THE ROLE OF ON-LINE POLITICS IN BRAZIL AND GERMANY:
A Comparative Research[1]

O PAPEL DA POLÍTICA ON-LINE NO BRASIL E NA ALEMANHA:
Uma Pesquisa Comparativa

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Resumo*: Este artigo é parte de uma pesquisa de campo realizada com deputados brasileiros e alemães (N=454), que teve como objetivo comparar estratégias de comunicação e comportamento eleitoral nos dois países. Entrevistas semiabertas e fechadas foram conduzidos para avaliar as percepções e práticas de parlamentares como um exercício inicial para explorar a relação entre visibilidade na mídia e carreiras eleitorais. A pesquisa constatou que, na Alemanha, a Internet não é vista como decisiva na arena política: ela é usada como uma alternativa complementar aos meios de comunicação de massa, e como uma estratégia adotada principalmente por deputados que pertencem a partidos pequenos e com poucos recursos. Parlamentares filiados a grandes partidos tendem a utilizar a Internet principalmente para afirmar certa independência face às burocracias partidárias. No Brasil, as estratégias on-line não foram vistas como principal meio de comunicação com os eleitores, mas com outras elites políticas. De um modo geral, a Internet foi usada pelos entrevistados de diferentes formas e para diferentes fins. Não se constatou o uso da Internet como uma força de globalização, ou seja, com uma tecnologia que produz um uso pasteurizado e inelutável em todo o mundo. Em vez disso, a Internet foi usada em contextos locais, para atender interesses locais.*

Palavras-Chave*: Política on-line, visibilidade midiática, carreiras eleitorais.*

Abstract*: This paper draws upon a field research conducted with Brazilian and German members of parliament (N=454). It aims to compare communication strategies and electoral behavior in both countries. Semi-open and closed interviews were conducted to assess the perceptions and practices of MPs of both countries as an initial exercise in exploring the relationship between media visibility and parliamentary careers. In Germany, the research found that the Internet was not perceived as a "game-changer": it was used as a complementary alternative to the mass media, adopted*

mostly by MPs who belong to small parties with few resources. Big-party MPs used the Internet mostly to gain some independence from the party bureaucracy. In Brazil, the Internet was not viewed as a valuable means of communication with voters, but with other political elites. The research found that Brazilian and German MPs used the Internet in different ways and for different purposes. It emerged not as a globalizing force, i.e., with a technological power to produce a pasteurized and ineluctable usage all across the globe. Instead, the Internet was used in local contexts to suit local interests.

Keywords: *On-line politics. Media visibility. Electoral careers.*

1. Competing sources of political information

The Internet continues to be the fastest growing medium of political and social communication in Brazil. According to Ibope/Media (2014), Brazil has become the 5th country with the largest number of Internet users (102 million), 40% of the population access the web daily, and 87% go online at least once a week. Social media users increased 400% in 2013. The main access is through public Lan Houses (31%), followed by home computer (27%), and friends' computer (25%). Altogether, Brazil comprises 105 million of "netizens", who spent, on average, 60 hours per week browsing the World Wide Web.[3]

The increasing presence of the internet in Brazilian households in recent years has brought about major changes in behavior of television and print media consumption. The first change was the habit of watching TV programs at the same time as browsing and posting comments on the internet, mainly on facts that are fun, controversial, different or unexpected. The second was an increase in the perception of the Internet as a reliable source of information, albeit the print media remain number one in this ranking. The content shallowness and the speed with which news spread through the Internet contrast with the in-depth interpretation of facts typical of quality print media. This trend points to a greater diversity of roles, the print focusing

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[3] Data retrieved from: http://www.ibope.com.br.

on investigative journalism, leaving the factual reporting to the online media (AGGIO, 2011).

In Germany, the Internet has developed in a very short time from a niche to a mass phenomenon. According to the ARD/ZDF online study, [4] the number of Internet users rose from 4.1 in 1997 to 49.5 million in 2014, more than tenfold. The use of the Internet became one of the everyday life, standard operating procedures not only for digital natives, but also for the growing number of "silver surfers", albeit the usage among under 60-year-olds is significantly higher than that of the over-60s. The group of 30-to-39-year-old is currently the most active user group. 76.5% of the population older than 14 has internet access, 75% of users receive information about politics and society from the Internet, and seem better informed on political events than offline-citizens.

The increasing focus on Internet especially by younger German recipients is due to the combination of an "all round-medium", which comprises informative, entertaining and social networking functions. Yet, Internet use does not lead to the withdrawal of users into a virtual online world. Instead, the Internet seems to be an additional tool to learn about current events. This online media convergence leads to an increasingly higher exposure to online services. Surfing, four times per week on average, takes place especially at home or at work, and the most commonly search is for news and information.

Three major sources of political information characterize the digital environment in Brazil and Germany. The first, associated with traditional media, refers to the coverage sponsored by mainstream press and broadcasting media in the form of large portals that offer all kinds of updated information about politicians and campaigns. A second major source of information is the committees of each candidate's own campaign (including websites and profiles on social networks), responsible for providing access to updates and information, videos, photos, audio and text. Thirdly, the franchising of information, which enables users with different levels of interest and

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[4] Available at: http://www.ard-zdf-onlinestudie.de.

technical skills to participate in the campaign by sharing opinionated material in the social networks (e.g., videos showing gaffes of candidates).

In both countries, the rise of digital media has brought multiple possibilities to political communication, such as a clear segmentation of messages based on different targets. In fact, the use of the Internet enables political organizations and candidates to establish direct contact with specific segments of the electorate, and operate a viral marketing that may overcome the traditional means of mass communication, such as the selection and editorial criteria of print media.

However, the online information generated directly by candidates and parties increases the competition for users' attention, and requires the feeding of websites and profiles with constant updates. A decade ago, it was enough for candidates to have an email to assure their presence online. A few years ago, a website could do the job. Nowadays, candidates must log into all social networks and update information round the clock in order to keep up with the ubiquitous and asynchronous demands of online politics. Users see favorably not only closer interaction with the electorate, but also transparency in the management of social networking and how genuine the candidates' messages are or appear to be. When the users receive messages from politicians on Twitter, for example, they tend first ask whether it was the candidate who drafted the text or someone else, and then give them different levels of attention (SMITH, 2009).

Yet, direct communication with voters also implies obligations and risks for political actors. E-campaign implies greater demand for mobilization, as the so-called "pull media" require active users, unlike the mass media, which are essentially "push media", in which the content reaches the recipients without requiring greater user activity. The main feature of the "pull media" is the three-way participatory communication, which represents a departure from the top-down, highly controlled communication environments typical of traditional political communication. It enables conversations that can involve multiple users in an open forum, like in social media. Conversations can be either synchronous (ideally), but also asynchronous with users contributing at numerous points within what some refer to as a global conversation. Clearly, the directions of communication allow different levels of user control over

communication, with one-way communication offering the least and three-way the most (CHADWICK, 2009).

