Israeli Parties and Party Leaders on Facebook during the 2013 Election Campaign

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Abstract

During the 2013 elections in Israel one of the major methods of interaction of the political parties and their leaders with potential voters was through their Facebook pages. These pages were followed for 50 days preceding the elections. For each page, 30% of the posts on the page were analyzed in terms of their rhetoric and subject. The largest number of the analyzed posts was intended for bonding with the audience, and unsurprisingly politics was the most frequent topic. The findings show that personal posts received the largest number of likes pointing to the personal nature of the elections. Findings were compared with results of analysis of the Facebook pages of the US Presidential candidates. Similarities were found, even though in Israel there is a party system and elections are not personal.

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1   Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public online profile within a bounded system and to form a connection with other network members (boyd & Ellison, 2007). These sites have become so influential that in many cases they help shape the way individuals think, interact, behave and organize their lives (Sevin, Kimball & Khalil, 2011). Hence, these sites have developed into influential platforms that can rapidly disseminate innovative information (Halu et al., 2013; Hanson, et al, 2010). According to the Pew Internet Project 73% of online adults use SNS; of them 71% use Facebook (Duggan & Smith, 2013) and 39% use SNS for some kind of political activity (Rainie, 2012). The role that SNS play in politics and political behavior has been investigated in prior research. A number of studies have analysed the effects of SNS on civic engagement and political participation (Andersen & Medaglia, 2009; Gil de Zuñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Vitak, et al., 2011). Other studies have examined the use of SNS as platforms that enabled social protests around the world (Jones, 2011; Madrigal, 2011; Shaheen, 2008; Ulrich, 2011). In some cases, studies have focused on the use of SNS for political purposes or during elections in specific countries or regions such as the European Parliament (Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2013), the US (Esposito, 2012; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010), Korea (Hsu & Park, 2012), Scotland (Baxter, Marcella & Varfis, 2011), and Finland (Strandberg, 2011). The current study proposes a different approach to the study of the use of SNS for political purposes by analyzing the content of SNS pages of Israeli parties and politicians. The analysis using the Aristotelian language of persuasion that consists of three elements: ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion) and logos (reason) as well as the subjects that politicians and political parties discuss in their pages. This mode of persuasion has been used as a framework of analysis in other studies analyzing terror imaging (Derian, 2005), midwifery care (Domajnko, Drglin, & Pahor 2011), social environmental reports (Higgins & Walker, 2012), WikiLeaks comments (Aharony, 2012) and identification of political talk in YouTube (English, 2011).

2   Literature Survey

The role that SNS have played as political platforms during elections has developed over the years probably because of their primacy and recency which are key components in voter mobilization (Panagopouluos, 2011). Primacy refers to the significance of the issue or candidate to a potential voter whereas recency refers to the time component that impacts the effectiveness of a message or call to action. Previous research suggests that communication technologies can impact primacy and recency more directly because communication technology enables campaign staff to target messages to specific users (influencing primacy) and to bridge time/distance (influencing recency) more effectively (Dale & Strauss, 2009; Panagopoulous, 2011; Michelson, et al., 2009).

Although e-campaigning has been used since the Clinton/Gore campaign in 1992 (Carpenter, 2010) most of these campaigns were characterized by Web 1.0 principles, that is, they were one-sided, hierarchical processes in which static content derived exclusively from the party or the politician was directed to the public (Lappas, Kleftodimos, & Yannas, 2010; Vergeer et al., 2013). Stomer-Galley (2014) provides a detailed account of US presidential campaigning in the Internet era. With the advent of social media that allow a bottom-up approach, content sharing and therefore a more direct interaction between the politician and the public, politicians and political parties have begun to use social media sites such as SNS to pursue their own interests, publish their own opinions and connect directly with the people thus circumventing the traditional autonomous news media (Keat, 2012; Vergeer et al., 2013). SNS have been found to be more user-centered than traditional media allowing new types of political interactions that were not possible in previous presidential campaigns (Hanson et al., 2010). There are a number of characteristics of SNS that foster political communication. First, as Williams & Gulati (2013) asserted, SNS can go beyond communicating the campaign's message because "active engagement by the candidate and a well-maintained site can make the candidate more accessible and seem more authentic" (p. 67). Second, SNS are much more affordable than campaigning through traditional media because most of the SNS infrastructure is already available without any effort from the candidate (Gueorguieva, 2008). Third, SNS have become a very effective platform for the recruitment of volunteers, for the mobilization of voters and for fund-raising (Bronstein, 2013; Greyes, 2011). Last, because SNS collect large amount of data about their users they are well suited for sending tailored messages to specific groups of voters (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Moreover, Keat (2012) asserted that politicians are aware of the marketing potential of SNS that allow them to make a case of the legitimacy of their candidacy by revealing the number of supporters. Politicians wishing to appear as the central node in a network of supporters can reach out to their supporters' friends and connections on that social network (Dalsgaard, 2008). Erikson (2008) compared the number of supporters a politician has on a SNS to the actual pools and these numbers accord status to the politician. However, with all their advantages, SNS pose a new set of challenges for campaign staff, because of the risk involved in the reduced level of control campaigns they have over their candidate's image. A number of studies investigating the use of SNS in election campaigns found that political parties' adoption of SNS as a campaign tool resembles a hybrid "Web 1.5" model where parties incorporate some of the Web 2.0 features but retain firm control of the user and networking effects (Bronstein, 2013; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Kalnes, 2009; Lappas et al, 2010).

