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Internet use in Ukraine's Orange Revolution

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Abstract   The Ukrainian presidential elections of 2004 witnessed a massive uprising of the Ukrainian electorate against the incumbent government's tactics of vote rigging and ballot fraud. In this paper, ten Ukrainian websites focusing on the election are critically evaluated and compared by analyzing their website activity data. Despite lacking access to mass media, supporters of democratic change compensated through skillful use of the internet to recruit volunteers, raise funds, organize campaigns, report breaking news, and garner the sympathy of the global democratic community. Comparisons with broader web usage are made, and social and business implications are suggested.
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1. Seeing orange

In the aftermath of massive demonstrations in Kiev, Viktor Yuschenko was elected president of Ukraine on December 26, 2004. Completing what popularly became known as the "Orange Revolution" (named after the color adopted by his political party), Yuschenko's election was a startling outcome in that it overcame concerted resistance from an entrenched, corrupt political group that controlled the mass media, resorted to wholesale electoral fraud by certifying the election of Viktor Yanukovych, and had the active support of Russia's president, Vladimir Putin. Information that was rapidly disseminated over the internet and throughout the campaign and crowds during the fifteen day period of protests helped sustain the momentum of the Orange Revolution. Equally importantly, it also reached

out for support from the broader democratic global community.

To date, the great bulk of academic and popular literature has considered how the internet has altered relationships between sellers, customers, and consumers. Thus, researchers have conceptualized the relationship of the web to traditional media (Dholakia & Rego, 1998) and studied attributes of webpage design that attract and engage visitors (Raman & Leckenby, 1998). The growing importance of the internet as a marketing tool has been recognized by colleges and universities, whose websites often serve as the first point of contact for many potential students and employees (Larson & Kyj, 2003; McBane, 1997). Indication of the increasing utilization of the web as a governmental resource in the United States is provided by Curtin, McConnachie, Sommer, and Vis-Sommer (2004). This has led to the formation of what Howard Rheingold (2002) terms "smart mobs": technology-enabled groups capable of exploiting their rapid access to information to advance

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specific causes. Politicians have taken note of this trend in Greek parliamentary elections (Demertzis, Diamantaki, Gazi, & Sartzetakis, 2005), with evidence of winning candidates having superior websites (Prodromos & Lappas, 2005).

Nina Koiso-Kanttila (2005) has proposed three consumer behavior tendencies that are helpful in analyzing web usage: perceived time scarcity, competition for attention, and the quest for authenticity. The internet is a time saver in that it is an efficient transmitter of information. The immediacy of real-time information has become a defining expectation for the web. Paradoxically, the wealth of information on the web has created a poverty of attention and puts a premium on creating "sticky" websites that entice viewers to linger. Authenticity suggests attributes of reliability, trustworthiness, and originality, and would be especially important for news sources. In the subsequent discussion, it will be pointed out how the websites in this study conformed to these behavioral tendencies. However, in order to comprehend what the websites were trying to convey, it is necessary to understand some of the background leading up to the Orange Revolution. With this in mind, let us turn our attention to some rough politics.

2. Muzzled against state power

Viktor Yuschenko's campaign for the presidency of Ukraine faced formidable obstacles from the corrupt political system put in place by Leonid Kuchma during a decade-long administration. During this time, Kuchma erected an authoritarian administration and governed like a Mafia Don; tacit agreements with regional oligarchic clans, a largely malleable judiciary, and unfettered powers over the appointment of governors all further enhanced presidential fiat in less obtrusive ways. Control of broadcast and print media was advanced through licensing and a program of intimidation that extended even to the murder of troublesome investigative reporters. While dissenting opinions and unflattering reports continued, they were largely limited to small regional papers or internet websites. With the exception of one television station, news reports covering the president or government featured fawning praise, with parallel vilification of opposition parties and dissenting thought.

Yuschenko did have one significant advantage: a good reputation as a former head of the Ukrainian Central Bank, under whom the country's new currency, the hryvnia, was successfully introduced. This positive experience was in direct contrast with that of the hyper-inflationary first transitional post-Soviet currency. Yuschenko's career success led to his selection by Kuchma to serve as the country's prime minister in 1999. In this capacity, Yuschenko resuscitated a national pension system that had fallen badly into arrears, an accomplishment which won him the admiration of a public that was more used to taking abuse from the government than being served by it. The more popular and visible Yuschenko became, the more he presented a sharp contrast to the highly unpopular Kuchma, who grew increasingly jealous. The final straw came in the form of Yuschenko's determined attempt to reform the country's corrupt energy sector, a principle source of sudden wealth for some of the oligarchs whose political parties represented more than 20% of parliament. Yuschenko had been prime minister for some sixteen months when he was dismissed (Rodriguez, 2004).

