Comparison of Communication of Political Parties over the Internet in Slovenia and Croatia

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ABSTRACT

In the past decades, information and communication technologies affect all aspects of our lives, including politics. Political parties use the Internet to communicate with their potential voters. This paper will give a short introduction to communication over the Internet in general, description of political parties in question, and the main part of the paper is the analysis and comparison of communication of Slovenian and Croatian political parties over the Internet. Special attention will be payed to communication using social networks, such as Facebook or Twitter.

Key Words*: Internet, communication, social networks, political parties, Slovenia, Croatia Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, web sites*

1   INTRODUCTION

Political communication is an interactive process regarding the transfer of information between politicians, media and public. Political election campaigns are organized so that they inform, persuade and mobilize. Campaigns in general can be best understood as an organized effort to inform, persuade and mobilize. The legal rules of the game determine the overall context, and that context is determined by the structure of mass media (LeDuc, Niemi and Norris, 2001). Internet, Social networks, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube… Those are relatively new terms in politics. New concepts, media and new opportunities to communicate ideas and messages, but still under-exploited channels for communication with the public. While the practice of using the Internet in political campaigns goes back to the nineties, only in recent years, with the emergence of new tools and social networks, real strength of this medium is demonstrated.

Information technology provides opportunities for the improvement of human activities, including politics. Used the right way, Internet can allow direct communication with voters, either to support or criticise, and can also be one of the tools for public opinion research.

This paper will give an introduction to communication over the Internet, the most commonly used means of communication will be described, and political parties with seats in parliament will be analysed. At the end of paper, results of this research will be given and future work will be defined.

2   COMMUNICATION OVER THE INTERNET

In comparison with the mass media, Internet can not be characterized as non-dialog space, because its interactive qualities shape the important opportunities for opinion modeling. Moreover, Internet links and combines multiple forms of communication, such as storing and

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sharing of information, as well as the reproduction and exchange of communication channels. The Internet is in that way the registry of information and also a communication tool (Oblak,2002).

Graber and Smith define political communication as "the construction, sending, receiving and processing messages that potentially have a significant influence on political beliefs. Senders or recipients of messages can be politicians, journalists, members of interest groups or unorganized citizens"(Graber and Smith, 2005). Given the era in which we are and development of technology, it is understandable that politicians are exposed to the public, not in the sense that they are monitored, but in the sense they are accessible to citizens or their voters and followers. Today they can be viewed as a service on the Internet, more developed and accessible they are, they are more popular.

The focus of this research are Slovenia and Croatia, so the level of Internet access in those countries is important(Figure 1).
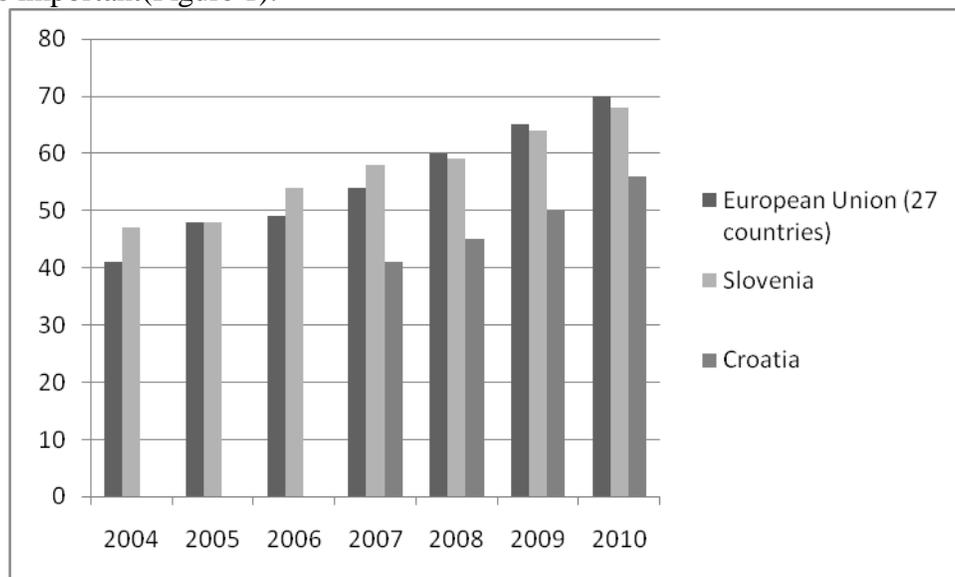

