

**The 2011 Canadian Federal Election:
Have Canadian Political Parties Finally Made the Jump to Social Media?**

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Introduction

This article investigates use of social and digital media by parties and leaders in the 2011 Canadian general election. An original database of digital media use in the 2011 general election, based on email subscriptions to each of the five largest parties and data collection related to each party's and leader's use of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

Despite high levels of internet connectivity in the Canadian population and rapid growth in social networking, there was surprising variation in party employment of digital media in elections prior to 2011 (Small 2008; Chen and Smith 2011) and unexpected lagging in use of social media compared to U.S. parties (Small 2008a). Canadian parties' use of social media in the 2008 election resembled that of UK parties, which Southern and Ward (2011) note did not embrace digital and social media to the extent that their American counterparts have.

This research addresses the following four questions:

- 1) To what extent are political parties at the federal level using social media?
- 2) Do the parties vary in their usage?
- 3) What might account for this variation?
- 4) Does party use of social media predict electoral outcomes and party success?

In this paper, we employ political communications theory as a backdrop. However, the principal objective of this paper is to generate new data on a small scale to provide insights into Canadian party and leader use of social media to communicate with the electorate. We begin therefore by referencing communications theory and the findings of previous researchers in their studies of digital and social media use in elections in Canada and abroad. We then document our data-gathering technique. We build on approaches used by Smith and Chen (2009) and adapt Small's (2008, 57) categories of analysis: information dissemination, interactivity and voter involvement to organize and analyze the data. We conclude by exploring what lessons parties might learn from the extensive and sophisticated use of social media by presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 2012 election campaign and ponder to what extent party and leader digital media strategies in the next Canadian general election will mimic strategies used in the Obama campaign.

Our technique permits cautious conclusions but the data suggest, first, that parties and leaders in 2011 accelerated their use of social media and adopted more strategic approaches than in 2008, when experimentation with digital media resembled a "throwing mud at the wall" approach rather than strategic communication. Second, there are significant differences in strategy and success of party and leader use of digital media. Use of digital media varied according to party finances and overall strategy. Last, election results in 2011 did not seem to be correlated to social media usage. The strength of the New Democratic Party may be due to the party's social media strategy or to the singular charisma and usage of social media by its leader, Jack Layton. Overall, use of social media in the 2011 federal election continues to lag behind that of US presidential campaigns, which serve as the pace-setter for at least Canadian and UK parties and leaders (Lilleker, Pack and Jackson 2010; Small 2008a).

Theory

Political parties, whether considered vote-maximizers or policy-maximizers, need to mobilize voters and funds to support their efforts. Political parties and leaders engage in political marketing which is “about political organizations adapting techniques...to help the organizations achieve their goals. This is in addition to the use of techniques to identify public demands and sell the political product on offer...” (Lees-Marchment 2004, 9).

Gibson and Römmele note three stages of political communication: a “premodern era” of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a second era beginning mid-twentieth century in which campaigns switched to using mass media to communicate with potential voters; and emergence of a third era in the mid-1990s, marked by increased individualization, modernization and greater uncertainty, with parties experiencing more difficulty identifying the desires of the electorate and how best to communicate their platform (2007, 17).

Coinciding with the third era of political communication was the emergence of the Internet as a dominant presence in the lives of most Canadians. In 2011, 79 per cent of Canadians had access to the Internet and over one-third (35%) accessed the Internet using wireless handheld devices like a Blackberry or Apple iPad (Statistics Canada, 2011). Gibson and Römmele (2007, 3), among others, argue that a party’s electoral success “depends increasingly on [its] ability to communicate properly,” with success indicated by a party’s ability to engage the electorate, get out the vote (GOTV) and raise funds. Online activity has evolved from basic websites to the new ‘social web,’ which provides numerous points of contact for political parties to convey their message. Essentially, this evolution marks a change from passive to active online behaviour.

It is not clear whether parties employ digital media as part of a bandwagon effect, out of fear of losing control of the uniformity and clarity of their message (Lilleker, Pack and Jackson 2010) or as Smith and Chen (2009) find in their analysis of the 2008 election that use of digital media builds on pre-Internet resource differentials among parties. Bastien and Greffet (2009, 3) suggest that the institutional context shapes party use of digital media and that smaller parties may employ digital media because it is cheaper than traditional media and as a means of bypassing mainstream media. Lilleker, Pack and Jackson (2010, 111) suggest that party ideology and values shapes party use of digital media. Finally, Gibson and Römmele (2007) find that a political party’s internal organization and available resources influence the adoption of new technology. To summarize, the literature has not established clear causal chains, which explain party variance in the use of digital media.

