

Communication Technologies for Promoting Political Leaders Online



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Abstract: *The development of the virtual sphere contributes to the formation of a variety of forms and methods of communication for the participants, presenting more and more advanced and effective tools for interaction and their influence on each other.*

The purpose of this paper is to study the experience of using communicative strategies and technologies to promote political leaders online. The study aims to find solutions to the following research problems: 1) to research and systematize the latest information and communication technologies that have been successfully used in world practice; 2) to determine the role and place of technologies for promoting political leaders on the Internet.

The paper justifies the relevance of using communicative strategies and technologies for promoting political leaders in online and analyzes the international experience of their application and systematization. Based on an expert survey, the authors analyze the possibilities of social networks as an instrument of political communication and promotion of political leaders and parties.

Keywords : *political leader, promotion technologies, Internet, website, social networks, blogosphere.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Internet today is a space of civic activity where people act upon their political and social needs [1]-[2]. The Internet has altered political communication and become a communication platform where politics takes on network forms. Today, the Internet is becoming an increasingly popular and effective tool for promoting political leaders and an integral part of the complex of electoral technologies that are successfully used in the electoral process.

Collection of personal data and detailed analysis of user behavior, targeted political campaigns, fake news and misinformation today are integral components of election campaigns around the world. Politicians use the virtual space to spread political messages and create a false impression of

public discussion [3]-[4]. Social networks allow one to distribute advertising messages created for and aimed at a specific person. There are campaign networks designed to attract as many supporters as possible in favor of certain politicians. Communication via the Internet is beneficial and convenient for politicians and political organizations since it has a great impact on users and allows one to achieve their own goal cheaper than the traditional way. It is much more efficient since it becomes possible to quickly convey information to certain groups of people already gathered into interest groups [5]. In this connection, the spread of Internet technologies in recent years has turned them into one of the most popular and creative communication structures during parliamentary and presidential elections.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In modern political communication, the presence of a politician online is no longer just an advantage, but rather a necessity. In this connection, the urgent need for scientific research and justification of communicative strategies and technologies for promoting political leaders online has led to the emergence of many theoretical and sociological studies.

Online activities of politicians have been studied fragmentarily, however, several areas related to this issue have been developed for a long time. Particularly noteworthy are the studies of the activity of American congressmen on Twitter [6], Instagram [7] and personal websites [8], as well as the study of political communication during the elections [9] and activities of protest leaders during digital campaigns [10]. Social networks, as a new discursive space, have also become the subject of many scholars' research. Thus, S. Stieglitz and T. Brockmann prove in their study that Facebook can be a convenient platform where users with different points of view can enter discussions on political topics and, due to the lack of access restrictions, more and more new people can join them in the process [11].

C. Vaccari and R.C. Nielsen based on their analysis of the use of Facebook during election campaigns in the US Congress conclude that there is a direct correlation between the number of Facebook users who support a candidate and the candidate's performance at the election [12].

Considering the 2009 European Parliament elections, researchers argue that social networking sites allow a politician to communicate with people who have little interest in the political process because they can follow the politician's profile on the social network, as well as the profiles of their friends and relatives.

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Besides, politicians who regularly communicate with audiences on social networks are more positively perceived by Internet users [13].

Nevertheless, the potential of the mechanism for converting this online dialogue and the number of "likes" received into real political capital and the votes remains debatable. R.C. Nielsen shows that in this context, the development of a political campaign on social networking sites correlates more with the civic activity of users than with political participation or trust in a particular politician, significantly inferior in effectiveness to the influence of users on each other [14].

Currently, social networks play the role of not only communication platforms but also act as professional platforms. It is through such platforms that political activities are actively performed and a dialogue is established between representatives of the authorities and the electorate. With the development of digital technologies, the communication environment of communication and the very structure of communication of political leaders in the network space change [15].

In general, directly communicative strategies of political leaders in the Internet space are a relatively poorly researched phenomenon. Although there are some examples of applied research in the literature related to the classification and analysis of such strategies, they are built on data from websites, as well as coding information from publication accounts on Twitter and Facebook [16]-[17].

The latest information and communication and Internet technologies for promoting political leaders and an assessment of their impact on the electoral choice of citizens remain insufficiently researched.

The hypothesis of the study: the use of the latest information and communication technologies today is an extremely popular and effective means of promoting political leaders, while communication technologies in the social networks of the Internet can become the most effective of them.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

A. General description

To achieve these goals, we used the method of scientific literature analysis to look into the international experience in the use of communication strategies and technologies for promoting political leaders online, as well as the expert

survey method for specifying the technologies for promoting political leaders online and for a separate discussion of the benefits of communication technologies in social networks.

