

Michał Jacuński

University of Wrocław, Poland

michal.jacunski@uwr.edu.pl

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6492-4945

The Limited Use and Non-Use of Digital Tools and Technologies in the Activities of Political Parties in Poland

Abstract: This article examines selected causes and manifestations of a limited use or outright non-use of digital technologies and tools by political parties in Poland. The analysis focuses on key areas of party activity within the digital ecosystem, particularly internal dimensions such as membership, party financing, internal e-voting, and decision-making processes. The research design combines a review of the existing literature, critical analysis of primary sources (including party websites and statutes), and original data derived from an expert survey.

Keywords: digitalisation, political parties, digital abstention, Polish politics

Introduction

Political parties operate in a digital environment and have been doing so for at least two decades. To better describe the conceptual framework for studying digitalisation, Dommett et al. (2020) termed this the ‘party-centred digital ecosystem’. A substantial corpus of literature exists in the domain of political science and the study of political parties that addresses the processes of these organisations’ transitions to the digital realm (see Correa et al., 2021; Deseriis, 2020; Gerbaudo, 2019; González-Cacheda & Cancela Outeda, 2024; Klimowicz, 2018). There is a broad consensus that digital technology is becoming an increasingly significant component of political parties’ internal and external activity in contemporary liberal and competitive democracies. Digital technology has had a profound impact on the manner in which political parties conduct their internal operations and engage with the public. Internally, the implementation of

digital tools such as party management software, online communication platforms, and e-voting systems has led to significant improvements in organisational processes, decision-making, and enhanced transparency among members. These technologies enable parties to manage membership data more efficiently, coordinate activities across diverse geographic locations, and foster real-time communication through platforms like Slack or dedicated intranets. Externally, digital technology has revolutionised political campaigning by providing platforms for targeted communication, social mobilisation, and rapid dissemination of political messages. Social media networks and mobile applications empower political parties to access wider audiences, engage with voters in interactive ways, and personalise outreach efforts, which may potentially increase voter participation and political efficacy.

While it is relatively straightforward to identify papers and research on the use and development of digital technologies and tools, it is more challenging to locate work or complex studies on the non-use of technology. This article will address a significant research gap in this domain by analysing the non-use or limited use of digital tools and technologies (hereafter referred to as DTT) by political parties in Poland. Its objective is to identify manifestations and the underlying causes of the non-use or limited use of DTT. Based on the problems introduced and the state of the art, the article poses several research questions: What are the areas of activity in which political parties in Poland refrain from or limit the use of DTT? What are the underlying causes of this digital abstention? The investigation goes on to consider whether these phenomena might be attributed to technological barriers or other limitations. In order to achieve the research objectives and answer the questions posed, I use the following research methods: analysis of literature on party organisation and digitalisation, critical analysis of party statutes and other party-related documents, content analysis of parties' websites, and the expert survey method. The article is divided into three sections: a theoretical section conceptualising the limited use of technology, empirical sections related to Polish political parties and analysis of digital tools and their application, followed by expert perceptions of DTT use. The last section discusses the limitations of the study and summarises the research findings.

1. Conceptualising the limited use of technology among political parties

The issue of the non-use of DTT necessitates an elucidation of their definition within the context of political activity. Moreover, it is imperative to delineate the concept of the non-use of technology in an era of advancing technologisation and digitalisation. For the purposes of this article, I employ the terms 'digitalisation' and 'digital tools and technologies', which are understood as follows: digital technology is generally defined as the set of tools, systems, and devices that encode, store, process, and trans-

mit information using digital signals represented in binary form. Digital technology is distinguished from other technologies that rely on analogue signals by its use of digital representations of information; this encompasses computers, software applications, digital communication networks, and associated devices and infrastructures. International organisations such as the OECD (OECD, 2025) acknowledge digital technology within the context of information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital data, emphasising its role in enabling automation, improving efficiency, and fostering global communication to shape a positive digital future. The scientific understanding of digital technology emphasises its capability to transform data into actionable information, thus driving innovation and influencing nearly every aspect of modern life.

