy for Teacher Empowerment through Action, Cooperation, and Harmony towards Educational Reforms (A Teacher) – A sectoral party organized by private and public school teachers that competed in the 2007 elections. [http://www.ateacher.org.ph/]
2. Agricultural Sector Alliance of the Philippines (Agap) – Established in 2003 to protect and promote the interests of the hog and poultry industry. [http://www.agappartylist.com/]
3. Akbayan Citizens Action Party (Akbayan) – Party list organization founded in 1998 by former national democrats, social democrats, Christian socialists and other left-wing tendencies. [http://www.akbayan.org/]

4. Alagad Party List (Alagad) – Urban poor party founded in 1997 and supported by the Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ). [http://www.alagad.org.ph/profile.html]
5. Anak Mindanao (Amin) – Mindanao-based party list organization organized in 1998. [http://www.anakmindanao.com/]
6. An Waray – Regional party list organization that was formed in 2004. [http://www.anwaray.com/awpl/index.cfm]
7. Bayan Muna – Formed in 1997 as the legal political party of the communist-led national democratic movement. [http://www.bayanmuna.net/]
8. Buhay Hayaan Yumabong (Buhay) – Party list organization founded in 2001 and associated with the Catholic Charismatic movement – El Shaddai. [http://buhaypartylist.com/]
9. Citizen's Battle Against Corruption (Cibac) – Party list organization founded in 2001 and associated with the Christian evangelical movement – Jesus is Lord. [http://www.cibac.org/]
10. Gabriela Party List (Gabriela) – National democratic and feminist organization that was active in the struggle against the Marcos dictatorship. Reorganized as a party list spin off of *Bayan Muna* in 2004. [http://www.gabrielaphilippines.org/index.php]
11. Kabataan Party List – Formerly known as Anakbayan, the party list organization first participated in the 2004 election to represent the youth sector. [http://www.kabataanpartylist.com/]
12. You against Corruption and Poverty (Yacap) – A self-styled advocacy group against corruption and poverty that first participated in the 2007 election. [http://yacap.org]

ICTs and the Challenge of Weak Citizen-Party Linkage

Political parties serve as the primary link between citizens and state in an electoral democracy. As such, parties act as the vehicle for representation and participation in the political arena. It is political parties "that connect government and the governed with one another." (Römmele 2003: 7) The concept of "linkage" is central to the existing literature on political parties and democracy. It refers to "the intermediaries or political mechanisms connecting the voters to their leaders, such as elections, opinion polls, mass media and various forms of political associations, which naturally include

the political party." (Löfgren and Smith 2003: 41) Democratic linkage can be defined as "institutional rules of competition [that] make rulers accountable and responsive to the political preference distribution among all competent citizens." (Kitschelt 2000: 845)

Despite being among the Southeast Asian countries with the most extensive history in electoral democracy, the Philippine political party system is gravely underdeveloped. The restoration of democracy in 1986 saw the emergence of a fluid multiparty system that replaced the formal two-party system of the pre-authoritarian period (1946-1972). A plethora of parties and coalitions were organized and dissolved in successive local and national elections since the 1987 congressional elections. These parties, however, were largely candidate-centered amalgamations of provincial bosses, political machines and clans. Clientelistic politics in democratizing polities, such as the Philippines, has been long characterized within the rubric of "patron-client ties"— an instrumental and interpersonal network driven by unequal socio-economic and power relations. Party politics and election campaigns are said to have been built on the infrastructure of patron-client relationships, and its derivative — the political machine (Lande 1965; Kerkvliet 1995).

The instrumental nature of clientelistic politics has weakened democratic citizen-party linkages in the Philippines. Clientelism "represents a transaction, the direct exchange of citizen's vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods, and services." (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007: 2) Parties are dependent on their candidates for raising campaign funds. Most voters choose candidates who can best deliver resources to the constituency once elected. Parties that are out of power face extreme difficulties in attracting winnable candidates and mustering voters support. Moreover, political parties tend to lose vital financial support when their elected members switch parties, usually taking their electoral machines with them. Most parties are inactive in between election cycles, and only maintain a handful of full-time staff personnel outside the campaign period. Generally, most citizens do not identify with any particular political party. (Arlegue and Coronel 2003) In two national surveys conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) in 2004 and 2006, 67% of the respondents do not consider any political party as representing their welfare. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Voters' Identification with Political Parties