As Stromer-Galley (2000) pointed out, there are reasons why candidates should carefully consider the costs and benefits of campaigning online and closely interacting with users. The difficulty of controlling what users say and reverberate in the Internet represents a risk for campaign coordinators and image managers, whose main goal is to prevent embarrassing situations or controversial questions that may not fit into the candidate's profile or campaign platform. A video about a blooper during a presentation in the campaign or an embarrassing comment made by mistake propagate worldwide within seconds through the Internet. This raises the question on how candidates can control their own agenda in an environment where a significant portion of users demand interactive applications in order to suggest topics for debate, modifications in candidates' programs as well as the discussion of controversial issues, which might jeopardize the candidate´s campaign.

2. Hypotheses, variables, and design

In this study, the perceptions of the Brazilian and German MPs regarding the Internet and various types of media and media strategies were analyzed and compared against two main variables: (i) electoral formula and (ii) vote concentration. On the one hand, it was assumed that the proportional representation (PR) coupled with open list of candidates reinforces personal vote seeking strategies (CAREY and SHUGART, 1996). On the other, the "horizontal vector" projects into space the dimension of vote concentration. Given that the *electoral formulae* and geographical *voting pattern* produce incentives for different kinds of campaign strategies and electoral connections, as a territorial basis of representation inevitably introduces particularistic and parochial concerns into the policy-making process, it is also assumed that they might produce differences in media strategies. Thus, variations on MPs' personal media strategies were expected to occur in function of the degree of concentration of votes.

Our main hypotheses are:

H1: *High concentration of votes coupled with electoral formulae that foster personal vote seeking significantly increase MPs' personal media strategy and visibility.*

H2*: District candidates (SMD) tend to rely more on media as a strategy to seek personal vote than list candidates (PR), who mostly run party-driven campaigns.*

The research's design called for a postal, elite, self-administered, census survey, the one which gathers information on all elements of the target population, i.e., the group of people to whom the survey intends to generalize. The survey, "Media and Electoral Careers", was administered to all individuals of the population, because it targeted a very specific elite group (Members of Parliaments).[5] In so doing, sampling and margin errors, and uncertainty in the estimate could be eliminated, and representation and response rate significantly increased. Precisely because it is not a representative sample of subnational and national lawmakers from Brazil and Germany, the analysis and conclusions presented here should not be extrapolated beyond the group of interviewees.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. Cross-tabulations--"the workhorse vehicles for testing hypotheses for categorical variables" (POLLOCK, 2009)--were used between the independent variable "vote concentration" (using a three-way split of high, medium and low concentration) and the dependent variables related to MPs' media strategies.

The "vote concentration index" comprises three levels:

- *Low concentration of vote:* less than or equal to 39 % of the votes in the 10 first districts.

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[5] In Brazil, the questionnaire was sent to all 513 members of the Chamber of Deputies (54ª Legislature) in May 2013, and received 20% of response (N = 100). In Germany, the survey, "Medienpräsenz und Wahl", was sent to all members of the Bundestag (17th Legislature) in April 2013. The response rate was 36% (N = 224). In the Bavarian Parliament (Landtag), the questionnaire was administered to all members of the 16th Legislature (2008-2013). The response rate was 69% (N = 130).

- *Medium concentration of votes:* between 40% and 64% of the votes in the 10 first districts.

- *High concentration of votes:* equal to or greater than 65 % of the votes in the 10 first districts.[6]

3. MPs' perception on the Internet and social media

Chart 01 reports that 83.3% of the Brazilian MPs in the high vote concentration layer considered the Internet and the social media "important and very important" for their election/re-election, followed by 67.1 % of MPs in the medium range and 66.7% in the low range.

Brasilia (N=100): 01. "Evaluate which media were important for your election/re-election: Internet/social media".
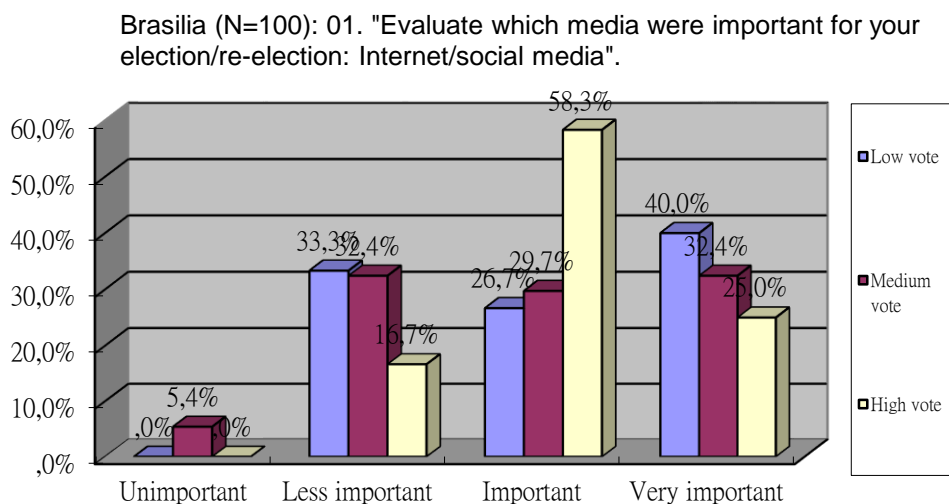
These figures jumped to 93.8%, 83.7 and 100% (high, medium and low ranges) when it comes to keeping in contact with the electorate, clearly showing a strong adhesion on the part of Brazilian MPs to the new media (chart 02).

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[6] In Brazil, the voting pattern was operationalized through the following equation: $c = (x/y).100$ where x is the number of nominal votes obtained by a MP in the first 10 municipalities, and y is the sum of valid votes in the first 10 municipalities. In Germany, the following equation was used to measure the vote concentration index: $c = x / (x + y^1 - z)$, where x is the number of first vote (*Erststimmen*) in the district (*Stimmkreis*), and y is the number of the second vote (*Zweitstimmen*) on the party's list (*Wahlkreisliste*).

Brasilia (N=100):02. "Evaluate which media is important to keep in contact with your constituency: Internet/social media".
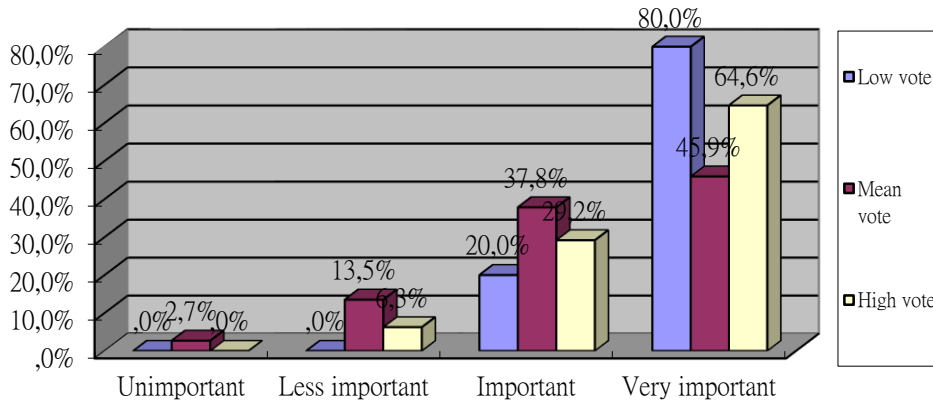

These results confirm the increasing importance of e-politics in Brazil. In the elections of 2002 and 2006, the Internet played mostly a subsidiary role reproducing the jingles and videos aired on TV and radio during the Free Time of Electoral Propaganda (HGPE). In the 2010-election, e-politics assumed an unprecedented importance, and forced political actors to pay much more attention to online politics. For the first time, candidates developed a kind of intimacy with various social media, a strategy meant to attract the sympathy of users, although it did not necessarily converted into votes. Campaign advisers finally adhered to the "culture of social networks", based on the reciprocity of interactions mediated by the digital media, exchange of information, and the collective construction of projects (MARQUES et alia, 2011).