Canadian and UK authors, as well as parties and leaders, continued to look to the example set by the Obama campaign in 2008—and more recently in 2011-2012, in its use of digital media. As well, the 2008 election in Canada provides a baseline and possible roadmap for analyzing social media use in the 2011 election. The Canadian election campaign of 2008 saw relatively non-intensive use of digital and social media by Canadian parties and leaders. While anecdotal data on the use of digital media in 2008 exists, there is relatively little publicly available data for investigation. Smith and Chen (2009) and Chen and Smith (2011) generate their own data set, using a mixed-methods research design, including content analysis of candidates’ websites and party online videos, semi-structured interviews and counting of the

‘mentions’ of party leaders in blogs and online advertising.

Methodology

This research employs a mixed methods design and, like Small, we examine three components of each party’s digital media campaign: information dissemination by the parties, interactivity and voter involvement (2008, 57). We base our research on the following:

- An original database of data collected on each party’s Facebook, Twitter and YouTube content and activity
- Viral lift which measures the number of times an article or story is shared in social media
- Detailed reports by PostRank¹, a Canadian company that provides analysis of the popularity of the 3 largest political parties and candidates in social media
- Conversations with Gosia Radaczynska, the Liberal Party’s digital communications team lead and with Keiran Green, the Green Party’s Director of Communications²
- Six Gmail accounts³ created to track the number and content of emails sent to the party’s email database⁴
- Qualitative analysis of each party’s website to identify the priorities of each party’s digital media strategy.

PostRank monitored three specific aspects of social media in the 2011 election:

- Viral lift is an indicator of how frequently something is shared in social media
- Engagement scores which measure the popularity of a website in social media
- Engagement events which are actions like sharing or linking to a story within a social network

One of the primary features of Facebook is a person’s newsfeed, which is a list of status updates and postings by people in her Facebook network, called “friends.” Users can show their excitement for, or appreciation of, a status update or post by “Liking” it or “Sharing” it among their network. Twitter is a network where users can send messages, called “tweets,” to people who have subscribed to receive their tweets, called “followers.” To organize tweets, “hashtags,” a string of words preceded by the # sign (hash sign) are embedded in tweets. These tweets can then be “re-tweeted” by followers to their followers and so forth. YouTube, another social media website, hosts videos uploaded to an individual’s or group’s “channel.” YouTube videos can be linked-to in emails and tweets and embedded in websites and Facebook posts. The next section of this paper provides an overview of some of the primary digital media strategies used by political parties.

¹ PostRank was acquired by Google in June 2012; articles are no longer available online.

² The other parties did not respond to requests for conversations with senior party staff.

³ British Columbia; Alberta; Saskatchewan and Manitoba; Ontario; Québec; Atlantic provinces

⁴ Postal codes for each region were entered when subscribing to party emails. Postal codes used were the top result for a Google search of “<Province/Region> postal code.”

Digital Media Strategy: Social Proof & Viral Lift

Social media offers at least two benefits to political parties and leaders: social proof and viral lift. Online social proof is the perception that a political story or message is credible because it was shared or re-tweeted by someone in a person's social network (teBrake 2010, 33). Therefore, online sharing of political stories is powerful because it enables "independent validation of the political message" to a network (teBrake 2010, 33).

Social proof is created more quickly in social media than in non-digital forms of social networking and because social media enables individuals to validate political stories more quickly than through face-to-face meetings. According to the Liberal Party's digital communications team lead, the party's focus in 2008 was to disperse positive stories through blog, whereas, in 2011, the party undertook to help supporters create 'social proof' through the sharing of positive political stories with their online social networks.

Table 1.1 Number of Articles, Events and Viral Lift in Social Media

Party	Articles	Events	Viral Lift	Platform Mentions	Website Content Shared
LPC	263	3618	13.8	263	63%
CPC	903	7657	8.5	903	3.3%
NDP	365	2620	7.2	365	21.4%

Data: PostRank, 2011b

Note: March 25 to April 4, 2011

In Table 1.1 above, we can see that among the three largest parties, the Liberal Party was successful in its goal to be the most visible in social media, likely the result of having shareable stories on its website and Facebook profile. Over the course of the election, the Liberal Party had the highest viral lift, which means that although the party had the fewest stories, each story was shared more frequently than those of the other parties. Content from the Liberal Party's website was also the most shared in social media. The Conservative Party's platform, however, was the most popular followed by the NDP and the Liberal Party.

Digital Media Strategy - Bypassing Mass Media

Bastien and Greffet suggest that political parties' "status in the political system, and their opportunities to access to other media" determine how a party uses the Internet in election campaigns (2009, 3). The Green Party's Director of Communications confirmed that digital media and social networking are particularly beneficial for relatively poorer parties because the cost-to-reach ratio is much lower than for traditional media. Second, social media helps garner attention for smaller parties since national media focus on front-runners.