He did not go quietly. By this time, a coalescing political group calling itself "Our Ukraine" was preparing to mount a political challenge to Kuchma, and reached out to the deposed prime minister to become the party's leader. Next, we examine the factors that came into play permitting Yuschenko to compete politically for the presidency, despite being shunned by the mass media.

3. Exposing entrenched corruption

Through persistent reporting in his internet newspaper about rampant corruption within the administration, Kiev investigative reporter Georghi Gongadze ran afoul of president Kuchma. Gongadze's website, Ukrayinska Pravda (Ukrainian Truth), became a principal forum for questioning government motives and conduct. One investigation centered on Kuchma's lack of oversight in the case of Pavlo Lazarenko, a former prime minister who made off with several hundred million dollars after being dismissed from office. Lazarenko went on an odyssey throughout Europe and Central America before finally ending up in the United States, having traveled on forged passports. Ukrayinska Pravda questioned where president Kuchma was during all this, and how he might be involved. Subsequent investigations showed financial links to Mr. Kuchma's family via allegations Lazarenko arranged for the capitalization of Kyiv Star, a mobile phone start-up company that happened to have the president's daughter as one of the principal officers (Kupchinsky, 2002). The average Ukrainian would be well acquainted with corruption in its many guises, from the petty to the

astonishingly gross: avaricious police, bribe-seeking bureaucrats, dishonest tax agents, and academicians seeking "gifts" to expedite the admission of students.

Within two weeks of this exposé, Gongadze's headless body was discovered some fifty miles north of Kiev (The Economist, 2001). The suspicion of a political killing, another in a string of eleven unsolved murders of reporters during a two-year period, quickly fell on the administration. This was further fueled by the explosive revelation of a secret tape recording made by one of Kuchma's body guards, in which the president demands "something be done" with Gongadze. Large scale protests erupted in Kiev accusing Kuchma of complicity in the murder and demanding he resign. The opposition called for a "Kuchma-free Ukraine".

As Kuchma faced the high probability of criminal prosecution once his presidential immunity expired, a pliable or at least accommodating successor was imperative. Kuchma sought someone who would do for him what Vladimir Putin did for former Russian president Boris Yeltsin: allow him to retire in peace, confident there would be no investigations of him or those around him. Viktor Yanukovych, the country's then-prime minister, fit the profile to a tee.

Despite serving in high positions within the government, first as governor of the large Ukrainian oblast (region) of Donetsk and then as the country's prime minister, Yanukovych had a checkered past. He was saddled with two criminal convictions as a youth, including one for armed robbery. However, in the rough and tumble world of twilight communist Ukraine, Yanukovych somehow got the convictions squelched and went on to manage a large enterprise and achieve stellar academic accomplishments.

4. The Ukrainian web

As evidenced by Gongadze's site, the web in Ukraine had evolved to the stage of being a reliable information medium (Deboo, Robb, & Yen, 2002). Ukrayinska Pravda became a template for opposition group political action websites during the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections. According to CIA estimates, Ukraine had over 94,000 internet hosts and, extrapolating from figures given in 2002, about a million users (Central Intelligence Agency, 2004). While these numbers might seem small by European standards, the ability to get news out to even a small, select group had a profound effect on the course of events in Ukraine.

All websites in Ukraine with a core following subscribe to rating services, which monitor site activity in terms of number of visitors and frequency of visits. Rating services segment sites according to genre (e.g., politics, news, sports, business, personals, etc.) and rank them according to popularity. Websites incorporated in this study included:

- Our Ukraine and Yanukovych, the official sites of each presidential contender;
- Maidan, Pora, Ostrov, and Donbass, samples of sites with strong regional or political orientation;
- Ukrayinska Pravda, ProUA, and Obozrevatel, representing top-ten internet news journalism sites; and
- Channel 5, a television station with an internet presence.

TopPing (http://mytop-in.net/), a major rating service, provided year-comprehensive, daily statistics of the activity of most sites in downloadable spreadsheet format. Competing rating services offered current and previous-day reports, but then consolidated data into cumulative form by previous week, month, and year. Using TopPing, it was possible to review website activity on a daily basis during the three rounds of the presidential elections. Our Ukraine, however, was a restricted, password-protected site, most likely because the party was savvy enough not to make available its web-based information to political opponents. Table 1 presents a content analysis overview of the respective designs of the ten selected websites across thirteen attributes. The table suggests that Yanukovych partisan sites, represented by the bottom three listings, did not fully exploit the attributes of the web, while the strongly pro-Yuschenko sites Maidan and Pora did. As the internet was a critical medium for the Yuschenko coalition in getting its message out to the public, our next focus is to look more closely at the details of website design.