Figure 1: Level of internet access in % for households

The most popular social network web sites which will be analysed are Youtube, Facebook and Twitter. In addition to these, web sites will also be analysed. In the next few lines, each of these technologies will be explained in short.

Web site is a collection of web pages, and web pages are what makes the world wide web. They contain text, images and multimedia important for communication with visitors of a web site. Nowadays presence on the Internet is an imperative for all business, and politics isn't any different. Political parties can promote their ideas, communicate with members and potential voters using their web site.

Another important tool for communication over the Internet is Youtube. Youtube is a web site for sharing videos. It lets anyone to upload videos. Those videos can be for private or public viewing. Visitors can comment on uploaded videos and leave opinions. Political parties can upload videos from their meetings and promote their ideas and the party itself.

Facebook and Twitter, as the most popular social networking websites, have become a must-have in Internet marketing. In the last few years, political parties have also started using Facebook and Twitter for promotion.

3 POLITICAL PARTIES

First step in political parties analysis is to define a political party. Huckshorn (1984) defined political party as an autonomous group of citizens having the purpose of making nominations and contesting elections in hope of gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organization of the government. Burke (1981) defined political party as a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed. Downs (1964) says it is a coalition of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by legal means. Schlesinger (1991) defines a political party as a group organized to gain control of government in the name of the group by winning election to public office. Aldrich (1995) says that political parties can be seen as coalitions of elites to capture and use political office, but it is more than that. It is an institutionalized coalition, one that has adopted rules, norms and procedures.

3.1 Slovenia

There is a great number of political parties in Slovenia: Social Democrats (Socialni demokrati), Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska demokratska stranka), Zares, Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije), Slovenian People's Party (Slovenska ljudska stranka), Slovenian National Party (Slovenska nacionalna stranka), Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (Liberalna demokracija Slovenije), Greens of Slovenia (Zeleni Slovenije), Lipa, New Slovenia - Christian People's Party (Nova Slovenija – Kršćanska ljudska stranka), Slovenia is Ours (Slovenija je naša) etc.

There are seven parties in Slovenian parliament (Figure 2(a)): Social Democrats with 29 seats, Slovenian Democratic Party with 27 seats, Zares with 9 seats, Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia with 5 seats, Slovenian People's Party with 6 seats, Slovenian National Party with 5 seats and Liberal Democracy of Slovenia with 5 seats. These are the parties which will be analysed in this paper.
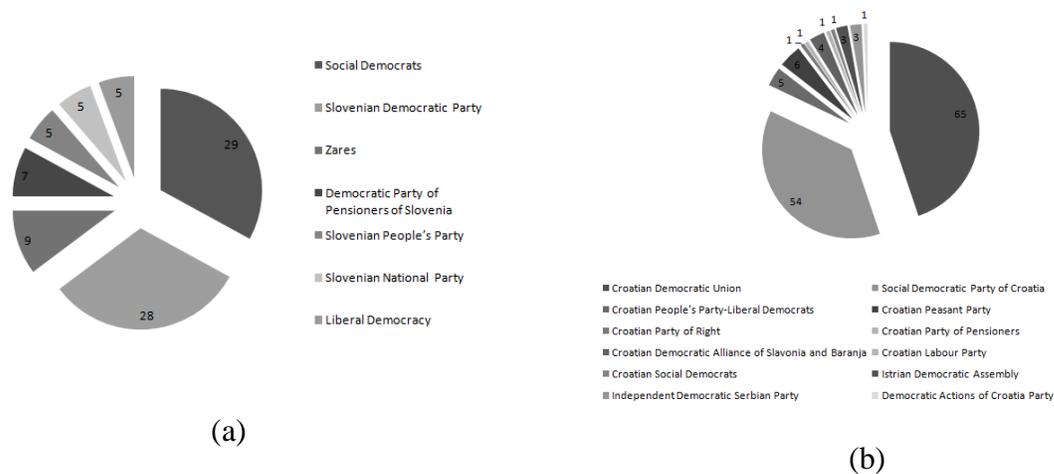