In 2008, the Green Party experienced what growing parties in other countries have experienced during elections: the national media "editorializes, confuses and misinterprets their messages" (Lees-Marshment 2009, 187). The party anticipated that challenge in 2011 and invested in software development and substituted social network sharing for national media coverage. While the Green party was able to communicate its message directly to voters and Elizabeth May won her seat in 2011, it is still apparent that "credibility among political

commentators remains more critical for a campaign than coverage in ‘new media’” (Lees-Marshment 2009, 188). We now turn to an analysis of the parties’ digital media strategies for the 2011 election.

Digital Media Strategy - Web Portals

The Conservative Party’s use of a web portal, called *Tory Nation*, was unique in the 2011 election. Like Barack Obama’s portal in 2008, *Tory Nation* is “a 24/7 virtual campaign office that connects like-minded people” (Sylvestre Marketing 2011). Party supporters could create accounts or login via their Facebook account to access campaign news, monitor fundraising efforts and connect with other supporters. Users who opted to sign in through Facebook consented to have their portal activity and official party updates posted on their newsfeeds. This feature suggests the Conservative Party was trying to create social proof by having users communicate their support to their social networks. Overall, the Conservative Party’s digital media campaign was well thought out and did not “try to please everyone” (Sylvestre Marketing 2011), a strategy that likely helped the party meet with electoral success.

Digital Media Strategy - Smartphone Applications

Just two parties developed election smartphone applications (apps), with the NDP launching its “Jack Layton” app for iPhone and iPad users on March 24, 2011 and the Green Party launching its app on April 13, 2011. Because developing apps can be costly, the Green Party used in-house staff to create its app, which had over 2,000 downloads. One of the features was a virtual postcard that users could send to their contact lists saying they had voted (K. Green, personal communication, October 24, 2011). Somewhat surprisingly, the Conservative Party did not develop a party app until after the election.

Information Dissemination

Three aspects of each party’s digital media campaign, information dissemination, interactivity and voter involvement, are evaluated. Information dissemination is measured through official party websites, email updates and official YouTube channels. Websites are the bedrock of digital media so each party’s website is evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Amount of content available
- The overall appearance of the site
- Ease of navigating the website
- Level of accessibility to social media

Next, email communication to each party’s subscription list, frequency of email and the targeting of specific regions of Canada was monitored. Lastly, we report the number of videos posted on party YouTube channels, the popularity of videos and analyze the dominant content of each party’s channel.

Political Party Websites

In previous elections, parties experimented with websites as their foray into Internet communication. In 2011, websites were more sophisticated and included downloadable copies of party platforms, embedded videos, social networking capabilities and online shopping for party paraphernalia. Two primary differences among the party websites were the focus or emphasis of the website and the organization of content.

The Liberal Party's website was sleek and designed to be as 'shareable' as possible by having one-click sharing to Facebook and Twitter on stories and videos (G. Radaczynska, personal communication, October 11, 2011). One side of the website included a Facebook newsfeed plug-in, which listed the top Liberal Party postings circulating in Facebook. Visitors could 'like' each video via Facebook or link to it via Twitter. Website visitors could download an official Liberal Party image for their social networking profiles, follow candidates on Facebook and Twitter and view upcoming events in their area. The Liberal Party was the "first party to ever launch it [the party platform] online" (liberalvideo 2011) and had a real-time feed of the event on its website.

The Liberal Party also had a separate website, called "Liberal University,"⁵ that provided candidates and their teams with website design service, downloadable recruitment materials and sample phone scripts, as well as instructions on how to use RoboCalls and send email blasts (Liberal University 2011). Additionally, there was a guide for its candidates, which describes Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and provides instructions on how to set up accounts.

Because of the number of images of Layton throughout the NDP's website, at first glance, it appeared to be Layton's own website: taglines like "This is Canadian leadership" further emphasized the message that by voting for the NDP, a person was in fact voting for Layton, a 'true' Canadian leader. The website emphasized social media, with embedded YouTube videos and a box showing images posted on the party's Flickr account.

The Green Party's website was more interactive than in 2008 but it still had a cluttered homepage which featured news postings and blog posts, May's Twitter feed and large icons related to campaign involvement such as donating and subscribing to the email update list. The Green Party's website has several unique features such as endorsements by Canadian celebrities Margaret Atwood and Nelly Furtado and a link to Apple's App Store where supporters could download the Green Party of Canada smartphone app. The Green Party was the only party to have links to its youth website and was one of two parties to have an online store where supporters could buy party paraphernalia.

