Social Media in The Israeli Political Context

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1/3/2012
## Appendix

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Introduction:

Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies designed to turn unidirectional communication (from content creators to consumers) into interactive dialogue. Through social media, information is distributed amongst a network based on multiple parties, who then distribute information to an infinite number of consumers. This form of media is distinguishable from traditional media as it has significantly lower barriers to entry as well as greater reach and accessibility to both the producers and consumers of information. As a result the capacity to express one’s views to a large audience is greatly increased. Worldwide, politicians and political parties have created social media presences, through which they are able to communicate with their constituencies.

In seeking to understand the implications of these innovations for politicians, one prominent theory is that social media, being inexpensive and broadly accessible, can level out a political playing field which up to now has been largely determined by financial resources of the party/candidate (Benkler, 2006). This thesis will study how Israeli politicians and political parties have made use of social media in order to advance their messages and garner support. Specifically, the research will explore whether the social media environment has broken down the barriers to media presence that small parties face due to their smaller budgets. Ultimately the research will seek to conclude whether in fact the use of social media led to a more equal or balanced media capacity of various sized parties.

This thesis will then study the case of Israeli political actors through the lenses of theories of
political participation and the internet in order to ascertain the impact of social media on political participation. This thesis shall thus test the importance of social media as a tool for encouraging political participation, and its effectiveness in the Israeli context.

**Hypotheses**

**H1:** Social media equalizes levels of exposure among large and small parties in Israel.

**H2:** Israeli Political Actors use of Social media affects voters’ political participation positively as is according to the theories of political participation and the internet, discussed in this thesis.

**Methodology**

This thesis will review theories of the internet (and social media) and its capacity to encourage participation. The study will focus on Israel as a case study, examining factors specific to Israeli society, and the relationship to social media and the internet in Israel, as well as the manner in which Israeli politicians utilise social media.

The research will open with a description of social media and its fundamental differences from traditional mass media. The main body of work will be based on primary research and secondary sources. The primary research will be accomplished through studying and recording the different social media pages of Israeli politicians and parties. The main body of analysis will be a discourse on the different theories regarding political participation and the internet. This will be undertaken with a view to studying the Israeli case through the lens of the various applicable theories. In order to accomplish this, the thesis will first analyse the different theories, then apply these to the Israeli case, utilising available socio-economic, demographic and political participation information.
**Literature Review**

Social media has been defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content."(Kaplan and Haenlein 2009).

This means that through the internet based technologies that will be referred to as “social media,” the content is created and expressed by the users of the technology through the channels of the technology. It is important to highlight the definition of social media, because although much has been written about the effect of the internet on political participation, little has focussed expressly on social media. It should further be noted that many of the theories discussed in this review date from before the maturity of social media, which occurred around 2004/2005.

Yochai Benkler (2006) describes the fundamental difference between the networked information economy- the open information economy that exists in social media- and traditional mass media such as newspapers and television, as being the differences in network architecture and the cost of becoming a speaker. That is to say a shift from a singular point of information production to multiple producers of information. This is sometimes referred to as a shift from a unidirectional “hub and spoke” model to a multi-directional “node and network” model.

Internet research includes several theories which debate how the internet will affect political participation of the masses. Yet there is very little research to date about the political impact of social media as a factor separate from the internet as a whole.
There exist three central groups of theory surrounding the question of internet access, social media and political participation. Some theorists suggest that the internet will not have any effect on political participation, as those who are politically active will merely change their channels of involvement from offline activities to online activities. This is known as the “Normalisation Theory” (Margolis and Resnick 2000, Norris 2000). This theory is supported by Bimber and Davis (2003) who produced survey data which demonstrates that the vast majority of visitors to political websites are not swing voters interested in learning more about candidates, but rather voters who are already entrenched in their decision to vote for a certain candidate and wish to be engaged and motivated to take positive action for the benefit of their chosen campaign.

Matthew Hindman (2005) asserts a belief that business has proven that the real success of the internet has not been in retail; rather it can be found in the “back-end”, in the streamlining of organisation and logistics. According to this logic, the internet may change political infrastructures in a similar fashion. Thus the internet may prove more useful in garnering financial support and organising positive action from committed constituents, than it is in selling the politicians messages to possible new supporters.

A second standpoint claims that the internet will positively affect political participation, by encouraging new actors, such as previously uninterested youth, to become politically involved (Ward Gibson and Lusoli, 2003). This theory states that the internet provides a captive medium through which political opinions are broadcast and participation is encouraged. Chan (2005), claims that the presence of multiple actors, engaging horizontally, and freely exchanging opinions encourages interaction and participation. Bennett (2003) asserts that the “diverse organisational capacity of the internet” enables users to create
affinity networks and are thus likely to form political ties amongst a similarly thinking networked group. Traditional media, through its vertical (spoke and node) structure, cannot foster discussion and as such does not espouse contrary thought. Social media thus overcomes the limits of traditional journalism and can thus be seen as agents of more vibrant participatory and citizen led democracy.

A premise that underlies the debate on the internet’s effect on political participation holds that the internet has significantly reduced participation costs for both voters- who gain access to readily available, tailored and free information, and for political parties- who benefit from an increased ability to spread their message en masse (Borge and Cardenal, 2011). The extensive reduction in participation costs, may encourage frequent surfers to become involved in politics even without motivation to do so, thus encouraging political participation amongst previously non-participatory constituencies. The ease of establishing interpersonal links on the internet, thus enables individuals to participate in more diverse and numerous political communities than they would be able to in the “physical” world (Bennett 2003). Furthermore, through stimulating exchanges amongst similarly interested people, social media can help create group identity and induce active real world participation (Can 2005).

Kreuger (2002) believes that the internet has resulted in the diminishing importance of socio-economic status of voters in political participation (see also: Boulianne 2009). Moreover, the anonymity of participation in social media may eliminate certain social pressures that would previously have acted as barriers to participation. That is to say that individuals belonging to specific ethnic or religious groups, may feel a greater freedom in
expressing opinions anonymously on social media, if these opinions are contrary to the hegemonic group opinion.

Robert Putnam suggests that the internet will change the nature of political participation and will negatively affect political engagement (Putnam, 2000). This position is based on the premise that the major use for the internet is entertainment, and as such internet users are distracted away from social activities, resulting in a decline in “social capital.” However this theory is repudiated by Boulianne (2006) who claims that meta-data suggests that the internet has not had a negative effect on political participation of the masses. Furthermore Fischer points out that there may be alternate explanations for many of the trends that Putnam points to, such as waning trust in politicians leading to reduced voter turnout (Fischer 2001).

Yossi Benkler (2006) outlines 5 main reasons he believes that the internet may not be a democratising medium. Firstly Benkler mentions the possibility of information overload. In this respect, it is possible that there will be too many fragmentations of opinions on social media and as such it will be very difficult for consumers to digest the opinions of so many contrary views. This is also linked to the possibility that even in the “utopian” social media environment, money may play an important role in deciding which opinions gain an audience. Another linked possibility is the polarization of opinion in which groups on the internet will appeal only to certain members of the public and as such there will be no, or very little balancing of views.