In Germany, candidates to the Bundestag seem to have followed similar trend, as 83.7% of MPs in the high vote concentration layer, 57.8% in the medium, and 75.2% in the low considered the Internet/social media "important or very important" (chart 03). The multilevel character of election campaigns in Germany might explain this variation. The Federal level tends to feature political celebrities and top candidates, whose main communication strategy rely on media, political advertisements and large-scale political rallies. At the state level, average citizens run the political campaigns mostly on a party list or as direct candidate in a local constituency. They usually meet their potential voters face-to-face on market squares,

visiting associations, taking part in social events, or simply knocking on their front doors (ZITTEL and GSCHWEND, 2008).

Berlin (N=224): 03. "Evaluate which media were important for your election/re-election: Internet/social media".
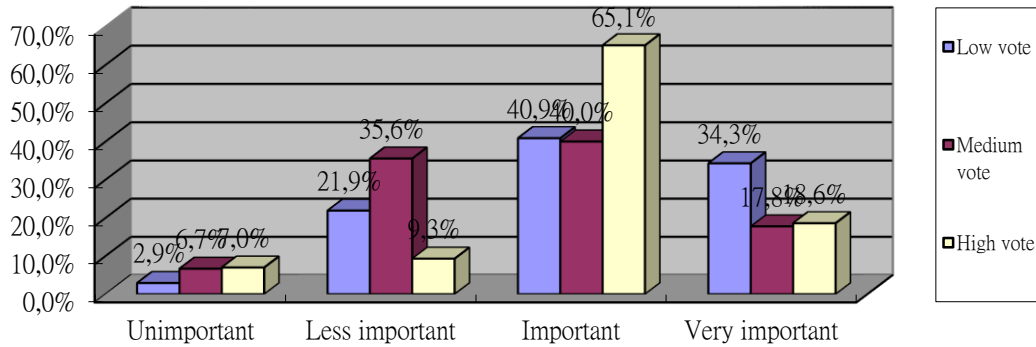
The upward trend continues when it comes to contacting voters: 93% of MPs in the high vote concentration area, 86.6% in the medium, and 94.2% in the low range deem the Internet and the social media "important and very important" for their PR strategies (chart 04).

Berlin (N=224): 04. "Evaluate which media is important to keep in contact with your constituency: Internet/social media".
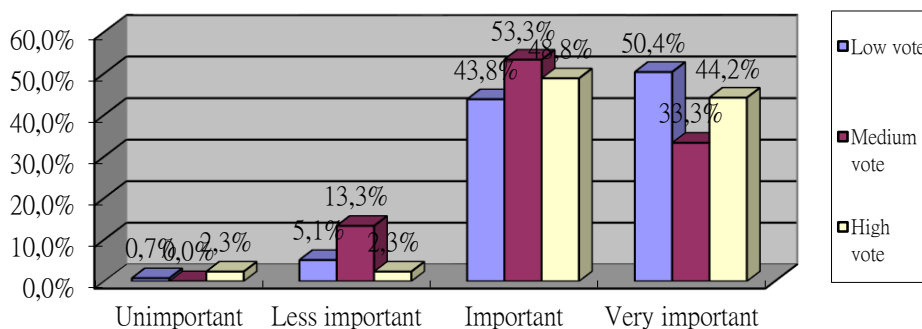
As for the vote type (chart 05), district-elected MPs (79.8%) displayed higher scores of preference for the Internet and social media compared to list-elected MPs (69.5%). These findings confirm our second hypothesis, according to which district

candidates tend to rely more on media as a strategy to seek personal vote than list candidates, who mostly run party-driven campaigns.

Berlin (N=224): 05. "Evaluate which media were important for your election/re-election: Internet/social media".
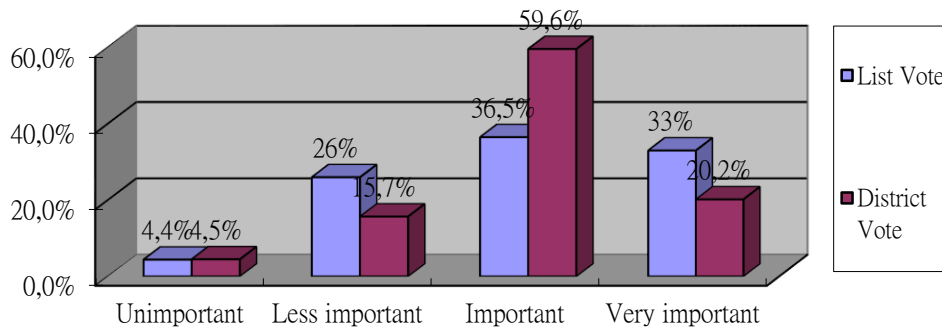

The median vote concentration values for the Internet and social media in both countries (chart 06) partly confirm our first hypothesis: higher scores tend to follow higher vote concentration, except for the medium layer of the German MPs, which fell short 5.7% points in relation to the low vote concentration layer (42.3% and 36.6%).

Chart 06: Median values of vote concentration: Internet and social media
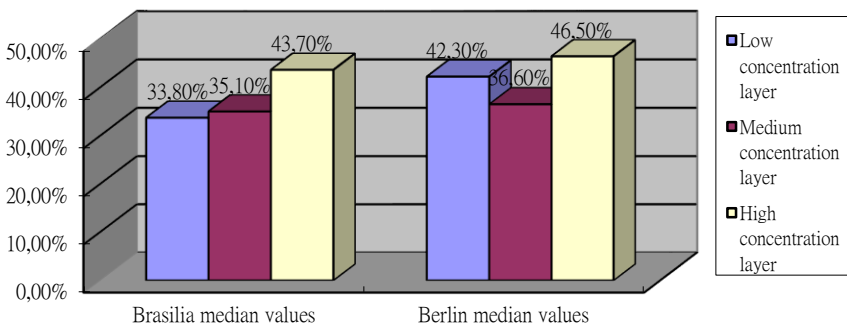
With regard to the level of candidacy, we expected stronger media emphasis among candidates running for the Bundestag (Federal election) than among candidates running for the Landtag (State election). The median vote concentration values for Bavaria (Internet/social media) clearly confirm this expectation (chart 07).