The source of factual and analytical data was materials from foreign press and statistical materials from international organizations: worldbank.org, Statista's online statistics portal (statista.com), research conducted by scientists, papers published in peer-reviewed journals.

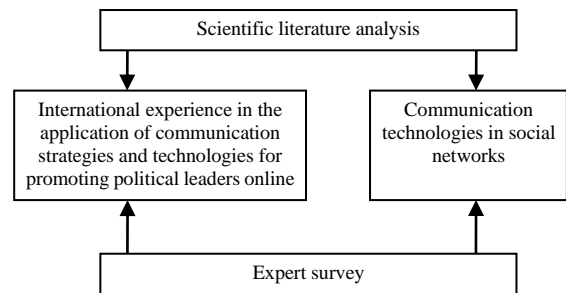
Twenty-two experts took an expert online survey during the discussion of the results of the study, answering questions regarding the current practice of applying technologies to promote political leaders online. Particular attention was paid to the use of social media as an instrument of political communication and promotion of political leaders and parties.

B. Algorithm

At the first stage of the study, we performed an analysis of the scientific literature on the use of communication strategies and technologies for promoting political leaders online.

At the second stage of the study, an expert discussion of the stated problem was held.

C. Flow Chart



IV. RESULT ANALYSIS

A. Results

The analysis of scientific literature, foreign press and results of the expert survey allowed us to determine the main technologies for promoting political leaders online (Table 1).

Table 1: Technologies for promoting political leaders online

Promotion technologies	mentions (%)	Rating
Traditional		
website creation and promotion	64%	5
attraction of additional funds for the election campaign	73%	4
leaking compromising facts or spreading false information about political opponents	55%	7
driving up ratings for the website of a political leader or their party	59%	6
New		
use of YouTube.com	86%	2
creation and maintenance of social network pages and keeping a blog (virtual diary) to promote a certain political leader, brand or idea	100%	1
personalized advertising technologies in social networks based on Big Data	77%	3

Compiled by the authors based on the results of the expert survey.

In general, analyzing the results of the expert survey, one can divide the technologies for promoting political leaders

online into traditional and new ones.

The traditional technologies include the following:

- **creation and promotion of a website**, which in the historical perspective is the most famous technology [18]-[19];
- **technology for raising additional funds for the election campaign** via the Internet. So, during the election of candidates for nomination from political parties in 2000, J. McCain and A. Gore received funds from Internet users of \$6 million and \$10 million, respectively. During the 2004 presidential election campaign, one of the main candidates for the presidency, J. Kerry, managed to raise more than \$100 million in donations and his rival, George W. Bush, raised \$55 million [20]. In the 2008 election, the B. Obama team collected more than \$160 million in community contributions and also formed a personal information database of more than 250 million Americans;
- **leaking incriminating facts or false information about political opponents**, which "legitimizes" the appearance of such information in the traditional media, relieving them of responsibility for its veracity. There are two opposing points of view regarding the effectiveness of such technology. Some experts who participated in the survey claim that over time it loses its effectiveness because traditional media already have experience working with such websites and are rather cautious about the information presented on them. Other experts are convinced that, given the expansion of the Internet's audience, such misinformation will no longer need the mediation of traditional media, but will be spread by "dumping" the information on specialized forums or through social networks by users themselves;
- **driving up ratings for the website of a political leader or their party**. Quite often, website owners, including political websites, resort to such technology when, due to fake visitors, they manage to reach the first positions in Internet ratings;

Among the new technologies one can name the following:

- **use of YouTube.com**, which provides ample opportunities to use it as an alternative to television: for posting videos with speeches given by political figures, recordings of press conferences, broadcasts, etc. At the same time, this site is often used to conduct "black" PR campaigns [21];
- **keeping a blog (virtual diary) and creation and maintenance of social network pages to promote a certain political leader, brand or idea**. This Internet technology is often exploited both for spreading positive information about oneself and for countermeasures against political opponents.
- **personalized advertising technologies in social networks based on Big Data**. Experts emphasize that Big Data technologies offer great opportunities not only for large businesses, but also for politics. Today, the development of new effective methods for using Big Data tools to subconsciously influence the target audience to control the community's behavior, actions and even their political choices has only begun.

V. DISCUSSION

The subject of discussions during the expert survey was the analysis of the use of the new technologies in social networks as tools for political communication and promotion of political leaders and parties.

According to the experts, political figures and parties

always prefer direct communication with citizens; therefore, they quickly learned how to use social networks for self-presentation, information, dialogue, receiving feedback and performing control, recruitment and mobilization of the electorate. The outbursts of their Internet activity during election campaign periods are a good example of this. Such political practices play a significant role in the political field of the US. The example of the successful use of social networks in Barack Obama's political campaign during the 2008 presidential election, which brought him victory, has become a textbook example. Researchers attribute this success to the deconstruction of the long-established tradition of building a political campaign with a focus on the media effects of hidden or direct political advertising on television, PR and other well-known media-oriented tactics for promoting candidates [22].