Secondly Benkler mentions a problem he terms “the centralization of the internet.” Even in a completely open network a vast degree of attention is focussed on a few top sites. In this respect there may be a replication of a mass media “hub and spoke” model.
Thirdly the diminishing role of the mass media as a “watchdog” scrutinising the actions of elites is diminished by the internet, yet privately funded individuals cannot successfully accomplish this task.

Fourthly, it has been shown that authoritarian countries such as China are able to censor the internet. This point however may be void in light of the “Arab Spring” in which Arab youths have risen up against their dictatorial regimes, aided in no small way by social media networks.

Finally Benkler mentions the digital divide and the possibility that internet access and skills are not evenly distributed across the population. This point is echoed by Castells (2009), who disputes that participation costs are eliminated through internet media, claiming instead that the specific skills that allow actors access to the internet, can be construed as a form of capital, and as such these skills act as a cost of entry into the internet realm. However, it has been shown that in the USA socio-economic factors become less important as a variable in measuring political activity when online participation is measured (Gibson, Lusoli and Ward 2005).

Further opinions exist as to the reason that the internet may not in fact be a democratising force. Nahon (2011) mentions Network Gatekeeping Theory, which states that networks have gatekeepers, or elites who are able to include and exclude entities from networks. In this respect the gatekeeper may be a singular individual restricting access to a Facebook page, or a government dictating to search engines, which results they may deliver for
certain controversial topics, for instance a search for Tiananmen Square from a Chinese IP adress delivers government censored results\(^1\).

This theory is closely linked to the concept of “filter bubbles” in which search engines, as well as social media platforms refine results according to the particular preferences and search histories of the individual surfer. As such, the internet user no longer has a plethora of opinion available to him, but rather is subjected to a streamlined result consistent with what these platforms believe the individual wants to see. This narrows the consumer’s worldview, and information producers lose the ability to access consumers with vastly different standpoints and opinions (Pariser 2011). There has therefore been a transference from the human gatekeepers (such as newspaper editors), who used to control our access to information, to algorithmic gatekeepers, who lack the ethical capacity to allow us an even spread of opinion (Pariser 2011). This phenomenon may be contrary to the supposed equalising nature of the internet and social media.

**Israel and Social Media**

Israel has a very high percentage of internet users. The semi-annual TIM survey, which measures online exposure and usage patterns, displays that 4.3 million Israelis over the age of 13 utilise the internet. About 77% of Jewish households had Internet access at the end of 2008, up from 73% in 2007. Of Israeli Jews over the age of 18, 71% surf the web, while 56% of Israelis over 50, and 90% of Israelis aged 13-17 surf the internet. A breakdown by

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\(^1\) Google Search Results For Tiananmen Square: UK Vs. China (PICTURE). *Huffington Post*
Uploaded 26/11/09  
Accessed 02/11/2011
demographics found that 51% of Israeli Internet users are men and 49% are women. 81% of people with a higher education use the Internet, compared with 71% of the general population (Lev-On. 2011). Furthermore the Worldbank studies into the levels of internet penetration worldwide, displays that Israel has a higher than average percentage of internet users².

While it has been shown that Israel has a high percentage of internet users, the distribution of these skills may be unevenly spread across socio-economic and age brackets. This has already been displayed in the previous paragraph where it was demonstrated that members of the public with higher education are more likely to use the internet (Lev-On 2011). As such social media may be a more effective tool for parties which appeal to a more technologically connected constituency. It has been suggested that the internet may reinforce inequalities, as it allows citizens with greater resources the capacity to become more involved and better informed (Anduiza, Canttijoch, Gallego, 2009).

Lev-On (2011) asserts his belief that Israel is in the middle of an era in which the internet is the key arena for public and political marketing. However, a study by The Marker Newspaper after the Knesset Elections in 2009 showed that although the Israel has high internet usage, the majority of Israelis who surf the internet did not visit party websites, with only 34% claiming to have received information about a party or a candidate through the internet. Israeli internet users who accessed Party websites, did so in order to gain

information about candidates and parties and not for the purposes of becoming actively involved in campaigns (Cohen 2009).

In terms of the usage of Social Media, the 2008 municipal campaigns of Israeli politicians were “characterised by comprehensive usage of Facebook, blogs, websites, and all the tools the internet has to offer.” (Mor, G. 2008) This seems to be in line with the general “Obamanisation”, or “Americanization” of campaign politics (Caspi and Lev 2009). One would expect that the ease of entry into social media platforms as well as the didactic nature of these platforms, which allow politicians a view of the public opinion, as well as make them appear more accountable and responsive, should aid in small political actors gaining parity in exposure with larger political actors. This however, was not the case in the 2009 general elections in Israel, during which Caspi and Lev (2009) point to a “significant assimilation gap” between parties and their constituencies. This is to say, that while parties made use of a large variety of online social media platforms, their respective constituencies did not expose themselves to them. This is clearly evident when one studies the very small number of “friends” of the party’s respective Facebook pages, comments or threads on these pages, as well as videos uploaded, viewed and commented upon on YouTube. For instance, Caspi and Lev (2009) demonstrate that the biggest Facebook page belonged to Kadima with only 5776 “friends”, the 17 posts recorded on the 431 topics is negligible. The second most popular party according to numbers of Facebook “friends” was Meimad or the Greens, who did not succeed in achieving a Knesset seat. Lev-On (2011) further demonstrates that although there was a significant movement toward using YouTube as a campaign platform in the 2009 electoral campaign, the extremely small numbers of video views, channels and comments, displays a clear “assimilation gap” between parties and
their constituencies, as well as the relative ineffectiveness of Social media as a campaign tool in the 2009 elections.

Of further interest to this study is Lev-On’s (2011) assertion that municipal candidates with YouTube presences, tended to compete in constituencies that were less peripheral and that had a high concentration of students. Furthermore, candidates with YouTube Presences were shown to be competing in constituencies with a high number of eligible voters and in constituencies where the electoral race was much closer, relative to candidates without YouTube presences.

**Methodology and Sample Design**

For the purposes of this paper, the parties who won seats in the 2009 general elections were used as the base for the sample studied. This list was buffered by parties mentioned in Azi Lev-On’s paper- *Campaigning Online: Use of the Internet by Parties Candidates and Voters in National and Local Election Campaigns in Israel* (2011 in Policy and Internet). This was done in order to allow for possible comparison between the Lev-On finding and the findings of this article, in the cases of Parties that did not win parliamentary seats. In every example measured, wherever possible, the party studied was grouped with its head and one other party member, with an emphasis on a male female combination. In some instances it was found that while the party did have social media presence, its leader and members did not. Data was gathered in the manner that a general member of public would approach these social media pages, through searches on social media sites. In all instances the pages were confirmed through cross checking them against the social media links on the party’s official websites. This methodology eliminated confusion caused by searches returning more than one clear result.
Problems and Inconsistencies with Data

Social media data is highly dynamic. New members join groups constantly, new videos and other content are being uploaded all the time and everyday thousands of new tweets are posted.