(a)

(b)

Figure 2: Political parties in (a) Slovenian and (b) Croatian parliament with number of seats

3.2   Croatia

In Croatia also, a great number of political parties exist: Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica), Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske), Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka), Croatian People's Party-Liberal Democrats (Hrvatska narodna stranka – Liberalni Demokrati), Istrian Democratic Assembly (Istarski demokratski sabor), Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja (Hrvatski demokratski savez Slavonije i Baranje), Croatian Party of Pensioners (Hrvatska stranka umirovljenika), Croatian Party of Right (Hrvatska stranka prava), Croatian Labourists - Labour Party (Hrvatski laburisti - Stranka rada), Croatian Social Democrats (Hrvatski Socijaldemokrati), Croatian Demochristian Party (Hrvatska demokršćanska stranka), Croatian Labour Party (Hrvatska radnička stranka), Croatian Party of Rights 1861 (Hrvatska stranka prava 1861), Croatian Pure Party of Rights (Hrvatska čista stranka prava), Croatian Republican Union (Hrvatska republikanska zajednica), Dalmatian Liberal Party (Dalmatinska liberalna stranka), Democratic Party of Zagorje (Zagorska demokratska stranka), Democratic Party of Pensioners (Demokratska stranka umirovljenika), Green List of Croatia (Zelena lista) etc.

Parties to be analysed are (Figure 2(b)): Croatian Democratic Union with 65 seats, Croatian People's Party-Liberal Democrats with 5 seats, Social Democratic Party of Croatia with 54 seats, Croatian Peasant Party with 6 seats, Croatian Party of Right with 1 seat, Croatian Party of Pensioners with 1 seat, Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja with 4 seats, Croatian Labour Party with 1 seat, Croatian Social Democrats with 1 seat, Istrian Democratic Assembly with 3 seats, Independent Democratic Serbian Party with 3 seats and Democratic Actions of Croatia Party with 1 seat.

4   ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION

All political parties members of the parliament in both Croatia and Slovenia, have a web site. Another important thing regarding web sites is its ranking. The Alexa global rank is used. This global rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors to webpage and pageviews on webpage over the past 3 months. Results of global ranking can be seen in (Figure 3) where grey color represents Slovenian political parties and black are Croatian political parties. Higher ranking number means lower global importance and thus smaller number of visits. It can be seen that Slovenian political parties have greater significance in global web then Croatian parties.
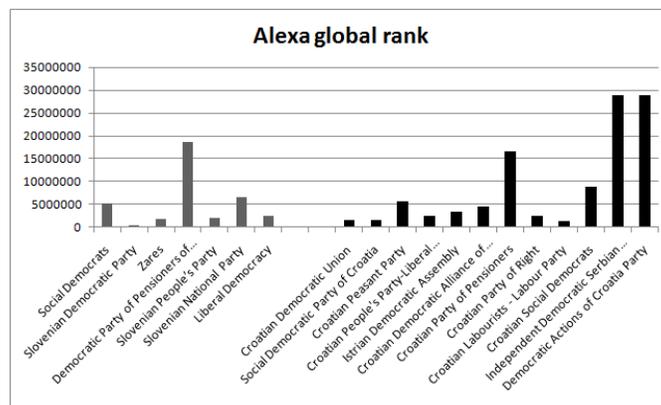

Figure 3: Alexa global rank of Slovenian and Croatian political parties

Six out of seven Slovenian political parties members of the Parliament have a Youtube channel, while nine out of twelve Croatian political parties members of the parliament have a Youtube channel. Political parties in both countries have recognized importance of Youtube in political campaigns for attracting younger population of voters. In Slovenia only two political parties continued updating their youtube channel after elections, while in Croatia most of political parties continued to do so (Table 1).

