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THE CHARACTER, DEVELOPMENT AND CONSEQUENCES OF DANISH PARTIES' ELECTIONEERING IN CYBER-SPACE UP TO AND AT THE 2005 GENERAL ELECTION[1]

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Political parties to an increasing extent apply the new information and communication technologies in their campaigning; hence, it is relevant to analyze the character, development and consequences of cyber-campaigning. The character and development of cyber-campaigning is depicted in a taxonomy with three phases of cyber-campaigning based on a study of Danish parties. The study is based on interviews with web-editors and the content of web sites in 2005. Political parties increasing apply online technologies during campaigning. The development of cyber-campaigning is depicted in a three phase typology of cyber-campaigning based on Danish parties. In the archive phase the websites are phonebooks and libraries/archives. Offline content, such as statutes and programs, are simply up-loaded. There is no web strategy, interactive features, emails. In the information-broadcasting phase a web strategy is formed, the website becomes more advanced with interactive features, chats, newsletters with special sub-sites for special groups. In the integrated image phase the websites are proactive designed to swing voters and mobilize activists. Parties launch special campaign sites and include games, online donations, meet-ups, web-shops and advertise their website in offline media. The online web strategy largely determine the overall campaign strategy. The latest development in 2005 was related to the swift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 era where participation and knowledge is create and validated through online social networks. When the effect of Danish parties' cyber-campaigning on the electoral arena is assessed on the basis of available data on the number of visits to party web pages, the use of websites and SMS/email reception, the conclusion is that, yes, cyber-campaigns do reach some voters and, yes, they may help in clarifying electoral choice; however, the impact is in 2005 still quite limited.

Parties and cyber-campaigning

Electoral competition among parties and candidates has increased due to the general dealignment of the electorate, including decline in the level of party identification, party membership and turnout, and increase in the level of electoral volatility (Wattenberg 2000; Dalton 2000; Pharr et al. 2000; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Mair and van Biezen 2001). Change is also seen in parties' electioneering with longer campaign preparation and permanent campaigning, higher levels of professionalization and specialization, increased application of political marketing techniques such as focus groups and survey research, and more emphasis on various channels of communication (Bowler and Farrell 1992; Farrell 2002; Norris 2000; Farrell and Webb 2000). The advent of new online information and communication technologies provides political parties with additional tools in their campaigning; something that to an increasing extent is applied. Since parties are inevitable in representative democracies, their actions and organization affect the character of the political system. The way in which parties apply the online technologies therefore affects how democracy works. The purpose of this article is, on the basis of a study of Danish parties, to contribute to a better understanding of the character, development and consequences of cyber-campaigning, i.e. electioneering in cyber-space, in 2005. This is achieved through the creation of a typology of the character and development of cyber-campaigning and analyses of the implications of this on the electoral arena in 2005.

The online information and communication technologies provide inexpensive modes of communication and an additional communication mode, which surpass the traditional filters of mass media and allow tailored and direct communication to voters. An enthusiastic activist, student assistant, parliamentarian or party official with some technical knowledge is about all it takes to set up a simple website. If information provided on the website is party documents created for other purposes than the web, it does not require much extra effort for the party headquarters to upload the

material. The online technologies provide cheaper means of potentially reaching a high number of voters and activists, and also voters and activists in areas where they are without local party organizations. To new and insignificant parties often ignored by traditional media it may make a big difference whether they, with few resources, may acquire a simple platform even if it is not visited by more than a small share of the electorate. Research proposed by cyber-optimists supports the hypotheses that the web levels the playing field (Norris 2003; Tkach-Kawasaki 2003; Gibson et al. 2003: 50). This may explain why smaller and upcoming parties often are more enthusiastic about the (potential) value of ICT than larger and established parties (Margolis et al. 2003; Cunha et al. 2003; Copsey 2003; Ward et al. 2003: 23).

However, most research shows that the balance between parties has been normalized and that the Internet does not level the playing field (Gibson et al. 2003: 50, 2000, 2002; Ward et al. 2003: 24; Margolis et al. 1997, 1999; Hestvik 2004). This thesis is supported in this study of Danish websites. Major parties offer more than minor parties when it comes to, for example, content, links and appearance on the websites. The development of web technology calls for a professionalization of website maintenance and enhancement. More skilled expertise and manpower hours are spent on it, and party employees need to spend time on, amongst other things, material that is customized to websites and the development and implementation of web strategies. Moreover, whereas the electorate encounters conventional advertising such as newspaper ads, radio spots and TV commercials without much effort of their own, websites require that voters actively log on; something voters are not in general inclined to do (Norris 2003; Bimber and Davis 2003). Since voters are not to any great extent interested in politics and parties, they need to be encouraged to enter the websites of the parties. Parties therefore need to promote their websites and the information, debate, games, chats, etc. to be found there. The major, wealthier parties have more resources for this conventional, offline communication. Hence in some ways the Internet resembles

traditional mass media. Nevertheless, some minor parties, notable Green parties (Gibson and Ward 2000, 2002; Voerman and Ward 2000), do go against this picture thus pointing towards not only resources and size as determinants of website content. Thus the proclivity to engage in cyber-campaigning is expected to vary among parties according to mainly but not only available resources.