The data presented here was collected over a week period between the 9th and 16th of November 2011. Thus data recorded on the 16th of November (at the end of the collection period) is likely to be slightly greater than data collected on the 9th of November (at the start of the collection period). Because all the data was not collected at precisely the same time, it should be treated as a representation of the trend and not statistically perfect.

Not only are the users dynamics, but the platforms of social media are themselves evolving and changing. In 2009 (when the last Israeli elections were held), most candidates had standard profiles with which constituents could become “friends”, at the time of this data collection most parties and politicians had official “Like Pages”. Consumers support “Like Pages” by clicking on a “Like” button. A few of the pages studied had not been updated into “like” pages and were thus: “Groups”, which are supported through becoming a “member” of the group in question. A group is limited to 300 people, and personal profiles are limited to 3000 friends. By contrast, there is no limit on the amount of people who may “like” a "Like Page". “Liking” a page allows fans of an individual politician or political party to join a Facebook fan club. “Like Pages” look and behave much like a user's personal private profile. Owners can send updates to their fans. They also have access to some insights and analytics of their fan base. Users originally had the option to "become a fan" of the page until 19 April 2010 when the option was later changed to "like" the page.³

As such, this data often compares different versions of similar concepts, due to the inconsistent rate at which political figures update their electronic presence. Yet since there is no significant difference between becoming a member, a friend and “liking”, the different forms can be credibly compared. The act of becoming a friend and “liking” accomplished by clicking on the specific page of the politician/party, and results in the constituent being exposed to messages released by the politician/party.

A second challenge in researching social networking data involves the difficulty of distinguishing official YouTube Channels from other related channels. First, channels are often named in a non-descript manner, making them difficult to locate. If a party or politician claims to have a YouTube Channel, but the channel cannot be easily located, or is indistinguishable from other related channels, then its effectiveness at reaching viewers may be lower than a political channel which is easier for the average user to find. A simple comparison of data shows that two parties may both have a YouTube channel, but one is practically impotent as a producer and messenger of information.

Another problem with YouTube is that many politicians’ channels double as their party channels, such as “LikudNetanyahu”, or “Ehudbarakhaatzmaut”. Other channels may appear to be official yet are fake, such as “yisraelbeiteinu” which is a channel espousing opinions opposed to those of Avigdor Lieberman, the head of Yisrael Beiteenu. Additionally, there may also be multiple channels for particular individuals and organisations, such as “yallakadima”, and “kadima” or Ehudbarak” and “Ehudbarakhaatzmaut”, which can confuse the image for consumers who may be searching for a channel or information.

To correct for these problems, in this study, official channels were found using the parties’ official websites. Channels not linked to on the parties’ official website, were thus
understood to be either out of date and no longer being used (such as EhudBarak’09), or the channels of supporters of the party or politician in question.

Collecting data about political Twitter accounts poses related difficulties. Many profiles on twitter are known to be fakes. For example, a Twitter search for Avigdor Lieberman provides four English profile results all including profile pictures of the politician (only one official) and hundreds of tweets in both English and Hebrew.

**Data Observations**

**Facebook:**

Generally Facebook is the most comprehensive and basic platform in terms of both politicians and parties. Not all subjects had a YouTube or Twitter account, but all the subjects who had a virtual presence at all, had a Facebook page; those who had YouTube and Twitter also had Facebook (but not the reverse).
Facebook Popularity in terms of “Likes”

Graph 1.1

Graph 1.2

Facebook Likes, talking Abouts, Friends/members excluding Netanyahu
Benjamin Netanyahu has the most “likes”, of all the politicians and parties measured. Netanyahu has two pages, one as a politician from the Likud Party, which is run out of the Likud offices and one as the Prime Minister of Israel, which is run out of the office of the Prime Minister. For the purposes of this study both pages are significant, as they are both a means through which Benjamin Netanyahu has access to his constituency. Both profiles have more likes than any other politician or party that was measured for the purposes of this study.

1.3
Yet the Prime Minister’s popularity is not matched by equal levels of Facebook popularity for Likud, his party, which is currently leading the government. In fact, Likud has a relatively low number of likes compared to other parties; with 1443 likes, it is in seventh place amongst all parties examined.
The most popular party on Facebook is Kadima, which was the most successful party in the previous elections yet was unable to form a government. There is a clear trend on Facebook, wherein left-wing parties and politicians seem to enjoy greater following. However, this trend does not hold when studying YouTube and Twitter, wherein there is much less clarity regarding the relative popularity of left or right wing parties and politicians.

When studying the graph representing the Facebook presences of parties in order of the seats they hold in Knesset (graph 1.5), there is a quite clear trend. Kadima, who received the most votes in the general elections are the most supported party in terms of likes. However, following Kadima there is a trend toward an inverse relationship between seats held in Knesset and Facebook friends. In fact, following Kadima, the next most supported party on Facebook is Tzabar with no Knesset seats and then Meretz who hold only 3 seats in Knesset. This may be due to the efforts of smaller parties to gain an equal exposure by investing in their online presences. Thus it seems that if one were to rely solely on Facebook Data, social media does in fact provide a medium through which parties of different size and political clout can gain parity of exposure.

The “Are Talking About This” Metric

The Act of liking/becoming a fan of a page involves only a click. The “Are Talking About This” metric, measures those members/fans who have interacted with the content on the page, and as such may be a more accurate measure of the reach of each of these pages. While it should be noted that all sharing is not positive, negative sharing also demonstrates that information consumers have interacted proactively with content produced.
The politician with the most interactive Facebook page, as measured by the percentage of total fans they have that are “Talking About This” is Ehud Barak (62.5%). Barak is followed by his party “Atzmaut” (38%). Both Barak and Atzmaut have very poor numbers in terms of likes and in terms of electoral polling, yet these two pages appear to be the most interactive. However it should be noted that Benjamin Netanyahu has more “fans” interacting with his page, than Ehud Barak and Atzmaut have “fans” at all. That is to say that in terms of percentages Barak’s page seems very potent, yet in terms of pure quantity of people being exposed to the messages, it is extremely weak. What this does show however, is that, while Barak has fewer Facebook fans, the fans he has are interacting proactively with the content being produced (as is demonstrated by the Graph Below (graph 1.6) entitled “Percentage of Friends ‘Talking About This’”).

1.6
In terms of numbers of visitors interacting with a page, again Benjamin Netanyahu has the two most popular pages (demonstrated in Graph: “Are talking about this,” below), although it should be noted that as a percentage this interaction is actually very weak (as discussed above). Following Netanyahu in number of “Are Talking About This” is Shelly Yachimovich (Labour), Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz) and then TzippiLivneh (Kadima). Again there appears to be a weakness of parties vis-à-vis politicians in generating content with which consumers will interact.

