4th ECPR General Conference, PISA, 6-8 september

Section 20 "Contemporary European Party Politics"

Panel 44 "Party organisations and new information and communications technologies"
Panel chair: Rosa Borge (UOC)

Paper: **Reconsidering the analysis of the uses of ICTs by political parties: an application to the Catalan case.**

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1-. Introduction: Theoretical perspective.

For years a literature on the uses that political parties make of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has been developed. It is a rapidly increasing, rich, and interesting field in the forefront of the investigation in political science. Generally, these works start from the expectation that the ICTs have a regenerative potential for liberal democracies and for the political parties as well. In developed societies, political parties have experienced some transformations that have leaded them to an increasing divorce with the public. This divorce is shown by the decay of party adscription and membership, and also by the decay of the conventional political participation. In the theoretical discussion this situation has been described as 'the crisis of the democracy' (Norris, 1999). According to the more radically oriented scholars this crisis reflects the incapacities of liberal democracies. In this sense, ICTs suppose a great opportunity to surpass the representative institutions and to institutionalize new forms of direct democracy. More moderate scholars have considered that ICTs offer the opportunity for 'renaissance' for representative institutions, as they can reinforce the bonds between the public and its representatives.

Both points of view share maximal expectations with respect to the use of the ICTs as long as assume that political institutions, governments or parties, should work taking advantage of the technological development. As it is foreseeable – and often in a way that does not hide some degree of disappointment – most of the empirical works show that those expectations are not fulfilled. Parties are not efficient in distributing information that is often outdated and incomplete; the resources assigned to the maintenance of websites are not enough to respond to the demands made through the established channels by members or voters; still worse, political parties do not take advantage of the potential of interaction and participation offered by ICTs. As it can be seen, cyber-disappointment goes hand in hand with cyber-optimism.

This paper tries to upturn the question of the uses of ICTs by political parties. Instead of taking for granted the technological potentiality of the ICTs and asking to what extent this potentiality is reached by parties, we will try to ask how the internal and external characteristics of political parties can explain the range of different uses they make of ICTs. Therefore, the paper takes an explanatory focus that's distant from the normative or prescriptive focus that has dominated the current literature.

Theoretical approach

Political parties can be understood essentially as organizations that serve as vehicles for individuals that have the objective of obtaining public positions through competitive elections (Aldrich, 1995; Schlesinger 1984; Downs 1957). The characteristics of these organizations and their ideological speeches are the crucial instruments that allow them to face the challenges of the electoral market.

In broad terms, political parties use ideology to offer interpretations of the reality that help to coordinate and to make more coherent the interactions among the political actors

(Calvert, 1992): between candidates and voters in the electoral fights; between representatives in legislative institutions; between governments and public administrators; and, finally, between public administrators and citizens. Political parties build their organizations in order to be able to operate effectively in these contexts. Thus, for example, the mass party could be seen as the organizational type that arises to face the increasing problem of coordination with voters due to the extension of the suffrage.

From its birth a party is equipped with ideology and with an organization. It has to adopt a coherent communicative strategy in order to simultaneously maximize the benefits and minimize the risks that come from the structure of the electoral market and the institutions of government formation. This 'communicative strategy' could be understood as a short run strategic activity that it is conditioned by other strategic decisions in the long run: the organizational structure and the ideology. The continuity or changes of the long run strategies will depend to a large extent on their fortune or their failure in facing the structure of political opportunities. The political speech can be seen as affected by the changes of the environment as well. A good example is the elimination of all references to marxism made by the western Social-Democratic parties after the World War II.

We can draw the following dynamic scheme of the relation between the described variables:

$$(I_0 + O_0) \rightarrow ECs_0 \rightarrow EM_0 \rightarrow (I_1 + O_1)$$

where I_0 stands for the 'ideology' that, at the 'initial moment', justifies the creation of the partisan organization (O_0) which will face the competitive elections through a potential rank of communicative strategies (ECs_0). These communicative strategies are formulated according to the conditions and opportunities offered by the electoral market (EM_0). The reform of the ideology and/or organization ($I_1 + O_1$) can be proposed when it is perceived that the former ideology and/or organization do not make easy the formulation of the right communicative strategy to guarantee the benefits at stake.

The digital barriers

Obviously, the use of the ICTs is a component of the political parties' communicative strategy. Its importance depends on the extent of its diffusion within the political community. It has been stated that this diffusion depends on technological conditions of the political community. These technological conditions are only pre-conditions for the strategic use of the ICTs by political parties. Nevertheless, political parties can gain political power and modify strategically the social and economic environment in order to assure their advantage in the polity's cyberspace. However, it is clear that if the potential electorate doesn't have a minimum access the political parties are not going to devote a systematic effort to design and maintain a communicative strategy through the ICTs. Graph 1 shows the trends of the habitual users of the Internet in Catalonia. The percentage of habitual users among the Catalan population of more than 15 years is only 41.5. However, when taking into account different ages it can be seen that since 2001 the proportion of the youngest population that declare to be habitual users of the Internet surpassed the two thirds and, in the last estimation, it reached the 81%. The generational replacement will soon make possible a wide majority of the population

being able to use the resources of the Internet. People in charge of communication strategy of political parties are aware of this tendency so they have to take decisions on this matter.
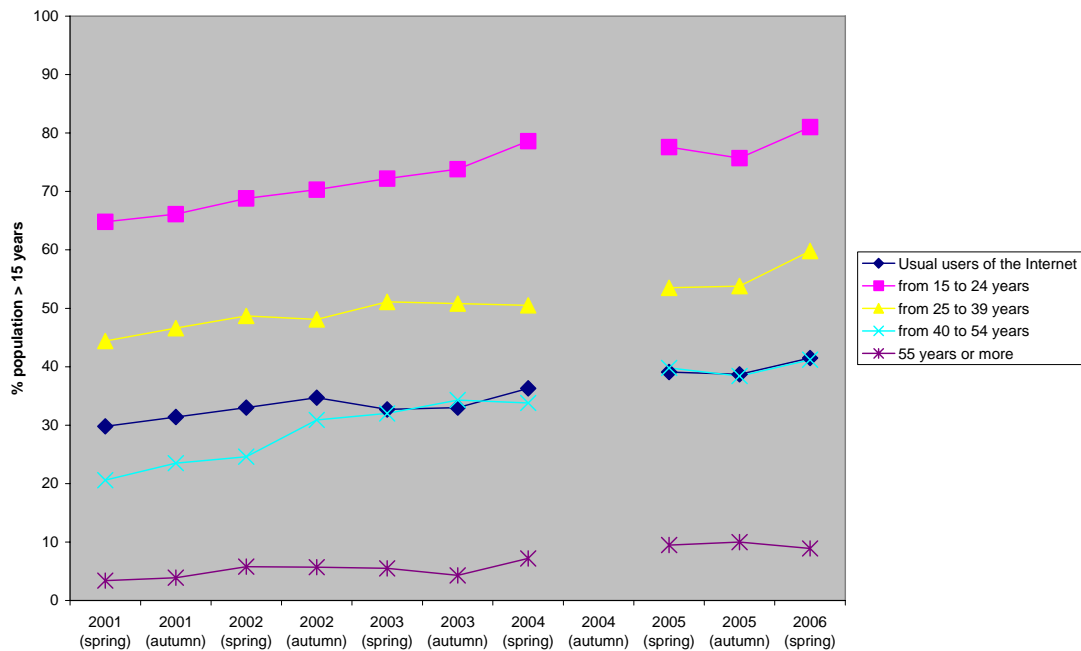
Graph 1. Percentage of Catalan population habitual user the Internet
Sources: Own elaboration from data of FOBSIC and IDESCAT from the INE.

On the other hand, trying to establish the importance that political parties attribute to the Internet considering only the percentage of population that uses this new media could be a rough task because this measure has validity problems since parties will consider qualitative aspects of the population that have access to the Internet. Are they influential people? Have they social visibility? Have they more political resources than the average people? Empirical evidence shows that usually this is the case: the users of the Internet are between the most politically active and have wider networks of contacts. Thus, political parties are interested in reaching those habitual users with tailored messages that could be disseminated as a part of their strategy of effective political communication. Additionally, the impact of the information transmitted through the Internet depends on the political context in which this communication takes place. For instance, in countries with autocratic regimes or in which the mass media are controlled by the political power, the value and the impact of the political information spread through the Internet could be greater than in democratic regimes (Shynkaruk, 2005)

The increasing importance of the ICTs causes parties to devote more resources to this new media. So it is becoming unlikely that the organization or the functionalities of the political parties' websites to be conditioned by random factors. Actually, the technologies related to parties' websites have experienced a remarkable evolution in last few years and therefore they are ready for a variety of strategic uses. For example, regarding the Danish political parties, Hansen and his colleagues (Hansen et al., 2005) speak about 'three generations' of website uses showing an increasing complexity in terms of functionalities in a context they consider a true 'cyber-campaigning'.

