

The Role of Facebook in the 2014 Greek Municipal Elections

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to examine the use of Facebook by candidates running for the 2014 Greek Municipal Elections by addressing the following questions: (1) which factors affect Facebook adoption by municipal candidates?, and (2) whether Facebook usage along with the popularity of candidates' Facebook pages influence candidates' vote share. Results indicate that Facebook is not a very popular campaigning tool among municipal candidates in Greece. This implies that Greek candidates still rely on traditional ways to lure their voters. Furthermore, findings reveal that candidates running in large municipalities who hadn't been elected before are more likely to utilize Facebook as a means of political marketing. Despite the low adoption rate, results suggested that candidates who made use of Facebook won more votes compared to non-Facebook candidates. Moreover, it was found that a candidate's Facebook page popularity is a good indicator of the candidate's vote share.

Keywords: Facebook · Political marketing strategy · Vote share · Greek municipal elections · Quantitative analysis

1 Introduction

Throughout the years the Internet has become an important vehicle for political campaign activities. In 1996 candidates incorporated websites in their election campaigns in order to provide top-down communication to voters; in 1998 they used emails for contacting with voters and in 2003 blogs became an important part of their online campaign activities [1]. Web 2.0 entered the political marketing arena, with Facebook paving the way, during the 2008 presidential elections in the US [2]. Until now, polit-

ical marketers have acknowledged the value of Web 2.0 tools as a cost-effective method of political promotion [3, 4]. According to Pena-Lopez [5], Web 2.0 gives candidates the opportunity to produce and promote customized messages for their targeted voters.

Despite research enthusiasm on e-campaigning, most of the studies have been conducted in candidate-centric electoral systems. These electoral systems tend to favor the quick adoption of new media [6] allowing for personalized campaign styles. In contrast, little is known about how candidates originating from party-centric electoral systems and adopting a Western European campaigning style [7] have realized the potential of new media in reaching voters [8].

Not too long ago, the Greek political campaigning style was characterized by its party focus. Greek candidates during the pre-election period of national elections relied on the party's communication strategy. In the 1996 national elections, political parties were in charge of managing and controlling the communication activities of their candidates using primarily television [9]. Although the use of the internet in election campaigns was introduced in Greece by the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in the parliamentary elections of 1996 its adoption did not change the party orientation of the Greek electoral campaigns. In the 2000 national election all nine political parties had an online presence through their websites whereas only 1 out of 6 members of the Greek Parliament had a campaign web site [10]. Until 2000, Greek candidates followed the party's communication strategy and made no use of Internet for personal promotion [11].

In the following years, Greek politics faced a number of critical changes. In the process of appealing to voters of various ideological persuasions, parties adopted a catch all orientation without a clear basis of differentiation and voters became more volatile in their preferences. [9]. These changes combined with the new opportunities for more individualistic forms of political campaigning offered by the Internet, impelled Greek candidates to increase their personal online visibility. In the 2004 national elections approximately 1 out of 3 candidates representing the two major parties was a web candidate (33%). From the 2000 to the 2004 Parliamentary elections, the number of e-campaigning politicians doubled, underlying the importance of the web in politicians' campaign strategy. Web 2.0 tools were first adopted by Greek political parties in the October 2009 national elections [12]. Although, websites were still the main online stream for parties and candidates in the 2009 national elections, among Web 2.0 tools (YouTube, Twitter etc) Facebook was the most popular medium.

This study examines candidates' use of Facebook in the Greek Municipal elections of 2014. Specifically, the purpose of the present study is twofold. First, to decipher Whether characteristics of candidates such as gender, incumbency, status, municipality size have an effect on candidate's Facebook use, and second to identify whether Facebook use by candidates along with citizens' awareness of the Facebook pages of candidates are important predictors of a candidates vote share.