1.7
The data depicting the “Are Talking About This” metric in terms of seats held in Knesset (as shown in Graph entitled “Are Taking About This in Order of Seats Held in Knesset” (graph 1.8)), reveals a similar pattern to the graph depicting “likes” in order of Knesset seats (graph 1.5). Meretz, who hold only three Knesset seats are the most potent producers of information which is “talked about”. Avoda, with 8 Knesset seats are the second most successful, Kadima with 28 seats, is only the third most talked about party. Thus, here again the data seems to point toward a trend in which the less powerful parties are given an equalised opportunity to reach their population through social media. While there is no clear trend in any direction, it is clear that the number of party seats held in Knesset has no positive relationship with the quantity of content being “Talked About”. This is further evident when studying the graph below (graph 1.9), which represents the individual politicians “Talked About” metrics, in order of the number of seats that their parties hold in the Knesset. While it is obvious that Benjamin Netanyahu has a very clear lead, there is no positive trend linking seats held in Knesset to the “Talked About” metric.
1.9

"Are talking about this" Politicians in Order of Seats held by Party They Represent

YouTube

Graph 2.1

YouTube: Channel Views, Registered Members, Videos Uploaded, Total Video Views
Benjamin Netanyahu has the most significant YouTube presence in terms of total video views and channel views. His personal page as Prime Minister is more successful than the page where he represents his party, Likud. The Likud homepage links to the channel “LikudNetanyahu”, which is thus the official Likud channel for the purposes of this study. However, the significance of the naming of the channel “LikudNetanyahu” should not be overlooked as it seems the Likud is basing its strength around the personality of its leader. A similar action has been taken by Haatzmaut (Independence), which link to “ehudbarakhaatzmaut” channel on their official website.

By contrast to the Facebook data, there is no clear difference between the popularity of a party against the popularity of a politician associated with that party. In fact, Kadima, Atzmaut and YisraelBeyteinu are not represented significantly on YouTube, despite the size and importance of these parties in the Knesset. Hadash, Meretz, IchudLeumi, Tzabar and Or, have stronger representation than their relative power in the Knesset would suggest (see graph 2.2 below) In fact Tzabar and Or are not represented at all in the Knesset and it is not clear whether they will compete in the next elections. These are thus parties with significantly weaker electoral situations, yet seem to be investing in YouTube as a social media platform. A further point of interest is the significant number of video views that the Shas channel has received. Significantly, Shas Leader Ellie Yishai does not have his own channel.

The graph depicting the total YouTube performances of Israeli Parties in order of the seats they hold in the Knesset (graph 2.2), displays interesting outcomes. As was the case with Facebook, there seems to be no correlation between seats held in the Knesset and the total video views a party’s channel has received. In fact despite Likud, which has a very strong
channel in terms of video views, the next best performers are Hadash and Shas, which have significantly less seats in the Knesset.

2.2

Amongst the politicians, there are a few surprising results. Again Ehud Barak is outperformed by Member of Knesset Einat Wilf, from his own party. Shelly Yachimovich, has a very strong YouTube presence which is far superior to the other Labour politicians who were measured for the purposes of this study (Yitzchak Hertzog and Amir Peretz). The results do not demonstrate any correlation between the size and importance of the
politician’s party in Knesset, or of the politician within the party, and the success of their YouTube channel in terms of total video views. Thus it may be deduced that in terms of video views, YouTube offers politicians and parties of differing strengths and importance, an equalised level of exposure.

2.4

### Videos Uploaded Metric

![Videos uploaded graph](image_url)
The Videos Uploaded Metric is of interest to this study as it demonstrates the resources that each of the subjects measured invested in their YouTube Channels. The results are quite surprising. The channel with the highest number of video uploads belongs to Einat Wilf, which may explain the high number of video views she has received. Following Einat Wilf is Shelly Yachimovich and only then Likud and Benjamin Netanyahu (as Prime Minister). This may lead into success in the “Registered Members” metric. Registered members demonstrates the number of viewers that are prepared to register to a channel, identifying with the channel and making an active choice to be updated whenever new videos are posted to the channel.
The channel views metric is significant as it demonstrates the number of surfers who actively seek out a channel in which information and videos from an information producer can be easily accessed. This is thus a group who have not stumbled upon a video, but have been proactive in finding content uploaded by a certain entity. The three most successful channels, and as such the three most sought after channels, all belong to Benjamin Netanyahu. The next most popular channel belongs to Anastassia Michaeli of Yisrael Beiteinu, who is in turn followed by Hadash. Anastassia Michaeli has not featured highly in any other metric. It would thus seem that her constituents seek out her messages, alluding to the ease of information production on YouTube. This also may further demonstrate that Michaeli gains equalised exposure through her proactive utilisation of YouTube as a media.

2.7
Twitter

Graph 3.1

3.2

Twitter is the least popular platform for Israeli politicians and parties.

Benjamin Netanyahu is the most popular and most successful Israeli politician in terms of followers on Twitter. Netanyahu is followed by Tzipi Livni, Nitzan Horowitz, Ahmad Tibi and Shelly Yachimovich. Both politicians and parties run Twitter accounts. Twitter data (number of followers) suggests that politicians are more popular than the parties they represent.
The tweets metric demonstrates the degree to which each of the parties and politicians measured here are investing in Twitter as a media platform. Meretz is the most active tweeter (1162 tweets at the time of data collection), followed by Shelly Yachimovich (Labour), who again is amongst the most successful producer of information. Benjamin Netanyahu is only the eighth most prolific “Tweeter”, and is outperformed by his fellow Kadima MK Danny Danon. The low investment of important government ministers and party heads Ehud Barak and Avigdor Lieberman is noteworthy.
When studying the party data (followers and listed) for Twitter, Likud is outperformed by both Kadima and Meretz. The "followers" metric measures the number of Twitter users who chose to follow a certain party and as such be updated any time the party uploads information onto their page. This metric shows Kadima with a healthy lead over all other parties. Kadima is followed by Meretz, the Likud, Avoda, and Ichud Leumi and Or. The order of the popularity of party’s Twitter pages shows that there is no correlation between Seats held in Knesset and Twitter popularity. This once again alludes to smaller parties gaining equality of exposure through the use of social media. If one takes into account the “tweets” metric, measuring the quantity of information each party uploads onto Twitter, then it becomes clear that small parties are actively using Twitter as a medium through which to gain parity in exposure. The party uploading the most information is Meretz, followed by Kadima, Or (no Knesset seats) and then Avoda.
Politicians Use of Twitter

3.5

As discussed above, Benjamin Netanyahu is the most successful politician in terms of twitter followers, once again demonstrating his popularity on social media platforms. However the popularity of politicians in terms of followers exposes a very strange pattern. After the second most popular politician in terms of followers (and first most popular in terms of Knesset seats) Tzippi Livneh, there is no logical pattern to the popularity of politicians. In fact it seems as though “fringe” politicians such as Nitzan Horowitz, Anastassia Michaeli and Dov Khenin, are more likely to be well supported than “mainstream party” leaders such as Avigdor Lieberman and Ehud Barak. Thus it seems deducible that in terms of politicians as well as parties, Twitter allows actors of differing sizes a more equalised exposure to their constituencies.
Does Social Media Equalise Levels of Exposure in Terms of Large and Small Political Actors in Israel?