The evolution and the increasing complexity of the uses of the ICTs minimize the motives that lead to the first establishment of political parties' websites. As responsible actors can attest, at first "the established political parties were trying to join the tide in order not to seem old fashioned." In fact, the leading parties assigned few resources to these technologies since they perceived them not to be significant in solving the communication problems with their electorate. This lack of centrality explains why people in charge of the party websites were usually enthusiastic activists, party officials or student assistants (Hansen et al., 2005). From this point of view, it can be said that political parties initially did not have a strategy regarding the use of the ICTs apart from facilitating the management of the party organization -for example, distributing information from the headquarters to the local organizations. But this is only partially true. On the one hand, political parties wanted to anticipate the actions of other political parties in case the ICTs were proven effective in recruiting voters –acting in a situation that looks like the biological phenomenon of 'co-evolution': in order to maintain its biological niche, species are forced to mutate by the mutations of the other species, they have to *co-evolve*. On the other hand, political parties could use the websites to reinforce their presence in traditional mass media. In other words, to have a website could be a new by itself (Pedersen and Saglie, 2005). Therefore, it is possible to understand the establishment of a party website as a strategic action. But, as long as it was perceived as immediately unimportant, we can think about it as a low level strategic decision. Because of this, the variation in the uses and the functionalities of the web pages of the different political parties could be attributed to random factors –such as personal tastes or the availability of software- rather to a strategic decision of the dominant coalition within the political party.

Previous Literature

As it has been said, the previous studies on ICTs and political parties can be divided in two branches: Those that have focused their attention on the effects of the ICTs in the electoral behavior of the political parties, and those that have emphasized the impact of the introduction of the ICTs in their internal structure.

A great number of studies have focused in how parties use the ICTs in the electoral campaigns. For example, Bowers-Brown, 2003; Carlson and Djupsund, 2001; Cunha et al., 2003; Farmer and Fender, 2005; Gibson and Ward, 2002, 2003; Gibson et al., 2003; Löfgren, 2000; Margolis et al., 1997, 1999, 2003; Newell, 2001; Norris, 2003; Schweitzer, 2005; Semetko and Krasnoboka, 2003; Smith, 2000; Thach-Kawasaki, 2003; Tops et al., 2000. To a great extent, these studies have been descriptive. They measure the content and the functions of websites, but they do not try to answer political questions such as who controls the contents of the website, or which are the strategies of the parties that can explain their different uses.

In the field of the electoral competition, the main hypothesis advanced by the 'cyber-optimists' is the equalization of the political field among the different political forces: old and new, minor and big. This prognosis stems from the advantages that the ICTs offer to the political parties when they have to compete in electoral processes. First, ICTs reduce the price of communication with voters, supporters and members in a way that does not depend on the existence of a territorial structure of local distribution. Secondly, ICTs constitute an additional way of communication that avoids the traditional filters of mass media: On the one hand, the transmitted message can be

adapted to the characteristics and the interests of the audience; on the other hand, parties can create a direct bond with these addressees. Since it is not necessary to be an established or a great party to take advantage of the characteristics of the ICTs, minor or new parties could overcome some of their handicaps and successfully challenge their opponents. Part of the research in the field has found evidences in favor of the leveling hypothesis (Norris, 2003; Tkach-Kawasaki, 2003; Gibson et al., 2003; March, 2004; Shynkaruk, 2005; Semetko and Kransnoboka, 2003).

Nevertheless, most of the existing literature shows that the great and long standing parties are those that are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by ICTs (Coleman, 2001; Hansen et al., 2005; Gibson et al., 2003, 2000; Ward et al., 2003; Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Margolis et al., 1997, 1999; Resnick, 1990). This is the so called <u>normalization hypothesis</u> of politics by means of the ICTs.

The 'normalization hypothesis' is constructed on an assumption of how the political communication with the ICTs works. The more attractive and/or well designed is a web page, the more effectively will carry out the political communication. It supposes a linear relation between the design of the Web pages and the communication transmission. But this assumption is too simple and naïve since it does not have into account that the persuasive capacity of political communication can be negatively affected if the receivers perceive an 'excess' of resources. In politics it is not always clear that credibility is related to resources. Consider the fact that all the current political communications that seem to have more diffusion through Internet (and, therefore, greater informative effectiveness) are very cheap: humoristic videos on personal candidates or personal blogs. As we said, the perception of spontaneity and closeness on the part of the receiver goes in favor of political communication. Certainly, if a party has a lot of resources and good political communication advisers could take advantage of their knowledge of the medium and imitate the genuine spontaneity and closeness resultant of the lack of resources. In sum, the revolution of the Web 2.0 and the personalization of politics go against the supposition of an existing relationship between available resources and communicative potentiality, an assumption on which the hypothesis of the political normalization is build.

This does not mean that political normalization does not take place. But it is surely carried out by other elements and conditions of the political system that work in favor of the greater and established political forces. Specifically, by the fact that parties that obtain political representation in parliaments and that form or support governments have to design and to implement policies. Therefore, voters consider the credibility and the expectations of continuity of the political forces to which they vote for. Usually, the great political parties (in terms of number of members, voters, etc) have greater credibility and continuity expectations -among other reasons, because they are able to attract professionals offering them offices in political institutions or in public administrations. But the existence of ICTs changes the environment of the great and well established political parties: they make it more fluid and complex. The visibility and capacity of mobilization of individuals and single issue groups has dramatically increased. For that reason, the political parties' essential work of constructing coalitions of voters through the supply of policy packages becomes more difficult.

Another branch in the literature has focused on the potential effect of the ICTs in the internal structure of the political parties. Is there an impact on the relationship between

leaders and members, affiliated and activists? Is a 'reinvention' of the political parties possible? (Pedersen and Saglie, 2005; Ward et al., 2002; Gibson et al., 2005; Löfgren, 2000, 2003). The dilemma is about to what extent the opportunities of participation can be used to invigorate the old mass parties or, on the contrary, can be used to reinforce the oligarchic and centralizing tendencies within the parties.

To solve the dilemma it is necessary to consider how parties work internally. Inside them there is a fight to gain or maintain decisional power. Sometimes, the potential changes allowed by the ICTs are not implemented because they do not grant net benefits for the coalitions that hold the power within the party. This is so because the implementation of ICTs implies a sharing of power and an intensification of the potential conflict within the party.

In the literature there are some efforts to find the explanatory factors of the uses of the ICTs by the political parties. Several studies considered factors like the party size, the resources of political parties or their parliamentary privileges (Gibson and Ward, 1998), or the parties' structure and ideology (Gibson et al., 2000; Römelle, 2003). But these works do not make a systematic treatment of the proposed independent variables. Additionally, the measures of the dependent variable are not too appropriate to deal with the strategic use of the ICTs by the political parties.

In this paper we will try to approach this kind of problems with a greater emphasis on the independent variables and a treatment of the dependent variable that gathers the most strategic aspects of the political use of the ICTs.

Model of analysis

Graph 2 shows a conceptual map of the relationships between the variables that we will consider in explaining the political parties' uses of ICTs. These relations are unavoidably very complex and we do not have the aim of making a detailed explanation of them in this paper. Instead, we will only point a summarized description of this complexity.
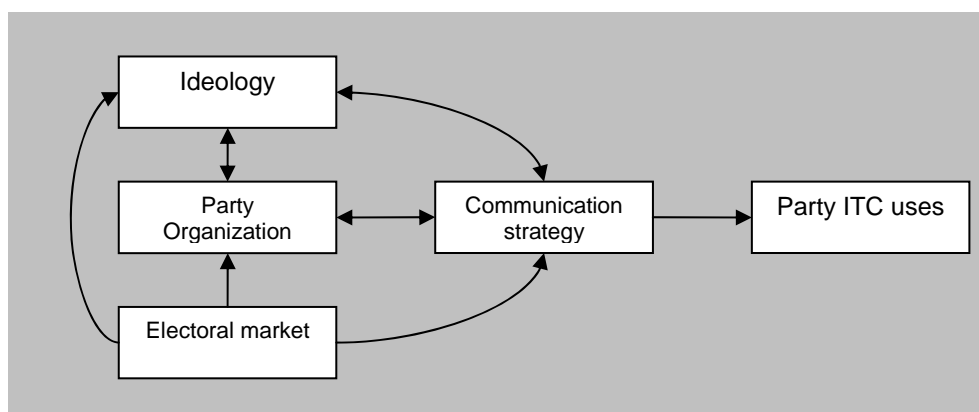
Graph 2. Conceptual map of the explanatory factors of the political parties uses of the ICTs.

