Chapter 26
The Obama Effect: The Perception of Campaigning 2.0 in Swedish National Election 2010

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ABSTRACT
This chapter presents a survey study on attitudes towards political campaigning in social media. During the national election in Sweden in 2010, a considerable amount of resources was invested in online communication with the constituency, not least in social media. Whereas several studies have focused on e-democracy at a macro level, there is a lack of studies examining the phenomenon of campaigning 2.0 as it is perceived by the actual voters. This chapter, therefore, asks the question whether the voters noticed the political campaigning in social media at all, and if so, how they perceived it. The main findings are that respondents who were already interested and politically engaged considered campaigning 2.0, in line with the politicians’ rhetoric, as a way to enhance democracy. Respondents who were neither interested nor engaged in politics, on the other hand, showed little interest in this kind of communication. Consequently, the study confirms assumptions about digital divide and continued fragmentation of the citizenry.

INTRODUCTION
Political campaigning in 2010 is campaigning 2.0. The American president Barack Obama serves as the front figure of this new way of communicating with the constituency – direct and online. Election campaigns often function as test sites for new communication technologies and tactics. At the same time the discourse among campaigners, politicians and the political experts is rather technologically optimistic. Above all, they embrace the democratic potential of the new media. Online campaigning is presented as a possibility to solve the well-known problems of disengaged citizens, decreasing voter turnouts and declining party membership (Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2007;
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Stakston, 2010). Generally, it is claimed that the Internet, and Web 2.0 (social media) in particular, supports the development of e-democracy through fostering direct contact between the political representatives and the citizenry (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Negroponte, 1995; Rheingold, 2003). This enthusiastic tone of the discourse is obviously not limited to campaigns in the US. When Sweden prepared for the national election in September 2010, the expectations on Web 2.0 were high among politicians and campaign workers (Gelin, 2010; Staktson, 2010). The main political parties in Sweden spent a considerable amount of time and money communicating on social media platforms. Numerous employees worked solely with social media campaigning, professionals were hired to coach politicians in different online possibilities, and campaign workers were activated to spread the political message in their online networks.

However, several studies are questioning this celebratory discourse. These studies stress phenomena such as the digital divide (Norris, 2001), simplification (Noam, 2002), commodification and commercialization of political information (Andrejevic, 2009; Papacharissi, 2002), as well as online noise covering the important political discussions (Dean 2010; Noam, 2002). In this binary discussion of the potentialities and actualities of campaigning 2.0, there is still a clear gap: the voters’ perspective on these developments is missing, at least in the Swedish context. The question is whether the potential voters even care about the interactive possibilities following campaigning 2.0 and politics 2.0.

Therefore, this chapter analyzes how users of social media - one of the main target groups of politicians, campaigners and spin doctors - perceive this form of subtle and innovative campaigning. Firstly, the chapter describes how media and politics converge in Sweden, with special focus on the appearance of party campaigns in social media in the national elections 2010. Secondly, and mainly, the study examines the awareness and perception of both political campaigning and politics in general in social media. Based on a survey among students at a Swedish university, the chapter asks whether the addressed citizens notice political campaigning at all in their social networks, and if so; how do they perceive it? The chapter concludes by critically examining to what extent civic awareness is raised by new media.

THE SWEDISH POLITICAL SYSTEM

In order to understand the discussion in the chapter, it is necessary to present the general political and media related background. Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. The parliament has legislative power, and the government implements the decisions of the parliament. General elections are held every fourth year, on the third Sunday of September. During most of the twentieth century, the party system has consisted of five significant parties organized in two blocks; the Left block and the Right block. Since the 1930s, the Social Democrats, the biggest party within the Left block, has been the party to most often hold the government position as a single-party minority government. When they have formed minority governments they have organized coalitions with other parties (not necessarily another party within the same block). This system of constant cooperation has resulted in a relatively consensus-oriented political climate in Sweden. Towards the end of the 1990s the political landscape changed to some extent with more political parties on the field, but the left-right distinction in politics has remained relevant nonetheless (Strömbäck & Nord, 2008). All in all, Sweden fits well into Hallin & Mancini’s (2004) description of democratic corporatist model which includes, for instance, a rather extensive welfare state, consensus-oriented politics, high levels of political parallelism and active state intervention.

The Swedish parties are mainly financed through public funding. Apart from that, they receive small incomes from member fees, donations,