The Bloc Québécois' website was entirely in French and had vast amounts of information ranging from the party's voting history on issues to an assessment of the Conservative Party's balance sheet to a page dedicated to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The broad range of topics indicates that the party did not re-gear the website for the election. Links to the party's social media profiles were not on the homepage but were featured in a drop down menu on the

⁵ liberaluniversity.liberal.ca

homepage’s toolbar, making them less accessible for users. The Bloc Québécois website emphasized membership renewal and fundraising more than did website of the other parties.

The Conservative Party’s website had a minimalist design and was user-friendly. The homepage featured a rolling campaign image and video gallery and utilized typical social media, donation and email subscription buttons. The website primary focus, however, was to direct visitors to its portal website, *Tory Nation*, which is “how the Conservative Party [chose] to engage with its supporters” (Sylvestre Marketing 2011).

To conclude, the focus and organization of party websites varied widely. First, the Liberal Party’s website reinforced the party’s social media push in this election. The party, however, likely spread itself too thin by attempting to utilize many popular social media outlets instead of directing voters to a central hub. The NDP’s website design suggests that its purpose was to communicate to visitors that the party’s leader, Layton, *was* the party. Third, the Bloc Québécois’ website was surprisingly not redesigned with an election focus and much of its content was arguably irrelevant to the party’s campaign. Fourth, the Green Party’s website clearly communicated the party’s goal of getting its leader elected to Parliament. Lastly, the Conservative Party’s website served the purpose of providing information about the party but seemed to exist primarily to direct supporters to the party’s portal, *Tory Nation*.

Email Marketing

Among the types of digital media used, the parties varied the most in the content and regularity of their email updates. A heavy investment in social media did not necessarily mean a party connected with supporters through email newsletters. The best example of this disparity is the Liberal Party, which maximized social media but neglected email marketing entirely. The Conservative Party, only slightly better, sent a thank-you message to subscribers one month after the election.

Table 1.2 Total Emails Sent to Newsletter Subscribers during the Campaign

	CPC	LPC	NDP	BQ	GPC	Total
Ontario	1	1	36	4	16	58
Alberta	1	1	36	4	16	58
British Columbia	1	1	35	4	16	57
Québec	1	1	35	4	16	57
Saskatchewan/Manitoba	1	1	35	4	16	57
Atlantic Provinces	1	1	34	4	16	56

Data: Authors’ database

Table 1.2 shows the number of emails each party sent to subscribers. The Bloc Québécois sent the same four emails to each of the six email addresses, which is intriguing given that the party runs candidates only in Québec. A likely explanation is that the party decided to forego filtering out subscribers from other parts of Canada. The Green Party provided regular updates on campaign events but because it failed to require postal codes, could not target regions. Table 1.2 shows that while the NDP sent the most emails, the party’s email schedule was erratic. There seemed to be a lack of organization since some days several emails were sent and other days none were sent.

YouTube

YouTube provides the opportunity to communicate cheaply with the electorate and can lighten the tone of electoral politics by engaging the electorate in a less serious manner. All the parties used YouTube extensively but the popularity of their videos and their number of subscribers varied. While YouTube could allow political parties to show a more personal side of their leaders, through posting informal videos, the parties predominantly used YouTube to record their campaign schedules. Speeches and several made-for-television advertisements comprised the vast majority of videos on party channels. This was a poor use of this powerful medium, which could be used to communicate witty videos about the party, the election and the party's views, which would be too costly to air on television.

Table 1.3 Party YouTube Channel Statistics

	Channel Videos	Channel Views	Subscribers	Most Popular Video (Number of Views)
CPC (cpcpcc)	1	131,526	1,406	131,107
LPC (liberalvideo)	127	861,461	N/A	186,560
GPC (canadiangreenparty)	?	71,710	945	59,205
NDP (NDPCanada)	67	246,867	N/A	46,981
BQ (BlocQuebecois)	72	?	482	40,394

Data: Authors' database

Table 1.3 demonstrates variation in YouTube strategy. The Conservative Party's channel (cpcpcc n.d.) had just one video and the 'Comments' section was disabled, suggesting that the Conservative Party sought to avoid controversy over the party moderating or deleting critical comments. The channel's most popular video, posted prior to the election, features images of Canadian landscape and a voiceover by its leader, Stephen Harper (cpcpcc 2011). At the close of the election,⁶ the Conservative Party's channel had the most known subscribers.

The Liberal Party posted the most videos during the election and its channel (liberalvideo n.d.) had the most views, reflecting the party's social media focus. The party's channel does not show the number of subscribers so its popularity cannot be compared with that of the other parties. The party's most popular video was an attack advertisement uploaded first in 2008 (liberalvideo, 2008). This suggests that while visitors to the Conservative Party's channel were drawn to a video about an idealized Canada, visitors to the Liberal Party's channel were drawn more to an attack ad directed against the Conservative Party.