4.1. Mainstream news

During the fifteen days of the Orange Revolution protests, Ukrayinska Pravda, Obozrevatel, and ProUA published breaking news and analysis of the crisis. The scope, depth, and sophistication of Pravda's news reporting and analysis made it the prime intellectual fountain of the opposition. Interestingly, Pravda provided an English version of selected stories, along with a note acknowledging the assistance of the National Endowment for Democracy. Typically, Pravda ran twenty daily news stories covering election-related issues, with

Table 1 Site attributes

Sites	Traits												
	Partner sites	Registration	Donation	Contacts	Mobile web	Photo gallery	Multi-media	Breaking news	News analysis	Language(s)	Chat/ Forum	Humor/ Games	Opinion poll
Pravda http://www2.pravda.com.ua	N	N	N	M	N	N	N	Y	Y	U RE	N	N	N
Maidan http://www.maidanua.org	Y	Y	Y	P M	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	U RE	Y	Y	N
Pora http://kuchmizm.info, http://pora.org.ua	Y	Y	Y	P M	N	Y	Y	Y	N	U R	Y	Y	N
Our Ukraine http://razom.org.ua	N	Y	Y	M	N	Y	N	Y	N	U RE	N	N	N
Channel 5 http://www.5tv.com.ua	Y	N	N	M	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U R	N	N	Y
ProUA http://www.proua.com/	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	U R	N	N	N
Obozrevatel http://www.obozrevatel.com.ua	N	N	N	M	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	U R	Y	Y	N
Yanukovych http://www.ya2004.com.ua	N	N	Y	M	N	Y	N	Y	N	U R	N	N	N
Ostrov http://www.ostro.org	Y	N	N	M	N	N	N	Y	Y	R	N	N	N
Donbass http://www.donbass.dn.ua	Y	Y	N	P M	N	N	N	Y	Y	R	N	N	N

Y-Yes, N-No, P-Phone, E-mail-M, Ukrainian-U, Russian-R, English-E.

special focus on the maneuvering of the groups supporting Yushchenko and Yanukovych. Most of the analytical essays featured on the Pravda site were written by their own journalists, but providing authenticity on an ongoing basis were reprints from western sources such as the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, and *Washington Post*. Collectively, these provided the site with a measure of "stickiness" and time saving inclusivity for visitors.

Obozrevatel had the look of an internet tabloid, featuring an eclectic mix of sports, business, a photo gallery, humor, and politics. Its "Jolly Eggs" link featured a particularly popular, ongoing series of political cartoons parodying Kuchma and Yanukovych. ProUA was promoted as the newspaper for professionals; it was a very well-supported site that featured tourism destinations and breaking news and commentary with a strong business slant to its reporting.

4.2. Partisan warriors

The site Maidan ("square" in Ukrainian) was named in reference to Independence Square in central Kiev, the scene of previous protests against the Kuchma government. The website's icon featured a mailed fist, in defiance of state power, and promoted itself as the "Pulse of Civic Protest in Ukraine." A typical headline called out: "Kievites, All out to Vote!" It was a classic gripe site and forum for attack (Falk & Sockel, 2003).

News stories on the site generally ranged from one to two paragraphs, and were ongoing reports by activists from the field rather than professional pieces. This being the case, facts, rumors, and errors were apt to share space; for example, reports repeatedly surfaced that Russian troops were landing and secretly assembling at Ukrainian airports with the implied aim of suppressing the Orange Revolution demonstrations.

Characteristic of smart mob communities, registered site members were encouraged to volunteer their services for the election of Viktor Yuschenko. Maidan also solicited funds via Visa and MasterCard. For all intents and purposes, this was an outreach to global Ukrainian communities, whose progeny were overwhelmingly of western Ukrainian origins and shared a similar culture and political outlook with the Ukrainian supporters of Viktor Yuschenko. Another attention-grabbing feature of the site was an extensive photo gallery documenting the many aspects of the mass civic protests in Kiev and sympathy demonstrations by Ukrainian communities throughout cities in Europe, North America, and Australia. This display was powerful in that it linked an entire nation and drew the attention of

Ukrainian communities scattered throughout the world to the bold campaign cry set to the staccato beat of a rap song: "Together we are many! We will not be repressed!"