2 Literature Review

Researchers point out that the use of Internet has brought changes in the way politicians promote themselves and voters participate in politics. Norris [13] has postulated three political campaign models using as a yardstick the most prevalent medium used in the campaign. The first model is known as the pre-modern campaign model in which parties/candidates use mainly the press and interpersonal communication to persuade voters. The next model is referred to as the modern campaign model where parties/candidates promote themselves via television news and commercials. The usage of new technologies by parties and candidates has given rise to the third post-modern model. Vergeer et al. [6] adds a fourth model to highlight the increasing use of social media as a medium for political campaigning. The fourth model is referred to as the personal campaign model considering the fact that social media campaigns allow for personalized promotion and candidate-centric races. Tops et al. [14] introduces the term cyber-democratic model of democracy to draw attention to the significant role of internet and electronic networks in shaping politics. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter let candidates differentiate themselves on a personal basis, increasing thus their awareness to their online supporters [8]. What is more, social media enable candidates to provide “not just top-down communication, but also network-based horizontal communication” [7, p. 6].

In a number of recent studies Facebook has been found to play a significant role in political campaigns across the globe. For example, almost 40% of candidates had a Facebook presence in the 2009 Norwegian parliamentary elections [7] while 29 out of the 31 investigated candidates in the 2011 local elections in Norway used Facebook as a promotional vehicle [8]. In the context of the 2007 Australian Parliamentary elections, Chen [15] indicated that Facebook was the most prominent social media campaign tool. Gulati and Williams [16] investigating the 2012 US congressional elections found that 97% of the candidates running for the Senate seats and 90% of the candidates for the House of Representatives had a Facebook presence.

3 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Factors Affecting Facebook Adoption

Adoption of Facebook by candidates is affected by several factors related to the personal characteristics of the candidate as well as other electoral system-related factors. For example, Strandberg [17] found that gender was a significant predictor of Facebook adoption by candidates contesting in the 2011 Finnish Parliamentary elections. Specifically, males were more likely to be Facebook adopters. Williams and Gulati [18] investigating candidates running for the House of Representatives in 2006 found that a candidates' incumbency status affects the use of Facebook. Specifically, they report that challengers who were not holders of any political position were more likely to implement Facebook campaigns.

The effect of the size of the candidate's electoral district on Facebook adoption has not been clearly identified by prior research. For example, in the context of the 2008 Congressional elections Gulati and Williams [16] found no effect of the district urbanization on the Facebook usage of candidates. On the contrary, Strandberg [17] found a positive effect of the urbanization level on the Facebook adoption of Finnish candidates in the 2011 pre-election period. Significant differences were found in the level of Facebook usage between Greek candidates running in different peripheries in the 2010 Greek local elections. Specifically, candidates with a Facebook profile came from large peripheries and highly urbanized areas (i.e., Attiki, Central Macedonia) [19, 20]. These inconsistent results call for a further investigation of the relationship between a candidate's Facebook presence and the size of the district in which the candidate is contesting. Toward this end it is suggested that candidates running in large electoral districts will be active Facebook users compared to candidates belonging to small constituencies. Thus, the following hypotheses are developed:

H1: Gender will significantly influence Facebook use among candidates.

H2: Incumbency status will significantly influence Facebook use among candidates.

H3: Candidates contesting in electoral districts with high population densities will differ significantly in the level of Facebook usage compared to those in small electoral districts.

3.2 Factors Affecting Facebook Effectiveness

A politician's involvement with social media can have a positive impact on his vote share [21]. Recently, a number of studies support the fact that Facebook can be regarded as an important campaign activity capable of contributing to election success. The significant role of Facebook on the effectiveness of political marketing was best described by the term "Facebook election" used by Johnson and Perlmutter [22] to refer to the 2008 presidential elections in the US when the candidate Barak Obama incorporated Facebook efficiently in his campaign. Empirical evidence derived from the 2010 local elections in Greece suggested that candidates with a Facebook profile doubled their winning odds compared to non-Facebook adopters [12]. Another study, in the US showed that 55% of the congressional candidates who incorporated Facebook in their campaigns won a seat compared to 11% of elected candidates who were non-users. Based on the aforementioned results, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Facebook usage by candidates will significantly influence in a positive manner the number of votes received.