The notable studies mentioned above of cyber-campaigning have contributed with knowledge on the application of new information and communication technologies in party campaigning. However, first of all, focus has been mainly on the content of the website and not on other important aspects of cyber-campaigning such as who controls the website, what are the web strategies of the parties, what combination of online elements is used, are emails distributed and to whom, etc. Secondly, some of the assessments have been multidimensional though often the various elements of cyber-campaigning develop together and not independently; various stages in or phases of cyber-campaigning seem plausible. Hence, a typology is created to advance the understanding of the character of, development in and consequences of application of online information and communication technologies in parties' political campaigns.

After a brief discussion of the empirical setting of the case of Denmark in the *second* section, the *third* section presents a typology of cyber-campaigning developed on the basis of the Danish case. In the *fourth* section we analyze some of the implications of cyber-campaigning, namely whether the Danish electorate in 2005 is reached and affected by parties' cyber-campaigning. Finally, in the *fifth* section, we conclude on the character, development and implications of cyber-campaigning and discuss the future of cyber-campaigning.

The Danish case

In 2005 Denmark is well wired with 74 per cent of the Danes having access to the Internet (Rambøll Management 2005) and a little less than a quarter of the electorate with Internet access having visited a party website during the three weeks of national election campaigning in 2005 (Gallup for Ugebrevet A4 2005). Around a fifth of all Europeans use the Internet as a source for collecting information about the EU, its policies and its institutions. The Danes are a little above average at 30 per cent whereas the Dutch top the list at 42 per cent and the Portuguese are at the bottom at 9 per cent (Eurobarometer 2005).

In an international comparison Danish election campaigns have been rather traditional and inexpensive since the parties have been somewhat 'reluctant to make use of many of the paraphernalia of contemporary campaigns' (Bille et al. 1992: 79). Yet, much change has taken place recently. The introduction of (1987) and substantial increase (1995) in public financial support for party organizations have left the parties financially stronger. The last three national election campaigns (1998, 2001 and especially 2005) have seen not only increased election spending but also the application of modern techniques such as focus groups, opinion polls, Internet and emails. Danish parties seem in general to be catching up with their counterparts in other established democracies.

The number of parties represented in parliament is high in Denmark compared to other established democracies. Our complete study of the ten parties standing for election to national parliament, *Folketinget*, in 2005 includes a heterogeneous mix of parties varying for example in size, age, ideological profile, image and organizational characteristics. The two largest parties represented in parliament following the 2005 election are the Liberals and Social Democrats (29 and 26 per cent of the votes, respectively), followed by the Danish People's Party (13),

Conservatives (10), Social Liberals (9), Socialist People's Party (6) and Red-Green Alliance (3). The Christian Democrats, Centre Democrats and Minority Party did not make it into parliament.

These parties all act within the same context leaving the institutional framework, political culture, and media environment constant. The comparative analysis of the ten Danish parties thus yields insight into differences among parties that are caused by their individual characteristics. Maximization of variation due to the large number of parties is expected. Furthermore, research shows that the differences between major and minor parties are larger in election campaigns than between campaigns (Gibson and Ward 1998, 2000; Gibson et al. 2003: 50), thus also pointing towards a high level of variation between the parties within the Danish case (Gerring 2004).

The analysis of the Danish case is based on party websites and interviews with web-editors. The party websites were downloaded throughout the period from January 18th 2005 when the election was called and February 21st 2005, 13 days after the election. Old websites were assessed through www.archive.org. Interviews with web-editors were conducted April-June 2005.[2]

All together, the Danish case provides a rich opportunity for creating a general typology to understand the character and development of party websites undertaken in the next section.

The development of cyber-campaigning

Cyber-campaigning was introduced in the American presidential election campaign in 1992 but the major breakthrough came in 1996. In most other Western countries the breakthrough came in the mid- or late 1990s (Gibson and McAllister 2003). Party websites were established due to a number

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[2] We acknowledge the contributions by and extend our thanks to the parties' web-editors for taking the time not only for the interviews but also for answering our many follow-up questions.

of factors (Löfgren and Smith 2003; Hestvik 2004; Gidlund and Möller 1999: 70; Pedersen and Saglie 2005; Roper 1998). First, at the advent there was a general hype about the online information and communication technology thus leading the parties to join the tide in order not to seem old fashioned. In addition the Internet had an image of being popular in particular among younger citizens. Parties also felt compelled to adapt the technology applied by other parties in order not to decrease their own competitiveness. More importantly, at the time parties found that websites with party documents etc. lessened the administrative burden of the party office (Löfgren and Smith 2003). Even though many parties applied the online technology, website strategies were seldom considered. Few resources were spent on the site and programming was mostly done by an enthusiastic activist, party official or student assistant.