Digitalisation in the context of political parties pertains to the utilisation of digital instruments and technologies in the internal and external dimensions of party operations. The term 'digital tools' refers to specific web applications, computer programs, or platforms that use online communication to enable specific functions in a digital environment, whereas a lack of digital implementations often centres around concepts such as 'digital non-use', 'digital abstention', or 'digital exclusion'. I will briefly explain these and link them with political parties.

Digital non-use is defined as a state in which individuals either never adopt or actively disengage from digital technologies. This concept is closely tied to the idea of the digital divide, where non-use may further entrench existing social inequalities. Digital abstention, as defined in several academic studies, pertains to a deliberate rejection of digital technology. This phenomenon can be attributed to various factors, including personal values, concerns regarding privacy, or resistance to technological change. Digital exclusion is a broader concept that encompasses both non-use and forced non-use, mainly due to socio-economic factors and low digital literacy. It is defined as the outcome of systemic barriers, such as limited access to digital technologies, insufficient digital literacy, or economic constraints, that prevent individuals from participating fully in the digital society. These definitions typically distinguish between individuals who lack access to digital tools due to structural barriers and those who deliberately refrain from using technology.

Existing academic work has significantly advanced our understanding of digital non-use, digital abstention, and digital exclusion by revealing their multifaceted nature, but they do not explain technology non-use among political organisations. A growing body of research (Boulianne, 2015; Norris, 2001; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015) has examined the surprisingly low uptake of digital technologies in political engagement, revealing that technological access alone does not guarantee political participation. The collective analysis of this work underscores that the underutilisation of technology in politics is not merely a consequence of inadequate access but rather reflects a complex interplay of cognitive, cultural, and structural factors that must be addressed to fully harness the potential of digital innovations in democratic processes.

One of the consequences for parties and their members of technological transformations, observed across society, is the digital divide triggered by digital exclusion. The competencies required to leverage digital media to its fullest extent are not distributed uniformly among rank-and-file party members, nor do they align among political activists or representatives. This phenomenon can be conceptualised as a group of ‘losers of digitalisation’, or those who deliberately oppose modernity (Jacuński, 2018, p. 7).

Table 1 outlines the distinctions between digital non-use, digital abstention, and digital exclusion, and their respective implications for party members and organisational dynamics. Digital non-use refers to a state where parties or members either never adopt or actively disengage from digital technologies, often relying on traditional tools and exhibiting strong organisational inertia rooted in institutional norms. Digital abstention represents a deliberate resistance to digital innovation, where party elites may suppress technological change to retain control, offering members conventional modes of participation and adopting digital tools only sporadically or in hybrid forms. In contrast, digital exclusion highlights the unintended consequences of digitally native parties that, while technologically advanced, fail to accommodate members with low digital literacy or limited access – thereby reinforcing socio-economic divides.

Table 1. The relation between concepts and their impact on party members and party organisation.

Concept	Digital non-use	Digital abstention	Digital exclusion
Meaning	A state in which individuals or organisations either never adopt or actively disengage from digital technologies.	A deliberate rejection of digital technology; resistance to technological change.	Non-use and forced non-use due to low digital literacy or socio-economic factors.
Impact on party members and sympathisers	Party members and sympathisers choose not to use many ICT tools and rely on traditional solutions. They can deliberately refrain from use or stay connected via grassroots digital tools.	Party members are offered traditional forms of engagement. Party leaders may also deliberately prevent technological change to better control members' behaviour.	Digital-native parties may be technologically savvy and digitally advanced. They contribute to the digital divide and exclusion due to not offering, or having a limited offer, for offline engagement.
Impact on party organisation	ICT and digital tools have limited impact on party functioning and institutionalisation. Party structures ignore changes due to embedded rules, norms, and reputations. Organisational inertia is observed.	Technology and digital solutions are sporadically used. Hybrid solutions can be introduced, which is typical for late adopters. Party structures resist change due to embedded rules, norms, and reputations.	Party organisation neglects chances to remain open to less affluent and digitally literate individuals; its digital nature limits inclusion and accessibility.