Table 1: Last Youtube activity of Slovenian and Croatian political parties with a Youtube channel

Political Party-Slovenia	Latest Youtube activity
Social Democrats	30.4.2008
Liberal Democracy	20.8.2008
Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia	30.8.2008
Zares	30.4.2009
Slovenian People's Party	23.7.2011
Slovenian Democratic Party	27.7.2011
Political Party-Croatia	
Social Democratic Party of Croatia	5.3.2007
Croatian Party of Pensioners	14.10.2007
Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja	8.11.2007
Croatian Social Democrats	31.1.2011
Croatian Party of Right	30.3.2011
Croatian People's Party-Liberal Democrats	30.6.2011
Croatian Labourists - Labour Party	30.6.2011
Istrian Democratic Assembly	9.7.2011
Croatian Democratic Union	16.7.2011

Slovenian political parties all have a Facebook account. In Croatia only Independent Democratic Serbian Party and Democratic Actions of Croatia Party don't have an account on Facebook. Political parties with the most seats in parliament also have the largest number of likes (Figure 4), with the exception of Croatian Labourists which increased in popularity after the last elections.
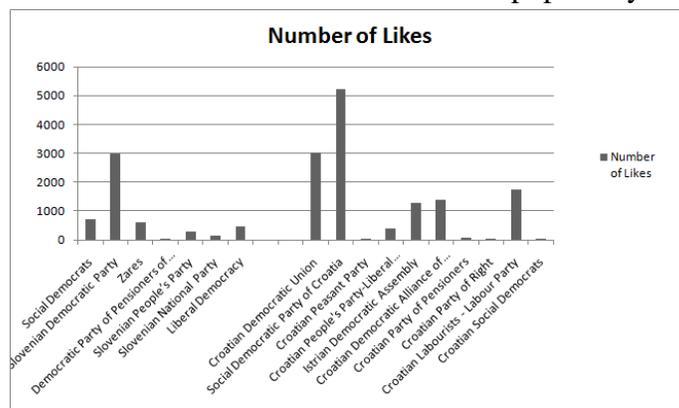

Figure 4: Number of likes of Facebook pages of Slovenian and Croatian political parties with a Facebook page

Political parties in general have not yet recognized Twitter as a tool for promotion of their ideas and attracting voters. Only 57% of parliamentary political parties in Slovenia use Twitter, in Croatia this number is even smaller, only 42%. In Slovenia, these political parties have a large number of tweets, and in Croatia two of those political parties have less then 20 tweets (Table 2).

Table 2: Tweets and followers of Slovenian and Croatian political parties with a Twitter page

Political Party - Slovenia	Tweets	Followers
Slovenian Democratic Party	1793	347
Zares	814	347
Slovenian People's Party	1429	427
Liberal Democracy	399	427
Political Party - Croatia		
Croatian Democratic Union	5	152
Social Democratic Party of Croatia	1325	829
Croatian People's Party-Liberal Democrats	142	146
Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja	150	28
Croatian Labourists - Labour Party	17	23

5 CONCLUSION

By analysis of statistical information, and by reading numerous articles, it is concluded that Internet is used in politics in both Slovenia and Croatia. All political parties members of the parliament of both countries have a web page, most of them have a Youtube channel and a Facebook account. Twitter is yet to be exploited. In most cases, politicians and political parties are active during election campaigns for state, local or presidential elections to win more votes. With election ending, Internet activity also mostly ends. Future work will analyze political communication over the Internet in other neighbor countries.

6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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