Three phases are identified in the analysis of Danish parties' cyber-campaigns. In the first phase there is no clear web strategy and material uploaded on the website has been produced for traditional channels of communication, such as newsletters, membership magazines, meeting memoranda etc. Parties are simply transferring offline content to the online context. Much of the difference between this first phase and the next is that the website content is created for the net in the second phase whereas it is simply 'cut and paste' in the first phase. The first phase of websites resembled a phonebook where users could find the address and telephone number of the party office and a library for old and new party programs, statements and press releases. At first, parties provide information for actors that without the websites would get the information in another way. Thus there is no need for advertising the websites – those using the websites would contact the party in one way or the other anyway. Emails, interactive features etc. are not part of this first phase of cyber-campaigning. In a few words, parties are "using the Internet to do what parties have always done in elections" (Ward et al. 2003: 20). The online technology does thus not substantially alter the character of party campaigning (Coleman 2001; Norris 2001; Gibson et al. 2003; Löfgren 2001;

Hestvik 2004; Ward et al. 2003; Villalba 2003; Margolis et al. 2003). The archive phase is a suitable term for this phase of cyber-campaigning.

In the <u>second</u> phase of cyber-campaigning many new features are added to the websites and a general website strategy is developed focusing on informing voters on the party politics. The target groups are thus not only members but also voters. Parties also provide information in particular for journalists, students and pupils in order to decrease the administrative burden of responding to these groups. Interactive features such as quizzes, online polls and chats are present. Parties in this phase of cyber-campaigning emphasize that the web is an important tool when it comes to the provision of information, in particular to researchers, journalists and party activists, and recruitment of volunteers and members, but not when it comes to feedback from the electorate or as a 'vote-persuading tool' (Gibson et al. 2003: 65-6). Parties are thus using their websites to perform existing functions. This indicates that the Internet is a new mode or method of communication but that the message remains mostly the same. One way of doing this was through direct e-mails and distribution of weekly newsletters. If named, this could be called the information-broadcasting phase.

In the <u>third</u> phase the website changes from being a sideline activity to being a major and integrated part of the main strategy of parties' electioneering efforts. Howard Dean's campaign for nomination as the democratic presidential candidate in USA in 2002 is the catalyst for this phase of websites. In some ways the development from the second to the third phase can be emphasized by the development from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 as described by O'Relly (2005). I.e. in the Web 1.0 era online participation is related to the establishing of personal websites and specific sites to Web 2.0 where participation is linked to multi-user blogging with free and unlimited access. Furthermore, knowledge in Web 2.0 is create and developed in social networks such as Wikipedia and in this sense validated among the users rather than a specific authority (O'Relly 2005). In this

third phase there is a shift from the dissemination of information to resource collection. There are three specific strategic purposes of the website in this phase – to swing voters, raise money and mobilize activism. The offline and online messages become more integrated when the Internet is used more proactively. Often the general campaign messages (e.g. five key points, which the party focuses on in the campaign) of the website are decisive when it comes to the general election messages. Thus the strict and focused website in this phase helps control the key messages for the various party candidates running for office. This development suggest that the web in this phase are becoming more and more the core of the campaign and to a large extent set the tone and style of the campaign at large. New features such as meet ups, personalized blogs and online coordination of response and activism show a strong potential in this phase. In the Danish general election 2005, 53 of the 947 running candidates have personalized blogs. The younger candidates dominate the list but also many of the top politicians are represented among the bloggers (Pedersen and Klastrup 2005a). In comparison only about 50 blogs were active among the more than 3,500 candidates in the British general election 2005 (Lusoli 2005). The label 'integrated image' fits this third phase.

The development of the features and the aims of parties' websites are summarized in Table 1. Even though based on the Danish case this standardization enables cross-national and longitudinal comparative analyses of the character of cyber-campaigning. The three phases identified in this analysis could, as Weberian ideal types are used as a standard for comparison of differrent party websites. The ideal type does not fit any party perfect. Even though Table 1 shows the development over time, not all Danish parties are developing their cyber-campaigning at the same pace. In general the resource weak parties lean toward the first phase whereas the resource rich lean toward the integrated image phase. This tends to support the 'normalization' hypothesis discussed above. Some elements from the earlier phase are still used today, such as newsletters, whereas others are regarded as an old fashioned technology belonging to the Stone Age. Much fashion is

involved not only in design, but also in the features available on the site. These new features are often launched in election campaigns because there are potentially more visitors; more attention is paid to the parties and politics, the political interest is larger and parties are in general campaigning.

In sum, the character of parties' cyber-campaigning varies among parties and develops over time. This variation is summarized in a typology with three phases of cyber-campaigns leaving room for adding more phases.