Source: own elaboration

A limited use of technology can also be theoretically explained by broader historical and sociological institutionalism and path-dependency frameworks, which help us understand how party structures resist change due to embedded rules, norms, and reputations. The face-to-face foundations of party organisations created norms and procedures that parties are incentivised to maintain, even as new tech arises, which may be reflected in a historical reliance on local party networks or a central party office for legitimacy and control. Institutions reinforce internal legitimacy through long-standing procedures, so that informal hierarchies may view digital systems as threats to vertical authority and elite control. Path dependency in party organisational developments assumes that early institutional choices, which were often contingent or pragmatic at the time, produce self-reinforcing mechanisms. In such a loop, a lack of member pressure results in low innovation levels, which brings few digital users and returns to a state of no pressure.

Having addressed the limited use of technology, we move beyond the theoretical framework to assess how Polish political parties operationally employ DTT or not. The following sections of the article empirically examine the existence or non-existence of digital tools.

2. Empirical analysis

The first empirical section is based on the content and a functional analysis of nine official political party websites, supplemented by analysis of party statutes and historical analysis of selected digital practices. The sample was selected using the criterion of representation: all the parties are represented in the lower house of parliament (the Polish Sejm). Based on the matrix of digital instruments proposed by González-Cacheda et al. (2022), an extended list of nine digital features was proposed to analyse several aspects of digital party functioning: e-participation (online membership, e-voting, participatory programmes), funding (micro-donations, micro-credits), deliberation (discussion forums), and contact (mailboxes). Social media icons were also taken into account, as they enable participation, deliberation, and contact across the board.

2.1. E-participation

The use of technology in the context of applying for membership of political parties has been widely discussed in the literature. Sobolewska-Myślik et al. (2007, p. 439) cite the thesis of Seyd and Whiteley (2004) that the decline in interest in membership of political parties is not only the result of structural changes in society, and therefore not only that citizens have lost interest in party membership, but also because parties are not as interested in recruiting members as they once were. This prompts the question of the efficacy of contemporary technologies and digital tools for remote registration and verification of membership in various social and civic

initiatives, in the absence of any interest in their implementation. A thorough examination of party statutes and relevant websites reveals that parties solely permit the initiation of the recruitment procedure online. Statutory eligibility rules (age, citizenship, acceptance of the party code or programme) are common across parties that have published statutes. The application process for membership is reduced to two online steps: downloading the membership declaration and searching for information about membership structures and further procedures without the use of digital tools. Full membership generally requires additional steps, such as personal meetings or submitting signed documents. To analyse the parties more closely: Poland 2050 (Polska 2050), the Left (Nowa Lewica), and Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) provide robust digital onboarding for new members, including online forms and automated follow-up consistent with their statutes. The Polish Peasants' Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) offers membership through downloadable documentation, but lacks an end-to-end web-based process. Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), the Confederation (Konfederacja), the Greens (Zieloni), and Polish Initiative (Inicjatywa Polska, IPI) either do not support online member applications or keep membership processes largely offline or internal. The Together Party (Partia Razem) offers a 'Join' feature on its official site but links it to volunteering or supporting, not a formal membership registration.

According to the PiS party statutes (article 5(3)), membership of the organisation is granted upon resolution by the PiS district board, regional board, political committee, or by a decision of the PiS Secretary General, subsequent to the submission of a written declaration and relevant documentation. Article 38 stipulates that individuals aged between 16 and 30 are eligible to join the Youth Forum; the procedure for admission to this is not specified in the statute.

The Civic Platform party has adopted a more streamlined approach to membership, with an online application and confirmation of registration via a link in an email constituting the entire procedure. The subsequent steps are completed in accordance with conventional methods, namely by liaising with a regional office employee, submitting a membership declaration, and participating in a local chapter meeting. The Polish Peasants' Party asserts that the process of becoming a member is streamlined to a mere three steps: firstly, downloading the membership form from the party's official website, then locating a local branch within one's municipality, and finally submitting the completed form (the method of submission remains ambiguous). A similar approach is adopted by the National Movement party, part of the right-wing coalition Confederation Liberty and Independence (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość), frequently shortened to just Confederation (Konfederacja). Interested individuals may join the National Movement via the Confederation's website. This conservative approach to the acceptance of new members, and the lack of digital tools that allow for single-step registration of new members, may be due, for example, to a fear that members with an established position in the organisational

structure may lose the party authorities' control over the membership structure before new members are accepted.