In the right side of the graph, the uses of the ICTs by the political parties appear as a component of the parties' communicative strategy. The communication strategy is

explained by the influence and interaction with three factors: ideology, party organization and electoral market.

In the first place, the structure of the <u>electoral market</u> is the unique exogenous factor. We understand 'electoral market' as a summary of the set of opportunities and threats that every political party has to face. Since competing in elections is the distinctive element of political parties, the test of elections is crucial (Schlesinger, 1984). The 'electoral market' can be understood as the 'resultant' of the set of pressures and forces that political parties experience to obtain 'satisfactory' electoral results. The concept goes beyond the narrow electoral competition and it takes into account the existence of a segment of the electorate receptive to the message of the party or to the policies that it will try to implement once in office. It also has to register the 'mechanical' influence of the electoral system and the way it favors the majority forces and penalizes the minors. In addition the 'electoral market' has to consider the rules of legislative institutions and the opportunities and benefits it offers to the different possibilities: to form government, to stay in the opposition, etc. (Strom, 1990).

The understanding of the electoral market in this broad sense offers the structure of incentives that political parties have to face. This structure affects, in the short term, the <u>communication strategy</u> appropriate to obtain votes (the crucial resource of this game). Nevertheless, if a political party wishes to be viable in a long term it has to obtain other resources of its environment. For that reason it will have to construct an adapted <u>organizational structure</u> that guarantees, among other factors, the financing and the availability of enough qualified personnel to be able to win the elections and formulate and implement its preferred policy. At the same time, the existence of a stable party organizational structure becomes a resource for the party's communicative strategy since it confers credibility. Therefore, the organizational structure can be seen as a long term answer to the incentives of the electoral market that determines the communicative strategy and that, in its turn, is affected by the latter.

Finally, the <u>ideology</u> maintains a relationship with the incentives of the electoral market similar to the organizational structure. They differ because the ideology works in the long term; it is far away from the immediate incentives provided by the electoral market. In the model, the ideology of the political parties is not understood as a unique and static formulation. At the most general level, ideologies are constituted by principles and articulated explanations of the social reality that help to identify what has to be changed or to be conserved. For that reason, ideology acts as a mechanism that coordinates the different actors related to the political parties: voters, candidates, members and supporters. Because political parties are treated as complex organizations, the different coalitions within the parties tend to propose different ideologies to differentiate themselves in order to help them in their fight for power. The competition between different ideologies and the success of some of them at different times transform the ideologies within the political parties. In a quite Darwinian way, we suppose that successful ideologies will be those that fit better with the structure of incentives offered by the electoral market and that, at the same time, are coherent with the organizational structure of the party.

As an explanation of social reality, the ideology confers the contents and the forms of the communication strategy. It also determines the appropriate form of organization of the parties. At the same time, the communicative strategy carried out by the parties in

order to face the exigencies of the electoral market can affect the ideology in an update process. On the other hand, the organizational structure can affect the acceptable ideological forms, as it has been shown by the neo-institutionalism (North, 1990).

Naturally, in this paper we will not deal with all the complexity of these relations and interactions. With our case of study, we will simply consider how the use of websites by Catalan political parties in the local elections of 2007 was affected by the three main factors we have drawn: the electoral market, the organizational form of the party and the ideology

The dependent variable: the political use of websites

Following the previous empirical literature, and in order to measure the uses that parties make of the Internet, we employ indices for the five fundamental functions – information provision, participation, resource generation, networking, and campaigning – identified by Gibson and Ward (Gibson and Ward, 2000, 2002), Gibson et al. (2000, 2003), and Newell (2001). The main advantages of these indices are their detail, comprehensiveness and comparability.

The case of study

Our paper is based on the study of websites of the Catalan political parties with representation in the Catalan Parliament during the local elections of 2007.
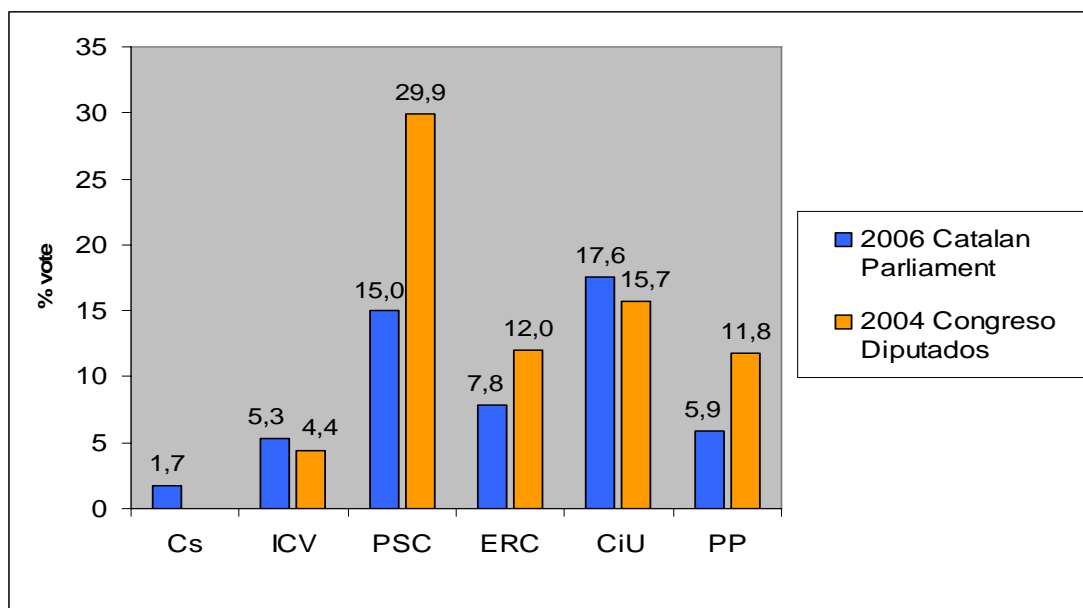
Graph 3. Vote share of Catalan parliamentary parties

To introduce the individuals of our case, Graph 3 shows the percentage of votes obtained by Catalan parties in the two most recent elections: the Catalan Parliamentary elections held in 2006 and the election to the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados* held in 2004. In the last regional elections Cs (Ciutadans) accessed for the fist time to the Parliament with 3 seats; ICV (Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds) a self called 'ecosocialist' party obtained 12 seats; the socialist party, PSC (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya), obtained 37 seats; ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya) a left wing Catalan

nationalist party, obtained 21 seats; CiU (Convergència i Unió) which is an electoral coalition of two parties CDC (Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya), a conservative Catalan nationalist party, and UDC (Unió Democràtica de Catalunya) a Christian democratic party, obtained 48 seats; finally, PP (Popular Party), the Spanish nationalist party, obtained 14 seats.

The six parties with parliamentary representation constitute a system of moderate pluralism. As we will see in the following sections, they show a considerable range of variation regarding the three explanatory variables: ideology, party organization and situation in the electoral market. And they also show a certain range of variation in the dependent variable (the use of websites). So the Catalan parties seem a good sample to explore the relationships between our variables that we have hypothesized.

It can be objected that the results of this investigation can not be generalized because we are studying parties belonging to the same political system. This objection has merit and it has to be taken into account. It is possible to think that different political systems, with different incentives and political cultures, will differ in the particular relations between our variables. But at the same time, considering the parties of a unique political system we are able to control many of the variables that could affect the generalization of the relationships that we found –since the political culture, the electoral system, etc are the same.

Another potential objection is related with the fact that we centered our observations while an electoral process was being carried out. In this sense, it is possible that political uses of websites are not readable in strategic terms because the benefits at stake in local elections are smaller than in other kind of elections and because these elections are dominated by local specificities in terms of both the electoral behavior and the political formations that compete.

However, local elections could be interpreted as key indicators of the situation of the national parties (for instance they are followed by mass media in order to grasp the public acceptance of the main parties). Therefore, they are an important part of the continuous electoral campaign and could have effects on the national leaderships. On the other hand, our study is not interested in the campaign itself; it tries to observe all the parties 'at full engine', having all their resources and organization operative, and being affected by the same kind of stimuli. So the political campaign of local elections allows us to compare the behavior of the different parties with certain guarantee.

2-. Empirical perspective.

In this part of the paper we will proceed to confront the independent variables that we have identified in our theoretical model to the website uses that Catalan parties have performed in the last local elections. We will begin with the ideology and then we will deal with party organization; finally, we will analyze the effects on ICTs uses coming from the relative situation of the parties in the electoral market.

2.1-. The ideology.