Table 1: Three phases of party website

	1. The Archive Phase	2. Information-broadcasting Phase	3. Integrated Image Phase
Purpose	- Party library and archives	- Inform voters	- Swing voters - Mobilize activism
Online strategy	- No strategy	- Web strategy independent of general campaign strategy	- Web strategy determines campaign at large - Banner ads on others site
Focus	Party politics	Party leaders	Infotainment and party leaders
Elements	- Material is taken from elsewhere and up-loaded on the web - Count of visits - Small animations - Contact and purely practical information has a high priority	- Joining newsletters (weekly) - Downloads wallpaper, screensavers etc. - Quiz - Online chat - Candidate have sub-site - Calendar for central activities - Special sub-site for party members, media, and schools - Search function on the site - Online opinions polls on policy issues	- (We)Blogs – personalizing the campaign - Video, flash special designed for web - Meet-up – how to become active in your our area - Special campaign site - Candidate have own independent site - Online donations - Games - Calendar for central and local actives - Webshop
Interactive features	- None	- Few	- Many
Target group(s)	- Members	- Members and citizens	- Swing voters and potential activist
Conflicts	- Few	- Lack of resources	- Challenge existing lines of communication with the party organization
Preparation	- Little change during election	- Election top story on site	- Launch of new site at the calling of the election
Update frequency	- Once in a while	- Daily	- Continuous (RSS feed)
Production	- Internal party	- Internal and external staff	- External consultants
Source of ideas	- Enthusiastic activists	- A small group of internal staff	- External professionals with input form internal staff
Web-statistics	- Very simple	- Simple	- Advanced web-statistics of users (stats on each page)
Size	- < 100 MB	- 100-1000 MB	- >1 GB

Sources: Danish parties' website and interviews with party web-editors 2005 and www.archive.org for historical websites.

Effects of cyber-campaigning on the electoral arena

When assessing the effect of cyber-campaigning there is a marked difference depending on who you ask: Parties, candidates, IT consultants, voters and researchers vary in their assessments of the impact. Whereas cyber-optimists point towards the democratizing value of the Internet, cyber-pessimists point more towards the limited or even distorting effect of the online information and communication technologies. It is almost impossible to determine the exact effect of several aspects of electioneering, such as cyber-campaigning, posters or televised party leader debates. However, here the effect of Danish parties' cyber-campaigning is tried assessed by analyses of the number of visits to party web pages, the use of websites and SMS/email reception. The data presented here is far from perfect, yet it is the best available and a decent first step.

Website visits

Early opinion-based research shows that few voters seek out party websites (Norris 2003). In addition, visitors to party websites are mostly party activists and other sympathizers already committed and interested in politics; younger voters in particular (Ward et al. 2003: 24-5). Some argue that website visits do not seem to change the voting behavior (Ward et al. 2003: 24-5), whereas others point to an effect (Gibson and McAllister 2006; D'Alessio 1997).

At Election Day Gallup interviewed 5,080 Danish voters from their Internet panel on their use of the Internet during the campaign. Table 2 summarizes the use of party websites among the voters with Internet access divided on age, gender and education. Almost a quarter of the voters with Internet access visited a party website during the three weeks of campaigning. With 4,003,616 eligible voters and an Internet access of 74 per cent this implies that more than 700,000 voters

visited a party website during the campaign[3]. Compared to that only around 4 per cent of the American online public visited a party site in 2004 and 18 per cent of online Australians, 23 per cent of online Danes visiting a party site are high (Gibson and McAllister 2006:252).

The 18-29 years are by far the most intensive users. If the younger generation keeps its habits it is obvious that the Internet with time will increase as a source of information. Thus in the coming elections still more voters are expected to access party websites. Gibson and McAllister (2006) show that in the 2004 Australian election the Internet as a source of information about the election came close to the use of radio and newspaper and whereas the radio and newspaper use is declining the Internet use is triplet since the 1998 election and seem still to be growing exponentially.

Table 2: Share of voters on the net, which have visited a party-website at least once (percent) (2005)

	Share which has visited a party-website at least once
Age	
• 18-29 years	38**
• 30-39 years	24
• 40-49 years	19**
• 50-59 years	18**
• 60+ years	20**
Gender	
• Men	27**
• Women	19**
Education	
• Lower education	22
• Lower secondary education (skilled laborers)	18**
• Upper secondary education	29**
• Higher education	23
All	23

Source: G@llupForum for Ugebrevet A4. n=5.079. ** different from all $p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$.
Applying a binary logistical regression to the data in the table 2 using gender, ages groups and education as independent variables and party-website visits as dependent variable confirms that all independent variables relates to the dependent variable (regression not shown).

Furthermore table 2 also shows that men and voters with an upper secondary education are more frequently user of the party-websites.

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[3] The survey-data is collected in February 2005 and weighted according to gender, age, place of living (geography area) in order to secure representatively to the electoral.