3   Objectives and Research Questions

Most of the past research has investigated the impact SNS have on elements of political behaviour such as political engagement or political self-efficacy, however, the use of social networks as platforms for the dissemination of information by politicians in electoral campaigns has yet to be researched in depth. The purpose of this paper is to extend the existing literature on the subject by identifying the use patterns of SNS of Israeli parties and politicians in the 2013 Israeli general elections. The specific research questions examined were as follows:

1. What topics are covered in the posts? What rhetoric categories are used? Are there differences regarding topics and rhetoric between SNS pages of parties and SNS pages of party leaders?
2. Do the distribution of subjects and rhetoric categories differ according to political affiliation (left-right, religious-secular)?

4   Research Setup

The elections to the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) were held on January 22, 2013. The elections in Israel are based on party-list proportional representation. At this election the major online platform for communicating with the voters was Facebook. The websites usually contained only static information. Some parties did not even have a website. We followed the parties' and the party leaders' Facebook pages for 50 days, between December 5, 2012 and January 23, 2013 (the day after the election) for the major Israeli parties. The ultra-orthodox Yahadut Hatora did not have either a Facebook page or a website. In addition we did not follow the Facebook pages of the Arabic parties because of language limitations.

For each party, we located both the Facebook page of the party, and the Facebook page of the party leader. For Shas (Sfarad's Guards of the Torah) – an orthodox religious political party (Shas, 2014), we monitored the Facebook pages of two of its leaders, Arye Dery and Eli Yishai. HADASH is a Jewish

and Arab socialist political party (Hadash, 2014). We followed only its Hebrew language Facebook page, and the Facebook of Dov Khenin, the third on the HADASH list, because the Facebook page of the party leader, Mohammad Barakeh was in Arabic.

We monitored the number of posts, the number of likes, comments and shares of these posts (these were captured a day after the posts were published). The content of 30% of the posts was analyzed by the three authors. The content categories were collaboratively decided based upon the categorization used in (Bronstein, 2013) and adapted for the current context. Similarly to Bronstein (2013), we identified both the rhetorical perspective (Green, 2004) and the subject of each post. Data were analyzed to look for elements of the Aristotelian language of persuasion (Green, 2004): Ethos, Pathos, and Logos. The current study refers to two of the three themes: Ethos and Pathos.

1. Ethos: an ethical approach that tries to convince the audience of the candidate's or party's credibility. Posts included in this theme attempt to create a specific image of the candidate or the party, by exposing his/her/their accomplishments, life story and future plans. Posts coded under this theme were classified under the following two categories:

    •   Candidate image: the way that the politician presents himself/herself to the public. Past and present versus future, activities, achievements, roles, including posts about their personal lives, and families.

    •   Party image: the way that the party presents itself to the public.

    •   Expression of opinion: personal opinion or criticism (when they criticize competitors or present an opinion, not when they talk about themselves).

2. Pathos: an emotional approach that tries to persuade the audience by appealing to their emotions, by creating fear, sympathy or anger. The posts use vivid language as a persuasive way to reach the audience. Posts coded under this theme were classified under the following three categories:

•   Positive image of audience: takes place as the candidate flatters the audience

•   Homophily: causes the audience to identify with the candidate while creating a bond between them

•   Creation of fear: persuades the audience by presenting possible menacing future scenario.

While analyzing the posts an additional theme was found: announcements - messages candidates would like to convey to their audience. We also added an "other" category for the few cases that did not fit any of the previously defined ones.