Pora, in Ukrainian, means "it's time"; in the context of civic action, Pora implies "it's high time" to run off the rascals. During the presidential elections, two related groups distinguished by their headbands, the so-called "black" and "yellow," were active. Pora was a highly politicized group with a campaign to change the fundamental nature of Ukrainian politics by targeting youth as their proclaimed agents of social change. The literature suggests this type of group tends to be open to new developments and is a sophisticated web user (Sorsa & Holmlund-Rytkonen, 2004).

Under a category heading of "Who Are We?" the Pora front page offered a pull down menu that led to capsule summaries in thirteen European languages. Besides this multi-lingual feature and occasional English-original pieces, translation of Ukrainian material was not offered on the site. Rather, the daily focus centered on the group's activities as they related to the election, including such things as instructions on proper conduct after arrest for civil disobedience and downloadable, convenient, ready-made campaign posters. The site listed email contacts for activists in all twenty-five oblasts of Ukraine, and seemed to serve recruitment and morale-boosting functions for a youthful constituency challenging established authority. Pora's anthem, available in MP3 format, served as a glue of group cohesion and provided a sense of camaraderie and heroism. In like manner, a steadily updated photo gallery detailed the latest activities and exploits of members throughout the country. That the Pora site was used as a morale booster would be in keeping with the findings of Shaw (2004), which stated that, during the 2000 U.S. election between Bush and Gore, the respective party websites were used primarily to energize the faithful.

An interesting feature found on this site was an icon supported by a "button code." A button code is a piece of web wizardry that can be copied and pasted into personal or company pages, enabling visitors to go to the original source associated with the button by simply clicking on it. The intent of button codes is to multiply and spread, like a virus, the original source's site.

Ostrov and Donbass were based in Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine, solid Yanukovych territory. Both offered a wide news format with a strong regional perspective and nostalgia for the Soviet past, with Donbass even going so far as to display the hammer and sickle logo of the U.S.S.R.

Neither site sought to enlist support for political action; rather, they were content to report positively on behalf of Yanukovych and denigrate Yuschenko as nothing more than a puppet of western interests.

4.3. Mixed media

An independently owned station promoting itself as "the channel of honest reporting," Channel 5 television was important to the candidacy of Viktor Yuschenko. It was the only mass media outlet covering his campaign, and was free of the sycophantic coverage of the government candidate. The organization paid a price for its contrarian stance, however: it had to contend with a host of frivolous lawsuits impeding its ability to broadcast and work around such government intrusions as the freezing of its bank accounts, intended to cripple its daily business operations (Krushelnycky, 2004).

Channel 5 television had limited coverage in Ukraine, as oblast and local government officials thwarted its licensing agreements with other channels to rebroadcast programs. These impediments were insufficient, however, to prevent the station from providing direct television and audio transmissions from its website. Through its web portal, Channel 5 played a crucial role in providing continuous real-time reporting from Independence Square after Yuschenko called for civic action to protest a rigged election denying him the presidency. As the number of protesters rapidly swelled following this appeal, Channel 5 was there and covered the happenings via its website.

The station provided a video archive link to downloadable short videos of election-related stories, making it possible to save, review, and disseminate them. A sample of available videos featured street interviews with citizens, including the oligarch, Viktor Pinchuk, Kuchma's son-in-law; inebriated Yanukovych supporters arriving in Kiev; and proceedings of the Verhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament. Channel 5 adopted a feature used on many American and European websites: the running public opinion poll. While such polls are not reliable harbingers of overall public sentiment, they are engaging and useful in prolonging time spent on the webpage.

4.4. Party sites

The coalition of parties organized under the slogan "Our Ukraine" maintained an official webpage featuring Ukrainian, Russian, and English versions;

the English version provided a link to volunteer help through monetary assistance for Yuschenko's campaign. Our Ukraine even bought banner ads on American websites, such as Fox News, in order to solicit donations for its cause. Orange, the campaign color, had sartorially become extremely fashionable in Kiev. Taking advantage of this, the site offered as premiums orange scarves and knit hats for donations of $100 or more. Our Ukraine replicated a web strategy that had proven successful in the United States: organizing, searching for volunteers, and soliciting funds (Dutton, Elberse, & Hale, 1999).

In contrast, Yanukovych's site suggested that the campaign merely needed a web presence, effective or not. While there was a contributions link, giving was not an easy, convenient process: a physical address was provided that required the donor to visit the campaign's bank in person. And while the site's photo gallery included images of Yanukovych visiting miners and honoring octogenarian war veterans, it is extremely unlikely that members of either group had the technical skills to view their photos on the web.