In this section we will examine the relation between the ideology of the Catalan parties and the use they make of the websites. As stated in the theoretical perspective, we see ideology as the partisan element that works in the long run, changing slowly and offering the background and the context affecting the other variables act (i.e. party organization and electoral market). In the first place, we will analyze if the right wing parties are different from the left wing parties regarding the functions they unfold in their web sites (information provision, participation, networking, resource generation and campaigning.) Secondly, we will study the consistency between the participative values of the parties and the existing channels of participation in their websites.

Left-right placement and websites uses.

According to the analysis of Norris (2001) and Trechsel et al (2003), the ideological orientation towards the left or the right does not significantly influence in the building up of websites neither in the development of their functionalities. In our case, all the Catalan parties with parliamentary representation have webs, but the use they make of these websites varies a lot, although not always in the direction that it would be expected. For example, left parties are not those developing more channels for participation online and, on the other hand, right parties are not those having the most professionalized webs (i.e. focused towards different segments of the electorate and better designed.)

In Tables 1 and 2 we present the scores of the parties along the different functions according to their location on the right or on the left side of the ideological spectrum:

Table 1

Right wing parties	Information	Participation	Resource generation	Campaigning	Networking (absolute values)
PP	0,63	0,43	0,30	0,62	9
CiU	0,75	0,71	0,30	0,85	421
CDC	0,88	0,71	0,40	0,92	72
UDC	0,75	0,36	0	0,46	25
Cs	1	0,36	0,70	0,62	78
Mean	0,8	0,5	0'34	0'69	121

Table 2

Left wing parties	Information	Participation	Resource generation	Campaigning	Networking (absolute values)
PSC	0,75	0,71	0,40	0,85	1253
ERC	1	0,36	0,20	0,69	468
ICV	1	0,50	0,80	0,85	180
Mean	0'9	0,52	0,47	0'80	634

The means show that the left wing parties score clearly better in campaigning and networking, and slightly better in the resource generation. But the difference regarding information provision and channels of participation is not significant with respect to the right wing parties.

Analyzing more in detail the position of the parties, we observe that the parties that deploy all the informative channels and, consequently, score better in the dimension of information provision are a center-right party (Ciutadans) and two left wing parties (ICV and ERC). But, in general, the differences between parties in the dimension of information are not important. Therefore, it does not seem that party ideology causes differences in the more or less amount of information provided online.

The party that more professionalism demonstrates with respect to the use of the web for electoral campaigning is a center-right party, CDC, although the three parties of the left score better next, along with CiU. The rest of the right wing parties scores lower in this dimension.

The number of links and blogs ("networking") in the website is much higher in left wing parties, and among them, the network of the PSC stands out in first place. However, among right wing parties, CiU also counts on an important number of links and blogs. It is important to pinpoint that CiU and, in several occasions, CDC are placed over the other right wing parties' mean in the analyzed functionalities, surpassing the smaller left wing parties such as ICV (in the dimension of participation or in the number of links and blogs) or ERC (in campaigning and resource generation).

With respect to the dimension of participation, the largest parties from the right (CiU and CDC) and from the left (PSC) are the ones with more channels of interaction and debate with the citizens. ICV is placed in fourth place even though ICV is the party that builds the most intensive speech in favour of citizen participation in politics, as we will see some pages ahead. The parties with smaller score in this dimension are a left wing party, ERC, and two right wing parties, UDC and Ciutadans. In general, parties on the left side score better in the functionalities of the website, but if the right wing party is large and established scores also remarkably high, some times over the smallest leftist parties.

Participation: speech and reality.

As shown in preceding pages, the large parties of the right (CiU and CDC) and of the left (PSC) have deployed many more channels of interaction and debate with citizens. It was expected, however, that ERC, ICV or Ciutadans would have scored much higher in the participation dimension because their ideology and public speech is much more "participatory" and critic with the separation between the parties and the society. The reality is that ICV is in fourth place and ERC and Ciutadans share the last position, even behind the PP. These results, in addition, contradict other studies made in Spain and Catalonia in which ICV stands out of the rest of parties with respect to the number of participation channels in their website (Borge and Alvaro, 2004; Matas, Reniu and Terra, 2005).

Therefore, we will analyse the specific dimensions of the participation function in which the theoretically "participatory" parties fail. The dimensions are the following: website's openness towards the citizen (e-mail addresses and blogs), the feedback spaces (general and on policies) and the channels for debate (bulletin board, chats, blog for discussion, forums). We will compare the scores of the large parties (CiU, PSC) with those of ERC, ICV and Ciutadans.

Table 3

Participation	PSC	CIU	CDC	UDC	PP	ERC	ICV	Cs
Openness								
E-mail								
1.Web Master	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
2.Leader	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
3.Party Organization	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Party Leaders								
1.E-mail	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
2.Blog	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
MP								
1.E-mail	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
2.Blog	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Local/Regional branches	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
International offices	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
nº of blogs (MPs & Party members)	40	15	0	0	9	12	3	26
Feedback								
General	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
Specific policies	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Debate								
Bulletin borrad	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Chat/discusión	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Forums	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
ABSOLUTE SCORE	10	10	10	5	6	5	7	5
RELATIVE SCORE	0,71	0,71	0,71	0,36	0,43	0,36	0,50	0,36

As the table 3 shows, there is a very important difference in scoring with respect to the openness dimension. That is, ERC, ICV and Ciutadans only have displayed in the website 4 or 3 electronic addresses or blogs to contact with party leaders and party organizations or to post comments in blogs of leaders and parliamentarians. The number of e-mails and blogs of parliamentarians and leaders is 7 in PSC's website and 6 in

CiU's website. In addition, none of the smallest parties displays a specific space or a mailbox in the website to gather comments and opinions on policies and neither ERC nor Ciutadans have forums on the website. However, in comparison with the major parties, the lack of channels of participation does not reside so much in the absence of forums or feedback spaces on policies but in the insufficient number of electronic addresses in the website. That is to say, in the case of ERC, ICV and Ciutadans do not exist the possibility of contacting via email with the leader of the party nor with the parliamentarians. Also, in the case of ERC and ICV, the citizen does not either have direct access via email or blog with other leaders of the party (local, regional, areas, etc..). Therefore, these parties do not offer the possibility of direct communication with party officials or political representatives. Regardless their ideology, major parties offer this possibility, although quite often they do not respond to requests or questions made via e-mail or e-mailbox (few days before the local elections of May 2007, we sent an e-mail to each party, using the "contact us" section, the "have your say" section, or the generic address of the organization. We asked about the tools and projects for enforcing citizen participation that parties had in mind. CiU and ICV replied the following day and Ciutadans and ERC answered in two days. PSC and PP did not respond. CiU and ERC's replies were clearly insufficient –CiU attached the electoral program to the answer "to see if there were some content on participation", and ERC wanted to know the origin of the person in other to build a better answer but never answered the new e-mail. The parties that provided more information were Ciutadans and ICV).

The inconsistency between the findings of the studies made during the autonomic elections of 2003 and our research analyzing the local elections of 2007 is probably due to methodological matters and not to changes in time. In this sense, in Borge and Alvaro (2004) and Matas, Reniu and Terra (2005) the online channels for recruiting militants, supporters and volunteers were considered indicators of participation whereas in our investigation they are treated as part of the resource generation function. Both in the previous studies and in ours, ICV is the party that presents better online channels to recruit volunteers and affiliates. However, conceptually it is more correct to consider processes of affiliation and of achieving collaboration and supporters as resources and support for the party better than as instruments of citizen participation in party decisions. In fact, this is the dominant position in the literature that has studied the functions that parties deploy in the websites (Gibson and Ward, 2000; Gibson et al., 2003; Newell, 2001).

With regard to the participatory narratives of the parties, we have analyzed the electoral programs of the candidates for Barcelona in the local elections of May 2007. All the candidates devote a specific section in the electoral program to the matters of citizen participation. In addition, all the parties but PP –which does not mention this issue- consider that ICTs should be used to develop new channels of participation. However, the candidates that devoted more attention to the citizen participation issue and offer more instruments and projects on public participation are CiU, ICV and ERC. The PSC's candidate is in a second level of attention and specificity because the electoral program displays very few proposals and rather more generic. In the third level is the PP that only presents 4 participation measures, at the end of the program and in which, in addition, the participation word appears scarcely. Ciutadans should also be placed in a low level of specificity because it shows very few proposals of citizen participation at the local level, although in its narratives and speeches the participatory values and the word "participation" appear frequently.

If we compare the program proposals on citizen participation with the channels of participation in the party websites, it is possible to state that the most coherent candidate on the matter is X. Trias from CiU because he articulates a participatory narrative with concrete proposals at the local level and websites, the one from the party and the one from their own, with numerous channels for the interaction with the citizenry. The candidate of the PSC, J. Hereu, however, is much more scarce and generalist when presenting proposals on participation, although his party website is also one of the best as far as communication channels and debates with the citizenship is considered. Probably, this inconsistency have to do with the fact that the PSC is the party that holds the mayorship of Barcelona and, therefore, their participatory bets cannot be so numerous nor bold. In this sense, all the parties, except for the PSC, defend the participative budgets and the direct election of the district councilman. X. Trias, in his electoral program, even defends to reduce the number of general consultation councils and organs for the participation of organizations and associations, and instead insists on displaying consultations to the citizenry and referendums.