Through the use of Data collected on Israeli political actors social media pages, this thesis has shown that social media equalises levels of exposure amongst actors of different sizes and economic capabilities in Israel. On Facebook, the relationship between a party’s seats held in the Knesset and their Facebook support as measured according to “likes” and “Friends,” “likes” was shown to be almost inverse. The “Are Talking About This” metric too did not demonstrate any correlation between the seats a party holds in the Knesset and the number of people “Talking About” the information uploaded. This was also true when studying politicians in order of the various strengths of the parties they represent in the Knesset.

The data collected off YouTube also did not show any correlation between the popularity of an actor’s YouTube channel, as measured by video views and registered members, and the power the actor holds in the Knesset. In terms of videos being uploaded, which demonstrates the actor’s investment in social media, again there is no clear trend depicting a correlation between the size and relative power of the actor and the investment the actor makes in this form of media.

Twitter is the least utilised of the media studied in this paper. The results for followers, or the amount of people wishing to be updated when a political actor uploads information, demonstrate that with the exception of Benjamin Netanyahu and Tzippi Livneh, small and less powerful actors are equally as likely to be supported as large powerful actors. The Tweets metric which measures the investment of each actor in this media, reveals that small actors are investing equally and in many cases more, than big actors in Twitter.
Thus through these findings it seems deducible that social media does in fact allow actors of different size and powers equality in terms of exposure. However, the overwhelming success of Benjamin Netanyahu in each of the platforms measured, does seem to prove that although social media allows smaller actors equality in exposure, the large actors - such as is demonstrated by Netanyahu - are still likely to be more successful. Moreover, in each of the metrics measuring the investment of an actor in the platform studied (YouTube: videos uploaded; Twitter: Tweets) Netanyahu has not been the most active user of these platforms. Netanyahu’s success thus seems to come from pure popularity, possibly as a result of the power he wields as Prime Minister. Similarly, Tzippi Livneh does not have her own YouTube channel. However, her presence on Facebook and Twitter is amongst the strongest, seemingly mirroring her success in the previous elections, and the power she and her Party (Kadima) wield as the head of the opposition and the largest group in the Knesset. Conversely however, Meretz and Hadash, which are amongst the smallest parties in Knesset, have robust social media presences in terms of support, yet are shown to also be amongst the most active investors in these media. Thus, despite the possible connection between power held and success in social media platforms, there is a trend indicating that actors of all sizes and degrees of power gain equality in exposure through social media.

**Social Media as a Tool for Encouraging Political Participation.**

As was discussed in the literature review; there are three core theories regarding the impact of the internet as a force encouraging political participation. The first school of thought suggests that the internet will not have any effect on political participation. This theory, the “Normalisation” Theory, states that politically active individuals will merely change their channels of participation from offline to online. According to this theory visitors to a
politically themed website tend not to be neutral, but rather are already entrenched in their political leanings. (Bimber and Davis 2003)

The second school of thought suggests that the internet, through its low cost of entry and mass appeal, is a medium which encourages political participation from previously uninterested individuals (Ward, Gibson and Lusoli, 2003). The network nature of communication on the internet (and especially in social media), is understood to encourage a free exchange of opinions. Thus through this networked structure, the internet is able to create a much more vibrant participatory democratic system. (Chan, 2005)

The third group of theorists, state that the internet will negatively affect political engagement (Putnam, 2000). This theory states that the core purpose of the internet is for entertainment, and as such the internet will lead to declining social capital. A significant point of view is put forward by Castells (2009), who disputes that participation costs are eliminated through internet media, claiming instead that the specific skills that allow actors access to the internet, can be construed as a form of capital, and as such these skills act as a cost of entry into the internet realm.

This study has researched the social media pages of Israeli parties and politicians. The above mentioned theories will thus be tested against the results of this research, in order to ascertain the importance and success of social media in Israel, as a tool for encouraging political participation.
Internet Skills as Social Capital.

The Israeli population is highly connected to the internet. The below graph, taken from information provided by the WorldBank, displays that Israel has a higher than average percentage of the population with internet connectivity.

Graph 4.1

4.2

Internet Users Per 100 People
According to the CIA, Israel has 1,689,000 internet hosts. This places it in 35th place worldwide, which when compared to its population size is a very remarkable statistic. A study undertaken by ComScore.inc revealed that per capita Israel is the second highest internet user in the world. Israeli users spend an average of 2300 minutes on the internet every month (38.3 hours per month).

As such it would seem that Castell’s argument, claiming that internet skills are a form of social capital which excludes certain groups from internet based political participation, does not hold for Israel. However, Israeli society is made up of a wide range of ethnicities and populations. The Israeli party system includes parties which are set up to represent certain traditional and religious groups, as well as differing political ideologies. The penetration of these unique parties into social media, may be seen as a yardstick for the influence of social media in these communities. Thus the effectiveness of social media in encouraging political participation amongst these communities may allow further understanding into the importance of socio-economics, as a barrier to entry into social media. Thus in order to ascertain the importance of internet skills as a social capital encouraging political participation, the lowest socio economic groups in Israel will be studied, namely the Mizrahi, Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) and Arab citizens of Israel.

The Mizrahi Community

The Mizrahi Community (Jews of Middle Eastern and North African origin) have been subjected to a long period of an absorption and modernization efforts, aimed to assimilate them, socially, politically, economically and culturally into the dominant Ashkenazi system. However this campaign was only partially successful and much of the Mizrahi population still remains at the lower end of the Israeli class system (Kimmerling 1999). The dominant
representative party of the Mizrahi community is the Shas party. Shas currently forms part of the coalition government and is led by Ellie Yishai, although influenced by the teaching and thoughts of Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph.

Shas is a party based on ethnically homogenous orthodox elite, and a large periphery of people, who are ethnically homogenous but traditional rather than orthodox. Shas thus represents a population of mostly ethnically homogenous Mizrahi Jews, who remain at the lower end of the class system in Israel. Shas have been very successful in creating institutions such as schools, as well as media platforms such as a radio stations and newspapers such as Yom LYom (Shas Party Homepage).