5. Interactive ridicule

Although the charges against him were dismissed, Viktor Yanukovych's run-ins with the law as a youth were to haunt him throughout his presidential campaign. Continually referred to as a "zek," the vernacular equivalent of the English "jailbird," website photo galleries regaled viewers with pictures of students in prison garb parading through various Ukrainian cities in mock support of "the bandit" Yanukovych. Obozrevatel's link to the Jolly Eggs cartoons featured an ongoing series of snippets of Yanukovych as statesman that mocked his coarse manners and speech. For its part, the Yanukovych camp sought to tie Yuschenko to sinister American interests, and portrayed him as groveling to Uncle Sam. Furthermore, Yuschenko was castigated for having an American-born wife, which the Yanukovych camp claimed was further "proof" of something amiss.

During the initial phase of the presidential campaign, Yanukovych traveled to a city in western Ukraine, a heavily pro-Yuschenko region. There, he was pelted with an egg, allegedly by a Pora hooligan. A tall, burly man, Yanukovych collapsed. Rather than injury due to physical trauma, however, on-scene video strongly suggested bad acting in a botched publicity stunt. From this, a campaign legend was born! Both Pora and Maidan featured video of the event. Online games dubbed "The Boorish Egg" followed, in which players were encouraged to fight for democracy by launching virtual eggs against a series of Yanukovych henchman. "Because," the campaign slogan of Yanukovych (a reference to the ten reasons to support him), was lampooned. The original Ukrainian word, "Tomu cho," was translated into English and then sounded out back to a rough Ukrainian equivalent, producing the following: "Tomu cho"=Because="Bek osch!" literally meaning, "See, a steer!" In Ukraine, dumb, half-witted, rude men are referred to as steers or bulls, since they have little regard for those around them.

Yuschenko partisans coined a word to describe Kuchma's political and social associates: "Yanuchari." This was a pun on Yanukovych's name that really meant Yanichari or, in English, Janissaries, a deeply pejorative term suggestive of "traitor." The term dated back to the impressed Christian boys who were the shock troops of the Ottoman Empire and scourge of 15th–17th century Ukraine. Hence, referring to Yanukovych supporters as "Yanuchari" was a particularly stinging rebuke, which implied that Kuchma, Yanukovych, and the inner circle administration were the chief traitors of the Ukrainian people. Only Yanuchari would imperil their country's sovereignty by inviting a Russian president, the modern Sultan, during the campaign for support and guidance.

6. Website analysis

The Ukrainian presidential election played out over three rounds. The first eliminated all but the top two contenders, the second was invalidated as fraudulent by the Supreme Court of Ukraine, and the third, necessitated by that Supreme Court decision, was finally certified with Viktor Yuschenko declared as the winner. In studying the impact of the web on the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections, the focus was on a ten week period that began one week before the first round (October 25, 2004) and ended a full week after the final round (January 2, 2005). Data was adjusted in two cases for presentation purposes. While the two wings of Pora are treated in this study as one group, they employed different website rating services. Furthermore, the yellow band group did not get started until November 26, 2004, while the black group's site was functional in March 2004. Its statistics, however, maintained by the Bigmir service (http://www.bigmir.net), were presented only in monthly totals. The composite monthly total number of visits, "hits," and unique web "guests" were estimated by calculating the daily percen-

tages recorded in December for the yellow site and then applying the same percentage over the month to the total recorded for the black. The black daily projection was then added to the yellow to produce a grand total. As it was similar in many characteristics, Maidan's site was used as a surrogate to estimate the daily black Pora numbers for November. The very low daily activity of the pro-Yanukovych sites presented a comparison difficulty, so all three were consolidated into one group labeled "Allies".

For the purpose of enhancing visual clarity, only ten important dates (based on high web activity) were used in comparing websites; thus, the data was smoothed to eliminate the noise of multiple similar observations clustering together and obscuring relationships. The spread between observations ranged from four to thirteen days, with dormant periods overlooked.

Fig. 1 illustrates the number of hits, or activity, on the websites. The highest number of hits was recorded after the third round election on December 27, 2004; a peak of activity also occurred on November 22nd, following the second round election. Somewhat smaller activity can be observed post-first round election on November 1st, as few actually expected any candidate to win outright in that race. A flurry of web activity occurred between the second and third round elections as street demonstrations increased, the government vacillated between applying force and seeking a peaceful resolution, foreign diplomats and presidents traveled to Kiev to mediate between factions, and the Ukrainian Supreme Court ruled on the legitimacy of the results of the second round election. This increased web activity suggests that the internet savvy were using the medium to regularly pursue updated information.