Finally, it is worthwhile to mention that in the websites of the ERC and PP's candidates to the mayorship of Barcelona there are other important mechanisms of participation such as the possibility of sending proposals for the electoral program. In the case of J. Portabella, from ERC, the proposals are collected in a document and in a website's section entitled "100 proposals for Barcelona" that have been included into the electoral program. The proposals were sent out via website, but also through 20 meetings with the militancy and the associations of the districts of Barcelona.

All these results are in general in line with the study already mentioned from Matas, Reniu and Terra (2005) where were analysed speeches, narratives and participatory programs of the Catalan parties in the local and autonomic elections of 1999 and 2003. In this research the PP of Catalonia turned out to be again the party with the lesser number of proposals for participation and references to participation. On the contrary, IC-V was the party more devoted to participation, with more references and more specific proposals and applications. ERC was the second party in number of participative concepts but remained to a large distance of IC-V. PSC and CiU were in an intermediate position, better PSC than CiU with regard to participative references, but the PSC had a pretty incoherent position between a participatory language and the very few concrete proposals in its program.

2.2-. The party organization.

As we said in the theoretical introduction, party organization can be understood as an attempt of coordinating and stabilizing the interaction among party members and voters in different processes in order to secure the resources needed for the party performance. To explore the relation between party organization and parties' use of internet through their websites we use two indicators of party organization: 1) party type; that is, whether party organization responds to the "mass-party" type or to the "catch-all" party type; and 2) party centralization; whether parties are more or less centralized or decentralized in their decision-making process.

Some of the questions related to this topic are: Is party type related to the use of specific functions? Does party type help to explain the uses – in terms of specific functions – that parties are making of the internet – as measured by those functions specified in the literature? For example, is a catch all party more likely to use the web for "campaigning" than a mass-party type? And conversely, is a mass party more likely to use the web for resource generation than a catch all party? With regard to the latter question, it has been pointed that parties are not making use of the internet to increase their number of resources, and more particularly their number of militants (Margetts, 2001). This is a question that needs further empirical testing, and in case it is confirmed by further evidence deserves an explanation.

Other set of questions related to party organization concern decision-making rules. Are decision-making rules – in particular, whether the decision-making process itself is more or less centralized -- related to the ways parties make use of the Internet – also measured by website functions? For example, is a more decentralized party more likely to use internet to facilitate participation? And conversely is a centralized party less likely to use internet to promote participation? Is party centralization related to specific functions that parties perform in the internet and to the efficiency with which they perform those functions? In other words, do centralized parties tend to perform certain functions in internet at the expense of others? And do they perform them more efficiently than decentralized parties?

Here we are interested in exploring how party type and party centralization – both, relevant features of party organization – affect party uses of internet, and hence we need to develop some measures of both these variables.

Party type

To classify parties along the dimension of party type we use the classical distinction between mass-parties and catch-all parties. Mass parties and catch-all parties were first conceptualized by Duverger (1951) and Kirchheimer (1966). Yet to classify parties along this dimension we follow Botella (1989). Botella does not provide operational definitions of these concepts directly but he suggests a way to operationalize these concepts by highlighting a series of aspects that could be used to build indicators that should allow classifying real parties along the dimension of party type.

Botella defines a mass-party as a party whose "sole link between the party and its followers (i.e., voters) is the organized action of its members-" For mass-parties "electoral results will depend of (and only of) its organized membership and activity." In contrast, he defines a catch all party as a party "for which members are not relevant (…), the only linkage with voters is the presence of party leaders in the mass media, and the key question is the leadership's ability to meet the preferences of the voters." While for catch-all parties the organization may still play a role, it does have a "linkage" function.

The author warns us that these are ideal-types and that "of course" no real party fits perfectly into these definitions. What we find in the real world is: parties that are partially catch-all and partially mass-parties. Yet what is interesting, according to the author, is that this mixture varies from party to party; that is, some parties may be close

in the continuum to the mass-party type while some may approach better the catch-all type.

In order to measure how close or how far a party is from the extremes he suggests looking at a series of aspects around which a set of indicators can be built. Some of these different aspects include the programs (whether they are structured or issue-manifestos), the press (whether party press is present or absent), the financing (whether it is public or party-raised), the links with interest groups (whether they are stable or occasional), the types of electoral support, in social terms (whether it is based on class or any other of differentiated support or cross-cleavage) or in geographical terms (whether it shows geographical contrasts or a homogeneous distribution), etc…

Botella does not include in his list a typical and most frequently used indicator in the literature such as the ratio members/voters. Yet we do not expect the ratio m/v to provide much information if applied to the Catalan parties -- or for the same reason to Spanish parties. Spanish and Catalan parties emerged in an age in which the process of party "cartelization" was well under way. This partly reflects in the low member/voter ratio that Spanish parties consistently show and explains the small variance that we expect to find across parties in this indicator.

Of the different aspects highlighted by Botella here we use a) the links with interests groups and b) the type of electoral support to classify our cases. We leave out the other factors either because we do not have the information or because they do not seem to be very promising at showing relevant differences among the cases. (For example, since Spanish parties emerged in the age of party "cartelization" we do not expect to find differences concerning the financing of parties. The main source of financing is public for all.)

With regard to the first factor, we consider that parties with stable links with interest groups are closer in the continuum to the mass-party type, while parties with loose and occasional links with interest groups are closer in the continuum to the catch-all type. To measure the stability of party-interest groups' links we use a proxy: parties' concern with stability. We assume that parties that "regulate" their relations with interest groups and external organizations in their statutes are concerned with stability, whereas parties that "do not regulate" these relations in their statutes are not concerned with the stability of these relations.

Table 4

	PSC	ERC	IC-V	PP	CDC	UDC	CiU	Ciutadans
Stable links with interest groups	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Electoral support (in social terms)	Class	Age	Class		Cross-cleavage	Religious	Cross-cleavage	Language
Electoral support (in geographical terms)	Contrast	Contrast	Contrast	Contrast	–	–	homogeneous	Contrast

With regard to the second factor, we consider that parties with some kind of differentiated electoral support (in terms of class, religion, or age) and a more contrasted geographical distribution are close in the continuum to the mass-party type, whereas parties with a broad cross-cleavage support and a more homogenous geographical distribution are closer in the continuum to the catch-all party type.

On the basis of these rules, we can now proceed to classify Catalan parties in the dimension of party type. As Table 4 shows, PSC-ICV-ERC would be close in the continuum to the mass-party type while the PP, CDC, and CiU, but mainly the later, would be close in the continuum to the catch-all party type.

Party centralization

To classify parties along the dimension of party centralization we follow Janda (1980) and Lundell (2004). Janda proposes a series of variables to measure party centralization. Among these, we have chosen to focus on two to measure party centralization: a) the selection of the national leader and b) the selection of parliamentary candidates. Both, the relevance of candidate selection as a central area of party activity and information availability, explain this choice.

To operationalize how centralized or de-centralized is the process of selection of the national leader we follow Janda. Following this author, the most decentralized or "democratic" method of selection would involve the direct selection of the leader by party members of even party "identifiers" or supporters. The most centralized or "oligarchic" method of selection would involve the leader naming his successor. Between these points a range of alternatives exist involving a variety of "open" or "closed" procedures.

Janda creates a scale composed of 8 values. The higher the score on this scale, the more centralized is the party on the leadership selection. Even tough some values are an empty set; the scale served our purposes because we were able to assign values to each of our cases (8).

The coding is as follows:

0   No national leader can be identified
1   The leader is selected by vote of party identifiers or supporters
2   He is selected by vote of party members -- a smaller group than above
3   He is selected by a national convention or congress, the delegates to which represent regional or local party organizations
4   He is selected by the parliamentary delegation of the party
5   He is selected by a national convention or congress, the delegates to which are appointed or primarily determined by the national party organization
6   He is selected by the national executive committee or party council subject to ratification by some lower levels of party
7   he is selected by the national executive committee or party council without further review of the decision
8   He is selected by his predecessor

To code parties on their procedures for selecting national leader we relied on "formal rules" as specified on their statutes. When additional information was available because we could directly observe the procedures used for selecting the national leader we used this information (the case of the PP). When formal and informal rules conflicted and we had evidence concerning the informal rules of selection we used the later.