No major Polish political party currently offers a publicly visible internal electronic voting platform, such as Zeus, used by the Together Party. While PSL supports the concept in principle, there is no evidence that it is implemented internally, and Civic Platform only refers to a historical 2013 online vote. None of the parties provide participatory platforms enabling cocreation or policy engagement; they are virtually absent, with The Left being the sole exception, inviting member input via email consultations. Participatory platforms, whether digital or hybrid, can foster more inclusive, responsive, and dynamic modes of political engagement; they encourage party members and sympathisers to contribute directly to the development of political programmes, policy proposals, and strategic priorities. Unlike traditional top-down models, participatory infrastructures create horizontal communication channels, where grassroots actors are not merely recipients of party leaders' messaging but active agents in shaping it. Such platforms advance intra-party democracy by institutionalising deliberation and feedback loops between the leadership and rank-and-file members. Their absence may mean that the parties analysed, no matter their size, age, or political leaning, refrain from creating a digital participatory environment. This does not mean that parties are against using participatory pathways, but it is merely visible in an online form.

2.2. Funding

Micro-donations, usually small contributions made by individual supporters, represent one component of party finance. Their function is to diversify sources of party income, making parties less reliant on public subsidies. In many campaigns micro-donations are often seen as a mechanism for grassroots mobilisation and empowerment. They allow engagement through material support, fostering a sense of political belonging. For newer parties without institutional funding, or for those outside the mainstream, this form of financing can be a vital resource for survival. Micro-donation infrastructures are often digitally mediated, using low – barrier tools such as recurring payments, crowdfunding, or in-app contribution buttons. Political marketers understand that simplified transfers can also provide valuable data on supporters' behaviour, geographic distribution, etc.

The use of technological systems to facilitate political party financing leads us to Confederation and Poland 2050, the only parties that offer the functionality of donations using an efficient and uncomplicated payment mechanism. In the case of Confederation it is the Paybynet system, which has been implemented by the National Clearing House (Krajowa Izba Rozliczeniowa S. A.). This mechanism, which is well known and commonly used in e-commerce solutions, has been implemented on the Confederation's website: there is a 'Support' page with preset donation tiers (e.g. PLN 25, 50, 100), suggesting small donations, but lacking recurring micro-credits. Poland

2050 enables small individual donations (even starting at PLN 10) and allows electronic recurring payments via PayU. Donors can set small amounts and automate monthly contributions.

In contrast, the other major political parties in Poland use conventional bank transfers as the primary means of financial collection. The Together Party has a 'Support' section for contributions, but this appears to be standard donation amounts, without micro-payment flexibility or recurring support. The Left provides a public register of donations, and regional pages list bank transfer donation options; no user-oriented interactive micro-donation features are accessible. PiS, PSL, and the Greens offer donation via a standard bank transfer form, with legal disclaimers and limits; there are no visible micro-donation interfaces or widgets, nor recurring options. The requirement for the payer to provide their full details is a mandatory prerequisite, whereas the use of instant payment mechanisms or alternative methods such as the mobile payment system BLIK is not a possibility. The Civic Platform, on the other hand, offers the possibility to support various causes, such as a party or an election fund for a presidential campaign.

While the technological possibilities for fundraising exist, political parties evince a marked conservatism with regard to the methods by which they raise funds from supporters. This conservatism may be attributed to various factors, including the stringent donor oversight requirements, the stipulations for a public register of donations, and the reliance on public funding, which provides the majority of financial resources for major political parties. In terms of technological innovation, the potential implementation of digital reporting tools for political party finance, with the aim of introducing traceability mechanisms at all stages of the process, is also indicated.

While parties could ensure greater transparency in terms of financing, the system is imperfect in Poland. Article 11(2) of the Polish Constitution stipulates the requirement for transparency in the financing of political parties. Digital technologies have the capacity to facilitate the online publication of financial statements, thereby enhancing citizens' access to information regarding the sources of parties' income and expenditure. For instance, the National Electoral Commission has a website that publishes the financial statements of political parties, thereby allowing public scrutiny of them. Digital technologies facilitate the process of collecting contributions through online payment systems, which increases convenience for donors and efficiency in financial management. However, it should be noted that the Political Parties Act stipulates that political parties are only permitted to accept funds from Polish citizens permanently residing within the country's borders. This necessitates the implementation of robust mechanisms to verify the identity of donors within online systems. As of 1 July 2022, political parties are obligated to disclose information regarding donations received, with the stipulation that these donations exceed PLN 10,000 annually.