The next stage of the content analysis identified the subjects depicted in the posts analysed. To some posts we assigned more than one subject or rhetoric category. There were 800 subject assignments, and 844 assignments of the rhetoric perspective for the 775 posts that were analyzed. Each of the three researchers analyzed seven Facebook pages of both leaders and parties. The initial coding scheme was developed after the analysis of about 10% of data. As the coding scheme developed the three researchers revised the scheme in two additional occasions until it was clear that no new categories were appearing in the data so the final category scheme was completed.   The final percentage of agreement for all coding decisions was 90%, which suggests that the coding classification used was reliable.

Following are the subject categories revealed in the analysis of the data:

a) Economy: economic indicators or data and/or the candidate's or party's proposals on economic issues

b) Environment: environmental issues or problems and/ or presenting the candidate's or the party's proposals on the subject

c) Equal opportunity: social inequality regarding army service, tax evasion, as well as religious/secular issues

d) Israeli-Palestinian conflict: ramifications and consequences of the conflict.

e) Jewish identity: definition/discussion of Jewish identity

f) National security: matters of national security

g) Personal life of candidate : candidates' personal life, their family, travels, and personal activities

h) Politics: varied political issues such party's policy, as party or coalition debate and/or conflict, right-left differences, entry into the government

i) Social aspects: all other social issues that are not categorized under 'equality of burde

j) Other

5 Results

The content analysis of the data consisted of both textual and statistical findings. The quantitative findings are presented first followed by the qualitative findings.

5.1 Quantitative Findings

We monitored twenty Facebook pages: nine party pages and eleven pages of the party leaders. The religious party HaBayit HaYehudi did not have a party Facebook page; all Facebook communication was through its leader's, Naftali Benett's Facebook page. The newly formed party Yesh Atid's Facebook page was only used for English language posts, all Facebook communication in Hebrew was through its leader, Yair Lapid's personal Facebook page. We monitored eight Facebook pages of left-wing parties and party leaders, four pages of right wing parties/party leaders, six pages belonging to mid-stream parties/party leaders and four pages belonging to religious parties/leaders.

From each Facebook page, 30% of the posts that appeared during the 50 day period were randomly selected for content analysis. This resulted in analyzing 775 posts out of 2590. Table 1 displays some basic characteristics of the analyzed posts.

Name	Type	Affiliation	Knesset seats	No. posts analyzed	Average likes per post	Average comments per post	Average shares per post
HaBait HaYehudi	party	religious	12				
Naftali Bennett	*leader*	religious		29	4,036	136	359
Hadash	party	left	4	51	134	3	24
Dov Khenin	*leader*	left		46	347	7	45
Hatnua	party	center	6	84	50	2	4
Tzipi Livni	*leader*	center		62	724	33	53
Kadima	party	center	2	27	129	11	20
Shaul Mofaz	*leader*	center		25	313	13	35
Labor Party	party	left	15	26	186	8	44
Shelly Yachimovich	*leader*	left		35	1,369	114	247
Likud	party	right	20	25	560	38	85
Benjamin Netanyahu	*leader*	right		38	5,616	249	495
Meretz	party	left	6	68	516	9	77
Zehava Galon	*leader*	left		46	516	13	68
Shas	party	religious	11	45	91	3	6
Arye Dery	*leader*	religious		26	624	32	59
Eli Yishai	*leader*	religious		24	174	8	8
Yesh Atid	party	center	19	15	28	2	12
Yair Lapid	*leader*	center		23	1,630	418	211
Yisrael Beytenu	party	right	11	58	283	6	22
Avigdor Liberman	*leader*	right		22	1,636	64	80

Table 1. Basic characteristics of the analyzed posts: Parties in alphabetical order, leader(s) of party below party

We see that Hatnua party posted the largest number of items; while the number of likes, comments and shares per post was among the lowest. Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu's posts were the most popular both in terms of likes and shares. It can be seen that Netanyahu's Facebook page was the center of activity for the Likud party. The posts of Yair Lapid received the greatest number of comments on average. We see little correlation between the number of posts, likes, comments and shares and the actual number of seats they won at the elections (Knesset seats). It can also be seen that for all parties the posts of the leaders were more popular than the posts on the party Facebook (only for Meretz where they were equally popular).