Despite being physically silenced by death, Georghi Gongadze, in many ways, had his revenge on the authorities: his website became a dominant destination for news. Fig. 2 strongly suggest that those in power and those who could be labeled challengers have very different attitudes toward the internet. Something akin to virtual guerillas, challengers heavily used the internet in an attempt to level the playing field. It is striking to note that the Allies essentially had as much internet activity as a student group. Amazingly, the website of a candidate running for the presidency of Ukraine, a country of forty-eight million and the size of Texas, was unable to attract more attention than a site devoted to the shenanigans of politically inspired youth!
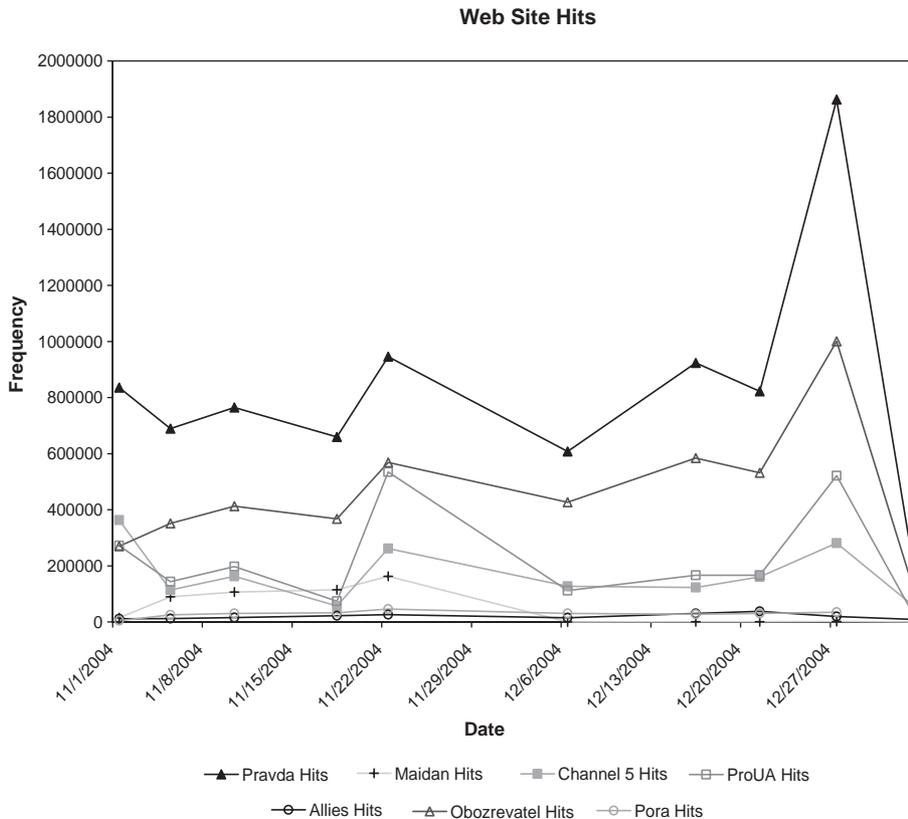

Figure 1   Number of site hits during high web activity days.
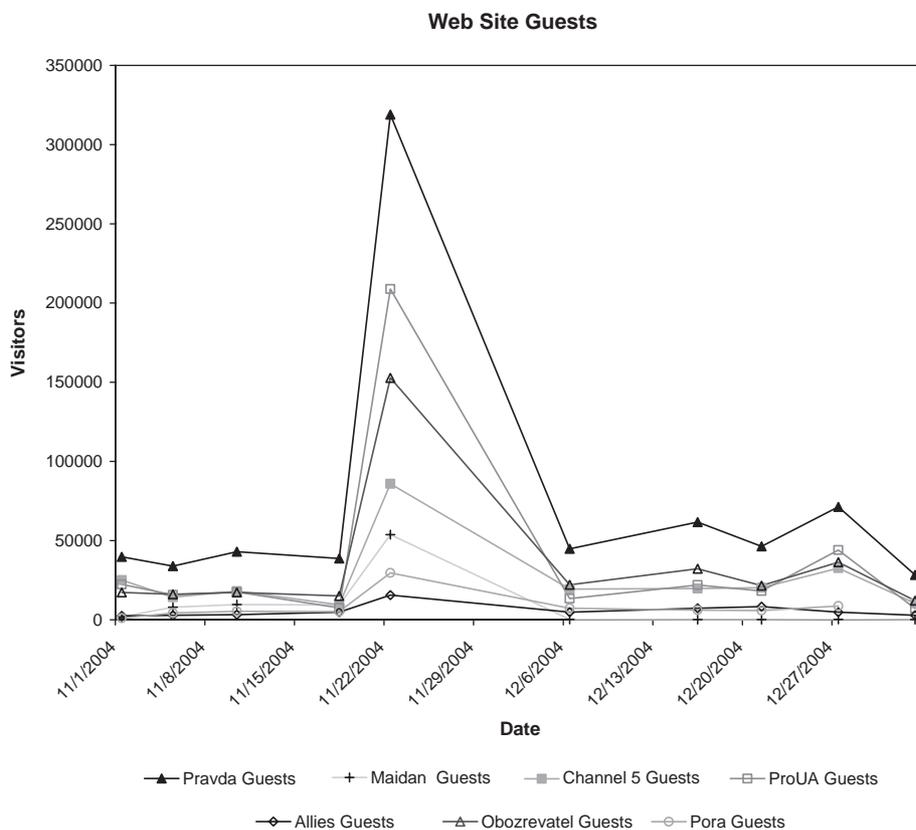
Web Site Guests