The Guardian called the 2008 US presidential election a "Facebook election" [23] because for the first time all presidential candidates tried to communicate with American voters through social networks, in particular, Facebook and MySpace. True, then the candidates did not perceive the network as a powerful tool of influence, except for Barack Obama, whose presidential campaign and victory radically changed the idea of the role of the Internet in the political process.

D. Carr believes that Barack Obama was the first politician to understand how to use the Internet to reduce campaign costs, attract citizens to the electoral process and become closer to his audience [24].

As early as in 2008, the Internet already was an important component in shaping the Americans' information space. At that time, 74% of the US population used the Internet and 46% used the Internet to monitor the presidential campaign. 35% watched political programs on YouTube and about 10% of Americans registered on social networks to join the electoral process [25].

The Guardian wrote that young people made up the majority of Internet users and Obama managed to use it. He earned the support of the "Facebook generation", the least politically active population group. According to exit polls, about 70% of young Americans under 25 voted for Obama. The US history had not seen a bigger number of young people voting at the elections since the first exit polls in 1976 [23]. In general, Obama used the Internet to the maximal benefit for his campaign. With the help of the Internet, his team collected more than \$160 million in community contributions and also formed a personal information database of more than 250 million Americans [26]. Although even then the Obama campaign used personal information about his potential voters and analyzed their online behavior, social networks were not so actively used to spread false information and fake news. According to one of the experts interviewed, "the Barack Obama's campaign can serve as an example of social engineering by its results, when a relatively new form of communication, marginal in the opinion of opponents or inaccessible to them, is adopted, popularized and effectively used to achieve political goals, increase activity and political voter participation and promote a certain candidate".

Moreover, it is much more important that the success of B. Obama made political strategists and political consultants around the world pay attention to the phenomenon of social networks and try to use them to one degree or another in the hope of copying the technologies used in the US, giving rise to a trend for political campaigns on the Internet. The image of the leading state-of-the-art marketing company in new media obtained by Blue State Digital after the 2008 Obama campaign, allowed the company to work in particular with Dilma Rousseff, Enrique Peña Nieto and Francois Hollande [27].

Analyzing the influence of social networks on the elections in Brazil in 2010, J. Gilmore notes in his article [28] that at that time, 40.6% of Brazilians (about 72 million) used the Internet. Brazil became the fourth in the world in the number of Internet users. According to Gilmore, the teams of the candidates for the presidential elections in Brazil had special groups that were responsible for the digital strategy. These included web developers who worked to increase the presence of their candidates in the information space, producers who created videos for daily posting on candidates' websites, on YouTube, Facebook and Orkut (a social network that was popular in Brazil). There was also a part of the team that updated the pages of candidates on social networks.

Each candidate's campaigns competed with each other and came up with unusual ways to get around their opponents. For example, the team of the candidate from the Workers Party Dilma Rousseff (who ended up winning the election) created a social network called Dilmaweb, similar to Facebook, to unite and better coordinate a wide range of allies, in particular, party members, activists, bloggers and voters. The team of another candidate Marina Silva from the Green Party created the interactive platform CasedeMarina on the candidate's website. Silva supporters could register their addresses and find like-minded people nearby, with whom they could cooperate in communities in their area.

In the current decade, according to the experts, the digital strategies of politicians have begun to change. The normal online presence, maintaining pages on social networks, communicating with voters online and broadcasting debates on YouTube has become insufficient. Social networks have become a tool for more subtle manipulations of public opinion and spread of false information in the election campaigns of countries around the world.

Experts point to other (manipulative) technologies that politicians use, such as the use of web teams for leading discussions on the Internet. By web teams, experts mean customer-controlled Internet users who form the public opinion they need and manipulate it on the Internet. From here came the term "astroturfing", meaning the use of modern software or specially hired users to control public opinion artificially.

The experts also mention the use of manipulative technology for constructing fake cyber users, which are used to create numerous virtual simulacra, i. e. online profiles that are not related to real people. This technology makes it possible to manipulate the minds of large groups of Internet users and cyber simulacra themselves, according to the experts, can solve several problems:

- creating an atmosphere of mass support (or, on the contrary,

sharp rejection) of a certain political leader;

- artificial creation of newsworthy events for the formation of an agenda favorable to a political leader;
- spread of false information about real political events;
- formation of models of mass behavior that are beneficial to a political leader;
- creation of new and correction of existing stereotypes of perception of a political leader;
- management of a candidate's political image.