The NDP posted the third highest number of videos, which included NDP television advertisements. The party's channel (NDPCanada n.d.) was the second most popular and, like the Liberals, did not disclose its number of subscribers. The NDP's most popular video, originally broadcast as a television advertisement in 2008, contrasts party leader Layton's leadership and stance on issues with those of Prime Minister Harper (NDPCanada 2008).

The Green Party's channel (canadiangreenparty n.d.) featured a combination of campaign

⁶ Final YouTube subscriber counts and number of views were recorded on April 30, 2011.

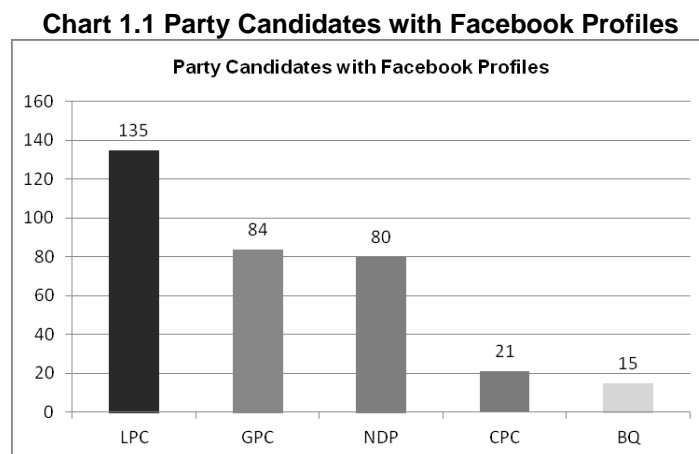
stop speeches and advertisements, one of which was the tongue-in-cheek, “Change the Channel on Attack Ads” (canadiangreenparty 2011), a critique of negative politics. This was the channel’s most popular video and overall the third most popular party video. Videos like this one demonstrate how parties can utilize YouTube to raise their profile while injecting irony into political debate.

The Bloc Québécois (BlocQuébécois n.d.) posted slightly more videos than the NDP but the channel’s small number of subscribers was likely due to the repetitive content of candidate speeches. None of the party’s television advertisements were posted, which is surprising given that posting videos is free and allows individuals to view the advertisement anywhere and anytime. The party’s most popular YouTube video during the election, “Pour qu’on nous entende parler Québec!” included a voiceover of party leader Duceppe encouraging viewers to envision how eight million Québec voters could influence the election (BlocQuébécois 2011). Québec voters clearly liked a positive video about their ability to influence Canadian politics and ultimately to further Québec’s interests.

Facebook

Here we examine party use of Facebook and Twitter to communicate with voters. Specifically, we examine the popularity of each party and leader’s profiles as well the content posted on these profiles. We then turn to the focus of campaign tweets and how much each leader used Twitter.

Slightly over half of the Canadian population are active Facebook users (Socialbakers 2011). While impressive, this number, when compared to the amount of Facebook support parties and leaders received, shows that Facebook’s influence in the election is ‘underwhelming’. Chart 1.1 below shows that Facebook ‘support’ for each of the party leaders over the span of the campaign. Even the most popular leaders did not have more than 80,000 ‘supporters,’ a small number compared to number of Canadians on Facebook or the number of potential voters. Canadians are clearly active when it comes to social media but, when it comes to politics, do not seem to express electoral opinions on Facebook.



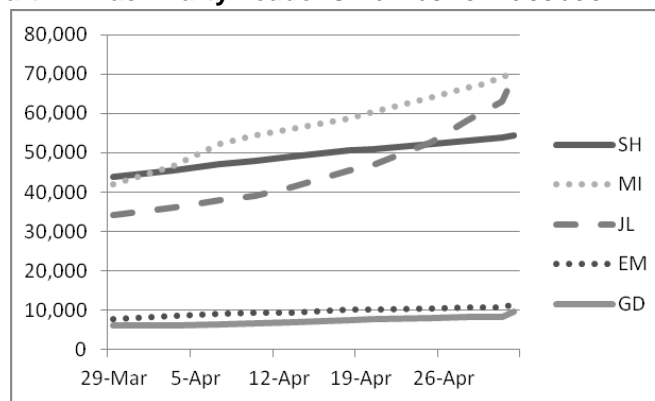
Data: May 2011b

Analysis of each party’s Facebook presence reveals a dramatic difference in the number

of candidate profiles. From Chart 1.1 above, more Liberal Party candidates had Facebook profiles than did those of the Green Party and NDP and dramatically more than did the Conservative Party and the Bloc Québécois.⁷ It is evident that the Liberal Party made more effort and dedicated more resources to have candidates set up Facebook profiles.