Chart 07: Median values of vote concentration: Internet and social media
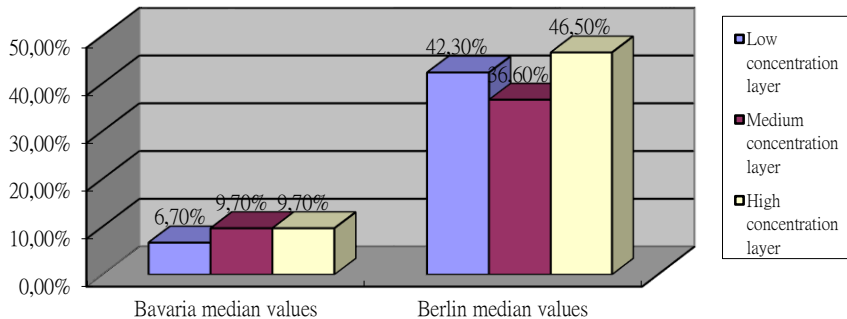
4. Party and personal websites

Until 2010, the electoral legislation in Brazil imposed an anachronism to online campaigns, since the use of social networks was blocked. Brazilian online campaigns could only take place in the internal environment to the official web sites of candidates and parties, which might have contributed to the poor assessment on party websites (AGGIO, 2010). In Germany, the media logic shapes particularly those parts of the websites that have the greatest significance for the party digital self-presentation, thus turning it less attractive to individual candidates (ZITTEL, 2010).

Brasilia (N=100): 08. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used a website designed and maintained by my party."
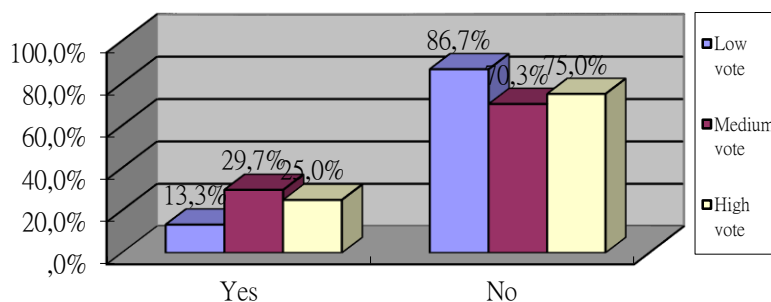
Charts 08 and 09 report that the majority of the surveyed Brazilian MPs (86.7% low, 70.3% medium, 75.0% high vote concentration) and German MPs (67.9% low, 73.3% medium, 62.8% high vote concentration) did not use a website designed and maintained by their parties. These findings dovetails neatly with the results found

amongst Bavaria MPs at the state level. In both countries, party websites focus primarily on the interaction with mass media rather than on candidates' personal features.

Berlin (N=224): 09. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used a website designed and maintained by my party."
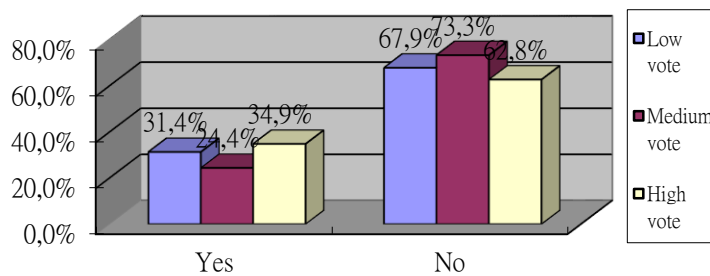

During the 2009 Federal election, the websites of German political parties adhered to traditional campaign functions, such as information provision and resource regeneration. Their Internet presences were highly standardized and showed only few differences in their overall design and technical sophistication. Yet, Web 2.0 features were introduced for the first time by all parties. These allowed site visitors to subscribe to newsletters and RSS feeds, share content with other users through social bookmarking or forward material within their social networks. In addition, citizens could respond to parties' news releases via online feedback forms or leave comments on their YouTube channels. Despite their extensive usage, though, these web 2.0 features remained more or less aesthetic tools embedded in order to drive perceptions, as opposed to connecting with voters at a more substantial level. Genuine political discussions were scarce (LILLEKER and JACKSON, 2011).

By contrast, the responses to the question on the usage of "personal website" revealed an abrupt increase, as 93.3% low, 89.2% medium, and 97.9% high vote concentration Brazilian MPs, and 92.0% low, 84.4% medium, and 81.4% high vote concentration German MPs adopted this kind of communication tool in their e-campaign (charts 10 and 11). Since Howard Dean's innovative use of personal websites for the 2004 Democratic primary in the United States, when he raised 41 million dollar online, and mobilize 185 thousand supporters through his "Meetup.com",

politicians all over the world started to figure out that a well-designed personal website is much more than just a place to download press releases.

Brasilia (N=100): 10. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used a personal website designed and maintained by my campaign team."
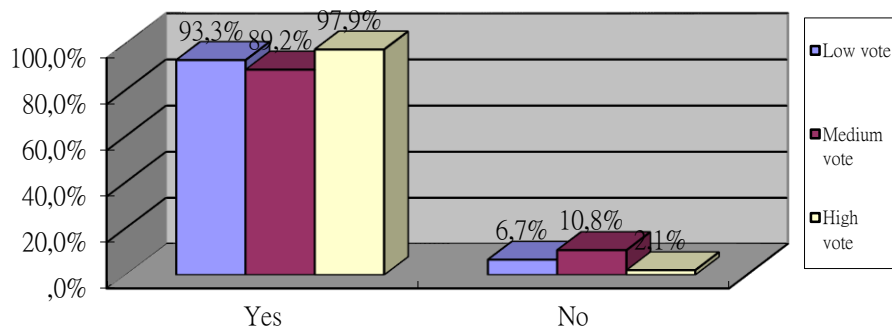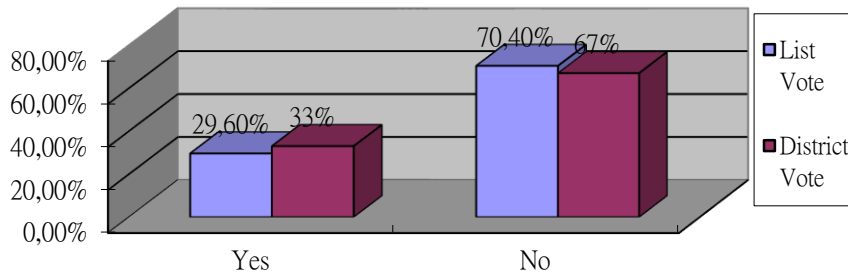

Berlin (N=224): 11. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used a personal website designed and maintained by my campaign team."
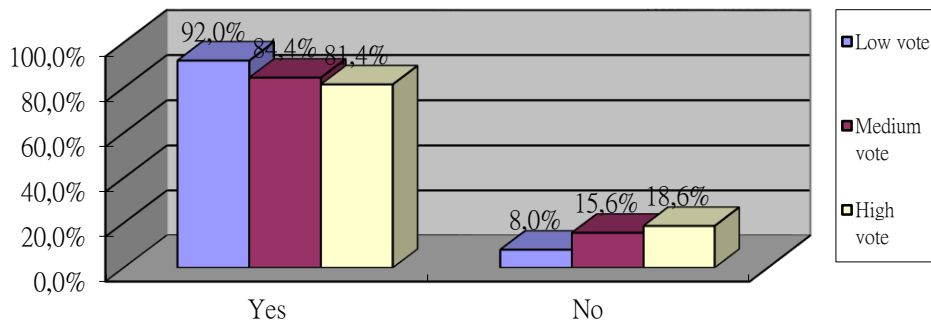

Yet, the political relevance of personal websites depends on the quality of their textual content and media-specific qualities of online communication. Digital outlets, which provide comprehensive and accessible policy information, may mobilize and educate citizens on political issues and legislative behavior of their representative and thus increase the accountability of the office holders. In contrast, digital brochures with colorful pictures and some general personal information have little relevance in this respect.