Thus, for example, in Australia in the 2013 parliamentary elections, the Australian coalition (Liberal and National parties) used fake accounts to artificially increase the number of subscribers, likes and reposts supporting the candidate to create the illusion of their popularity. Sometimes officials continued to use this tactic even after the victory of a candidate or a political party in the elections [29].

In the Philippines in 2016, the so-called keyboard trolls, hired to spread propaganda in favor of candidate Rodrigo Duterte during his presidential campaign, continued to distribute messages in support of his policies after his victory [30].

Discussing the use of the blogosphere in promoting political leaders, experts note that there are three main areas of using the blogosphere for political communication: 1) personal Internet journals kept by politicians (or at least by a politician's press service on their behalf); 2) using the authority of popular bloggers to disseminate information about politics; 3) ordering positive or negative comments under Internet materials.

G. Farrell and D. Dresner justify the influence of the blogosphere on political discourse by the fact that the highest-rated political blogs influence the journalistic community, which then provides the animated effect of the distribution of blogging news and analytical materials [31].

According to the experts, it was the laconicism of the messages on Twitter that led to the need for more detailed explanations of D. Trump's provocative messages, as a result of which the latter was invited to television. Thus, Trump's tweets became an extra reason to attract media attention.

Speaking about the personalized advertising technology on Facebook, the experts emphasize that its application had a significant impact on the results of the last US presidential election. According to the experts, the main problem in the use of Big Data technologies for social research is the collection of large amounts of personal information. However, on Facebook, Instagram and other social networks, data collection is automatic, as the users themselves make their information public. The same technologies are used today to collect individual data. Thus, an analysis of 68 likes on Facebook makes it possible to establish the color of the subject's skin with 95% probability, to predict their homosexuality with 88% probability and to find out if they belong to one of the political parties with 85% probability [32]. To create an individual psychological profile of a user, as the surveyed experts explain, these technologies use not only their Facebook posts and likes. They analyze photos on social networks, the number of friends, the intensity of changes in location, time spent on the network and other personal data provided by the owner unconsciously.

A network connection allows access to a user's personal data.

Developments in the application of Big Data technology based on data from computer networks are carried out by the British private company SCL (Strategic Communication Laboratories), known in the US as Cambridge Analytica. The company conducts data mining and analysis of user audience data, based on which communications are specifically aimed at key audience groups to change community behavior following the goals of the customer and determine the likelihood of an undesirable result [32].

According to researchers, Cambridge Analytica used personalized advertising and, more precisely, tailored the advertising message to the type of character of each user during Trump's election campaign. Cambridge Analytica used personal data from various digital sources and consolidated the collected information with lists of registered Republican Party supporters and likes and reposts on social networks. As a result, each supporter received a separate message. These messages differed only in small details (such as headers, message background, presence of photo or video information). However, all messages were precisely adjusted to the psychological type of each specific recipient. Such attention to detail provided the desired response to messages even from small groups of the population [32].

Experts who participated in the survey note that the 2016 US presidential election was a prime example of the use of Big Data to influence the unconscious choice of the electorate. Previously, election campaigns were conducted mainly based on demographic criteria analysis, such as gender, race, social status and the like. Hillary Clinton also used this method to conduct her campaign. Her team divided the entire community into formally homogeneous groups and all voters received the same messages based on their adherence to one group or another. Sociologists determined by what criteria groups should be identified and predicted Clinton's victory in the presidential election until the last moment.

Thus, the Trump election campaign has become a model for the application of an analytical system based on Big Data technology. In the 2016 US presidential election, only the forecasts of those statisticians and sociologists who applied the latest methods of big data analysis came true. Trump, who had always criticized digital technologies, won only due to their targeted use.

VI. CONCLUSION

The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that the use of the latest information and communication technologies nowadays is an extremely popular and effective means of promoting political leaders and communication technologies in social networks Internet may become the most effective technologies.

Moreover, not a single modern election campaign in Europe and North America goes on without the use of Internet technologies. There is also a noticeable upward trend in the influence of the latest information and communication technologies on election results. In Russia, as in many other countries of the post-Soviet space, the demand for online technologies for promoting politicians was formed a little later, although politicians, especially in the opposition, understand the prospects of using these technologies, actively

join the online sphere and use its advantages for their political purposes.

At the same time, social media (social networks, blogs, microblogging services) are becoming increasingly important for political communication between political leaders and potential voters, which necessitates further research. To increase communication efficiency through online social networks, politicians should pay more attention to the latest means of promotion. Political leaders themselves should actively communicate in social networks, keep in touch with their target audiences, create a platform for working with voters, distribute quality content, consider introducing a commercial component to raise funds for social projects and make their subscribers feel that they are involved in important matters.

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