Each leader’s support increased over the election but some saw support increase more than others. In Chart 1.2 below, we can see Harper began the election with the most Facebook ‘likes’ but support by this measure grew the slowest at just 19.4 per cent. May had the second slowest Facebook popularity growth at 31.2 per cent. Duceppe’s and Ignatieff’s support grew similarly, at 37 percent and 40.4 percent respectively; Duceppe’s support, however, dropped off on May 2, 2011 when his profile was removed from Facebook.

Chart 1.2 Each Party Leader’s Number of Facebook ‘Likes’



Data: Authors’ database

Layton began the election with fewer ‘likes’ than Harper, whose Facebook updates were in both French and English but surpassed Harper by election day having an increase in ‘likes’ of almost 50 per cent (49.3%). However, the number of ‘likes’ at the beginning and end of the campaign do not tell the full story. For instance, as Chart 1.2 shows, Layton’s Facebook popularity jumped near the close of the campaign mirroring the surge in support the NDP received the last week of the election. In light of the election’s result, Facebook popularity was a poor predictor of electoral success given that Harper started the election with more ‘likes’ than Ignatieff and Layton but Harper ‘likes’ fell below that of his opponents by election day.

The Liberal Party’s Facebook page (Liberal Party n.d.) had over twenty images of party logos and virtual G20/G8 “wish you were here” postcards. One ‘attack’ advertisement post showed Barack Obama seemingly pointing his finger towards Harper, who appears distracted, during a photo-op. Viewers were encouraged to post their own humorous caption but only about 40 did so. Campaign staff updated both party and leader profiles several times daily in both French and English. The updates primarily featured links to campaign articles and links to recently uploaded YouTube videos. The Liberal Party’s and Ignatieff’s (Michael Ignatieff n.d.) Facebook profiles were used primarily to announce campaign events. However, since the notice provided was often within an hour prior to the event, the effectiveness in doubtful.

⁷ The Bloc Québécois runs candidates only in Quebec, and in the 2011 election, ran 75 candidates (Elections Canada, 2013).

The Conservative Party's Facebook profile (Conservative Party n.d.) and Harper's profile (Stephen Harper n.d.) had a greater variety of posting updates than did the Liberal Party but failed similarly in providing advance notice for events. Both Harper's and the party's profile pictures featured an image of Harper. Both profiles were updated in French and English with daily platform and event announcements, embedded videos and election stories.

The focus of the NDP's Facebook profile (NDP n.d.) was its leader Layton and, like the other party leaders, Layton had his own Facebook page (Jack Layton n.d.). Both profiles had similar content and an image of Layton as the profile picture, so the party had essentially two duplicate profiles. Posts on both profiles included platform updates and event announcements on which visitors could comment. Most surprising was that despite the party's push into Québec there were no French postings. The NDP's Facebook presence does not explain the party's success in Québec.

The Green Party's (Green Party of Canada n.d.) and leader May's (Elizabeth May n.d.) Facebook pages functioned as hubs for party supporters and had English content. Updates were regular and varied and included appeals for support, links to polls and videos of May being interviewed by national media. Events were announced well in advance and reminders were posted shortly before events.

The Bloc Québécois' Facebook profile (BlocQuébécois n.d.) was only an information page and did not include a profile wall or online photo albums. The profile was never updated during the course of the election. The authors analyzed the parties and leaders' profiles following the election. Since, however, Duceppe's page (Gilles Duceppe n.d.) had been removed, no analysis on his page could be conducted. Aside from the Bloc Québécois, parties in this election used Facebook to disseminate information about platform announcements and events. While all four parties informed visitors of events, the NDP and Green Party provided sufficient notice and provided reminders leading up to events. In contrast, neither the Liberal Party nor the Conservative Party effectively used Facebook to announce events, suggesting that they used those updates to provide content updates. In fact, updates appear as afterthought, not strategy.

Twitter

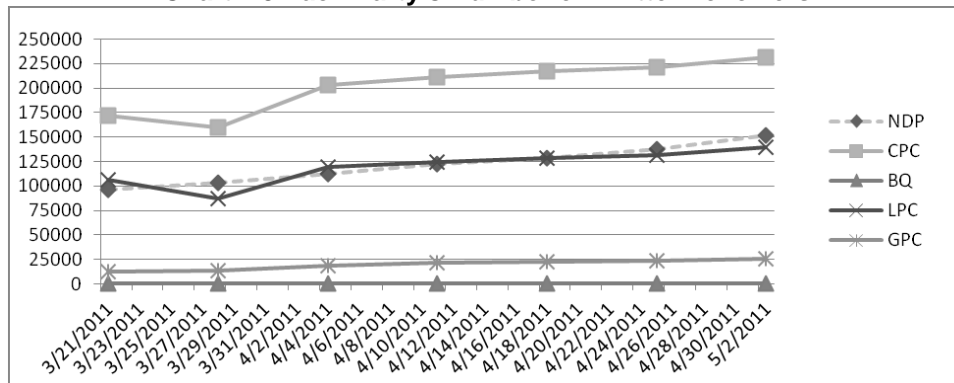
Twitter offers at least two advantages over traditional media: speed and accessibility. Small argues that with Twitter, "politicians can react to events as they occur, and in an instant, a tweet can be picked up by followers, journalists, and opponents" (Small 2011). Twitter also lets anyone "send the leaders a message on Twitter, where they are all active, whether it is praise or criticism" (Jones 2011). The Green Party recognized the important of this interactivity and made equipping candidates with extensive social media training and material a large component of its communications strategy. For example, candidates were regularly emailed items such as candidate press release templates, one-page bulletins of talking points from the previous day and "tweet sheets," which contained templates for tweets, including links and hashtags (K. Green, personal communication, October 24, 2011).