Much more empirical research is needed in order to shed more light on those aspects of Facebook activity that can become significant predictors of a candidate's vote share. Williams and Gulati [23] investigating the 2006 U.S. Congressional elections found that the number of an incumbent's Facebook friends is a significant indicator of his relative vote share. The contribution of Facebook on the electoral success of a candidate could be attributed to the fact that young voters prefer to support a political candidate with whom they have created a Facebook friendship [24]. Other studies point out that the "like" feature of Facebook posts can reflect the "real" vote share of candidates. For example, in the 2009 Greek National elections the winning party PASOK outpaced the other parties in the number of the "likes" received by its Facebook friends [12]. Similar results were found in the context of the Finnish national election where the winning party (Finns party) came first in the number of Facebook "likes" received [25]. The Prime Minister Julia Gillard who won the Australian election in the 2010 was also the winner in the Facebook liking arena [26]. Based on the aforementioned, the following hypothesis is developed:

H5: The number of Facebook "likes" will significantly influence in a positive manner the number of votes received by a candidate.

4 Methodology and Results

The analysis presented in this paper is based on a sample of 1,318 candidates who ran for the May 2014 Greek Municipal elections. The data for this study came from sources such as official state records and various online platforms. For each candidate data were collected regarding the size of the municipality in which he/she was contested, the number of votes he/she received, the gender, the age, and the previous experience of the candidate.

Then researchers examined whether each candidate had an official Facebook page. For every candidate that owned a Facebook page, the total number of "page likes", talking about and followers that appeared on his/her Facebook page were collected. Following data collection, the statistical package for social sciences SPSS 17.0 was utilized in order to test the research hypotheses.

Based on the analysis, almost 30.2 percent of candidates (398 candidates) had a Facebook page. A closer look at the Facebook pages of the candidates indicates that an average Facebook page of candidates running for the municipality seats received 1,159.52 "page likes", 117.04 "talking about" and had 651.51 followers.

Most of the candidates were male 89.7% while only 10.3% of them were females. Of the 398 candidates that had a Facebook page 367 of them were males (92.2%) while only 31 of them were females (7.8%). However, these numbers do not indicate that male candidates are more likely to use Facebook compared to females, since males are overrepresented in the sample. Regarding, the incumbency status of candidates, 68% were regarded as challengers and 32% were incumbents. 60.1% of the candidates with a Facebook page were challengers and 39.9% were incumbents.

In order to test whether a candidate’s gender and incumbency status predicts the use of Facebook a binary logistic regression was performed. Binary logistic regression was used to answer the first two hypotheses (H1 and H2). This type of regression was used since the dependent variable of interest – Facebook use - is a dichotomous categorical variable. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 1. The -2Log-likelihood value of the model is 1,588.81. Moreover, the significance level of the chi-square statistic is small ($\chi^2= 19.30$, $p = 0.000$), thus, it can be concluded that the model is significantly better than the intercept only model. Hence, the model explains well the variations in the Facebook usage. The regression model was also evaluated by using the goodness-of-fit test proposed by Hosmer and Lemeshow. The chi-square value of the Hosmer and Lemeshow test was insignificant ($\chi^2= 0.006$, $p= 0.997$) indicating a good fit for the data.

Table 1. Binary logistic regression results for facebook use variable

Heading level	Exp (B)
Constant	0.265*
Gender	1.444
Incumbency	1.634*
-2Log Likelihood	1,588.81
Chi-Square	19.30*

*Significant at the $p=0.05$ level.

As Table 1 shows only the incumbency status coefficient is statistically significant. Exp (B) for incumbency status is 1.634 which means that a candidate is 1.634 times more likely to have a Facebook page if she/he is a challenger. Hence, H1 is rejected while H2 is accepted.

H3 assumes that candidates running in electoral districts with high population densities are more likely to use Facebook as a campaigning tool compared to candidates who run in small municipalities. In order to test H3, independent t-test was used. Results of the tests are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results for Independent t-test for Municipality Population.