Table 5

Parties	Leader Selection
PSC	7
CiU	5
CDC	3
UDC	7
ERC	2
IC-V	3
PP[1]	8
Ciutadans[2]	-

[1]The PP is the primary example of conflicting rules concerning the process of selection of the national leader. While in its statutes, it states that the party's president will be selected by the National Congress by a majority in closed lists proposed by 1/5 of the delegates, in every leadership shift the national leader has been selected by its predecessor.
[2]With regard to this party, no information was available concerning the procedure of selection of the national leader.

To measure party centralization we look also at candidate selection methods. To classify parties on the basis of this dimension we follow Lundell (2004). Lundell uses a pretty straightforward tool for classifying candidate selection methods. While he is mainly interested on territorial centralization; that is, on the question of *where* selection takes place in the party hierarchy, we agree with him that there is some overlapping between territorial centralization and the inclusiveness of the electorate in the process – i.e., the number of people involved in the decision (for an extensive discussion, see Lundell). Compared to Janda, Lundell simplifies greatly the operationalization of this variable by proposing an ordinal scale composed only of five categories.

Following Lundell we classify candidate selection methods using an ordinal scale composed of five categories. To classify parties by their candidate selection methods we focus on candidate selection for legislative elections, both at the regional and national level. The meanings of the values are as follows:

1   Selection at local party meeting, by selection committees or by primaries open for all party members
2   Selection at the district level by a selection committee, by the executive district organ or at a convention (congress, conference) by delegates from local parties
3   The same as 1 or 2 but regional or national organs exercise influence over the selection process, e.g. add names or have veto power. The decision, however, is taken al the district level. Formal approval by regional or national organs without actual involvement in the process belongs to the second category.
4   The same as 5, but local, district or regional organs exercise influence over the selection process, e.g. party members, the local parties or committees at the

constituency or the regional level propose candidates. The decision, however, is
taken at the national level.

5   Selection by the party leader, by the national executive organ, by a national
selection committee, or by primaries at the national level.

As with the previous measure – i.e., the selection of the national leader -- the
information used to code parties has been the "formal rules" of candidate selection, and
the primary source used to gather this information has been parties' statutes.
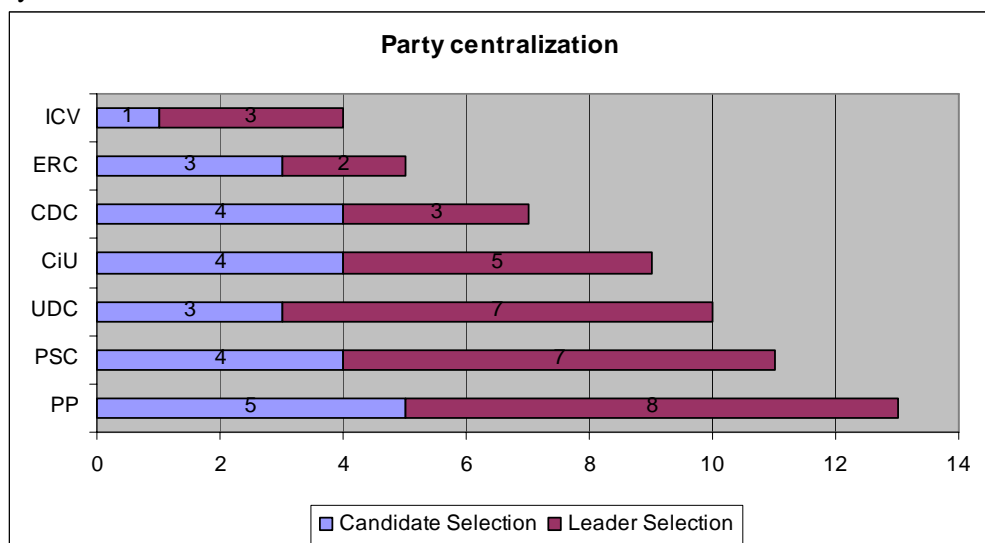
Table 6

Parties	Candidate Selection
PSC	4
CiU	4
CDC	4
UDC	3
ERC	3
IC-V	1
PP[1]	5
Ciutadans[2]	-

[1] Even though the statute of the PP states that regional and provincial electoral committees can
make proposals to the National Electoral Committee, all regional and provincial electoral
committees are appointed by the party organs at the national level. Hence, we do not take
proposals coming from these bodies as an indicator of regional, district and local organs having
influence over the process of selection.
[2] No information was available concerning this party.

By adding the values in the two scales we get a composed index of party centralization.
This index ranges from 1 to 13. In the graph bellow, parties are ranked according to this
index. As we can see, the most centralized party is the PP (13), followed by the PSC
(11), UDC (10), CiU (9), and CDC (7). With values bellow both the mean (8,7) and the
median (6,5), the most de-centralized parties are ERC (5) and ICV (4).

Graph 4: Party centralization

<u>Discussion</u>

The table bellow locates the Catalan parties according to the two dimensions of party organization: party type and party centralization. As we can see, all the right wing parties (PP, UDC, CiU, CDC) are classified as both centralized and catch-all parties, and are thus located in the upper right cell. The left wing parties (PSC, ERC, and ICV) are all classified as closer in the continuum to the mass-party type. Yet while the major party, the PSC, tends to be a more centralized party (and is thus located in the upper left cell), the smaller left-wing parties, ERC and ICV, are the most de-centralized (and are thus located in the lower left cell).

Graph 5

	Mass Parties	**Catch-all**
Centralized	PSC	PP UDC CiU CDC
De-centralized	ERC ICV	

According to these categories, what kind of expectations may we have concerning the uses that parties make of internet? To the five functions that Gibson and Ward (2003) identified as attributed to parties' websites – information provision, participation, resource generation, campaigning, and networking – they associated a different type of communication (see Ward & Gibson,). They viewed information provision, campaigning, and resource generation as involving mainly top-down communication; they saw participation as involving down-up communication or communication moving from the grass-roots to the top; and finally they saw networking as involving lateral communication or communication to the sides.

We can reasonably think that party organization influences both the type of communication and the dominant activities that parties engage in. For example, party centralization – whether a party is more or less centralized -- may influence the dominant type of communication; and party type – whether a party is closer to the mass-party or the catch-all party type -- may influence the activities that parties engage in.

In this sense, with regard to party centralization, we could hypothesize that a highly centralized party will engage in activities through the internet that involve top-down communication since engaging in activities that involve down-up or lateral

communication would create "noise" in the organization. A de-centralized party would act conversely: it will be more open to engage in activities through the internet that involve down-up communication, such as participation.

With regard to party type, we could hypothesize that the more a party is closer in the continuum to the mass party type the more likely it will engage in activities through the internet that are central to its type, such as networking and resource generation. Conversely, the more a party approaches the catch-all party type the more likely it will engage in activities through the internet that are central to its type, such as campaigning.

The analysis of the Catalan parties illustrates some of these points, but is obviously not conclusive.

Following our argument, the differences in the dependent variable, or more specifically in each function, should vary according to the differences in party organization. For example, we should expect parties that are located in the upper-right cell; that is, parties that are catch-all and centralized, to rank high in campaigning and low in participation and networking. We should expect parties that are in the upper-left cell, that is mass-parties and centralized, to rank high in networking and resource mobilization. Finally we should expect parties that are in the lower-left cell, that is mass-parties and de-centralized, to rank high in resource mobilization, participation, and networking.

Some of these expectations are met while some clearly not. The most important factor explaining the differences between parties in the campaigning function (Table 7) does not seem to be party type. In fact, among the parties that rank best in this function we find parties of all types: catch-all parties (CiU, CDC), mass-parties and centralized (PSC) and mass-parties and de-centralized (ICV). Yet if we take the parties that are classified as catch-all and centralized we realize that campaigning is the function in which they rank better (see Table 8).

Table 7

Campaigning	PSC	CIU	CDC	UDC	PP	ERC	IC-V	Ciutadans
Targeting								
Geographically based	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Economic/professional	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Identity	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Youth	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
Issue	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Freshness								
Home page	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
News/press releases	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Design								
Graphics	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
Frames	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Moving Icons	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Sound	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Video	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
Games	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
ABSOLUTE SCORE	11	11	12	6	8	9	11	8
RELATIVE SCORE	0,85	0,85	0,92	0,46	0,62	0,69	0,85	0,62

Table 8

Catch-all parties	Information	Participation	Resource generation	Campaigning	Networking (absolute values)
PP	0,63	0,43	0,3	0,62	9
CiU	0,75	0,71	0,3	0,85	421
CDC	0,88	0,71	0,4	0,92	72
UDC	0,75	0,36	0	0,46	25
Mass-parties	**Information**	**Participation**	**Resource generation**	**Campaigning**	**Networking (absolute values)**
PSC	0,75	0,71	0,4	0,85	1253
ERC	1	0,36	0,2	0,69	468
ICV	1	0,5	0,8	0,85	180

UDC is a special case because its website ranks poorly in every function except in information provision. Moreover, if we take the PP, which is by far the most centralized party, we realize that while it ranks well in information provision and campaigning – the two functions involving top-down communication— it ranks very poorly in networking and participation – functions involving lateral and down-up communication.