Political Parties	2004	2006
None	67%	67%
Lakas NUCD-UMDP	7	8
K4-*Koalisyon ng Katapatan at Karanasan sa Kinabukasan*	7	-
KNP-*Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino*	5	-
Bayan Muna	-	5
NPC-Nationalist People's Coalition	1	1
Aksyon Demokratiko	1	0.2
Bangon Pilipinas	1	-
APEC-Association of Philippine Electric Cooperatives	1	-
LDP-*Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino*	1	1
Liberal Party	1	5
PMP-*Partido ng Masang Pilipino*	0.5	3
Akbayan! Citizens' Action Party	0.4	-
Citizen's Battle Against Corruption	0.2	-
Nacionalista Party	0.1	1
PDP Laban	-	1
Kampi-*Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino*	-	0.4
Veteran's Freedom Party	0.1	-
Gabriela	-	0.2
Others	6.7	2.2
Don't know/Refused/No answer	1.2	7

Source: Social Weather Stations 2004, 2006

Waging election campaigns is one of the integral activities of political parties. The literature of campaign communication offers a perspective in understanding the potential impact of the Internet to party politics. Three trends have characterized campaign communication in recent years: 1) the increasing dominance of the media, particularly television; 2) the increased use of political marketing techniques; and, 3) the growing influence of political consultants. These trends cut across a combination of economic development, political culture, national party systems, and electoral rules as determinants in shaping campaign styles in specific countries (Ward et al 2003).

The use of the Internet and application of basic ICT to enlist, empower, and mobilize a vast and largely self-organizing social network open a range of possibilities for electoral campaigns (Norquay 2008). Internet campaigning can offer several tools to individual candidates and political parties that include: online donation processing; online data forms; email newsletters; viral campaigning; campaign intranets and email lists; and, password-protected areas (Ireland and Nash 2001). In addition, political parties may utilize the Internet in the following manner: administration, campaigning, participation and internal organization.

Electoral campaigns, particularly in the United States, have historically provided the opportunity for adopting emergent technological innovations in the political arena. Print, radio, and television comprised the initial wave of technological innovations that have been embraced by campaigns to maximize their reach of the electorate. These analog technologies primarily served as one-dimensional funnels that transmitted information from candidates to voters. Information was often mediated by party bosses, political marketers, and an assortment of gatekeepers, that left little space for direct citizen participation (Norquay 2008).

Just like any communication medium, the production, consumption, and regulation of information technologies such as the Internet has been politicized in recent years. The Internet has evolved beyond simply an informational tool into an arena for "a struggle for control, coupled with the use of its technologies for political ends" (Chadwick 2006: 2). The Internet cedes information control to individuals, thereby allowing the same individuals to become producers of information instead of simply being recipients of information (Ward et al. 2003).

As a network of networks, the Internet has supplanted the traditional "one-to-many" media in which a single information product is created by a relatively select group of people (journalists and producers) to a large number of people (readers, listeners, and viewers). The emergence of the World Wide Web has facilitated "many-to-many" communication in which large numbers of people simultaneously produce and receive information via discussion boards, mailing lists, blogs, and social network sites. Moreover, email, feedback forms, and online polls have allowed "many-to-one"

communication in which many web users can send information directly to the producer of a website, the author of a message on a discussion board, or a politician (Chadwick 2006) This new form of interactivity has allowed "citizens to debate with politicians or to other group of citizens from considerable distances, or to engage in written dialogue with computers" (Ward et al. 2003: 4).

Digital technologies offer an advantage over the existing or "old" media by providing political parties a more direct and real-time contact with citizens. "New" media has been characterized by the emergence of Web 2.0 – "an Internet characterized by interactive group networking and participation." (Lipton 2009: 1) Thus, the Internet may become an important tool in strengthening citizen-party linkages. The linkages can be strengthened through three important functions of political parties in a representative democracy, namely: *opinion formation* (informing the electorate), *interest mediation* (participation of the electorate), and *organization* (of the party) (Römmele 2003). The astute utilization of ICTs in the phenomenal 2008 campaign of U.S. President Barack Obama has been heralded as the coming of a new era of electoral and political party campaigning. It is already anticipated that the success of the Obama campaign in 2008 will serve as the template to be imitated or improved upon by succeeding electoral campaigns, not only in the U.S., but also in the rest of the world.