In terms of post topics, the majority of the posts were categorized as 'politics', dealing with the forthcoming elections (see Figure 1). The rhetoric perspective had a more even distribution as can be seen in Figure 2.
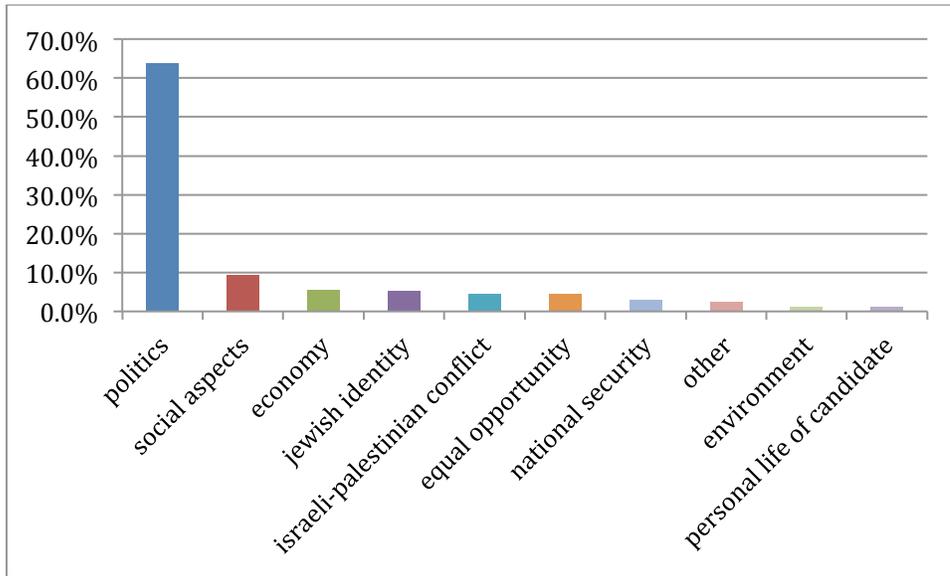

Figure 1. Distribution of the subject categories in percentages
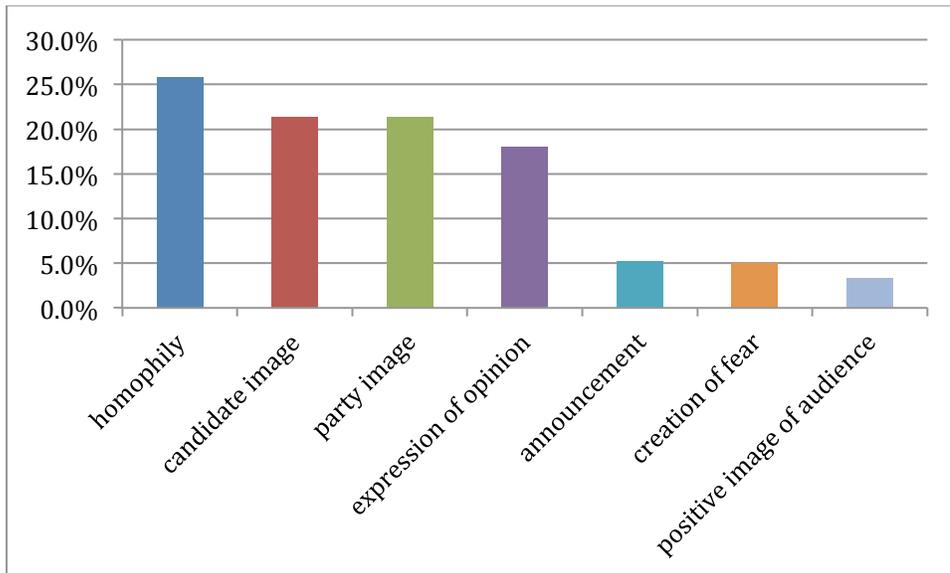

Figure 2. Distribution of the rhetoric perspective in percentages

There were differences in the distribution of the rhetoric perspective when considering leaders versus parties. Party leaders emphasized more their image and expressed their opinion on various issues, while parties concentrated on the party image and on bonding with the audience (homophily), as can be seen in Table 2. In terms of topics, the differences between leaders and parties were much less pronounced.