A review of Shas’ and Ellie Yishai’s social media performance displays an interesting trend. On Facebook, Shas performs poorly, with only 339 friends, a negligible number. Ellie Yishai is represented by a fan page which is not updated. The general penetration into Facebook is thus weak. Furthermore there were no official twitter feeds linked to Ellie Yishai or Shas (although there non official accounts which display that there is a population of surfers who are interested in Shas and who are producing information for Shas). On YouTube however, Shas has particularly strong presence. With 92 thousand video views, Shas are the fourth most popular Israeli political entity on YouTube, as measured by video views. This result is even more impressive when one considers that only 56 videos have been uploaded to the official Shas YouTube Channel.

Despite the large number of channel views that Shas has received, it has a very poor number of registered members – just 19. This implies that viewers may be interested to see their content, but unwilling to identify as a supporter of Shas on YouTube. This can be seen on the graph representing the percentage video views to registration (graph 4.3 below)
which displays that Shas was the worst performer of any of the parties measured. Thus, a tentative conclusion may be reached in which it can be claimed that viewers of the Shas channel are either not supporters of Shas, or are unwilling to identify as such. If this is the case, then Shas are using social media effectively as a tool of campaign, exposing possible new supporters to its message. Historically Shas voters have tended to under state their support for Shas (Bick 2003), and as such in this instance the online trend may directly mirror a proven off-line or real world trend. Internet skills as social capital thus seems to remain an inhibiting factor for the promotion of political participation through the internet, yet the ease of entry and low cost of participation may encourage other constituents with internet skills to become exposed to the messages of the party.

4.3
The Ultra-Orthodox Community

The ultra-orthodox or Haredi Community exist in an almost completely insular society (Kimmerling 1999). While at the start the ultra-orthodox viewed themselves as outsiders to the political system in Israel, over time this group has come to appreciate the need to become embroiled in politics in order to safeguard the particular needs of their society. As such religious parties such as the United Torah Party are willing to enter into coalitions with secular parties in order to maintain control over certain key ministries such as the ministries of religion, education and housing (Kopelowitz 2001). The Religious community remain amongst the poorest communities in Israel with 60% considered to be living below the poverty line (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2010). It should be noted that the Ultra-Orthodox community, being completely insular and separate from most of Israeli society, have separate media platforms and separate education institutions. The most dominant Ultra-Orthodox parties currently are: the United Torah Judaism Party (Yehadut Hatorah Hameuhedet), and the Ichud Leumi (National Union) Party.

In terms of social media penetration Ichud Leumi has a small Facebook presence (610 Friends), but it should be noted that this is an old Facebook page and is not updated. There are no other Ultra-Orthodox parties with Facebook pages, and IchudLeumi head Ya’akov Katz, does not have a private Facebook page. Ichud Leumi runs a YouTube channel which has a modest 7000 video views, and only 21 uploaded videos. However, of interest is the success Ichud Leumi demonstrate in channel views and registered members metrics. Furthermore, Ichud Leumi has demonstrated success in converting video views into registration (as displayed in graph 4.3 entitled “Percentage Video Views to Registration”). This could be understood to demonstrate a trend in which constituents, who are subjected
to Ichud Leumi videos, are willing to identify as registered members. It should be noted that the percentage is very small, only about a half of a percent, yet ranks very highly when compared with all other elements measured. The strength of Ichud Leumi channel views and conversion from video views to registered members, may demonstrate that Ichud Leumi messages are sought out on YouTube. This is of further interest as the low number of uploaded videos demonstrates that the party has not invested greatly in this platform.

Ichud Leumi has a Twitter account which has 83 followers and 58 tweets. These are small numbers when compared with other parties and politicians on Twitter, but are significant in that Twitter is the least popular platform of the three measured for the purposes of this study. As such the mere presence of a Twitter account demonstrates a determined attempt by Ichud Leumi to broadcast information through social media platforms, as it has three separate platforms (Facebook, YouTube and Twitter).

The size, importance and political clout of the Haredi Community is grossly under represented by the presence of only a single party on social media platforms. Furthermore, although there is a genuine attempt to utilise these platforms, the social media presence of this party is very weak when compared with other parties. Thus here again the lack of internet skills amongst the ultra-orthodox population can be understood as an inhibiting lack of social capital. However, it must be stated that social media has allowed Ichud Leumi a wider platform with which to broadcast information to constituents that may be found outside of their traditional support base.
The Arab Citizens of Israel

2011 was a watershed year for social media and social activism. The citizen led uprisings throughout the Arab world were inspired through an increased connectivity and ease of information flow, created by social media platforms and cell phone technology. It is in this light that the social media exposure of the Arab citizens of Israel shall be studied.

The Inter-Disciplinary Centre in Hertzlia, together with Israel Democracy Institute carried out a study in January of 2011 (updated in November 2011) as part of the world Internet Project. As part of this study the digital gap between the Jewish and Arab sectors in Israel was measured. According to this research 38.7% of the Arab sector claim that they are unable to surf the internet (the figure for Jewish citizens is 22.6%). Of unique interest to this study is the low percentage of Arab Youth who claim to be on social networks at least one time a day- 24.2% (the number for the Jewish population is 73%). The low number of Arab youths who visit social network sites should suggest that social media would thus be a weak medium through which to disperse information to this population. However, it should be noted that although the statistics used here are less than 12 months old, Social media in the Arab World is growing in size and importance exponentially (Ghanem 2011). As such it may not be possible to accurately ascertain the importance social media for information dispersion using any form of statistics.

In terms of political representation within the Israeli political system, Arab Citizens of Israel were for a long time left outside of the dominant Zionist Culture. From the independence of the State until 1966 the Arab population was subjected to military rule. Thus, for many years only the Communist Party served as a political outlet for this population. After 1967 the Arab voice in Israeli politics became more significant (Kimmerling 1999), yet Israeli leaders
have never trusted Arab parties as coalition partners (Kopelowitz 2001). Today the most significant Arab Parties in Knesset are: The National Democratic Assembly “Bal’ad”, Raam Ta’al, as well as a few bi-national parties such as Hadash (the new Communist Party) and Meretz. This study has measured the social media data for Arab Israeli Party, Ra’am Taal and its leader Ahmad Tibi, as well as for the Balad Party and its leader Jamal Zahalka.

An overview of the Arab Israeli data represented in this study displays that these parties have very disappointing social media. Ahmad Tibi, is the most successful in terms of Facebook friends, likes and “talking abouts” as well as having the only YouTube channel, and the only active Twitter account (Jamal Zahalka has a Twitter account, but it is inactive since December 2009). As the world becomes more convinced of the power of Social Media as an influence amongst Arab youth, it seems surprising that these politicians and political parties have not attempted to utilise this media in a more effective manner. In fact with the exception of Ahmad Tibi’s Twitter page, all the metrics measured here display Arab parties and politicians to be performing below the mean.