Party organization does not seem either to explain the differences in participation. As Table 3 shows (vid. page 12), de-centralized parties (ERC, ICV) rank poorly in this function while centralized ones (PSC, CiU, CDC) rank well. It seems that what explain the differences in this function is size and electoral position. The major electoral parties, PSC and CiU, are in fact the ones that rank better in this function. Hence, there seems to be no direct link between party centralization and using internet for participatory purposes. The most de-centralized parties are not using internet as a means to foster and increase participation.

Finally, expectations concerning the relation between party type and website functions such as resource generation and networking are only partially met. Table 9 shows the scores for all parties in the website function of resource generation. Clearly, parties that are classified as closer in the continuum to the mass-party type do not perform well in this function. In fact only one of the three parties classified as mass-parties, ICV, shows a good score in this function. What seems to explain the differences in scores in this function is not party type but party size and party longevity. In fact the two parties that score better in this function are both small in size and one, Ciutadans, is actually a new-born party.

Table 9

Resource Generation	PSC	CIU	CDC	UDC	PP	ERC	ICV	Cs
Recruitment								
Help/support	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
Join up								
1. Postal adress	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
2. Download form	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
3. On line form	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
4. Whole transaction	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Financial								
Merchandize (on line shop)	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
Donations								
1. postal adress	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
2. on line-form	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
3. checking account	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
4. whole transaction	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
ABOLUTE SCORE	4	3	4	0	3	2	8	7
RELATIVE SCORE (index [0,1])	0,40	0,30	0,40	0,00	0,30	0,20	0,80	0,70

Where party type seems to be relevant is concerning the networking function and web complexity. As table 8 shows, mass-parties perform better in the function of networking than catch-all parties. Only the website of ICV performs worse than the website of the top party in this function among catch-all parties (CiU). But this is because the measure does not take into account party size. In general, parties that are classified as mass-parties tend to make an intensive use of the net for networking activities (the extreme case is the PSC) and this is consistent with what we would expect from such a party type.

A superficial analysis of the complexity of parties' webs also shows that two of the three most complex webs belong to parties that are classified as mass-parties – in particular, to PSC and ICV.

2.3-. The electoral market

In this section we will consider the relative situation of the different political parties in the Catalan electoral market and the relationship of this exogenous variable with the parties' uses of ICTs in their political activities. As previously stated in the introduction, with the expression ' electoral market' we are trying to capture the whole set of opportunities and threats that affects the electoral dynamics of political parties in a situation of electoral competition. Although there are many elements of the electoral market that could have effects in the parties' uses of ICTs (i.e. the electoral system, the possibilities or incentives offered by the institutional design for the formation of coalition governments, the simultaneous call -or not- of regional, local or general elections, etc.) in this work we will centre our interest in just two easily measurable variables: (1) the position of the Catalan parties in the government-opposition scheme and (2) the parties' constituency type (i.e. regional or national constituency).

From a theoretical point of view, changes in the relative position of the political parties in the electoral market (due to a decay in partisan identification, to a changes in value

orientation of the voters, to a changes in the characteristics of issue competition, etc.) determine the partisan dynamics as long as they condition the parties' answers before the new situation. Obviously, the answer of the political parties to these new conditions could originate changes at organizational level (for instance establishing a certain degree of professionalisation or decentralization within the party structure, etc.) as well as changes in their political discourse (i.e. in their ideological position or in the issues they are interested to arise, etc.) But beyond these organizational or ideological changes, at this point we are interested in how the electoral market affects the communication strategy being developed by parties through Internet.

In order to measure the existence of this relationship we offer a classification of the Catalan political parties according their presence in the government or in the opposition and also according their constituency type:

Parties in regional government (PSC, ICV, and ERC): we assume that governmental parties are mainly interested in information provision and campaigning through Internet (i.e. those online activities that implies top-down communication). In this sense, those parties should be especially interested in the distribution of a unique and coherent electoral message to the public and should try to avoid the "noise" in communication that could be generated by establishing a strong participatory strategy.

Parties in opposition (CiU, PP, C's): we hypothesize that parties in opposition are specially interested in mobilizing their potential electoral support in order to win the elections so they are more prone to set up participation and networking mechanisms through Internet than parties in government. So, we should expect parties in opposition to be engaged in activities that imply down-up and also 'lateral' communications in order to take advantage of the possibilities for electoral mobilization offered by ICTs.

With regard to the constituency type, we established three categories: (1) Regional Constituency: parties that do not compete in other electoral circumscriptions –or very exceptionally as it is the case of the nationalist parties in some electoral districts belonging to the same linguistic community– (CiU, ERC, C's); (2) Regional Constituency with strong thighs with national party structures (PSC, ICV). As long as PSOE –Partido Socialista Obrero Español– and IU –Izquierda Unida– do not present to their own lists in Catalonia in general elections we can consider PSC and ICV as having a regional constituency. Nevertheless, the strong bonds of both parties with its homologous at national level – which are reflected in their statutes- places them in an intermediate position; and (3) National Constituency: Political parties whose 'natural constituency' is the whole nation and take part in regional elections just as a territorial section of the party (PP).

Regarding this variable, we could argue that the smaller the constituency, the greater the benefit for the parties in establishing mechanisms for the participation of the potential voters and the generation of resources facilitated through Internet. In this sense, the online participation mechanisms could be useful in order to know the position of the voters regarding some electoral issues and to formulate tailored electoral message in response. In the opposite sense, the greater the constituency of the party, the greater it will be the necessity to construct a message 'politically acceptable' by the medium voter and, therefore, the minor will be the interest to settle down mechanisms of participation

online destined to the potential voters. In a sense, we could argue the existence of a trade-off between information and participation in parties' communication strategy.

If we joint the considered variables in a graph, we can see the relative position of the different parties in the Catalan electoral market.

Graph 6

	Regional Constituency		National Constituency
Parties in Government	ERC	PSC IC-V	
Parties in opposition	CiU C's		PP

Therefore according to our hypothesis we expect the parties located in the lower-left cell to be the parties with a greater presence of mechanisms facilitating the political participation and networking; on the contrary, we should expect the parties located near the upper-right cell to use their websites to facilitate the provision of political information and campaigning. Is that the case?

If we take a look at Table 10, we find that neither the government/opposition position of Catalan parties nor the constituency type seem to be the factors explaining the differences we observe in parties' websites functionalities. As expected due to its location, CiU is the political party that ranks best in the participation function. But the case of C's does not seem to respond equally to the same factors: in fact C's is the party that gets the lower score in terms of participation via Internet. In addition, we would not expect PSC to get the same score as CiU regarding the participation functionality as long as it is the main government party.

On the other hand, taking the parties that form the government we realize, as expected, that they are among the parties that score best in the information function. But again, we find two parties at the opposition side (CiU and C's) that also seem to develop the information functionality to a great extent.

The case of PP is also illustrative to discard any kind of relationship between our independent variables concerning the electoral market and the parties' uses of ICTs : this party ranks poorly in participation (due to its constituency type?) but it also ranks in the lowest place if we consider the participation and networking functions (against our hypothesis).

Table 10

	Information	Participation	Resource generation	Campaigning	Networking (absolute values)
PP	0,63	0,43	0,3	0,62	9
CiU	0,75	0,71	0,3	0,85	421
CDC	0,88	0,71	0,4	0,92	72
UDC	0,75	0,36	0	0,46	25
PSC	0,75	0,71	0,4	0,85	1253
ERC	1	0,36	0,2	0,69	468
ICV	1	0,5	0,8	0,85	180
C's	1	0,36	0,70	0,62	78

At this point, we add a third variable that could also be considered as a factor related to the electoral market: the party size. We classified the Catalan political parties according their size (considering their parliamentary seats and also the percentage of votes obtained in the last regional and general elections) so we can observe their scores in the functionalities of their websites with regard to their different size.