It is notable that certain parties have adopted a more comprehensive approach by publishing data on all donations, including smaller ones. The Civic Platform has

made available on its website a downloadable PDF file containing a register of approximately 1,700 individuals who have donated, including both minor and substantial contributions (the smallest donation was PLN 50, and the largest over PLN 50,000). A comparable approach is adopted by the PSL. Poland 2050 offers online access to the document via the party's website at the Polish Public Information Bulletin (BIP). It is noteworthy that certain political parties opt not to disclose donations below PLN 10,000, opt for the anonymisation of individual data within contractual agreements, and refrain from disclosing the specific value or details of these contracts.

2.3. Deliberation and contact

Earlier empirical research on party members in Poland (Jacuński, 2023) indicated that party members perceive traditional and direct forms of interaction and deliberation as attractive. However, new parties with younger members clearly expected and practised more online activities. For instance the Together Party used communication and decision-making software, such as Zeus or Slack, to better perform and streamline administrative tasks, enabling efficient member registration, financial tracking, and event organisation. Internal communication platforms, dedicated forums, and integrated solutions facilitated real-time dialogue among Together Party members, thereby fostering a more collaborative environment. The significance of these tools extends beyond mere operational efficiency, as they also play a crucial role in cultivating a culture of transparency and accountability within the organisation. Is this also the case in the analysed sample of parties? In the case of other parties, it was not recognisable that they offered avenues for deliberation or any other specific solutions. Party websites do not offer discussion forums or members-only areas. The Left's website contains historical thematic regional and policy forums; it can be assumed that their existence and the links to social media compensate for the lack of discussion and deliberation features on websites.

Poland 2050, Confederation, the Together Party, the Left, PO, the Greens, and PSL offer clear public email contacts, including general offices and media/press addresses. IPI uses an online contact form instead of listing a direct email. PiS does not disclose a central party email publicly, though certain individual MP offices provide email contacts. The above-mentioned features are similar across all parties, and one can assume that their standardisation dates back to the early development of websites.

Table 2 presents a comparative overview of selected digital instruments across major parties in Poland, ranging from online membership and micro-donations to participatory programmes and social media integration. These tools are indicative of each party's approach to internal democratisation, technological adoption, and member accessibility. The table highlights both the presence and the absence of mechanisms such as electronic voting, member mailboxes, and discussion forums, offering insight into whether parties merely communicate digitally or also enable participatory engagement

through digital channels. This empirical mapping serves as the basis for analysis of the broader digital infrastructure and democratic inclusivity of party organisations.

Table 2. Selected digital tools and their application among Polish political parties' official websites.

Party name	Online membership	Micro-donations	Micro-credits	E-voting	Discussion forum	Participatory programme	Mailbox	Social media icons
IPI	No	No	No	No	No	No	Contact form	Yes
Confederation	No	Yes (donation form with fixed amounts)	No	No	No	No	Party units and press contact	Yes
Left	Online contact form + PDF package	No (bank transfers only)	No	No	Historical thematic forums (regional/policy)	Encourages consultations via email	General email and press contact	Yes
Together Party	Only volunteer/support options	Yes (Donation via micro-payment interface)	No	Not mentioned (however, use of open-source Zeus platform)	No	No	General email and press contact	Yes
PiS	No	No (bank transfers only)	No	No	No	No	General email	No
PL 2050	Form + declaration + regional follow-up	Yes (small online donations via payment widgets)	No	No	No	No	Contact form + email	Yes
PO	Email form, confirmation + regional follow-up	No (bank transfers only)	No	No	No	No	General email	Yes
PSL	PDF form + offline submission	No (bank transfers only)	No	No	No	No	Executive committee and press contact	Yes

Greens	Online contact form for members and sympathisers	No (bank transfers only)	No	No	No	No	General email and press contact	Yes
--------	--	--------------------------	----	----	----	----	---------------------------------	-----

Note: IPl: *Inicjatywa Polska* (Polish Initiative); Konfederacja (Confederation); Lewica: *Nowa Lewica* (New Left); Partia Razem (Together Party); PiS: *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice); PL 2050: *Polska 2050* (Poland 2050); PO: *Platforma Obywatelska* (The Civic Platform); PSL: *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* (The Polish Peasants' Party); Zieloni (Greens).