5

	leader	% out of leaders' posts (N=409)	party	% out of party posts (N=435)
announcement	17	4.2%	27	6.2%
candidate image	109	26.7%	71	16.3%
creation of fear	19	4.6%	23	5.3%
expression of opinion	94	23.0%	58	13.3%
homophily	90	22.0%	128	29.4%
party image	62	15.2%	118	27.1%
positive image of audience	18	4.4%	10	2.3%

Table 2. Rhetoric of parties versus leaders

In terms of topics versus political affiliation, the economic situation and national security was discussed more intensely right wing pages, while equal opportunity and social aspects were topics that were emphasized more by center and left wing parties and their leaders.

	center	N=260	left	N=300	religious	N=141	right	N=143
announcement	16	6.2%	23	7.7%	4	2.8%	1	0.7%
candidate image	60	23.1%	46	15.3%	36	25.5%	38	26.6%
creation of fear	9	3.5%	3	1.0%	21	14.9%	9	6.3%
expression of opinion	41	15.8%	67	22.3%	18	12.8%	26	18.2%
homophily	69	26.5%	90	30.0%	37	26.2%	22	15.4%
party image	56	21.5%	65	21.7%	18	12.8%	41	28.7%
positive image of audience	9	3.5%	6	2.0%	7	5.0%	6	4.2%

Table 3: Rhetoric by political affiliation

Finally, we also compared the average number of likes, comments and shares per post for the different rhetoric (Figure 3) and subject categories (Figure 4). It seems that the audience enjoyed most being flattered ("positive image of audience"). Besides this the audience responded actively when the candidates or the parties used the ethos rhetoric, either by building their image or by expressing their opinion. For the topics, the topic that got the highest number of likes, posts and comments by far is the personal life of the candidate.
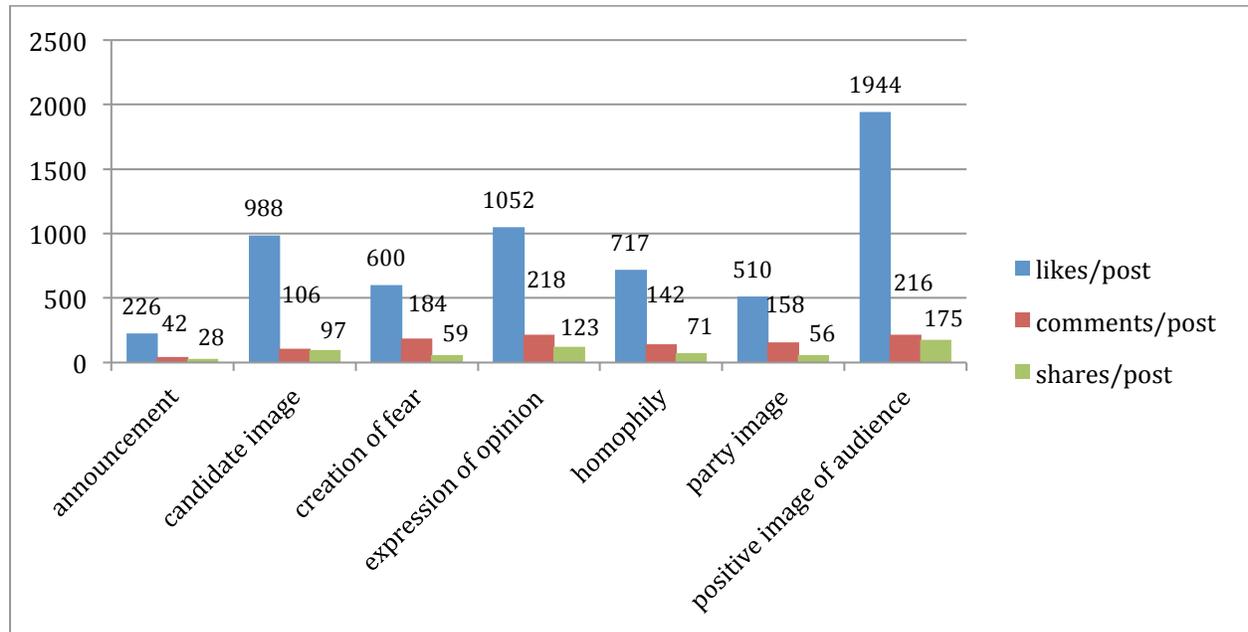
Figure 3: Average number of likes, comment and shares per post in the different rhetoric categories
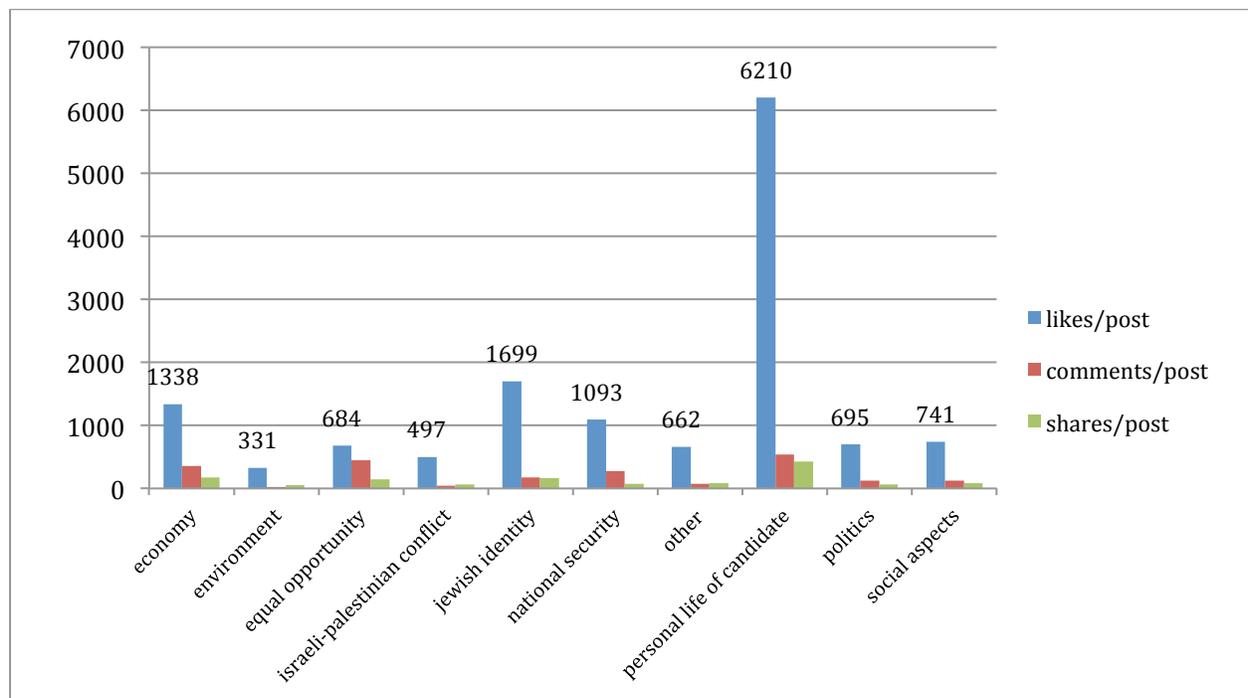