Figure 2   Number of site guests during high web activity days.

On November 22nd, Ukrayinska Pravda hosted 319,024 discrete visitors. Even taking into account the fact that some of these visitors were based outside Ukraine, one site managed to account for 30% of all internet users in the country. Although it is doubtful whether president Kuchma could quantitatively appreciate the threat of Gongadze's website, surely he had to understand it intuitively. Subsequent weeks produced nothing remotely in this range of visitors, which begs the question: why so many visitors on November 22nd, following the second round election? One is tempted to speculate that the Ukrainian citizenry did not trust mass media reports, and turned to internet sources for the truth. All Yuschenko sites recorded record numbers of guests:

- ProUA: 208,875;
- Obozrevatel: 152,737;
- Channel5: 85,850; and
- Maidan: 53,757.

Contrasted with an Allies total of 15,571, it is clear to whom internet users most turned for their information.

As the Orange Revolution swung into full gear, a number of Ukrainian television news anchors balked at toeing the party line and publicly aired statements that they could no longer bear lying on behalf of a corrupt administration. This may well account for the reduced number of visitors to the websites heading into the final election round, as the public may have viewed the mass media as having atoned for its sins.

Fig. 3 is a measure of a site's stickiness: it presents how many times a particular computer accessed a site. Because of low internet penetration and computer availability in Ukraine, different people using the same machine at a computer café or at work could access the same site and not be recognized individually; rather, they would be recorded as the same guest. However, as no one is forced to go to the same site as a previous user, repeat visits from the same computer are a measure of the ability of a site to attract and hold visitors. Fig. 3 supports the previous assertion that the Yanukovych bloc never intended to use the internet seriously, did not know how to use the internet, or had a technically challenged constituency. At no time during the election did the Allies group register 5 visits by a guest per day, while Obozrevatel had 27.5 and Pravda 26.1 the day after the final election round. Pora, in agitating its constituency, had 15.5 in a single day during election week (December 18, 2004).
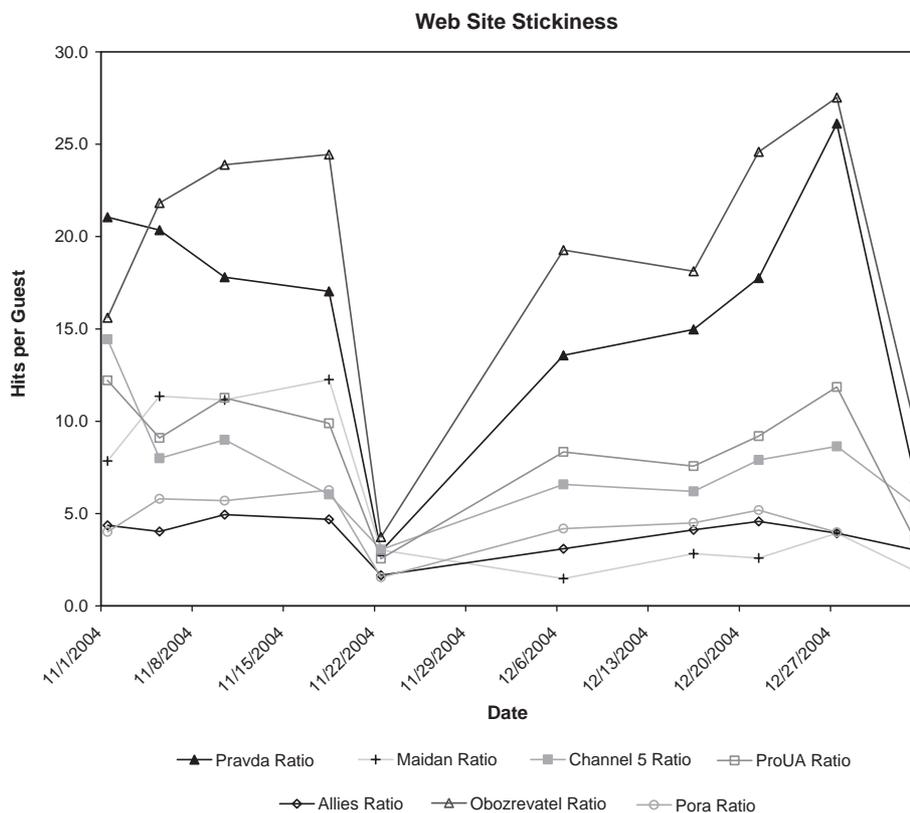
Web Site Stickiness