Through the Internet, political parties can control the content and "dosage" of political information they offer to the public. Thus, parties can target specific groups and constituencies that may be needed to mobilize opinion and support. Moreover, interactive features in websites present a new way to open parties to interested citizens who may not have the time or capacity to join political parties. Aside from providing access to the electorate at large, "the interactivity of the Internet can also be used by parties to build greater links with members. These linkages can take a bilateral form, such as email between the party and voter or member, or multilateral, involving many actors in online chat rooms, bulletin boards or special question-and-answer sessions . . . These electronic linkages make possible the forging of new group identities and thus new interests among party members that are not limited by geography" (Römmele 2003: 10).

Party Politics and Internet Campaigns in the Philippines

The expansion of Internet usage in the Philippines offers an opportunity for bridging the wide chasm between citizens and political parties. There is an estimated 20 million Internet users in the Philippines. This number is a reflection of the exponential growth of Filipinos connecting online to interact with their family and friends to be informed and entertained. The estimated number of Internet usage (as percentage of the population) has steadily grown from 2.7% in 1998 to 20.4% in 2010. Moreover, the growth rate of Internet usage is gradually catching up to nearly half of the total percentage of voters' registration in the country during the most recent electoral cycles. (See Table 2)

Table 2. Registered Voters and Internet Usage as Percentage of Population: 1998-2010

Year	Total Population	Registered Voters	(%) Population	Internet Usage (estimates)	(%) Population
1998-1999	74,786,000	34163,465	45.7	2,000,000	2.7
2000-2001	78,181,900	36,148,302	46.2	2,000,000	2.6
2004-2005	84,174,092	43,536,028	51.7	7.820,000	9.3
2007-2008	96,061,683	45,029,443	46.9	14,000,000	14.6
2009-2010	97,976,603	48,275,594	49.3	20,000,000	20.4

Sources: Data culled from National Statistic Coordination Board; National Statistic Office; Commission on Elections; Internet World Stats; and Yahoo-Nielsen Net Index (various years).

According to the Yahoo! Nielsen 2009 Net Index survey, 28% of Filipinos in National Urban Philippines has accessed the Internet in the past month. Moreover, 71% have accessed the Internet from Internet cafes in the past three months, and 47% of all Internet time are spent in Internet cafes. Among online activities, 51% of respondents claimed to have visited a social networking site in the past month, and that 1 out of 3 Filipino Internet users have a blog. In a country that sends an average of 20 text (short messaging service) messages a day, offline texting is moving online with 23% of Internet users sending Internet-based text messages. Internet usage is particularly high among the youth, most of which are of voting age. Compared to other age brackets, 41% of respondents between 20 to 29 years old have accessed the Internet in the past month (See Table 3).

Table 3. Average Age of Internet Users: 2009

Age Bracket	Past Month Internet Access (%)
10-19 years	50
20-29 years	41
20-39 years	19
40-49 years	12
50+ years	3

Source: Yahoo-Nielsen Net Index Study 2009

In the Philippines, the Internet has encouraged online campaigning not only by candidates, but also by individuals and organizations promoting voter awareness and education (Pabico, 1998, 2004). Reflective of the nature of Philippine party politics, online campaign sites by individual and party candidates sprouted during the 1998 presidential election but quickly disappeared after the political exercise. The maintenance of permanent party websites only emerged after the 2001 congressional elections and was pioneered by mainstream political parties (i.e. Liberal Party) and party list organizations (i.e. Bayan Muna, Akbayan). Since then, more than a dozen political parties and party list organizations have put up their permanent websites.

The use of the Internet for electoral campaign was first observed in the 1998 elections with candidates for president, vice president, and the senate setting up their individual websites. Among the prominent sites during the 1998 campaign were those of Joseph Estrada, Jose de Venecia, Raul Roco, and Renato de Villa. The early websites were candidate-centered and gave minimal focus on political parties. Soon after the 1998 election, these websites disappeared from the Internet and there were no efforts to maintain the sites.