Figure 4. Average number of likes, comment and shares per post in the different subject categories

The Kruskall-Wallis tests for likes, comments and shares are all significant (p<.001) when comparing the different rhetoric categories. The pairwise tests for likes show that the announcement category is significantly lower than all the other categories, except for creation of fear; positive image of audience is significantly higher than announcement, creation of fear and party image and expression of opinion differs significantly from announcement, creation of fear, homophily and party image. For comments and shares, only announcement is significantly different from all the other categories except for creation of fear. All the above mentioned pairwise comparisons are significant at least at p<.05 and are adjusted.

5.2   Qualitative Findings

5.2.1   Rhetorics

Ethos

<u>Candidate image:</u>
Avigdor Liberman (the leader of a right-wing party) presents himself focusing on national issues that are important to him as well as to his audience:
> "You are invited to watch my visit to the Cave of the Partriarchs in Hebron, this week".

Zehava Galon (leader of a left-wing party) describes her efforts to continue the political peace process with the Palestinians:
> "Today, I was in Ramallah and met Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinians. We presented our common vision about peace in the Middle-East".

<u>Party image:</u>
Benjamin Netanyahu (the Prime Minister) used this ethos element to portray his party's achievements in the last four years:
> "In the last 4 years we have done a lot for the State of Israel, among others we have doubled the release grant for soldiers who defend- the country".

To enhance his image as a prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu praises his government's accomplishments:
> "Over the past four years we have invested billions in paving highways, intersections, and trains. We have worked to make the Galilee and the Negev accessible to the center, and continue to strive to connect our country".

Arye Dery, (the leader of a religious party) introduces one of the main social issues that concern his party: the elderly population in Israel:
> "One of the most important issues that our party would like to focus on is the care for the elderly. We will introduce new legislation concerning the elderly. It is not an election promise, it is our duty based on the commandment: 'honor thy father and thy mother' ".

<u>Expression of opinion:</u>
Meretz (a left-wing party) addresses the political situation:
> "This week seven years ago, Prime Minister Sharon lost his consciousness. When I look at the state of Israel today and at the state of Israel it could have been with Prime Minister Sharon, I feel a great sorrow. Ariel Sharon has understood the responsibility of being a prime minister; therefore he supported the creation of a Palestinian state next to Israel".