With regard to the vote type, charts 12 reports a slight higher preference for party website amongst district-elected German MPs (33%) compared to list-elected MPs (29.6%), despite the fact that the second-vote election campaign would suggest a focus on the online activities of the party instead of the candidate. Chart 13 reproduces the same trend, as 89.9% of district-elected MPs said to have used personal websites against 87.6% of list-elected MPs.

Berlin (N=224): 12. Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used a website designed and maintained by my party.

Berlin(N=224): 13. Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used a personal website designed and maintained by my campaign team.
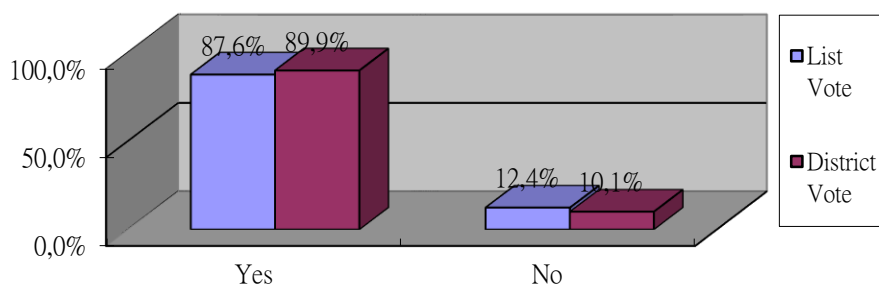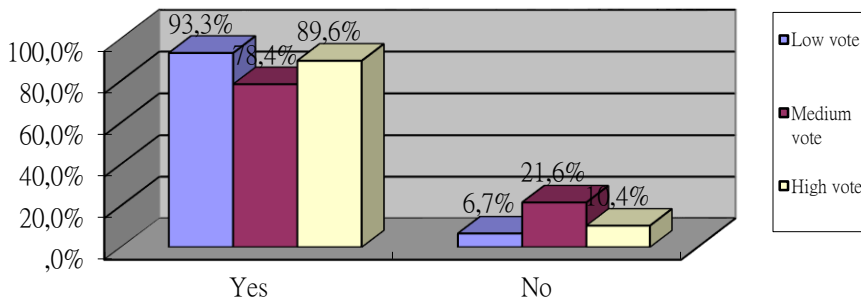

5. Mailing list

Despite all the Web 2.0 hype, e-mails represent 85% of all internet traffic in Brazil and Germany, falling short only to search engine traffic (90%). The low transaction costs and massive economies of scale of e-mails can substitute work previously done

with older technology such as post mails, phones, or face-to-face, and radically alter the strategies campaigns employ in every facet of political competitions. In principle, once the initial list of e-mail addresses and database infrastructure are in place, there is no cost to contacting voters via e-mail.

In both countries, political parties and candidates use e-mails for specific campaign goal such as voter mobilization, fundraising, and supporter's turnout. In the past, direct mail was an effective, albeit expensive, means of increasing voter mobilization (GERBER et al., 2003). Evidence from field experiments in the United States, however, has shown that, despite the similarity between direct mail and e-mail, there is no evidence upon the value of centralized mass e-mails as a means of registering individuals and moving voters to the polls. The reason is that the most personal old-fashioned grass roots mobilization techniques, such as face-to-face canvassing or peer-to-peer networks, work better than the least personal techniques, like e-mails. This does not imply that e-mail is ineffective as a campaign and organizational tool. Quite the opposite, it is an extremely efficient way of communicating information and instructions to supporters, organize rallies, raise donations, and solicit volunteer labor (NICKERSON, 2009).

Charts 14 and 15 show that e-mail is more popular among Brazilian MPs than German MPs, above all in the low vote concentration range (93.3% against 73.7%).

Brasilia (N=100): 14. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used the Mailing List to inform and organize the activities of my campaign."

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Berlin (N=224): 15. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used the Mailing List to inform and organize the activities of my campaign."
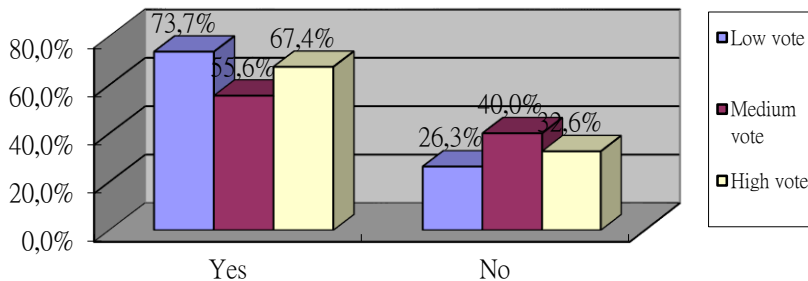
List-elected MPs showed a higher level of preference compared to district-elected MPs, as reported in chart 16 (73% against 61.8%).

Berlin (N=224): 16. Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used the Mailing List to inform and organize the activities of my campaign.
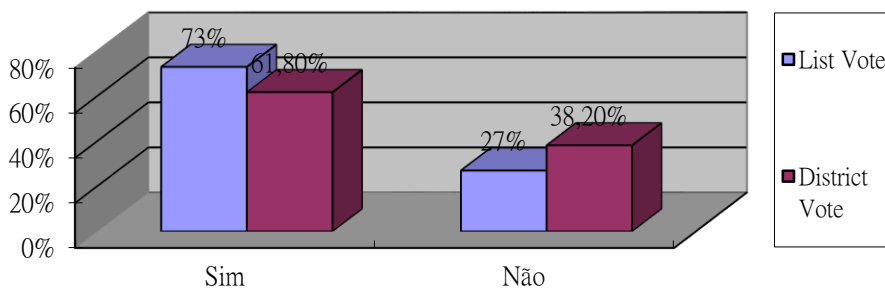

6. Twitter

Among the various possibilities of online politics, Twitter rises to prominence when it comes to providing a continuous stream of political events in real time, combine news updates of 140 characters, and organize "connective action" out of atomized and subjectively experienced stories. As a medium of self-expression, until recently restricted to private message exchange between users, Twitter has become the digital alternative for political activists to inform, and mobilize collective action and protests as well as create media attention for their demands. The rhythms of storytelling on Twitter reveal hybrid forms of journalism, interconnected and mutually dependent. Although the volume of comments on Twitter tend to rise according to the

volume of mass media coverage, it is not everything that receives mass media attention that leads to equal attention on Twitter (CHADWICK, 2011; BENNETT and SEGERBERG, 2013; JUNGHERR, 2014).