After the 2001 elections, the Liberal Party (LP) set up its permanent website, immediately followed by the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC). Soon after, permanent party-based websites emerged after every election cycle, with the Nacionalista Party (NP) in 2004, and the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) in 2007. Ironically, the party that dominated Philippine elections since 1998 – the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats (Lakas CMD) – has never set up a website even during election campaigns.

Among the party list organizations, the Akbayan Citizens Party (Akbayan) and the Bayan Muna party were the pioneers in online electoral campaigns. At the time of this study, there are more than twenty party-based websites currently online in the Internet.

Content Analysis of Philippine Party Websites

The contents of these websites were analyzed using a coding scheme developed by Rachel Gibson and Stephen Ward (2003) specifically for candidates and party sites based on content, presentation, and delivery. These criteria were utilized to establish the overall level of internal and external online activity (i.e. campaigning) among these political parties. The coding scheme assigned scores to websites based on four elements, namely:

o *Transparency/Information Provision* (Political parties open themselves up to the public by making information freely and openly available in the web.)

o *Interactivity* (Political parties offer bulletin boards, email and chat rooms, for example, to facilitate feedback from the public, party supporters and members on key issues of internal business or policy questions.)

o *Networking* (Networking involves the use of hypertext links to provide a "one-stop shop" for the public and party supporters and members to access internal and external organizations.)

o *Presentation and Delivery* (The design of the party website is catchy in terms of multimedia use, has features that provide ease of navigation, and contents are kept fresh.)

While more sophisticated tracking and analysis of web traffic, usage, and demographics of hits are available through the use of programs like Google Analytics and Pmetrics, these can only be done by the respective webmasters maintaining the party websites since there is a need to install tracking codes in the Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) of the web pages. The following sections will profile and assess seventeen of these websites, divided into five mainstream parties and twelve party list organizations.

Website Presence and Visibility

The study initially identified all political parties currently represented in both chambers of the 14th Congress. There are a total of seventeen mainstream political parties that have at least one representative in either chamber of Congress. However, only five of these parties maintain a permanent website (See Table 4). None of these parties have direct links to the official sites of the Senate and the House, and only the LP and NP have links to the websites of some individual members in both chambers.

Table 4. Philippine Political Parties Online Visibility: Presence on Major Indices

Party	Website	Links to Congress Website	Google	Yahoo	Wikipedia/WikiPilipinas	Facebook	Friendster
Lakas CMD			●	●	●		○
Kampi	●		○	○	○		
NPC	●		●	●	●		
LP	●		●	●	●	●	●
NP	●		●	●	●		
PDSP	●		●	●	●		
PMP			○	○	○		
LDP			○	○	●		
PDP-Laban			○	○	○		
PRP			○	○	○		
KBL			○	○	○		

Note:
● Present and complete information
○ Present but incomplete information

A quick search in the Internet showed that information about these parties can be obtained in the major search engines Google and Yahoo, and the popular online encyclopedia Wikipedia. Given the emergence of social networking sites in the Philippines, most political parties have set up accounts in popular sites, such as Friendster and Facebook. The social networking sites, together with Wikipedia entries, free blogging portals (i.e. Blogspot) and video-sharing sites (i.e. You Tube), collectively form the Web 2.0 technology that offer cheaper alternatives for political parties to link with the broad public. Among the mainstream parties, only the Liberal Party has an account in both Facebook and Friendster. Interestingly, the dominant Lakas CMD does not have its own website, but has an account in Friendster.

There are thirty-two party list organizations (PLOs) that are currently represented in the House of Representatives. Of this number, only 12 have permanent websites, 6 of which are linked to the official site of the House of Representatives (See Table 5). Some information about all the party list organizations currently represented in the House can be searched in Google and Yahoo. However, except for Akbayan and Bayan Muna, all of the Wikipedia entries for the PLOs are "stubs" defined by the online encyclopedia as articles "containing only a few sentences of text which is too short to provide encyclopedic coverage of a subject, but not so short as to provide no useful information" (See Table 5). Interestingly, most of these PLOs have taken advantage of Web 2.0 technology by eschewing the official party website for blogs, social networking sites, and video sharing accounts. The parties of the Left, that include Akbayan, Anakpawis, Bayan Muna, and Kabataan, all have accounts in both Facebook and Friendster. The right-wing party ANAD only has a Facebook account, while seven other PLOs only have Friendster accounts. Alagad, ANAD and Kabataan have uploaded videos on the popular You Tube site. Ang Kasangga, Anakpawis, and Kabataan utilize blogs as news and information dissemination channels.