In 2011, political parties and leaders were active on Twitter but failed to maximize their use of this potentially valuable communication tool. Other than May, who used Twitter to

communicate about a range of issues, the other leaders tweeted press release like messages and announced events. While Twitter can be an effective way to announce events, the vast majority of tweets were made during or after events occurred. The most popular election topics were the proposed debate between Harper and Ignatieff; the Liberal Party’s live online launch of its platform, which included answering questions submitted through Twitter; and May’s exclusion from the leader’ debate. Twitter users seem to be attracted to events and causes, something the parties should note for future elections.

For example, Prime Minister Harper, within days of the start of the write period, suggested he and Liberal Party leader Ignatieff have a one-on-one debate. Ignatieff tweeted back accepting the challenge of the debate. However, shortly after Ignatieff’s acceptance, Harper tweeted that Ignatieff had not yet responded. The failure of the Conservative Party’s digital media team to recognize Ignatieff’s response suggests that digital media may demand more work and a faster response time than when campaign staff communicated primarily with media journalists. Staff must now monitor dozens of digital media and social media outlets while disseminating news and responses. This contradicts popular opinion and early predictions of the lower cost of digital media: use of digital media may demand more resources whether in financial cost or the number of staff required.

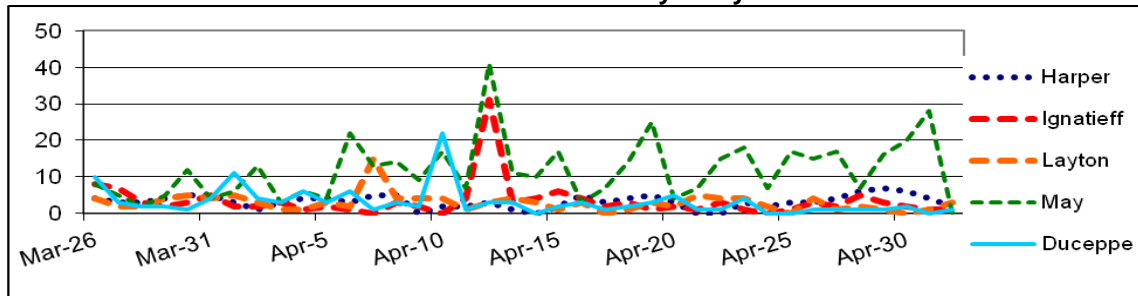
Chart 1.3 Each Party’s Number of Twitter Followers



Data: Authors’ database; May 2011c

Chart 1.3 above shows that the Conservative Party overall had the most followers during the election campaign but had the second slowest growth rate of followers at 25.4 per cent. The Bloc Québécois’ Twitter account saw marginal growth of 7.8 per cent in the number of followers. The Liberal Party and NDP began the election with a similar number of followers but, by the end, the number of NDP followers had increased by 36.7 per cent while the number of Liberal Party followers rose just 23.8 per cent. Across all parties, the Green Party’s number of followers grew the most and saw a 51.8 per cent increase in its number of followers, likely the result of the high number of tweets.

Chart 1.4 Tweets by Party Leader



Data: Authors' database

Chart 1.4 above tracks the number of tweets sent by each leader over the course of the writ period. May increased the frequency of tweets after March 30 when it was announced that she would not be included in the leaders' debate, which provides tremendous visibility for parties. Election day was not the most active day for the leaders in terms of the number of tweets sent. In fact, May and Ignatieff sent the most tweets on the day of the leaders' debates. Consistent with the Liberal Party's social media emphasis, Ignatieff was the second most frequent Twitter user next to May while Layton, who mentioned the Twitter term, "hashtag," during the leader's debate (Mehler Paperny 2011), used Twitter the least.