	Mean number of a municipality’s inhabitants	T-Statistic/ Significance
Candidates with a Facebook Page	69,037.92	
Candidates without a Facebook Page	46,135.58	-3.747/0.000

Findings indicate that significant differences ($p<0.05$) exist between Facebook candidates and non-Facebook candidates in regards to the population density of the municipality in which they contest ($t=-3.747$, $sig=0.000$). Specifically, candidates with a Facebook page contest in larger municipalities in terms of inhabitants ($M=69,037.92$) compared to candidates who do not make use of Facebook as a campaigning tool ($M=46,135.58$). Thus, it can be argued that candidates running in large

electoral districts are more likely to use Facebook in order to get noticed and communicate with their citizenry compared to candidates who contest in small districts. Hence, H3 is accepted.

H4 examines whether Facebook usage is a factor that has a significant effect on the vote share of a candidate. Independent samples t-test was used again to test H4 (Table 3).

Table 3. Results for Independent t-test for Vote Share.

	Mean number of Votes	T-Statistic/ Significance
Candidates with a Facebook Page	5,985.16	-8.267/0.000
Candidates without a Facebook Page	3,569.58	

Based on Table 3, significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were found between Facebook candidates and non-Facebook candidates in terms of vote share ($t = -8.267$, $sig = 0.000$). In particular, the mean score of votes for candidates with a Facebook page ($M = 5,895.16$) is higher compared to candidates without a Facebook page ($M = 3,569.58$). Hence, it can be argued that the usage of a Facebook page could be a factor that might exert an influence on the vote share of candidate. H4 was supported.

In order to test H5, which implies that citizens’ awareness of a candidate’s Facebook page as reflected in the number of Facebook “page likes” is an important factor that influences the candidate’s vote share, a correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson’s coefficient. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was utilized since the two variables - number of “page likes” and number of votes received - were continuous and Pearson’s coefficient measures the strength and direction of relationship between two continuous variables. Moreover, the values of Pearson coefficient range between -1 to +1. Results indicate that there is a significant ($p < 0.05$) positive correlation between the number of Facebook “page likes” and the number of vote share of candidates ($r = 0.583$). The significant correlation found could be characterized as moderate since the value of Pearson’s coefficient was below 0.70. Hence, one can conclude that as the number of a candidate’s Facebook “page likes” increases then his/her vote share will increase as well, in a moderate level. In other words, as citizens become aware of a candidate’s Facebook page and support it by pressing the “page like” button then the chances that citizens might vote for that candidate might increase as well. H5 was supported.

5 Discussion

The present study examined the use of Facebook by Greek candidates running for the 2014 local elections. Moreover, the factors that affect Facebook implementation by candidates were investigated. Finally, the impact of Facebook on candidates’ vote share was assessed.

Exploitation of Facebook during the municipal election was pretty low since the majority of candidates were not present on Facebook. Only 30.2% candidates owned a Facebook page. Evidence suggests that candidates of the local elections are moving towards the implementation of Facebook campaigns, albeit slowly. A small increase in the use of Facebook was found in the 2014 elections compared to the municipal elections of 2012 in which 26.4 of candidates utilized Facebook [20]. Possible reasons for this low exploitation of Facebook tools by Greek local municipal governments could be attributed to the fact that municipal candidates continue to rely on traditional forms of campaigning such as face-to-face communication. However, one should bear in mind that Facebook penetration in Greece is 41% while 26% of social networking sites' users access social media via their smart-phones [27]. Hence, candidates might have not utilized extensively Facebook as a tool for election campaigning due to the fact that the majority of Greek citizens are not using Facebook.

Findings of the present study confirmed the significant impact of urbanization on Facebook adoption. These results are similar with those reported in the study of Strandberg [17] in the context of Finnish elections. Thus, Facebook is becoming an important platform for targeting voters in densely populated urban areas. Facebook use also depended on a candidate's prior political experience. According to Williams and Gulati [18] challengers utilize Facebook in order to overcome the advantages of incumbents who have established supporters and contacts.