Table 5. Philippine Party List Organization Online Visibility: Presence on Major Indices

Party List Organization	Website	Links to Congress Website	Google	Yahoo	Wikipedia/WikiPilipinas	Facebook	Friendster
1 Utak			O	O			
A Teacher	●		O	O			
Aangat Tayo			●	●			●
ABA AKO			O	O			●
ABAKADA GURO			●	●			
Abono			●	●	O		
ABS			O	O			
Agap	●		●	●			
Akbayan	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Alagad	●		●	●	O		
Amin	●	●	●	●	O		
An Waray	●	●	●	●	O		
ANAD			●	●		●	
Anakpawis			●	●	O	●	●
Ang Kasangga			O	O			
APEC			O	O			
ARC			O	O	O		
Banat			O	O			
Bantay			●	●			
Bayan Muna	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Buhay	●		●	●	O		●
Butil			●	●	O		●
Cibac	●	●	●	●	O		●
Coop-NATCO			O	O	O		
Gabriela	●	●	●	●	O		●
Kabataan	●		●	●		●	●
KAKUSA			●	●			●
Senior Citizens			O	O			
TUCP			O	O	O		
UNI MAD			O	O			
VFP			O	O	O		●
Yacap	●	●	O	O			

Note:
● Present and complete information
O Present but incomplete information

The most basic indicator for web visibility is the number of links to party website. A link or hyperlink is defined by Wikipedia as "a reference or navigation element in a document to another section of the same document or to another document that may be on or part of a (different) domain." A search engine count using Google was conducted to determine the "bakpointers" or number of links to the party websites. This was done by entering *link:www.name of party* into the Google Search dialogue box and hitting enter. Among the mainstream parties, the LP has the most number of links with 125, followed by the PDSP with 12. The three other parties, somehow, did not have any links to other sites. (See Table 6)

Table 6. Links to Website (Google Back Pointer Search)

Parties	Number of Links
Mainstream Parties	
Kampi	0
NPC	0
LP	125
NP	7
PDSP	12
Party List Organizations	
A Teacher	1
Agap	0
Akbayan	251
Alagad	0
Amin	176
An Waray	0
Bayan Muna	215
Buhay	0
Cibac	101
Gabriela	13
Kabataan	4
Yacap	0

Compared to the mainstream parties, the PLOs have more extensive links to their websites. Akbayan has the most number of links with 251, followed by Bayan Muna with 215, Amin with 176, and Cibac with 101. The women's party Gabriela has only 13, Kabataan has 4, while the newly established A Teacher sectoral party has only one link. The rest of the PLOs (Agap, Alagad, An Waray, Buhay, and Yacap) have no links with other sites (See Table 6).

Website Functionality

Ideally, the emergence of information-based technology provides a greater opportunity for enhancing democratic linkage between political parties and an informed electorate. The real time provision of basic information about a political party, such as organizational history, constitution or basic rules, policy documents, media releases, party structure, and contact details, augurs well with the promotion of issue-based and transparent politics. From the party-perspective, websites can be efficiently utilized to communicate with party members, followers, and the general public. Corollarily, students, researchers, journalists, voters, volunteers and others seeking information about political parties would benefit from the transparency offered by online websites. (Ward et al. 2003) The following section will present the comparative analysis of party websites based on *openness with information, opportunities for interaction, level of connectivity,* and *over-all presentation.* Table 7 presents the summary of findings for each of the functions of the websites. The detailed coding scheme for each index is listed in the Appendix.