The strategic use of twitter during the 2010 political campaign in Brazil indicates that it served as a channel to integrate nontraditional political actors into the political debate, mobilize supporters for party rallies, and bring the attention of mass media journalists to political events. A few months before the election there was an intense debate among political observers about the possibility of candidates to reproduce the "Obama effect" in Brazil. The question was whether candidates with little chance of winning the presidential election could exceed the traditional obstacles represented by party bureaucracies and large advertising machines through the massive use of the Internet and social media. Optimistic predictions raised the possibility that the Green Party presidential candidate, Marina Silva, could somehow reproduce the amazing performance of the Green Party presidential candidate, Antanas Mockus Šivickas, whose candidacy prospered through the social networks in Colombia (BRAGA, 2011).

There was evidence that online politics had some influence in the course of the 2010 presidential campaign in Brazil. However, very little is yet known about the pattern of Internet and social media use by politicians at other levels of representation due in part to the ban on Internet campaign then prevailing in the archaic electoral legislation. According to Sergio Braga (2011), the 2010 majority election (governors and senators) pointed to a new pattern of online politics. First, he detected a more equitable and widespread use of the Internet among candidates from different regions of the country. Secondly, the use of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube by candidates tended to replace other interaction mechanisms, such as blogs, forums and chats.

These results dovetail with our findings reported in chart 17, where 83.3% of Brazilian MPs in the high vote concentration area, 83.8% in the medium, and 66.7% in the low range used twitter in their campaign efforts.
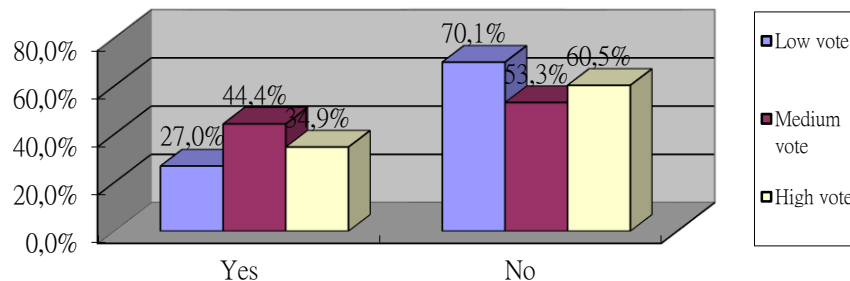
Brasilia (N=100): 17. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used Twitter to communicate with voters."
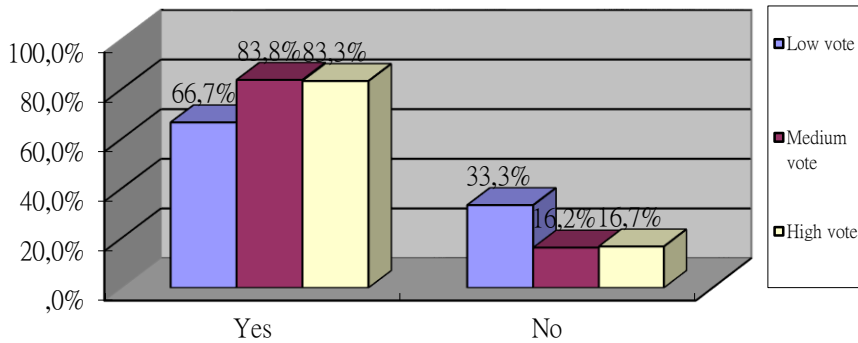
In Germany, empirical research on social media has focused on questions of whether online politics follows the same pattern of communication as offline politics, and more specifically whether mass media visibility leads to greater presence on Twitter. Contrary to most international research, which positively correlates powerful offline political actors and powerful presence online, Germany represents a notable exception. The Pirate Party, a young and vibrant political organization with 100% roots in online activism, and an undeniable hegemony of the online political sphere, was not able to win a single seat in the Bundestag. Parties, candidates and voters, it seems, use twitter to varying extent and with distinct purposes, but such use has not changed the traditional features of political campaigns, which still cling to mechanism of top-down and self-reported dissemination of information flow. The voting decisions of citizens seem alien to the influence of the information circulating on Internet, twitter and social media (JÜRGENS and JUNGHERR, 2011).

As documented in chart 18, 60.5% of German MPs in the high vote concentration range, 53.3% in the medium and 70.1% in the low said they did not use Twitter to communicate with voters. One possible reason for this poor performance found in our interviews is the length limitation of messages on Twitter (160 characters), which seems to focus more on prominent topics, such as televised debates, and contesting public statements of leading politicians.

Berlin (N=224): 18. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used Twitter to communicate with voters."

As regards the type of vote (chart 19), Twitter proved more popular amongst districted-elected MPs (40.7%) than list-elected MPs (27.8%). This result reinforces our hypothesis according to which district MPs tend to rely more on media as a strategy to seek personal votes than list MPs, who mostly run party-driven campaigns.

Berlin (N=224): 19. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used Twitter to communicate with voters."
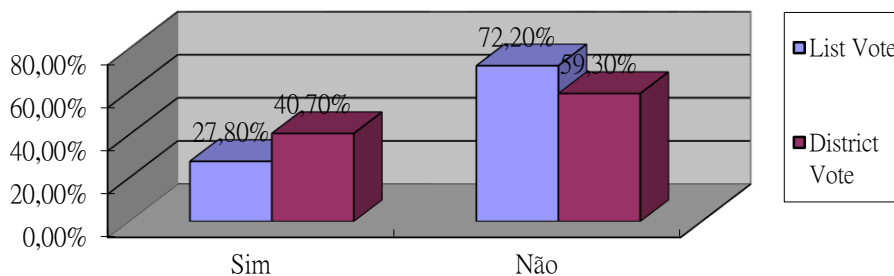
7. Other social network

In recent years, social media providers, such as Facebook and YouTube, have become important tools for political communication, as parties and politicians incorporated these services into their campaigns, journalists have use them as sources of information, and the public feeds them with comments and participates in political events and debates. In Brazil, the 2010 election represented a turning point in this regard, as the use of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube by candidates exceeded other online tools, such as blogs, forums and chats (BRAGA, 2011).

Brasilia (N=100): 20. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used other social networks to communicate with voters."
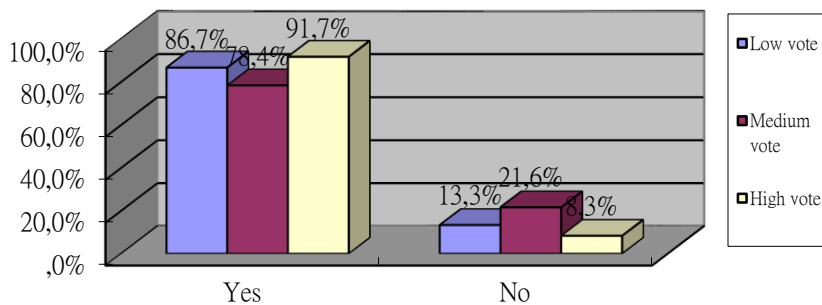
The responses of the surveyed MPs mirrors this trend, as reported in chart 20, where 91.7% of the MPs in the high vote concentration layer, 78.4% in the medium, and 86.7% in the low range said they used other social networks in their campaigns.