Source: own elaboration based on matrix by González-Cacheda et al. (2022, p. 341).

3. The use of DTT by political parties according to an expert survey

I conducted an expert survey among Polish scholars dealing with political parties in order to validate their own research findings and to possibly expand the field of research on the use or non-use of DTT by political parties in Poland.¹ The invitation was extended to participate in the survey, which employed an online structured questionnaire with the objective of enhancing the identification and evaluation of the tools utilised by political parties in Poland. The final sample of respondents numbered 25. The tools that were primarily mentioned mostly included communication tools, such as websites, social media, vlogs, and blogs. When asked about the existence of any digital tools used by political parties, respondents again indicated that parties primarily use social media, including social networking sites, blogs, and similar platforms. The most frequently cited social media platforms included Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, and TikTok. Concurrently, a significant proportion of experts expressed the opinion that digital tools are not being utilised to their full potential by political parties in Poland. Specifically, they are not employed in the areas of internal democratisation (52% of responses), decision-making and deliberative processes (44%), the creation of political/election programmes (44%), and the selection of candidates in elections or leadership processes (40%).

The participants in the expert survey identified two main barriers to the digitalisation of political parties in Poland: firstly, the leaders' fear of destabilising established procedures and hierarchies (56% of responses), and secondly, a lack of expertise and human resources, including experts in the field of new technologies (48%). Additionally, in the context of digital democratic innovations, respondents highlighted the presence of varying degrees of internal democracy within Polish political parties.

1 The survey, 'The digitisation process in Polish political parties', was conducted in February 2025. Party researchers were directly invited to participate in the study based on their membership in the research section of the Polish Political Science Association and/or their scholarly achievements. The survey is part of the research project 'Political actors and the digitalisation of internal and external environments'.

Utilising a scale of 1–5, where 1 signifies a low level of internal democracy and 5 signifies a high level, the least democratic parties were identified as Law and Justice and Confederation, while the most democratic parties are considered to be the Greens, the Left, and the Together Party. Opinions are ambivalent towards some parties, especially from the current ruling coalition (including Confederation and PSL): some consider them democratic, others do not. This suggests that organisational culture and internal decision-making processes, which are sometimes not very democratic, may be hindering digital democratic innovations.

The experts identified several instances of democratic innovation within Polish political parties, primarily focused on universal internet voting, which allows rank-and-file party members to participate; however, these are few and far between. They include an online vote on the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD) programme (entitled Constitution for SLD) and primaries for the election of the party leader (e.g. PO in 2013) or the presidential candidate (e.g. PO in 2010, 2020, 2024; KORWiN: the Coalition for the Republic's Renewal, Freedom and Hope in 2020). Jasmine, a project introduced by the Poland 2050 party, is regarded as the sole unsuccessful endeavour to date in implementing such an application. In contrast, the Together Party has opted for a different approach, whereby decisions are made by party members through internal votes on the Zeus open-source platform, an independent voting system developed by GRNET and widely used in academic and organisational elections, especially in Greece. In the Civic Platform, the initiative to co-create and consult on the election programme with voters, alongside online programme discussions, was initiated in 2015; the marketing idea was not developed after the party lost the election.

The results of the expert survey also proved that limited use of DTT, as described in previous sections, is a combination of deliberate omissions and reinforcement of existing patterns and norms. It is apparent that at present, no external pressure from (new) participants in political rivalries would force modernisation and elevate party organisations to a higher level of development.

Conclusions

Academic research on the use of digital technologies by political parties is constrained by several limitations that prevent a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Primarily, a significant proportion of the existing literature and empirical studies focuses exclusively on the members and the changing nature of party membership (Gauja et al., 2024; Gibson et al., 2016; Vittori, 2020; Ziegler et al., 2024).