Table 11

Major parties	Information	Participation	Resource generation	Campaigning	Networking (absolute values)
CiU	0,75	0,71	0,3	0,85	421
CDC	0,88	0,71	0,4	0,92	72
PSC	0,75	0,71	0,4	0,85	1253
Medium size parties	**Information**	**Participation**	**Resource generation**	**Campaigning**	**Networking (absolute values)**
PP	0,63	0,43	0,3	0,62	9
ERC	1	0,36	0,2	0,69	468
Small parties	**Information**	**Participation**	**Resource generation**	**Campaigning**	**Networking (absolute values)**
ICV	1	0,5	0,8	0,85	180
UDC	0,75	0,36	0	0,46	25
C's	1	0,36	0,70	0,62	78

Table 11 shows that the largest parties –despite being part of government or opposition and despite their constituency type– unfold better the functions of participation, electoral campaigning and development of networks, whereas the small ones stand out from the rest with respect to information provision and the resource generation. Therefore, we can conclude that party size really makes a difference. Effectively, small parties tend to use their websites basically as a mean of publicity, with the aim to spread their ideology and values (informative function) and as a way for recruiting militants, volunteers and funding (resource generation). On the contrary, large parties do not seem to need these functions so they focus their web functionalities on the maintenance and representation of their organizations and bounds (networking), on the interaction and

debates with the citizens (participation function) and on the development of an effective electoral campaign online.

In sum, from our case study we could state that the size of the party plays an important role in the development the functionalities of the web, more than their position in the government or in the opposition or their constituency type.

3-. Conclusions

The results of our paper are rather inconclusive concerning the relationships between the independent variables and the indicators used to measure the dependent variable.

First of all, with respect to the impact of the ideology on the parties' uses of ICTs we have found that the left-right ideological placement does not provide a clear cut of the Catalan parties regarding the functions performed by their websites. Even when a party has a discourse that favors participation among their members or between the party officials and the citizens, this does not grant that the party will show a good record on the participatory elements measured by our indicators.

Regarding to the party organization – a party being categorized as a mass party or a catch-all party and being more or less centralized – does not explain clearly the differences found in campaigning, information provision or participation through the Internet. It does not explain either the differences in resource generation and only partially seems to be related to differences in networking.

Finally, with respect to the incentives raised by the electoral market it seems that the position, size and longevity of the parties are between the best predictors of the parties' Internet uses. The big and incumbent parties tend to use the Internet to foster and increase participation more than the other parties. They are also more efficient in using the websites in the electoral campaigning.

In order to summarize these findings we have performed a principal components analysis of the website functions already measured in the Catalan parties.

Each of the two following bi-plot graphs shows two kinds of information. On the one hand, they show the position of the Catalan political parties in each of the estimated principal components (i.e. those unobserved factors –and uncorrelated each other– that summarize the values of our cases within the observed variables). On the other hand, and in order to allow the interpretation of the components, the bi-plot graphs show a set of vectors or labeled arrows that represent the weight of the different variables in each component. The longer is the projection of an arrow on an axis of the plot, the heavier is the weight of this variable in this principal component.

The reduction in the complexity of the information reached by the principal components analysis is due to the fact that the first component captures the maximum variance, while the successive components explain progressively smaller portions of the variance. In our case, the first component, which explains more than a half of the total variance of the cases in the original variables –and is being represented in the horizontal axis in both bi-plots–, differentiates those parties that score high in campaigning, participation

and resource generation. The second component, which explains almost one third of the total variance and is represented in the vertical axis of the first bi-plot, differentiates between the parties that put their efforts in resource generation and information provision against those parties emphasizing participation and, to a lesser extent, campaigning. Finally, the third component, which explains only 10% of the total variance, differentiates mainly between those parties that perform better in the internal and external networking.

Graph 7
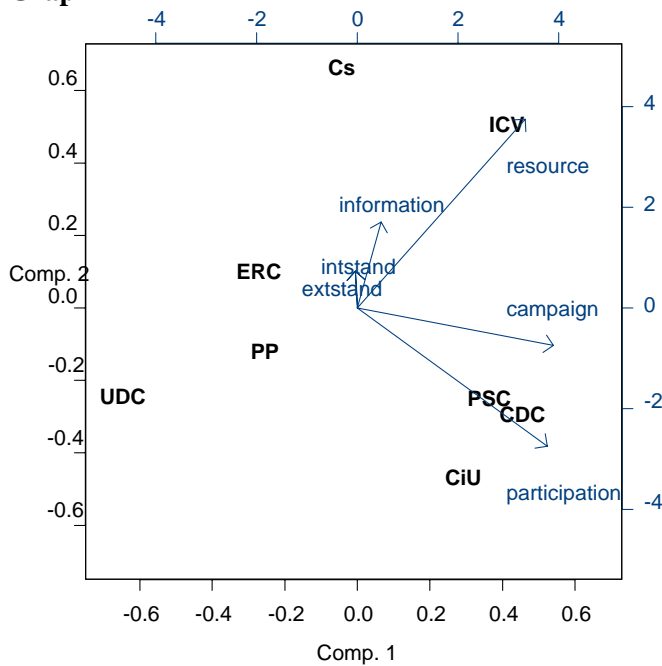
In the first bi-plot we can distinguish three party clusters. The first, in the south east of the graph, i.e. a position that reflects high scores in participation and campaigning, appear the socialist party (PSC), the electoral coalition CiU and overall, one of its components, the conservative Catalan nationalist party, CDC. Since this cluster is composed by the two main political parties of the Catalan party system, it shows that the main differences in the uses of the Internet by parties (as it has been measured) can reflect the size and position of these parties in the electoral market. So the position and composition of this cluster corroborates to some extent the normalization hypothesis in the Catalan cyber politics.

The second party cluster, placed in the north of the graph 7, is composed by Inicitiva per CATALUNYA-Verds (ICV) and Ciutadans (Cs). This cluster reflects that small parties with a participatory political discourse tend to put emphasis in the resource generation.

Finally, the third party cluster of the first bi-plot is composed by the left wing nationalist Catalan party –ERC-, the conservative Spanish nationalist party –PP- and the Catalan Christian democrat party –UDC- and it shows those parties that perform badly in both the first and the second principal components.

Graph 8
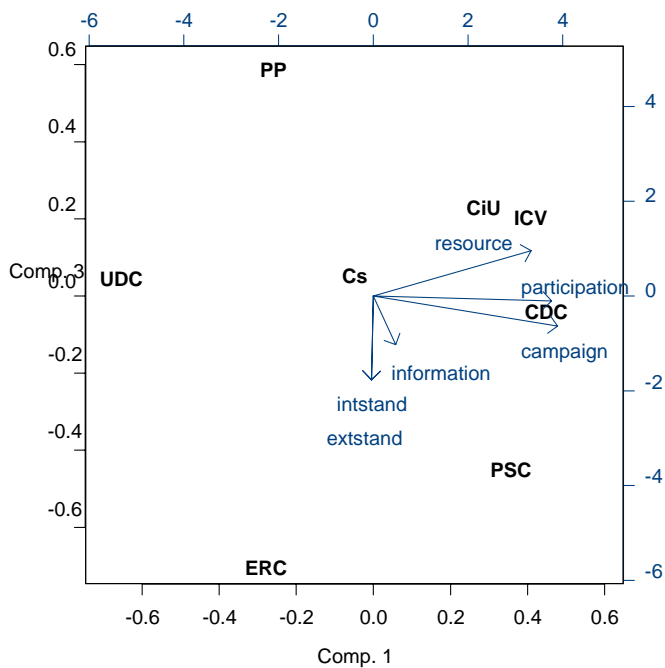
The second bi-plot shows the first principal component against the third principal component. The third principal component captures the weight of the internal and external networking ('*intstand*' and '*extstand*') performed by the parties' websites. This component tends to differentiate between the parties that can be categorized as 'mass parties' (ERC and PSC) from the others. Unexpectedly, ICV, the post-communist eco-socialist party, performs badly in this dimension. Two reasons could be adduced to explain this 'anomaly'. First, even though ICV has the vocation of being a mass party, its membership and bases are rather small and are predominantly composed by personnel in public offices. Second, ICV is a party that has a long history of internal ideological conflicts and splits. Maybe, this turbulent past is somehow paralyzing the party when it tries to establish its political positions or tries to build some external networks because each minimal movement in that sense could be very costly in terms of conflict.

As it can be seen, this method of treating the indicators that measure the dependent variable can summarize some of their complexity and allows us to build some tentative –and hopefully meaningful– conclusions. Nevertheless, these explanations depend on the quality of the indicators. Although the indices developed in order to capture the political parties' uses of the websites have clear advantages (they are complex and, since they could be applied to a large number of cases, make possible the comparative research) they also present some drawbacks. In particular, and due to the development of the web technology, it seems that some of the constitutive elements of these indices are becoming increasingly irrelevant. For instance, using a new media like YouTube the costs of using multimedia contents has diminished so much that this component of our campaigning indicator does have any capacity in differentiating parties' websites. Or, with the generalization of the broadband connections, the size of the home page cannot be longer used as a measure of the difficulty in accessing a web page. So in order to refine our research we have to imagine a future development of more sensitive and specifically designed measures of the strategic use of the Internet by political parties.

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