Table 3 shows that the two largest parties, the Liberals and Social Democrats, who also have the most advanced web sites, top the list of users, but also that the Social Liberals come in third even though the party is only the fifth largest party in parliament. The main reason for this is that Social Liberals' voters have the longest formal education as well as the highest access to the net (Rambøll Management 2005); but also shows that the Social Liberals' use of video on their site was a success. The three parties not represented in parliament after the election (the Christian Democrats, Centre Democrats and Minority Party), whose web sites belong to the archive phase, get the least visits, yet, they are visited by about 2 to 3 percent of the voter, which is more than electoral support would suggest.

Table 3: What party did the electoral visit? (percent) (2005)

Party	
Liberals	11
Social Democrats	10
Social Liberals	10
Conservatives	7
Socialist People's Party	6
Danish People's Party	6
Red-Green Alliance	5
Christian Democrats	3
Centre Democrats	3
Minority Party	2
Visited party you voted for	20
Visited other parties	16
Visited only one party	8

Source: Gallup for Ugebrevet A4. N=5,080.

The final three rows in table 3 show that 20 percent of the online voters visited the party they also voted for in the election in 2005. As 23 percent has visited at least one site it shows a large bias to the voters own party. We cannot conclude that it is the visit to the website which eventually persuaded the voters to vote for a particular party. Rather it seem likely that voters seek to be confirmed their choice for party. A choice which already are somewhat established prior to their visit. Bimber and Davis (2003:140) research also support that the effect of party websites is

confirmation of somewhat preexisting party choice rather than a persuading effect. On the other hand 16 percent visited other party than their own any only 8 percent only visited one party. This shows that when the voters access a party-website it is quite likely that they visit more than one party. Analyzing the correlation between which sites are being accessed shows first than they are all significant (p<0.01). Confirming than if you visit one site you are likely to visit more sites. Secondly, the strongest Spearman's correlations (both stronger than 0.53) are found among Liberals - Conservatives and Social Democrats - Social Liberals showing that the voters tend to access parties within the same parliamentary block of cooperation.

Since survey data has a tendency towards overestimation of activity it is relevant to include other measures for visits to party websites[4]. Today most parties collect statistics on daily hits, sessions, visits and number of downloaded pages. But there are a number of problems with these data. Most often a number of 'false' hits are registered, for example from search engines, researchers and web archives downloading the site. Second, parties employ dissimilar statistical software to gauge the traffic on their websites: Webalizer (Red-Green Alliance), Urchin (Social Liberals), Siteworks (Danish People's Party) and Awstat (Liberals, Conservatives and Socialist People's Party).

Figure 1 shows a measure for the number of hits taking consideration of the time. A user is counted once as visitor in every 30 minutes. Thus a user has to be on the site for more than 30 minutes in order to be counted twice and search engines in this way do not ruin the statistics but returning visitors are all counted. The parties for which comparable data is currently available are included. First of all, it shows that the pattern is almost identical for the different parties. It is not in the weekend but during the week that parties have most visitors. That the electorate surf in their

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[4] E.g. social desirability bias where the respondent overestimates his level of access in order to present himself as more political active on the Internet. Secondly, it is also likely that some self-selection bias in present in the survey data as voters with frequent use of party-sites would be more likely to participate in the survey than voters which did not access the sites.

lunch breaks is confirmed by the web-editors who points out that all important stuff should be uploaded by 11:30 AM. Except for the Social Liberals the number of visits top on Election Day. This indicates that voters seek out last-minute clarification and that the accessibility of the party web sites thereby makes a difference. The spike of interest immediately prior to, and on Election Day point to that website visit may have a stronger effect on voters' decision compared to traditional campaigning which has been intense through out the campaign. Also D'Alessio (1997) finds that visitors to party websites increase just before Election Day.