Table 7. Summary of scores by Philippine Political Parties: Transparency, Interactivity and Networking

Parties	Transparency/information Provision (17)	Interactivity (14)	Networking (7)
Mainstream Parties			
Kampi	9	4	0
NPC	7	1	0
LP	16	4	4
NP	12	2	3
PDSP	8	6	1
Party List Organizations			
A Teacher	11	4	0
Agap	1	5	4
Akbayan	12	2	1
Alagad	10	1	1
Amin	8	4	1
An Waray	8	6	0
Bayan Muna	8	4	0
Buhay	6	5	0
Cibac	9	7	2
Gabriela	6	3	2
Kabataan	0	0	0
Yacap	7	4	0

Transparency and Information

The Liberal Party scored the highest among mainstream parties in terms of providing the most information in their websites. The LP was followed by the Nacionalista Party and Kampi, respectively, in offering the public much background information about their parties. The most commonly available information about the three parties in their website includes values/ideology, policies, party documents, media releases, candidates' profiles, and leaders' focus. The LP and NP, being the two oldest Philippine parties, highlighted their rich and colorful tradition; while Kampi, despite being the emergent dominant party under the current administration, offers minimum details regarding the party's history, structure and history.

The scores attained by the Party List Organizations (PLOs) in the transparency and information index were not so distant from each other. Among the PLOs, Akbayan scored the highest, followed by A Teacher, Alagad, and Cibac. Three PLOs, namely, Amin, An Waray, and Bayan Muna, each got the same score. On the average, the PLOs offered more information than the mainstream political parties.

Interactivity

Most of the party websites have not maximized the potential of the technology for interactivity. This is true for both mainstream and party list organizations. In recent years, technological innovations of the web have increased the potential for real-time interactivity allowing for active engagement between web users and site providers. Unfortunately, most party websites have not gone beyond static and traditional information delivery. This is reflected in the dismal scores attained by both mainstream parties and PLOs in the interactivity index. None of the sites have approximated the campaign success of party-based websites in other countries, such as the U.S. and U.K., in harnessing ICT technology for voter mobilization and fund raising.

Among the mainstream parties, the PDSP is the most interactive with its section called "Knowledge Management Center" that offers an e-library, webmail, chat room, and public forum. It also has a separate members section that requires a more active engagement that requires users login in. On the other hand, Kampi is the only website that offers video streaming of its meetings and conventions. Perhaps reflective of its primary objective in setting up its website, Kampi also provides the most ease in membership recruitment providing the most essential information (i.e. membership forms and contact details) among the mainstream parties.

An Waray and Cibac are the most interactive among the party list websites. The online strategies of both PLOs are more oriented towards an Internet-based campaign. An Waray, for example, eschews traditional party recruitment and targets potential volunteers instead. This strategy is more in tune with the transient and ephemeral nature of the Internet activities. On the other hand, Cibac offers a web blog and a corruption complaint form. Overall, PLO websites are more interactive than mainstream parties. Most offer unique online features that cater to the interests and concerns of their sector and constituencies. A Teacher offers useful tools and resources (i.e. lesson plan guide) for teachers. It is also the only PLO that has uploaded its full membership roster online. Akbayan has music videos, while Bayan Muna offers a section for comments.

Networking

Networking is an integral aspect of information and communication technology. However, mainstream parties and PLOs grossly under utilize the networking potentials of their websites. Among the mainstream parties, only the LP has some links with global, national and local websites. Only the PDSP has a similar link with a global organization. Both are affiliated with international ideological networks: the LP is a member of the Liberal International (LI) and the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD); while the PDSP is a member of the Socialist International (SI). In terms of links with local networks, only the NP shares the same feature with the LP. Surprisingly, the mass-based PLOs have not maximized their websites for networking with allied sectors and organizations.

Presentation and Delivery

The homepage has become the new "face" of political parties online. Web visitors, on the average, have time to read from between 20% to 28% words in an average visit (Weinrach et al. 2008). Thus, web design and presentation are crucial to increasing web page visits and making sure the visitors stay. The emergence of Web 2.0 has made the Internet a haven for interactive group networking and participation. As Lipton (2009:1) asserts, "no longer is the Internet a one-way communications medium between candidate and electorate. It is now a powerful multi-directional networking tool." Unfortunately, most party websites in the Philippines appear to be stuck in Web 1.0 technology. The old Web was characterized by "sites, clicks, and 'eyeballs,' the new Web is about the communities, participation, and peering" (Tapscott and Williams, cited from Lipton 2009: 7).