Table 1.4 Leaders: Tweets Sent & Followers

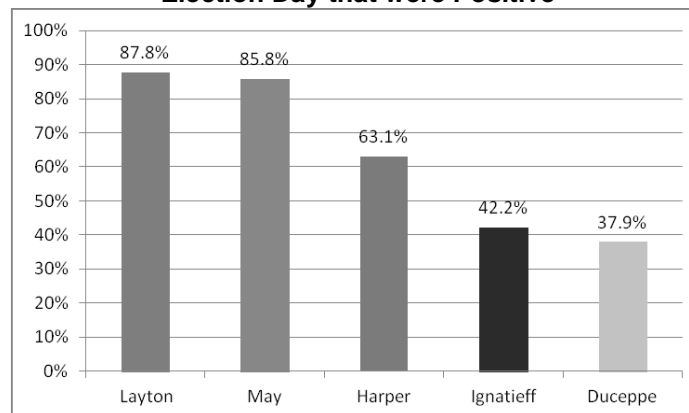
	Sent by Leader	Followers
May (ElizabethMay)	449	23,432
Ignatieff (M_Ignatieff)	127	97,209
Harper (pmharper)	122	132,964
Duceppe (GillesDuceppe)	119	N/A*
Layton (jacklayton)	111	92,746

Data: Authors' database; May 2011c

* No data available

Table 1.4 above shows that Harper had by far the most followers, followed by Ignatieff, Layton and then May. Despite the Liberal Party's strong social media push, Ignatieff finished the election over 30,000 followers behind Harper (May 2011).

Chart 1.5 Per Cent of Tweets about Each Leader on Election Day that were Positive



Data: May 2011c

Chart 1.5 above displays variation in the sentiment of tweets sent on election day. Twitter users were most positive about May and Layton and well over half of tweets about Harper were positive. In contrast, the majority of tweets about Ignatieff and Duceppe were negative (May 2011c).

This examination of Twitter usage shows candidates using Twitter extensively and posting on average more than a dozen tweets each day of the campaign. May tweeted about as often as Harper, Ignatieff and Layton combined, confirming the theory posited by Bastien and Greffet (2009) and Lees-Marshment (2009) that smaller parties will use digital media differently than more established parties, which receive more coverage from national media. In view of the final election result that saw the NDP gain Official Opposition status for the first time and the Conservative Party gain a majority government, the sentiment of election day tweets referencing leaders seemed to predict accurately electoral success. Similarly, negative sentiment tweets sent on election day appeared to predict the lack of success, measured in the loss of seats in the House of Commons, for both the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study of Canadian party use of digital media in the 2011 election. First, each of the parties invested more heavily in digital media than in previous elections. Whereas in 2008, when the parties merely experimented with social media, the 2011 election saw all the parties refine their strategies and execution of digital communications. Second, each party's digital media goals became more distinctive than in earlier elections. Last, the parties' use of social media indicates that the emphasis in their political communication is on sharing party information rather than inviting voters to provide feedback to the parties or to become engaged in dialogue. Canadian party use of digital media in the 2011 election period was therefore uni-directional, not bi-directional.

The Conservative Party invested in a well-designed quality website but directed supporters and potential supporters to its portal, *Tory Nation*, an online campaign hub where supporters could connect with each other. The Green Party's digital media strategy substituted social media for traditional media through frequent Twitter updates, posting of YouTube videos and creation of a smartphone app that kept supporters informed. The NDP's strategy was unique in that while it invested heavily in social media, the party targeted potential supporters by paying to have NDP advertisements alongside search results when a person searched for another party or party leader name in an online search engine like Google. The Liberal Party focused on creating social proof by emphasizing articles about the party through social media websites taking advantage of the multiplier effect that occurs when a person shares an article in social media. The Bloc Québécois, while weak in terms of its information-heavy website, was quite strong with regard to social media. The party focused on posting videos on YouTube and communicating with Québec voters via regular Twitter updates.

All of these observations suggest that Canadian political parties have made the jump to social media. They may not yet be seasoned users but they are investing in these technologies. The authors concur with Sylvestre Marketing's conclusion about how political parties should

best use digital media: “Find the right strategy, stick to it and don’t try to please everyone. Just do what works for you” (Sylvestre Marketing 2011).

Analysis of party, party leader and candidate use of digital media remains understudied. In-depth analysis of the content of YouTube videos, Twitter and Facebook postings and images uploaded to Flickr would provide insight into what and how each party tries to communicate through each social networking tool and who in the electorate is engaging in politics online during elections. Even more important, in-depth analysis may be able to link which social networking tools reap the greatest political benefits for a particular party. Whether parties will adapt the cutting-edge techniques of social media usage from the 2012 US elections is unknown: what is likely is ongoing adaptation of the successful data mining techniques in GOTV efforts. In early 2013, the NDP hired the national field director for Obama for America, to speak on data analytics and technology at its policy convention according to *The Hill Times* (Vongdouangchanh 2013).

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