In Germany, between 2002 and 2010, there was a clear trend towards a professionalization in German e-campaign that corresponds to international developments in computer-mediated political communication. The largest growth rates appeared for the implementation of several Web 2.0 options, such as YouTube (74.1%), Twitter (42.9%), and other social networks (39.3%). All parties with representation in the Bundestag adopted almost all new Web 2.0 technical innovations in the 2009 national election (SCHWEITZER, 2011, p. 320).

While these findings hold true for parties, the same does not seem to apply for individual candidates, who used Web 2.0 tools only selectively. On the one hand, political websites concentrates primarily on the respective parties as collective entities, while candidates are pushed into the background. The degree of personalization in German e-campaign has continuously decreased since 2002 on all levels of analysis and across all parties. In the last election, the political leaders appeared in one-third of all messages, and featured in only about one-quarter of all photos that accompanied the articles. This trend sharply contrasts with the intense personalization observed in German offline mass media coverage since the end of the 1990s (ESSER and HEMMER, 2008; SCHWEITZER, 2011).

On the other hand, to assume that this general growth in professionalization would inevitably lead to a growing political use by individual candidates risks hiding a central

feature of e-politics: it requires appropriate motivation. The eventual competitive edge of Web 2.0 dialogical interactivity, for example, contrasts with the logistical implications of such endeavor, given the amount of effort required for this kind of activity and the lack of time to organize dialogues through emails, forums or chat rooms. This might explain the poor performance of the Web 2.0 amongst surveyed German politicians, as the overwhelming majority (79.1%, 71.1% and 80.3%) did *not* use the social media in their political campaign to communicate with voters (chart 21).

Berlin (N=224): 21. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used other social networks to communicate with voters."
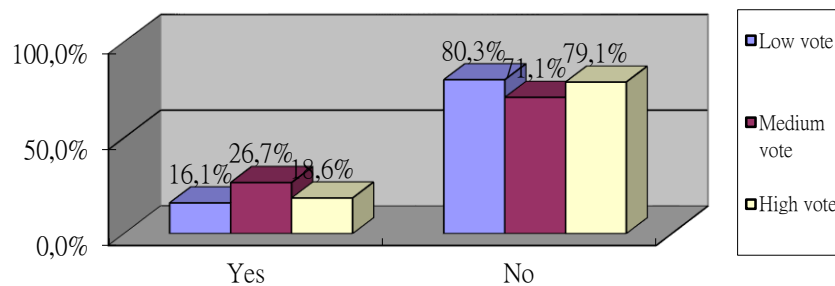
8. Political Blogs

The theory of gatekeeper comprises the idea of vertical information flow, stemming from the mass media, which determines what the audience receives. Weblogs, instead, was born from the idea of a stream of horizontal communication, which generates information produced by the interaction and dialogue between a primary interlocutor (the blogger) and a secondary (readers). There are different levels of interaction according to the blog. Some are more intervention-friendly and open to debate than others, since it is still up to the blogger to set the agenda, and decide what comment goes online.

As free spaces of online interaction, political blogs are loci for collective discourse and political conversation, organized around a central figure, and open to debate with multiple actors. They are subject to contentious debate and tensions, since the exposure of personal opinions and subjective personality are part of their appeal for readers. Political blogs have the potential to expand the universe of people

involved in the production and search for political information. They aim to guide readers in the quest for content and cognitive pathways.

The concept of timeliness links closely to the journalistic genre of blogs, etymologically interpreted as a daily journal, related to the periodicity, which becomes central to online journalism with round the clock updates. Although political blogs have no obligation to maintain any frequency of updates, they mirror the journalistic debate that discusses daily news and events. In this sense, blog is a kind of hybrid between updated journalism and personal chronicle (ALDÉ et al., 2007).

In Brazil, candidates who most used the Web to organize election campaigns in 2010 were not outsiders to the traditional political game, but the big parties of the center and center-left, especially the ruling coalition, with greater campaign resources. Candidates used blogs mostly for discussion of proposals and information, much less to mobilize and organize public opinion around ideological platforms (BRAGA, 2011).

Chart 22 documents that 68.8% of the MPs in the high vote concentration area used a personal blog as part of their media strategy, whereas 62.2% of the MPs in the medium layer and 53.3% in the low concentration range adopted such tools for political campaign. The ascending trend from lower to higher usage of blogs reinforces our main hypothesis, which expects more media emphasis among MPs featuring high vote concentration scores.

Brasilia (N=100): 22. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used a personal Blog during my election campaign."
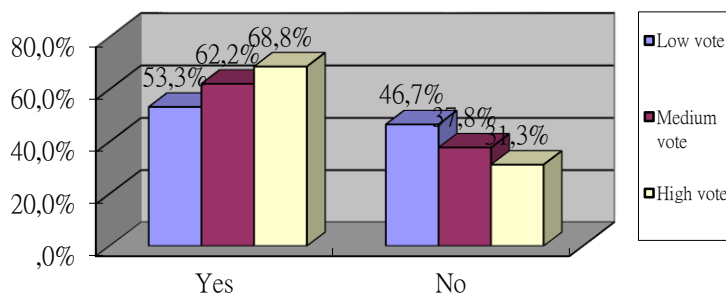
Berlin (N=224): 23. "Regarding the use of the Internet and Social Networking in the election campaign, answer yes or no: I used a personal Blog during my election campaign."
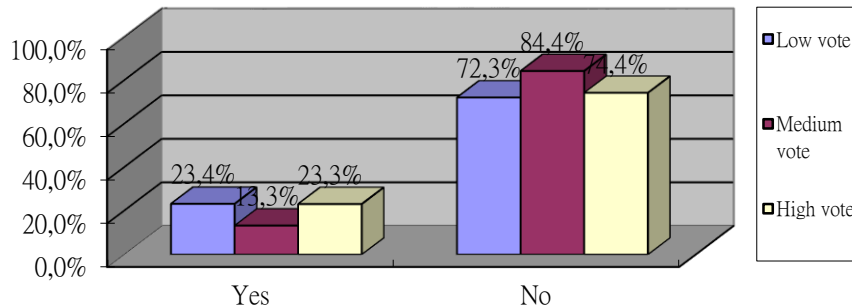

Following the same trend found in all previous cases of Internet usage by German MPs surveyed, personal blog was no exception (chart 23): less than one-quarter of MPs responded positively to blogs (23.3%, 13.3% and 23.4%).