Among the mainstream parties, the Liberal Party attained the highest score in terms of presentation and delivery. The administration party Kampi was a distant second. Both sites offered a visually engaging web layout, peppered by short video clips. Only the LP offers fresh news releases daily about the party and its leaders, although its layout tends to get cluttered by the information stream. On the other hand, the Akbayan, Bayan Muna, and Cibac offer the most compelling visuals, layout, and design among PLOs. They also provide links to popular social networking sites – Facebook and Friendster. Unfortunately, the rest of the party list websites are visually static and their contents stale (See Table 8).

Prospects for Party-based Internet Campaigns

Pippa Norris (2003) theorized that the political party websites serve to play two important roles, namely: 1) they function as a pluralistic civic forum by facilitating the voice of oppositional challenge and accommodating the visibility of small and marginalized parties; and, 2) they serve as a channel for political participation by facilitating interactive citizen-party linkages. However, the breadth and depth of the influence of the Internet on elections worldwide has been quite uneven. From a comparative perspective, the American experience with Internet campaigns is quite exceptional. Thus,

"different types of party organization and electoral environment have the potential to catalyze or to retard the development of Internet campaigning because they render new communication technologies more or less useful to candidates and parties seeking office" (Anstead and Chadwick 2008).

Table 8. Summary of scores by Philippine Political Parties: Site Presentation and Delivery

Parties	Glitz/ Multimedia (6)	Access (6)	Navigation (5)	Freshness (6)	Total Score
Mainstream Parties					
Kampi	5	0	1	0	6
NPC	3	0	1	1	5
LP	5	0	1	6	12
NP	3	0	1	0	4
PDSP	4	0	1	2	7
Party List Organizations					
A Teacher	1	0	1	0	2
Agap	1	0	1	0	2
Akbayan	5	0	3	6	14
Alagad	1	0	1	0	2
Amin	1	0	1	0	2
An Waray	1	0	1	0	2
Bayan Muna	3	0	3	6	12
Buhay	1	0	1	0	2
Cibac	2	0	3	6	11
Gabriela	2	0	2	4	8
Kabataan	0	0	0	0	0
Yacap	3	0	2	0	5

In recent years, four key areas have delineated the relation of political parties with the Internet, namely: 1) *the growth of party Internet usage* – the political and technological factors that encourage parties to use the Internet; 2) *party campaigning and electioneering* – the impact of the Internet on campaign style and strategy; 3) *party competition and party systems* – how the Internet is encouraging competitiveness among mainstream and movement parties; and, 4) *intra-party democracy and organizational change* – the role of the Internet in promoting accountability and participation within party structures (Ward et al.2003).

Conclusion

Thus far, Philippine political parties have not maximized the full potential of Internet technology. This is the preliminary picture that can be drawn from the over-all scores gained by mainstream parties and party list organizations in the evaluation conducted by this study. First, the party websites are still utilized as traditional media channel for simple public relation campaigns and disseminating press releases. Second, there is greater emphasis on political personalities, not sectoral, policy or issue-based concerns. Third, even the mass-based party list organizations are not immune to highlighting "constituency service" which can be considered part of the practice of traditional politics. Fourth, most of the party websites have low levels of interactivity and networking. Lastly, none of the party websites have maximized the potential of soliciting online donation as a means of expanding public support and reforming the existing campaign finance system controlled by special interests. The LP scored the highest, followed by the NP and PDSP. For party list organizations, Cibac garnered the most points, while A Teacher and Akbayan tied for second, and An Waray scored third (See Table 9).

Table 9. Overall Scores: Mainstream and Party List Organizations

Parties	Transparency (17)	Interactivity (14)	Networking (7)	Presentation & Delivery (23)	Total Score (61)
Mainstream Parties					
Kampi	9	4	0	6	19
NPC	7	1	0	5	13
LP	16	4	4	12	36
NP	12	2	3	4	21
PDSP	8	6	1	7	22
Party List Organizations					
A Teacher	11	4	0	2	17
Agap	1	5	4	2	12
Akbayan	12	2	1	14	29
Alagad	10	1	1	2	14
Amin	8	4	1	2	15
An Waray	8	6	0	2	16
Bayan Muna	8	4	0	12	24
Buhay	6	5	0	2	13
Cibac	9	7	2	11	29
Gabriela	6	3	2	8	19
Kabataan	0	0	0	0	0
Yacap	7	4	0	5	16