Figure 1: Number of session on the parties' web-sites during the campaign and after the election
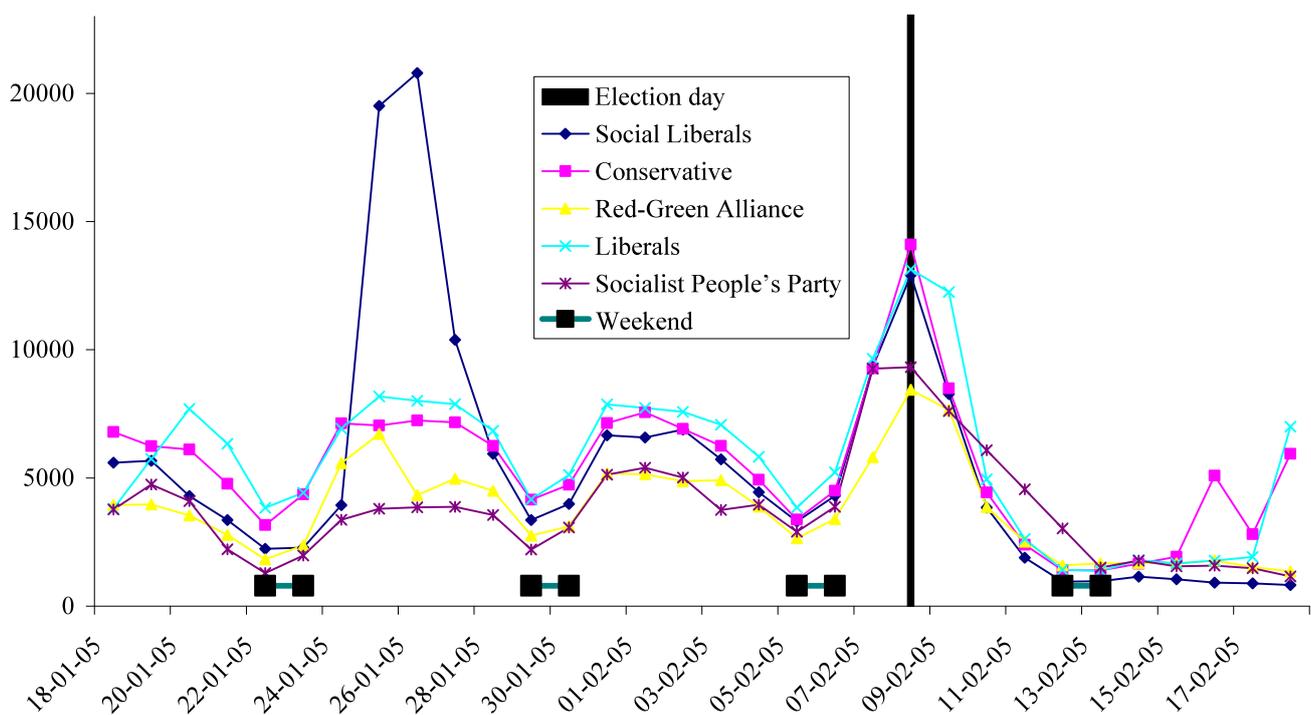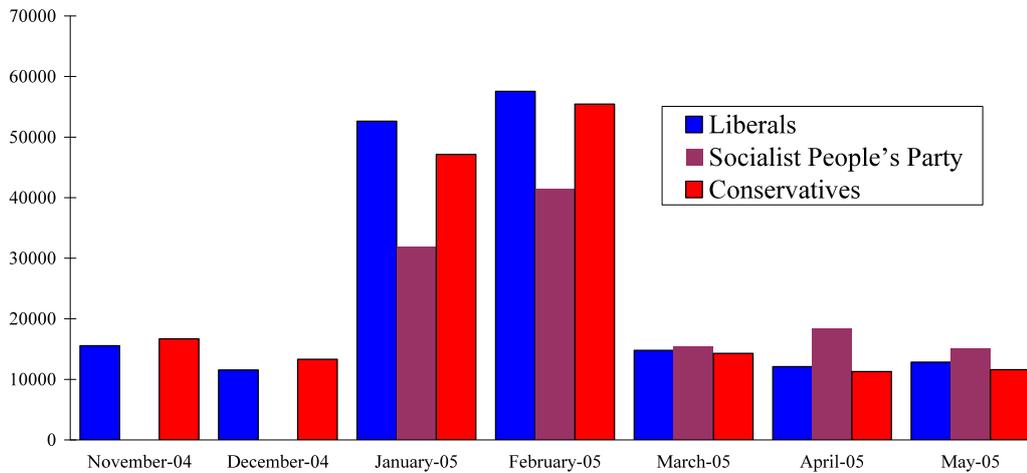

Source: Data provided by the parties. A session is counted within a given period of time (default 30 minutes). I.e. if a visitor is on the site between 0 and 30 minutes she is counted once and if she on the site between 30 and 60 minutes she is counted twice etc. An interpolation is used due to missing data for the Liberal 1/2 and 19/2 and the Socialist People's Party between 10/2 and 12/2.

Secondly, the differences among the parties are limited. The difference is larger during the election campaign than after the election where the parties have the same, low, level of visits. But even

during the campaign the disparity is modest. A small party like the Red-Green Alliance, who has a archive phase website, has fewer but not that many fewer visitors than for example the Liberals with a website belonging to the integrated image phase. One marked exception is the Social Liberals, whose website tops in visits on January 25th and 26th. They strongly oppose the government's stricter immigration policies and produced a video with citations by the present Minister for Integration putting him in a quite negative perspective. A link to the video was spread, first, through their email list, and secondly to journalists etc. The video was well covered by traditional mass media and gave rise to a debate due to its style. Negative campaigning has previously been largely absent except in the USA and to some extent in Australia and the UK (Ward et al. 2003: 18). However, this video is a good example of the elements of negative campaigning found in the Danish 2005 campaign.