Facebook is a political marketing tool used by candidates to send messages to potential voters [28], to interact with them, to influence their thoughts and attitudes and finally to win their votes [29]. The present research revealed a significant relationship between Facebook use and vote share. Hence, Facebook was identified by the present study as a powerful political marketing tool that can boost a candidate's vote share. Politicians can win votes if they are active users of Facebook. Moreover, a candidate's visibility on Facebook as reflected in the amount of "page likes" received can also be regarded as an indication of his/her ability to reach voters offline. This study found that Greek voters will connect on Facebook with the candidate that they will vote. Therefore, the more "page likes" a candidate receives the wider its offline impact would be in terms of vote share. The above findings are consistent with the earlier study of Williams and Gulati [23] which found a significant relationship between a candidate's Facebook supporters and his/her vote share. The positive link found in the present study between the number of "page likes" and the number of votes could be attributed to the content posted on the Facebook pages of candidates. Perhaps, candidates with higher scores than their opponents on the number of "page likes", succeeded in engaging their followers by publishing interesting content. As a consequence Facebook engagement was then transformed into offline support.

For example, in the municipality of Piraeus, the candidacy of Yannis Moralis ("page likes": 14,524), who won the elections differentiated his Facebook campaign from his main competitor Michaloliakos Vasileios ("page likes": 7,048). Specifically, Yannis Moralis posted content regarding his priorities focusing on young people, athletics and sports. His posts also included photos with children as well as young volunteers. In addition, a number of the posts published were photos and information about one of his municipal candidate councilors Evangelos Marinakis who is a fam-

ous shipping magnate and president of Piraeus football club Olympiacos. Hence, Yannis Moralis used his candidate councilor as an endorsement for his campaign. However, one of the most important features of his Facebook campaign was the communication style he used. Most of the posts were “we messages” with positive tone that aimed to build relationships with users. Furthermore, a number of posts prompted users to share the messages with other users while Yannis Moralis engaged in dialogue with his users by replying to their comments. On the contrary, Vasileios Michaloliakos provided mainly one way information to his Facebook users. Specifically, his posts informed users about his appearances and interviews in television, his speeches, and his meetings with professional groups and candidates.

Another example of Facebook campaign strategy differentiation was that of Patoulis Georgios who contested in the municipality of Marousi against his competitor Vlachos Konstantinos. Patoulis Georgios was an incumbent (“page likes”: 6,719) and won again the 2014 elections. The majority of his posts on Facebook included information about his proposed social policies towards the poor and elderly. Moreover, his Facebook campaign focused on profiling his candidate councilors as well as his accomplishments as a mayor. On the other hand, his competitor Vlachos Konstantinos (“page likes”: 386) concentrated on publishing posts about his speeches, meetings with citizens and associations. Another important feature of his Facebook page was negative campaigning since a large number of posts referred to the negative aspects of the main opponent Mr. Patoulis Georgios. Hence, it can be concluded that the way a candidate promotes his/her self on Facebook could affect the awareness users have of his/her Facebook page which in turn would influence the number of votes received.

Several practical implications arise from the study’s findings. Political marketers should take serious consideration on Facebook current impact on election campaigns and underscore to their clients the crucial role of maintaining a Facebook presence, especially regarding the creation of Facebook friendships. Facebook friendships can increase a candidate’s visibility and awareness.

What was the aftermath of Facebook campaigns following the 2014 Greek Municipal elections? Answering this question is not a simple task since Facebook is one out of the many campaign tools Greek candidates used to lure their voters (i.e. TV ads, speeches) and voting decision is affected by other micro and macro factors as well (i.e. political ideology, economic climate). In the present study, the impact of Facebook usage on voting share was assessed without taking under consideration other indicators that might influence voters. Jungherr et al. [30] highlights the danger of reporting biased results by excluding certain variables from the models that predict voting share. Hence, future research should continue to test the impact of Facebook alongside with other traditional and online media.

Acknowledgments. This research has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) - Research Funding Program: ARCHIMEDES III. Investing in knowledge society through the European Social Fund.

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