This fact may further point to the importance of internet skills as social capital. Relying on the statistics of the Israel Democracy Institute study, the Arab population are not accessing the internet and social media in the same numbers as the Jewish population. The weak social media accounts of the Arab politicians and parties measured can thus be explained by the limited population that can be influenced through these media.
A lack of internet skills is inhibiting to the promotion of political participation

As Bennett (2003) asserts that the “diverse organisational capacity of the internet” enables users to create affinity networks and are thus likely to form political ties amongst a similarly thinking networked group. The cases of the Mizrahi, Haredi and Arab citizens of Israel, demonstrate the importance of internet skills as social capital. The ease of entry into social media and low cost of information production is thus proven to be impotent when broadcasting to populations with low internet skills. This, it seems was the assumption made by municipal candidates in the 2009 municipal elections, in which Lev-On (2011) found that candidates with YouTube presences, tended to compete in constituencies that were less peripheral and that had a high concentration of students.

Low cost of Entry and Political Participation

It is generally accepted that the internet and social media in particular, are media with low costs of entry for information producers. Those wishing to broadcast messages have the potential to reach millions of consumers, through a medium in which entry is free of charge. As displayed above, there exists a school of theorists who hold that through the low cost of entry and wide appeal of internet media, political participation is encouraged. This group of theorists state that previously uninterested individuals are bound to become exposed to politics and participate in politics. The networked and didactic nature of social media encourages open exchanges of opinions, allowing for a vibrant participatory democratic debate. Traditional media, through its vertical (spoke and node) structure, cannot foster discussion and as such does not espouse contrary thought.
Applying this school of thought to the data collected, one should be able to view a disproportionate reach of small and fringe parties through their social media. If this theory is to be proven true in the Israeli political context, then politicians and parties without widespread support and large capital, should be able to broadcast their messages to consumers that would otherwise not be exposed to their messages, or alternately not be politically active at all.

The first part of this thesis demonstrated that small and large parties in Israel received parity of exposure through effectively utilising social media,

“Thus, despite the possible connection between power held and success in social media platforms, there is a trend indicating that actors of all sizes and degrees of power gain equality in exposure through social media.”

Upon viewing the graphs displaying the reach each party gains per seat it has in Knesset, which for this purpose is used as a measure of the power, size and reach of the party, it becomes clear that the smaller parties are relatively more potent at gaining support on social media. (displayed below)
4.4

Facebook Likes/Friends Per Seat in Knesset

- Likud: 27 seats
- Yisrael Beytenu: 15 seats
- Shas: 8 seats
- Avoda: 8 seats
- Atzmaut: 5 seats
- Hadash: 4 seats
- Ikhud Leumi: 4 seats
- Meretz: 3 seats
- Balad: 2 seats
- Tzabar: 0 seats
- Ale Yarok: 0 seats
- HAMIT: 0 seats
- The Greens: 0 seats

4.5

YouTube Views Per Seat in Knesset

- Likud: 27 seats
- Yisrael Beytenu: 15 seats
- Shas: 11 seats
- Atzmaut: 5 seats
- Ehud Barak (Haatza'ad): 4 seats
- Hadash: 4 seats
- Ikhud Leumi: 4 seats
- Meretz: 3 seats
In every case displayed above, parties with strong Knesset representation were not discovered to be the most strongly supported on social media. Thus it can be proven that small and less powerful parties have disproportionate reach and exposure through social media.

The Data collected does not display whether the users of social media visiting each platform are new to political media or not. In fact it is difficult to ascertain how this could be proven or disproven. According to the Israel Democracy Institute study, which was referenced in relation to the internet behaviour of the Arab Citizens of Israel, 73% of Jewish Israeli youth claim to be on social networks at least one time a day (the number for the Arab population is 24.2%). This statistic shows that a large percentage of Israeli Youth (especially Jewish Youth) are visiting social media sites. However, this cannot prove that they are exposed to political information on these media. Furthermore, of the population using social media as a tool for consuming political information, it is near impossible to state whether they would be active without these media.
In her article: *Stimulating or Reinforcing Political Interest: Using Panel Data To Examine Reciprocal Effects Between News Media and Political Interest*, Boulianne (2011) argues that exposure to news media on the internet causes increased political interest. Furthermore, the increased political interest and engagement tends to occur amongst previously uninterested individuals. That is to say that the causal flow is from online political news to political interest and engagement of previously uninterested and unengaged consumers. Social media, as a forum in which news and information is openly shared, can be understood to be a part of this causal flow. In fact, the increased open sharing of information may be seen as fast tracking the positive relationship between online news and political interest. However, in the Israel Democracy Index for 2011, only 23.5% of the total population believed political blogs and internet forums to be somewhat or very important source of information when forming an opinion (Herman 2011). The Democracy Index displays that the belief that an individual and his friends can affect political decisions has fluctuated and waned, yet not moved with any clear trend since 2005 (the birth of social media). Thus if Boulianne’s argument claiming that exposure to internet news and media positively causal to political interest is correct, then the above statistics demonstrate that there is no proof that social media causes an increase in political interest.

In terms of political participation, Israel has a rank of 3 out of 27, placing it very near to the top of the scale worldwide (Herman 2011), as well as ranking above the centre in terms of democratic political culture. Furthermore as a trend there has been no change in the state of the Israeli public’s commitment to democracy or it feeling toward it. The above statistics thus tend to disprove Putnam’s assumption that the internet will be detrimental to political participation. On the contrary, The Israel Democracy Institute show that interest in politics
(to a large extent and to some extent) as a percentage of the total sample tested in the 2011 democracy index has grown significantly to reach 78.8%, the highest rate yet recorded. However, the low point of this statistic occurred in 2008, which was well into the social media age, and preceding the 2009 elections, which are a point at which politicians were making very active use of social media platforms. Moreover, according to the democracy index, the high interest in politics has not lead to any growth in support for a political party, with only 7.1% of the sample claiming active membership in a party. Thus it seems that although there is increased interest in politics, this interest may not be translating into political activity. This discrepancy between keen interest in politics and a low active involvement in politics has not been altered by social media.

Previously Uninterested Individuals?

The theory that social media and the internet on a whole will encourage previously uninterested individuals to become politically involved is problematic to prove empirically. Firstly it is very difficult to ascertain which segments of the population were politically uninterested. As the data from the Israel Democracy Institute demonstrates, there has always been a very high level of political interest in Israel, which has not moved in any clear direction since the dawn of the social media age. Furthermore, it is difficult to prove a cause for the conversion from politically “uninterested” to politically “interested”.

Voter turnout at elections is one concrete method of measuring the physical participation of a population in the political process. Since the general elections in 1996 there has been a trend of decreasing voter turnout (Israel Bureau of Statistics)\(^4\). However, the percentage of the population who voted in the general elections of 2009-64.7% was slightly greater than

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that of 2006- 63.5%. Significantly, this increase is contrary to what had been a very clear trend of diminishing voter turnout. Practically this represents an increase of about 230,000 voters, in a year in which there had been an increase of 264,000 in the number of eligible voters. An increase in number of voters which nearly mirrors the increase in number of eligible voters, may indeed point to an increase in the number of youths voting (newly eligible voters) and may thus be explainable through the impact of social media, and its power over the previously politically uninterested. Despite this, the causal effect of social media on the increase in voter turnout cannot be proven empirically, and may merely be coincidental.