Summary

In this paper, we analyzed how Brazilian and German MPs have incorporated digital tools in their media strategies. We assumed that different media allow for different modes of information production and consumption, which depend on the technology and the institutions producing and disseminating those media. The advent of the Internet introduced different technological capabilities for the production and consumption of news in general, while offering new opportunities for political communication in particular. Politicians have to cope with a communication environment dominated by drastically lowered costs for publication and information retrieval.

Researchers interested in the relationship between online buzz and subsequent electoral results might find interesting clues in the case of Brazilian and German MPs. In both countries, this comparative analysis has found that online politics indeed offers opportunities for MPs to compensate for eventual offline disadvantages, such as lack of publicity and fewer financial and human resources. Yet, the traditional print and broadcasting mass media still appear more important for their election/re-election strategies as well as for keeping in contact with voters.

When the median values for the Internet were compared, it was found that 43.7% of Brazilian MPs in the high vote concentration area, 35.1% in the medium layer, and 33.3% in the lower range considered the Internet "important and very important" for their media strategies. German MPs showed a similar trend, as 46.5% of MPs in the high vote concentration area, 36.6% in the medium range, and 42.3% in the low had the same assessment (chart 24).

Chart 24: Median values of vote concentration: Internet and social media
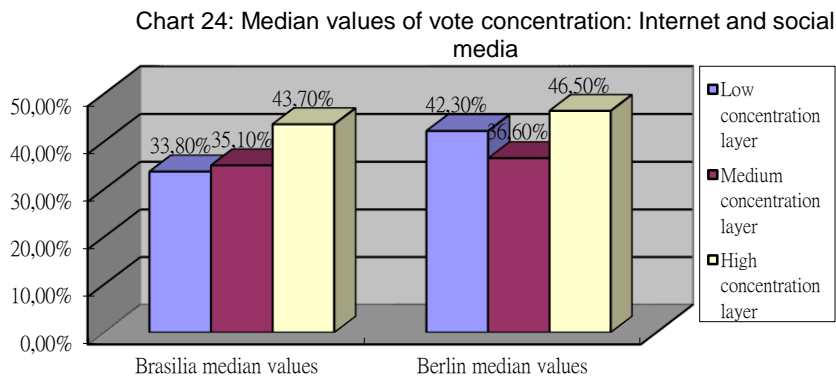
These figures contrast with 46.3%, 40.5% and 33.5% (high, medium and low ranges) for Brazilian MPs when it comes to local TV and radio and with 48.9%, 31.1% and 21.5% for German MPs (chart 25).

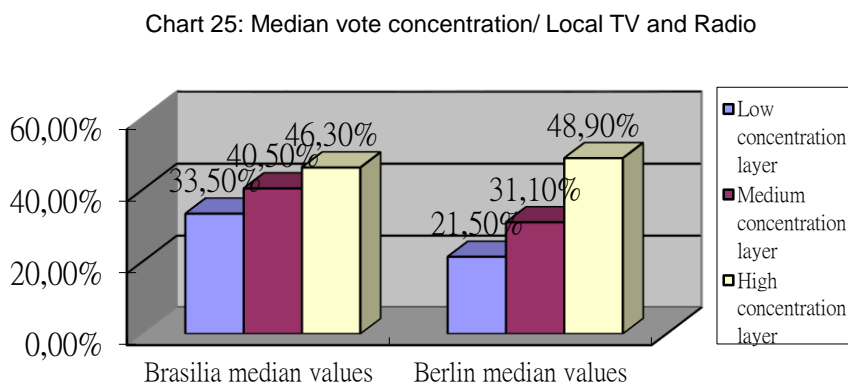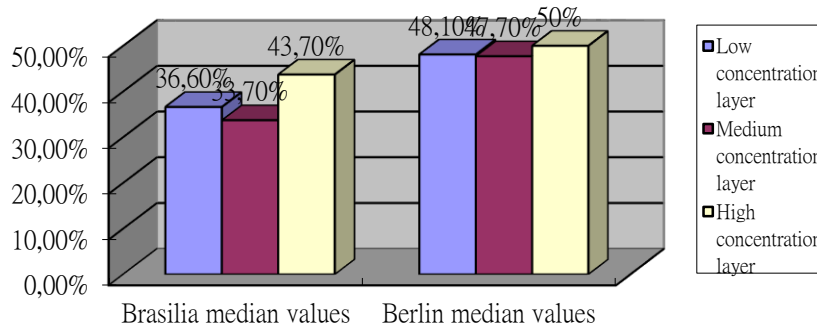Chart 25: Median vote concentration/ Local TV and Radio

Chart 26: Median vote concentration: Local Print Media

Local print media (chart 26) clearly appear more important than Internet for German MPs (50%, 47.7%, and 48.1%), and important for Brazilian representatives (43.7%, 33.7% and 36.6%). These findings suggest that Brazilian and German MPs used the Internet as a communications tool that complements, but in no case replaces the off-line activities, especially the traditional voter contact and articulation of canvassers, as well as the use of print and broadcasting media. Far from replacing the "old" media, the Internet seems to consolidate them in a relation of complementarity, in which the logics of various technological and social media systems mix to form a "hybrid media system" (CHADWICK, 2013). This serves to show once more that the debate about political communication has to abandon the demarcations of communication in traditional and new media systems but instead move on to map how these systems interact.

For the surveyed MPs, the so-called "Obama effect" appears to be a distant parameter, a far-away horizon rather than a political reality that is checking and spreading in countries with different political and socio-institutional contexts. To illustrate this point, it suffices to bring to memory the case of the Pirate Party as the most Internet savvy, civic movement founded in Germany in 2006, which employed almost all available interactive options in their campaign (chat room, discussion forums, blogs, wikis) to foster an immediate exchange with their supporters and to coordinate their offline campaign. Likewise, the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) in Brazil ran one of the most intense online campaigns. The Pirate Party has not managed to conquer one single seat in the Federal Parliament, and the PSOL remains

a fringe party with three seats in the Chamber of Deputies. These two cases clearly show that during the 2010 campaign in Brazil, and the 2009 campaign in Germany, e-politics showed little, if any, systematic relationship with subsequent votes on Election Day.

From what could be observed in the previous analysis, it can be said that despite the stark differences in the media and political systems in Brazil and Germany, online politics is found to offer new opportunities for MPs to compensate for eventual offline disadvantages, such as lack of publicity and fewer financial and human resources. Yet, the traditional print and broadcasting mass media still appear more important for their election/re-election strategies as well as for keeping in contact with voters.

These findings connote that the surveyed Brazilian and German MPs tend to use the Internet as a communication tool that complements, but in no case replaces the off-line activities, especially the traditional voter contact and articulation of canvassers, as well as the use of print and broadcasting media. The so-called "Obama effect" appears to be a distant parameter, a far-away horizon rather than a political reality that is checking and spreading in countries with different political and socio-institutional contexts. Far from replacing the "old" media, the Internet seems to consolidate them in a relation of complementarity, in which the logics of various technological and social media systems mix to form a *hybrid media system*. This may suggest that the debate on political communication should get over the split that separates "traditional" and "new" media systems, and move on to map how these systems interact.

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