Pathos

<u>Positive image of audience:</u>
Tzipi Livni (leader of a center party) flatters the audience:
> "First, I would like to thank you. You really deserve it. This applause is for you and not for me…."

Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the new pilots of the Israeli air force:
> "In the name of the citizens of Israel, I salute the new pilots who graduated today their training course".

<u>Homophily:</u>
The Meretz party (left-wing party) created an emotional bond with its voters:
> "We are Meretz. Who are you? Send your photos to our Instagram account and tag it: votemeretz#".

Eli Yishai (leader of a religious party) causes the voters to identify with him as he blesses them:
> "A good week for all of you, and have a happy Hanukkah".

<u>Creation of fear:</u>
Shaul Mofaz (leader of a center party) criticizes the current Prime Minister (Benjamin Netanyahu) and his government:
> "I read the interview with the previous head of the intelligence and I am worried about what he said. I know this person for many years and he is a serious-minded person. He talked about the process of decision making in Israel, and he is not satisfied with what is going on. … ".

Meretz party dealing with the main issues of the election
> "The current election focuses on major issues. If we do not agree with the idea of two countries to two nations, Israel will not survive…".

5.2.2   Topics

National Security:
> "A reliable leadership should care about the national Israeli interests.   The prime minister will continue taking care of the essential interests, needed in order to keep the Israeli citizens' security." (Benjamin Netanyahu)

Israeli-Palestinian conflict:
> "The most important element that Tzipi Livni proposed today is the recognition in the Palestinian country." (Shelly Yachimovich)

Politics:
> "Editorial article in "Haaretz": It is the most important thing to vote in the coming election. Meretz has presented the best political platform, addressing withdrawing from the occupied territories, dividing the country into two countries, separating religion from politics and empowering the Arabic minority" (Naftali Bennett)

Economy:
> "In the last four years Israel's economy grew more than all other western economies. While some of the European economies are in a desperate situation, we created more than 350,000 new jobs and reduced the unemployment to its lowest degree in the last few years." (Benjamin Netanyahu)

Equal opportunity: This topic refers to the currently existing inequality in the army enlistment requirements in Israel.
> "If you care about equal opportunity, you have only one address. Everyone should enlist the army or be recruited to a national or civil service. Everyone should study and work. It is not an anti-religious statement; I demand it from myself and from my kids." (Yair Lapid)

Jewish identity:
> "This week we celebrate the miracle of light, despite those who wish to extinguish the mighty flame of the Jewish people. Israel as a nation stands stronger than ever. We will continue to serve as a source of light that guides the Jewish people, as it has throughout history. With this in mind, I would like to wish you all a great week ahead and a happy Hanukkah." (Benjamin Netanyahu)

Social aspects:
> "The police and the judicial system should pay attention that each person will feel safe in his country. Israeli people confront external as well as internal threats and we should know how to cope with these threats." (Shelly Yachimovich)

Personal life of the candidate
> "My granddaughter's kindergarten class came to the Knesset today for a visit. There is no doubt that getting a hug in the middle of the day gives me a great moment of happiness." (Avigdor Liberman)

6   Discussion

The current study examined the patterns of use of Israeli politicians and political parties of their SNS pages during the 2013 Israeli general elections. The content analysis aimed to understand the ways in which they tried to motivate potential voters to change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to align with the politician's or the party's goals (Bronstein, 2013). When examining the topics addressed by Israeli leaders and political parties, the content analysis showed that a large percentage of the posts dealt with three very significant issues that are at the center of Israeli actuality, politics, social and economic issues. The fact that more than 60% of the posts dealt with political issues reflects the notion that the SNS pages of the leaders and the parties were used as political platforms that help them delineate their policies and campaign strategies and to differentiate themselves from their opponents. Moreover, unlike prior studies that revealed that politicians refrained from writing about controversial subjects on their SNS pages as a way to control the content and the message displayed on their pages (Bronstein, 2013; Williams & Gulati,

2007; Wortham, 2012), findings show that Israeli politicians were not afraid to bring up contentious subjects such as social inequality or army enlistment in order to define their political agenda.