Another way in which to gain insight on the effects of the website is to measure the number of unique visitors on the parties' websites. A unique visitor is a user that has made at least one hit on one page of a website during a month. Even if this user makes more visits during this month, she counts only once (http://awstats.sourceforge.net). Figure 2 shows the number of unique visitors at the websites of the Liberals, Conservatives and Socialist People's Party, which are the only parties applying the same web statistics software (Awstats), thus the statistics are comparable. However, due to server breakdown there are no figures for November and December for the Socialist People's Party.

Figure 2: Unique visitors

Source: Data provided by the parties.

Figure 2 shows first of all, that the number of unique visitors triples in the two election months of January and February compared to the other months. Thus, it is supported that there is a much stronger interest in party websites during campaigns than in between. Secondly, during the campaign the Liberals and Conservatives have more visitors than the Socialists. On the one hand, the lower level for the Socialist could be explained by their lower electoral support. On the other hand this does not explain the almost identical levels of the Liberals and Conservatives. However, after the election the Socialists have more visitors than the other two parties which could be attributed to the resignation of the party leader and election of a new leader by way of a ballot among the party membership and generally more active party members (Pedersen 2003). It is therefore no surprise that the Socialists are at a higher level than the two larger parties following the election.

Use of websites

One thing is the number of visits or visitors to party websites. Another thing is what the purpose of the visits is. Table 4 shows that the political content of the websites is important. According to

voters that have visited party websites during the campaign the most important reason for entering a party website is to clarify general party policies, followed by the party stand on single issues. In this way two thirds of all users mentioned information about policies. In addition a third of these voters mentioned search for information about candidates whereas only one out of seven indicated that games and videos were important in their use of the website. 'Practical information' (such as party's contact info and various official party documents), which is essential in the archive phase of websites (Table 1), is of little importance for visitors. This applies even more to the opportunity for supporting the party financially and signing up to be an activist; two successful elements of Howard Dean's campaign and central elements in the integrated image phase.

Even with a good chance of a high level of social desirability on these statements it is striking that relatively many indicate that they use the website for seeking information about politics and not simply for entertainment. The three phases of cyber-campaigning to different degrees offer information about party policies. In the archive phase, the text from party folders is uploaded. In the other two phases the information is to a larger extent created to the website. It is also in the information-broadcasting phase important for parties to inform the electorate about party policies, whereas the information provided is selected more strategically and targeted in the integrated image phase. In order to convert voters certain policies are emphasized whereas others are left out. For the electorate this entails that whereas they in the archive phase were mostly provided with official party documents such as party manifests, they are in the integrated image phase presented with special designed slogans and agenda tagged at web-site visitors aiming to swing voters. Parties' agenda-setting function is much more prominent in the integrated image phase of cyber-campaigning than in the two previous phases. That is in the integrated image phase the technically possibilities and design of the web site determinant more and more the features of the off-line campaigning – a development which probably will be even stronger in the future.

Table 4: The most important use of party websites (2005)

Purpose	Share (pct.)
Clarify general political questions	42
Look into single issues	25
Find the right candidate	19
Information about the lead candidate	15
Watch video or play games	14
Practical information	8
Economical support or sign up as activist	3
Other	12

Source: Gallup for Ugebrevet A4. N=1,157. Only voters, who visited a site, are included. Multiply answers possible.

The candidates of the parties are also to different degrees presented in the three phases of cyber-campaigning.[5] In the archive phase the candidates are not presented with any more than practical information such as name and constituency. In the information-broadcasting phase candidates have a website in connection to the party website whereby they may provide more detailed information to the electorate, within the limits set by the party. In the integrated image phase the level and type of information depends on the candidates themselves since they to a larger degree have their own independent websites, which they can personalize both in regard to image and political emphasis. This also implies that candidates need a certain amount of resources in order to exploit the opportunities provided by the new technology. Since candidates are far from equal both in regard to economic and IT competence resources this may give a skewed presentation of the candidates. Whereas the integrated image phase provides the electorate with detailed and framed information about some candidates and maybe none about others, the information-broadcasting provides more equal – and thereby also comparable – presentation of the various candidates within the different parties. In addition, as with other kinds of mediated presentation, a potential democratic problem is

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[5] The Danish electoral system is proportional where candidates stand for election in multimember districts. Voters may vote for either a party, for a candidate within a party or for an independent candidate standing outside the parties (the latter only exceptionally results in election). In most parties the candidates stand in parallel whereby the personal votes determines what party candidates are elected.

that personal characteristics successful in cyberspace are not necessarily advantageous characteristics when it comes to working in the political system.