Secondly, a persistent lack of transparency in parties' internal digital practices hinders researchers from accessing reliable data, leading to incomplete analyses. Moreover, there is limited demand for innovations and modernisation in the structures of many front-running political parties, until they are pushed to perform their digital transformation by the emergence of digitally native parties. This was presumably the case for Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and Podemos in Spain and Parti Socialiste and La France Insoumise in France (Mompó et al., 2025, p. 10), but it has not yet materialised in Poland. Therefore digital advancements are frequently viewed as secondary concerns, compared to more pressing political issues.

The limitation of expert research is that it reduces answers to the perception of the characteristics of the objects under study, rather than necessarily confirming the actual state of affairs (e.g. whether a feature is present or not). Nevertheless, the collective knowledge of experts is a strong point; it confirms the limited implementation of advanced digital tools in Polish political parties. It does not invoke the existence of digital democratic innovations, and it confirms the barriers to the digitalisation of political parties. The latter seems to attach greater importance to internal causes than to external ones, such as legal or technological barriers.

The analysis of digital practices across Polish political parties reveals a persistent disconnection between the technological potential for democratisation or improvements and the organisational realities of party life. Despite the widespread availability of digital tools for participation and transparency, most parties continue to offer minimal opportunities for member input or deliberation. This suggests that even a limited use of digital tools does not automatically translate into the democratisation of outcomes and that in many cases, elite control and organisational routine often outweigh the participatory affordances of technology.

In comparison with many of their western European counterparts, some of which have adopted online primaries, member consultations, or policy co-creation, Polish political parties appear to be undergoing a limited internal transformation in terms of adopting digital innovations to enhance intra-party democracy, facilitate candidate selection procedures, conduct online consultations, or co-decide policy development and implementation. In the context of the formation and organisation of political parties in Poland, it is therefore inaccurate to mention an entire non-use of technology; rather, the focus should be on the limited use of technology in the establishment and in party governance.

The hesitancy or restraint exhibited by mainstream political parties in Poland towards using solutions that are available and practised in other countries or sectors is rather due to the specific organisational model of parties, described in the literature (cf. Bennett et al., 2018; Bolleyer, 2012) as hierarchical, strataarchic, and connective. In Poland, parties with a typically hierarchical structure do not allow solutions that disrupt control over the party. Conversely, those with a strataarchical organisational model, predominantly left-wing and green parties, have been observed to resort to

consultation mechanisms such as referendums, albeit infrequently. The Together Party, which is similar to the connective model, is notable for the fact that it is easier to use digital tools in an organisation with several thousand members than in one with many times that number. The absence of an offer for light members or sympathisers, compounded by the failure to sustain Poland 2050's Jasmine application, and the absence of pressure from rank-and-file members to adopt new technological solutions collectively indicate that a breakthrough in this area is improbable. Consequently, the relevant parties in Poland can continue to exercise digital abstention, limiting the use of technology to communication and external purposes related to the conduct of election marketing campaigns.

The divergence among parties is related to their age and size. Newer and smaller parties like Poland 2050, the Together Party, and Confederation exhibit relatively more openness to digital innovation, albeit often in symbolic or limited ways. In contrast, mature and bigger parties, such as PiS, PSL, and the Civic Platform, reflect the characteristics of organisations that are hierarchical, less open, and less responsive to bottom-up input. Abstention from DTT aligns with principles of historical institutionalism and risk aversion. Once parties have invested in face-to-face engagement, offline membership procedures, and hierarchical leadership and management, the organisational, cultural, and strategic costs of transitioning to a digital ecosystem possibly become too high.

In nearly all cases, there is a visible reliance on a symbolic rather than a substantive development of digital tools. While most parties prominently display social media favicons or accept online donations, they avoid providing integrated platforms for policy co-creation, e-voting, or interactive dialogue. This limited use or non-use symbolises instrumental digitalisation, where ICT does not transform internal governance.

Finally, it is important to note that this article is deliberately focused on a single-country case study. Nevertheless, I am keen to acknowledge several potential avenues for future research, such as comparative studies covering parties in Central and Eastern Europe as well as those beyond. It would be an interesting area of research for scholars to investigate how party members themselves perceive digital engagement options and how they assess limited use of DTT. In addition, it would be equally interesting to identify what external factors could drive innovations from outside traditional party hierarchies. Furthermore, research agendas exploring the conditions under which symbolic digitalisation shifts into structural transformation appear to remain open.