The personal nature of the SNS pages analyzed can also explain the rhetoric chosen in the pages to convey these messages. Findings show that politicians used the ethos rhetoric to emphasize their image and their views on a variety of subjects that will bring users to identify with them personally and politically. These results support Erikson's (2008) claim that SNS has altered the nature of politics making them more personal. This new way of doing politics, coined "political fandom", comes from popular culture and it refers to the way by which people engage in politics based on self-identification and affective alliances. Defining the image of the politician was also revealed as significant by Gliem & Janack (2008) in their analysis of the site BarackObama.com. Erikson's (2008) analysis of Hillary Clinton's MySpace page from the 2008 election found that the page focused more on her personal life than her political career by posting information about her personal life, hobbies, habits and pets. Street (2004) observed that by releasing personal information, politicians try to portray themselves as ordinary people with whom their audiences can identify thus gaining their support. However, this strategy was not used by the two presidential candidates in the 2012 US presidential elections. Bronstein (2013) found that both candidates refrained almost completely from posting personal information about their lives and their families on their Facebook pages. An additional finding reveals the personal character of the use of SNS in Israeli politics; the content analysis showed that for all parties the posts of the leaders were more popular than the posts on the party Facebook (only for Meretz where they were equally popular). Findings also show that similarly to Bronstein's (2013) study, political parties used homophily, one of the pathos strategies, to bring audiences to identify with them through the creation of a bond between the party and the audience.

An additional finding supporting the "political fandom" approach is the relation revealed between the rhetoric perspective chosen in a post and the number of likes, comments or shares given to that post. Results show that the posts that received the largest number of likes were the ones using the pathos rhetoric that presents a positive image of the audience, followed by the ethos rhetoric that presents the politician's opinion, with the purpose of bringing potential voters to identify with or create an affective alliance with the leader or the party. Similar results were revealed when considering the number of likes, comments or shares with the topic categorization; the posts dealing with the personal life of the leader received the largest number of likes, shares and comments from all the other topics. In other words, supporting prior research (Bronstein, 2013; Esposito, 2012; Street, 2004) this study found that looking to form affective alliances the leaders and the parties actively produce the discourse of fandom through the information they posted on their pages by appealing to their audience affective states rather than to their logic and reason. Keat (2012) asserted that these affective alliances reflected on the number of likes and comments given to the pages are of great value to the campaigns. The SNS pages examined advertised the number of supporters because these numbers accord a certain status to the candidate and capture the underlying enthusiasm and intensity of support for him.

The current study's approach is innovative since it looked for differences in the distribution of subjects and rhetoric categories according to political affiliation. When analyzing the post according to topics and political affiliations findings show that besides the topic of politics, the parties used their SNS pages to promote the issues that characterized their political activity. That is, the center parties posted on the issue of equal opportunity, the left-wing parties focused on social aspects, religious parties centered on promoting Jewish identity and right wing parties discussed issues related to the economy, Jewish identity and national security. These findings support Vergeer et al.'s (2013) study about the use of SNS in the 2009 European elections that found that the SNS use patterns of the candidates reflected their ideology. One interesting finding was revealed when considering the rhetoric perspectives used in the posts and party affiliation. The religious parties and their leaders used creation of fear as a strategy to communicate with voters much more extensively than the parties and the politicians from other political affiliations. This result echoes Bronstein's (2013) study that found that Romney, the more conservative candidate in the 2012 US presidential election, used creation of fear as a campaign strategy in almost a third of his posts.

The present study has several limitations. First, the data was collected for a short period of time, only in the period preceding the elections. Second, only a third of the posts collected were analyzed. Third, Because of language limitations SNS pages written in Arabic were not included in the sample. Fourth, only the pages of the party leaders and the pages of the parties were included in the sample; the pages of other Knesset members or candidates were not included in the sample.

7   Conclusion

The current study presents a different way of using SNS for political purposes that portrays what Erickson (2008) called "political fandom". Israeli politicians gave a personal emphasis to their use of SNS pages as a way to create a personal bond with their audiences based on affective alliances. Unlike politicians in other countries, they were not afraid to lose control of the message on their pages by posting about controversial issues because these issues define their ideology and their political persona. The personal nature of the elections was also reflected in the parties' SNS pages which although represented a large number of political candidates use the candidate image rhetoric in a large number of their posts. This study shows that the easy and friendly access provided by the SNS has contributed to the creation of a more personally based type of politics by which politicians seek to become closer and more familiar to their audiences, "friending" them, talking about their personal lives and allowing a new and direct connection with the public.

As SNS become an integral part of our lives it is clear that they will continue to have a significant role in future elections. Further research is needed about the use of SNS for political purposes in other countries and cultures to further understand their role as political platforms.

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