The use of the web for campaigning offers an opportunity for smaller parties and independent candidates to get their messages communicated. In fact, with the rising rate of online usage, it would be difficult for political parties and candidates to have an effective political campaign without an Internet component. The use of technology as a campaign tool is ineffective, however, without an overall campaign strategy that maximizes the use of such technology. Hence, the strategic utilization of ICTs is crucial for political parties to foster stronger citizen-party linkages. ❖

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Appendix: Gibson and Ward's Coding Scheme for Party Websites

Transparency/information provision

Additive index – 1 point assigned for each item present (0-17) of:

· Organizational history
· Structure
· Values/ideology
· Policies
· Documents (i.e. manifesto, constitution)
· Newsletters
· Media releases (i.e. speeches, statements, interview transcripts, conferences)
· People/Who's Who
· Leader focus (picture, text on home page)
· Candidate profiles
· Electoral information (statistics, information on past performance)
· Event calendar (prospective or retrospective)
· Conference information
· Frequently Asked Questions
· Privacy policy
· Article archive or library
· Group pages

Interactivity

Each of the following can be assigned a value of 1 if present, yielding a score range of 0-14.

Information gathering (The site offers search engines, cookies, games/ gimmicks, audio and video, etc. whereby the user can gather more information about the organization.)

Information gathering (More active engagement is required, with users signing up for direct email updates and newsletters.)

Talking about politics with friends (The site offers some kind of bulletin board or chat room for interested visitors to exchange views with one another.)

Trying to influence others' opinions (The site offers or encourages individuals to send some kind of email postcard or message to friends to attempt to get them to support the organisation.)

Advertising (The site offers downloads of wallpaper or screensavers, which, like bumper stickers or badges, can be used to promote the organisation publicly.)

Leafleting (The site offers leaflets to download and print that can be distributed offline.)

Contacting (The site offers email contacts for itself and/or other individuals/ organizations that encourage people to express opinions and provide feedback.)

Petitioning (The site offers some kind of online petition to sign.)

Dialogue (The site offers online chat Q&A sessions with leaders.)

Donating (You can donate financially to the organization directly on the site.)

Joining (associate) (The organization offers associate membership or a 'friends of' status directly on the site.)

Joining (full) (You can join the organization directly on the site.)

Campaigning (The site offers a facility for taking a more formal role in an e-campaigning strategy, e.g. becoming an e-precinct leader.)

Membership section (Members-only pages are available that require an ID and password to enter.)

Networking

Internal

Additive index: 0-4:

- global
- national party leader home page
- regional or provincial
- cities/municipalities

External

Additive index: 0-3 (3 ordinal indices):

- partisan links are those to other parties and organisations that are supportive of the party's goals; for example, if the Labour Party links to the Trades Union Congress site, or the American Democratic party;
- reference links are those to neutral or news/educational sites such as news broadcasters, newspapers, parliamentary/government sites, national libraries etc.;
- commercial links are those promoting business services such as booksellers, web designers.

Presentation and delivery

Glitz factor

Cumulative index (0-6) comprises two additive indices.
Homepage design index awards 1 point for each item present (0-3):

- graphics
- frames
- moving icons

Multimedia index awards 1 point for each item present (0-3):

- sound
- video
- live streaming

Access

This consists of two dimensions, access in principle and access in practice.

In principle index awards 1 point for each item present (0-6):

- no-frames option;
- text-only option (entire site);
- text-only documents to download and print (clearly listed as such);
- WAP/PDA 'wireless' enabled;
- foreign language translation;
- software for the blind/visually impaired.

In practice:

- size of home page in Kb (> 25 slows site loading time significantly)

Navigability

Additive index awards 1 point for each item present (0-n):

- navigation tips
- no. of search engines
- home-page icon on lower-level pages
- fixed menu bar on lower-level pages
- site map/index

Freshness

Ordinal index (0-6):

Updated: daily (6); 1-2 days (5); 3-7 days (4); every two weeks (3); monthly (2); 1-6 months (1); +6 months (0).