Whether parties are visited by volatile voters in doubt about who to vote for or whether they are visited by their supporters have yet to be determined. But it is of utmost importance when determining the effect of cyber-campaigning. As mentioned above previous analyses show that the (few) voters who visit party websites primarily are party activists and other sympathizers. The Danish figures for the number of visits indicate that this may very well be the case here too. However, if at least some of the visitors to party websites have become more clarified about their electoral choice this indicates that cyber-campaigning might have some effect. Table 5 shows that two out of five have been helped by visiting party websites but that only one out of five to some or a high degree. This points toward an effect, although quite limited, of cyber-campaigning.

Table 5: Do website visits provide clarification?(2005)

Have party websites helped you clarify your final decision when casting your vote? (pct.)	
Yes, to a very high degree	5
Yes, to some degree	13
Yes, to a lesser degree	19
No, not at all	62

Source: Gallup for Ugebrevet A4. N=1,129. Only voters, who visited a site, are included.

It is not only party websites that provides the electorate with a source of political information in cyberspace. Voters having visited party websites were also asked whether they during the election campaign had visited other political websites unrelated to political parties or in other ways sought political information on the Internet. This was confirmed by two out of five (Gallup for Ugebrevet A4). Even though it might be problematic to extort a lot from these figures it may indicate that it is not general political interest and/or uncertainty about the selection of party or candidates that make voters hit the net; they to a larger extent seek information about their own party.

Emails and SMS

The potential effect of parties' cyber-campaigns might also be assessed by summarizing the number of people receiving direct e-mails and SMS etc. from the parties. Table 6 shows, first, the distribution of e-mails and SMS by the Danish parties in the 2005 general election. Compared to the number of potential recipients these figures are rather diminutive. Since voters have to sign up to receive this it is obvious that they have some sympathy for the party. This is supported by the web-editors. Even though the extent to which emails and SMS may swing voters is extremely limited, they may of course contribute to the maintenance of party identification or provide voters with information with which they can go out and be ambassadors for the party (cf. Scarrow 1996: 43; Whiteley et al. 1994: 4).

Second, the last column of Figure 6 indicates that even though most of the parties enable mobilization of activism on their website, the extent to which the electorate makes use of it is extremely limited.

Table 6: Distribution of emails and SMS and 'meet-up' (2005)

	Number of people on mailing list at the end of campaign	New people on mailing list during election campaign	SMS daily	Web-site mobilization of activism
Liberals	6,000	2,500	400	NA
Social Democrats	10,000	NA	50	NA
Social Liberals	7,000	1,500-2,000	800	NA
Conservatives	2,200	NA	Don't use	Don't use
Socialist People's Party	977	NA	640	177
Danish People's Party	1,997	NA	Don't use	30
Red-Green Alliance	2,050	500	Don't use	NA

Source: Interview with party web-editors. NA: Feature included but data not available.

In sum

Generally speaking very little systematic information is available on the effect of cyber-campaigning. However, on the basis of the limited evidence presented here, the conclusion is that,

yes, cyber-campaigns do reach some voters and, yes, they may help in clarifying electoral choice. But the impact is still quite limited. The exclamations that the 2005 election provided a major breakthrough for the Internet, and that the Internet had a significant effect (for example Ugebrevet A4 2005; Pedersen and Klastrup 2005b) might thus be deemed quite exaggerated. In addition, the available data is imperfect and more data, including experimental studies, are needed for further and firmer conclusions.

The character, development and consequences of cyber-campaigning

The purpose of this article is to contribute to a better understanding of the character, development and consequences of cyber-campaigning. The typology depicting three phases of websites contributes to an enhanced understanding of the character, development and consequences of cyber-campaigning in several ways. First, the typology indicates how there are several dimensions in the character of cyber-campaigning. Not only the content of the website but also the control and strategies are important factors.

Second, the division into three phases contributes to an understanding of the development in the character of cyber-campaigning. Divisions like this can almost always be discussed. This division is proposed because even though there are some overlaps, the three phases are still distinct from each other. The boundaries between the phases are on some of the dimensions more fluid, as for example the character of web-statistics (from 'very simple' over 'simple' to 'advanced'). Other dimensions have distinct limits, for example 'purpose' and 'target groups'. The latter differences are of such a nature that the phases are qualitatively different. The three phases show how various features change over time thus depicting how the character of cyber-campaigning develops.

Third, the three phases also contribute to an understanding of the variation among parties. Parties within a political system do not necessarily belong to the same phase even though the institutional context and technologies available within this system are identical for the parties. Parties vary in the resources available in the application of the online information and communication technologies. The typology enables a division of parties' cyber-campaigning into three types and thereby forms the basis of both a characterization and analyses of the development and of the implications.

Furthermore, the three phases enable a more elaborate analysis and discussion of the implications of cyber-campaigning on the electoral arena. Based on available data on the number of visits to party web pages, the use of websites and SMS/email reception this article indicates that there is an effect of Danish parties' cyber-campaigning on the electoral arena, yet it is rather limited. Yes, cyber-campaigns do reach some voters and, yes, they may help in clarifying electoral choice. But the impact is still quite restricted.

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