REFERENCES

- Bennett, W. L., Segerberg, A., & Knüpfer, C. B. (2018). The democratic interface: Technology, political organisation, and diverging patterns of electoral representation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(11), 1655–1680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1348533>

- Bolleyer, N. (2012). New party organization in Western Europe: Of party hierarchies, stratarchies and federations. *Party Politics*, 18(3), 315–336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068810382939>
- Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5), 524–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1008542>
- Correa, P., Barberà, O., Rodríguez-Teruel, J., & Sandri, G. (2021). The digitalisation of political parties in comparative perspective. In O. Barberà, G. Sandri, P. Correa, & J. Rodríguez-Teruel (Eds.), *Digital Parties. The Challenges of Online Organisation and Participation*. (pp. 287–304). Springer.
- Deseriis, M. (2020). Two variants of the digital party: The platform party and the networked party. *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 13(1), 896–917.
- Dommett, K., Kefford, G., & Power, S. (2020). The digital ecosystem: The new politics of party organization in parliamentary democracies. *Party Politics*, 27, 847–857.
- Gauja, A., Kosiara-Pedersen, K., & Weissenbach, K. (2024). Party membership and affiliation: Realizing party linkage and community in the twenty-first century. *Party Politics*, 31(2), 207–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688241306730> (Original work published 2025)
- Gerbaudo, P. (2019). *The digital party: Political organisation and online democracy*. Pluto Press.
- Gibson, R., Greffet, F., & Cantijoch, M. (2016). Friend or Foe? Digital Technologies and the Changing Nature of Party Membership. *Political Communication*, 34(1), 89–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1221011>
- González-Cacheda, B., & Cancela Outeda, C. (2024). Digitalisation and political parties in Europe. *Party Politics*, 31(3), 488–498. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688231225639> (Original work published 2025)
- González-Cacheda, B., Cancela Outeda, C., & Cordal, C. (2022). Factors for the digitalisation of political parties in Portugal and Spain: A comparative perspective. *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 15(2), 330–350. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v15i2p330>
- Inicjatywa Polska. (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from ipl.org.pl
- Jacuński, M. (2018). Digitalization and political party life in Poland: A study of selected communication habits of party members and elective representatives. *Polish Political Science Review*, 6(2), 6–25.
- Jacuński, M. (2023). Proces digitalizacji partii politycznych: W kierunku interdyscyplinarności badań. *Wrocławskie Studia Politologiczne*, 107–116. <https://doi.org/10.19195/1643-0328.31.7>
- Klimowicz, D., 2018. *Network Parties: A Model for Democratizing and Digitalizing Party Politics*, Progressive Zentrum. Germany. Retrieved from <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/bwct33> on 15 Oct 2025.
- Konfederacja. (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from konfederacja.pl
- Lewica (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from lewica.org.pl
- Mompó, A., Meloni, M., Barberà, O., Lupato, F., Sandri, G., & von Nostitz, F. (2025). When do parties go digital? Examining the drivers of internal and external party digitalisation. *Party Politics*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688251339977>
- Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the internet worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
- OECD. (2025). *Going digital*. <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/going-digital.html>

- Partii Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from bip.pis.org.pl
- Platforma Obywatelska. (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from platforma.org
- Polska 2050. (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from polska2050.pl
- Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe. (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from psl.pl
- Razem. (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from partiarazem.pl
- SobolewskaMysłik, K., KosowskaGąstoł, B., & Borowiec, P. (2007). Członkostwo w polskich partiach politycznych. *Politeja*, 8, 437–460.
- Vaccari, C., & Valeriani, A. (2015). Accidental exposure to politics on social media as online participation equalizer in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. *New Media & Society*, 18(9), 1857–1874. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815616223>
- Vittori, D. (2020). Membership and members' participation in new digital parties: Bring back the people? *Comparative European Politics*, 18, 609–629. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-019-00201-5>
- Ziegler, S., Borucki, I., & Weissenbach, K. (2024). The digital transformation of party membership: How party members perceive online participation and adapt to it under pandemic circumstances. *Party Politics*, 31(2), 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688241306726>
- Zieloni. (n.d.) *Strona główna*. Retrieved 16 September 2025, from partiazieloni.pl