Figure 3 Site stickiness during high web activity days.

In studying Fig. 3, it is interesting to note that Obozrevatel's stickiness ratio was higher than that of Pravda, the undisputed leader in absolute hits and guests. It is possible the tabloid format, variety, and web design of Obozrevatel played a role in this; after getting basic news, a visitor could indulge in some humor via the Jolly Eggs feature, and then check sports or drop a note to the editor.

In considering all three figures, it is interesting that the number of guests and hits for the Maidan site dropped off after the second election round; after November 24th, the numbers were so low they hugged the horizontal axis. It is important to remember, however, that Maidan was invested in civic action protesting fraudulent elections. Following the second election, many activists hustled off to Independence Square to live in tents for two weeks and block government buildings in order to force a re-vote. For these activists, this was a time to demonstrate, not surf the web. It was not until February 8, 2005 that Maidan website numbers would recover.

7. Reflections

The internet leveled the playing field in the Ukrainian election by successfully disseminating

information through non-traditional channels. In guerilla warfare-like fashion, the assorted websites supporting Yuschenko relentlessly pecked and savaged Yanukovych with high road criticism and low road ridicule, inflicting a political death of a thousand cuts. Evidence from the sample sites suggests the government retreated by ceding the internet to the guerillas and hoped to win via its "fortified positions": control of the mass media. The rules of the game regarding election conduction and outcome reporting had been fundamentally altered, however. In this rapidly changing atmosphere, the internet played pivotal and crucial roles. Among other things, it facilitated financing elections via credit card donations and posting election exit poll projections. People were enraged and quickly took to the streets when the Central Election Committee announced that Yanukovych had won the second round election, despite all exit polls indicating a decisive Yuschenko victory.

As evidenced by the career demise of Dan Rather following internet bloggers' challenge of one of his news reports, websites need not have mass appeal to initiate significant change. Such was the case in the Ukrainian situation. The ability to simply get information out to a limited audience was enough to set in motion a ripple effect. The organizational benefits of the web allowed Pora activists to bond

and direct action. These two factors proved to be formidable strategic advantages.

The technical ability to track and rank the activity of websites is a significant tool for both internal assessment and competitive analysis. In a country with low internet penetration, it is critical to be able to prove site popularity to prospective web advertisers. Within any particular segment, however, popularity drops off rapidly. Typically, the top ten ranked sites have hit counts numbering in the thousands, while the remaining two to three hundred sites are usually only in the double or single digits. As internet usage increases and the number of sites grows, this feature is likely to fade as respective sites build up their brand equity and listing details about a thousand or more sites becomes impractical. For popular sites, rating services can be expected to create business models that can exploit the commercial value of data, rather than give it away free.

As distinctions between media capabilities blur, traditional media, especially print and television, will increasingly be compelled to maintain a web presence. As illustrated by Channel 5, the merging of internet and television capabilities holds great promise for technological advancement. The addition of mobile internet sites (so-called "wap" technology) during the last days of the Orange Revolution points toward the increasing decentralization of news sources. Paradoxically, it also signals the ability to better organize and coordinate dispersed groups and individuals toward a common goal.

Weeks after Yuschenko's inauguration, segments of the former administration took their messages to the web, since they no longer held the exclusive attention of the mainstream media. In the business of truth, not political parties or affiliations, Ukrayinska Pravda broke a story regarding the qualifications of a cabinet appointee that proved embarrassing to the new administration; news that, again, mainstream sources did not report for weeks. For politicians world-wide, corruption, greed, half-truths, and plain boneheaded actions are under greater scrutiny than ever.

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