4.7
Thus, while it is true that empirically this thesis is constrained from assuming that the increase in voter turnout at the 2009 elections has its cause in the impact of social media, there are certainly points which tend toward this conclusion. The 2009 elections which were the first elections to be properly contended on social media platforms (Caspi and Lev, 2009), are also the first elections since 1996 in which the percentage of voters increased.

As has been shown, in the 2009 elections the number of voters eligible to vote increased by nearly the same number as voters increased. This seemingly points to a significant increase in the youth vote, as the youth are amongst the largest population who become eligible to vote between elections. Furthermore the difference between the number of newly eligible voters and the increase in voters in the election is the smallest since 1988, and represents a massive increase in previously ineligible (mainly youth) voting, which clearly had a decreasing trend. Therefore, although this cannot be proven, it seems that social media has indeed caused previously politically uninterested populations to become interested in
politics. Certainly, there has been an increase in physical political participation in the form of voting since the entrance of social media.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to prove two hypotheses:

**H1**: Social media equalizes levels of exposure among large and small parties in Israel.

**H2**: Israeli Political Actors use of Social media affects voters’ political participation positively as is according to the theories of political participation and the internet, discussed in this thesis.

The first hypothesis was examined through the collection of data regarding relevant political actors in Israel and their various social media platforms. While there were differences in some of the trends across different social media platforms, such as a dominance of the left on Facebook which was not mirrored on YouTube or Twitter, the data did clearly portray an equalisation of exposure for actors of different sizes and scopes across all the social platforms measured.

On Facebook, the relationship between a parties seats held in Knesset and their Facebook support as measured according to “likes” and “Friends,” “likes” was shown to be almost negatively correlated. The data collected off of YouTube also did not show any correlation between the popularity of an actor’s YouTube channel, as measured by video views and registered members, and the power the actor holds in the Knesset. The results recorded for Twitter followers, or the amount of people wishing to be updated when a political actor uploads information, demonstrates that with the exception of Benjamin Netanyahu and
Tzippi Livneh, small and less powerful actors are equally as likely to be supported as large powerful actors.

Thus through these findings it seems deducible that social media does in fact allow actors of different size and powers equality in terms of exposure. The overwhelming success of Benjamin Netanyahu in each of the platforms measured, does seem to prove that although social media allows smaller actors equality in exposure, the large actors- such as such as is demonstrated by Netanyahu- are still likely to be more successful. Similarly, although Tzippi Livneh does not have her own YouTube channel, her presence on Facebook and Twitter is amongst the strongest of all those measured, mirroring her success in the previous elections, and the power she and her Party (Kadima) wield as the head of the opposition and the largest group in the Knesset. Conversely however, Meretz and Hadash, which are amongst the smallest parties in Knesset, have robust social media presences in terms of support, yet are shown to also be amongst the most active investors in these media. Thus, despite the possible connection between power held and success in social media platforms, this thesis has proven the hypothesis claiming that actors of all sizes and degrees of power gain equality in exposure through social media.

The second hypothesis was examined through reviewing theories of the internet (and social media) and its capacity to encourage participation against data collected and published regarding the Israeli case. Firstly this paper examined the social media behaviour of political actors representing the lowest socio economic population groups in Israel, as a measure of the importance of internet skills as social capital. This was done in order to prove or disprove Castell’s (2009) argument that a lack of internet skills would prove to be a constraint on populations with low socio economic levels, and as such the ease of
information production and low cost of entry of the internet will not reach all populations equally. This paper found that there indeed was inferior social media presences in the cases of political actors representing particular social groups (Mizrahi, Ultra-Orthodox and Arab) with low socio economic statuses. The ease of entry into social media and low cost of information production was thus shown to be impotent when broadcasting to populations with low internet skills.

Secondly this paper sought to test the theory that a low cost of entry onto social media platforms and the wide reach of these platforms would encourage increased political interest and political participation—especially amongst previously uninterested individuals. It was confirmed again that small and medium parties are able to gain a parity of reach through active use of social media. This paper utilised the Israel Democracy Index (IDI) as a means through which to study the trends in political interest and activity. According to the IDI, 78.8% of Israelis are interested in politics to some extent, and as a trend there has been no change in the state of the Israeli public’s commitment to democracy or it feeling toward it. The above statistics thus tend to disprove Putnam’s assumption that the internet will be detrimental to political participation. However, the low point for the political interest statistic occurred in 2008, a year in which social media usage for political purposes was high.

This paper continued to debate the claim that social media would be positive for political participation as it caused previously uninterested individuals to become interested in politics. Firstly an argument was laid out in which it was highlighted that it is in fact very difficult to ascertain which portions of the population can be considered to be previously uninterested. However, if one were to use voting statistics as a measure of positive political participation, it can be seen that in fact there was an increase in voter turnout in the 2009
elections. This is significant as it shows a reversal of the trend of diminishing voter turnout preceding those elections. Furthermore this paper examined the number of voters who became eligible to vote between elections against the increase in voter turnout and found the numbers to be similar. This, while not proven, seemingly points to a vast increase in the number of youths voting. Furthermore this paper found a significant decrease in the gap between the growth of voter turnout and the growth in the number of eligible voters, which had been growing election on election.

In conclusion, as has been demonstrated in this paper, social media does allow parties of all sizes equality in terms of exposure, and thus hypothesis 1 is proven. The statistics used by this paper display an increase in political participation since the entrance of social media. Thus, it is clear that social media has not been detrimental to political participation, as was Putnam’s theory. However, as discussed in the paper, the causal effect between social media and this increase cannot be linked without a shadow of a doubt. As such Hypothesis 2 remains unproven, yet not disproven.

Further Observations and Areas for Possible Future Research

The research undertaken in this paper has highlighted a few interesting trends that are worthy of mentioning, and may be worthy of further study.

Females were consistently shown to have robust and active social media platforms. This may be due to the desire of these actors to be seen as more personable and approachable, or may have its roots elsewhere.
Benjamin Netanyahu would win an election based on social media statistics by a landslide. Yet this does not translate to his popularity in real world polling. Is social media thus very far removed from the reality of the physical world? Is Netanyahu attempting to up his popularity through the use of social media? If Netanyahu is so robustly supported on the internet, why is this support not translating into poll results?

There is a very clear trend toward the highlighting of the politician ahead of his party on social media. This is obvious when one studies the name of YouTube channels such as “EhudBarakhaatzmaut”, or “LikudNetanyahu.” Furthermore in most cases, the politician measured was more popular than his party. This may be in line with a growing trend toward personalisation of politics and a view that in Israel the population vote for politicians and not for the Party they represent. The personalisation of politics was thus an interesting trend that came to light during the undertaking of this research, and there is room for further investigation into this trend.

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