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THE EFFICIENCY OF ONLINE CONTENT IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract: *In recent years, social media has become an indispensable part of political campaigns, enabling political parties to have a strategic approach to creating digital campaigns. This paper deals with the identification of indicators that show the engagement of the online voter body. The first is the concept of political marketing, as well as the presentation of the modernization of political campaigns and funds through the stages of development. Then, the role of social media in political campaigns has been defined. By identifying the importance of monitoring political campaigns on social media, the paper reviews the existing developed and applied methodologies that determine the effects of political campaigns on the online voter body. Existing research has set a framework for the proposal of new methodologies for measuring the efficiency of engaging the online voter body on social media Facebook and Twitter. The proposed methodology defined in this paper will be a quantitative analysis of the published content of political parties in Serbia as well as the basis for a strategic approach in creating digital campaigns.*

Keywords: *political marketing, social media, real engagement, efficiency*

1. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 1990s has marked a growth in use of Internet. The number of social media users in 2010 was 0.97 billion users, and in 2018, 2.62 billion users show the trend of population growth (Statista, 2018b). For this reason, social media has become a fact of life for civil society around the world. As the communication landscape becomes more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is becoming more important and gaining more power since social media gives people the opportunity to access information much more easily. (Okan, et al., 2014). Additionally, social media has also made a significant contribution to the democratization of communications because of the possibility of free sharing of attitudes, opinions and other types of content. As a new space for targeting a specific target audience, it became an indispensable tool in both corporate advertising and political marketing.

Karlsen (2010) argues that the digital era, the era in which communication is established with voters, and that social media is an indispensable part of every political campaign. In addition, Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan (2012) argue that social media is increasingly being used in a political context, and that Twitter and Facebook have the potential to continuously increase political participation, confirming the importance of continuously monitoring the engagement of social media users in the course of political campaigns to adjust messages campaign to the electorate.

But if one looks at the field of political marketing, there is a group of authors who argue that despite the growing popularity of social media and the efforts of civil and political organizations to adopt these services, there is limited empirical research on the effects of using these services on citizens' political attitudes and civic behaviours (Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012). The extant body of knowledge is enlarging with the studies covering topics such as the effects of fake news in political campaigns (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017), the use of specific media, such as Twitter, for a particular campaign (Enli, 2017) or the intermedia agenda in the social media age (Harder, Sevenans & Van Aelst, 2017). Although there are studies dealing with the effect of political campaigns on the electorate and suggesting methodologies that can predict the results of the election (Williams & Gulati, 2008; Tumasjan, et al., 2010; Sang & Bos, 2012; O'Connor, et al., 2010; Barclay, et al., 2014), in Serbia, the field of political marketing has been insufficiently explored and leaves room for further research and monitoring of political campaigns. Empirical studies confirmed that political authorities in Serbia lack of transparency, responsiveness and interactivity with citizens (Milosavljevic, Milanovic & Benkovic, 2017). The confirmation of the Share Foundation's research on the use of social media as a channel for the communication of political parties with the electorate, and at the same time the existence of an online voter body, it is possible to plan better published content and improve the overall strategy of communication of political parties on social networks- media.

The paucity of the studies on the real effects of online political campaigns could partially be attributed to the lack of substantial matrices of indicators for the measurement of the effects of political campaigns in the

online arena. The aim of this paper was to identify the key indicators of the engagement of the online voter body by researching existing methodologies. The additional aim of the paper is to propose a new indicator of the efficiency of the engagement of an online voting body that would use political parties in Serbia as a feedback for the formulation of digital communication strategies.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 delineates current body of knowledge related to the concepts of political marketing, and the online channels for communicating political programs, aims and ideologies. Section 3 depicts on the main matrices used to indicate the relevanz of online presence in the sphere of political marketing. Section 4 is reserved for concluding remarks.

2. RELATED WORKS

The concept political marketing, although relatively new, has grown rapidly over the last decade. According to certain authors, while business marketing manages the market of customers, political marketing is governed by the voter market. In this case, the element of the market implies a political market, which further relates to the political public or, more specifically, the citizens as decision makers. Essential determinants of classical marketing, such as needs, desires and demands, have their own substitutes in political marketing. The needs can be replaced by interests, preferences of voters or the political market, while demands represent the interest of the political market for a political program (Škaro, 1999; Rocco, 1993). Nowadays, it attracts scholars from a number of disciplines outside the mainstream marketing field.

Political marketing includes political parties' influence on voters and focuses on influencing individuals in terms of political candidates to reach the maximum number of votes (Okan, et al., 2014; Bongard, et al., 1998; Slavujević, 2007). Political parties started to use marketing tools as part of their election campaign activities (Okan, et al., 2014). Karlsen (2010) claims that the recent decades of new information and communication technologies have influenced the creation of election campaigns. The same author, through three phases of campaign modernization, explains the instruments used in communication with voters. The first journalistic era (pre-modern campaign) is characterized by communication through newspapers, mass meetings and surveys whose main goal was to mobilize voters. The second television era (modern campaign) marks the use of television in campaigns that have been carefully prepared long before the election. Then there is a need of political parties to define the strategy of the election campaign. The third period is the digital era (post-modern campaign) in which communication is established with voters as well as the need for return information in order to adjust the message of the campaign to the audience. In the two-way communication, which marks post-modern campaigns, the possibility of a new type of engagement of the digital polling entity opens up feedback to political parties, thus adapting campaign messages to the digital voter body.

2.1. Social media as a channel in political campaigns

One of the marketing channels that political parties use to reach the voters is the social media (Shehata&Strömbäck, 2018). Since the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, the world's networked population has grown from the low millions to the low billions (Okan, et al., 2014). The global popularity of social media can be seen by comparing the acceptance of different media by users - the radio took 38 years for 50 million users, 13 for television, for the Internet 4 years, while Facebook had the same number of users in 10 months (Filipović&KostićStanković, 2017). Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012).

Marketing on social media can be defined as monitoring and facilitating interaction between customers, participation and exchange through digital media to encourage positive engagement with the company and its brands leading to a commercialized value (Chaffey & Smith, 2013). If a social media strategy is properly applied, marketing on social media can contribute to the success of achieving the goals of the organization. This is supported by facts about the number of social media users with whom it communicates with the implementation of the marketing strategy. Facebook has 2.167 billion users worldwide, Instagram has 800 billion active users and Twitter has 330 billion (Statista, 2018a).

Social media is considered to have made a significant contribution to the democratization of communications, the free sharing of attitudes, opinions and other types of content, through which editorial power is transferred from owners and editors of traditional media to users. Also, social media is a completely new space for the target audience to be targeted, making them an indispensable tool both in corporate advertising and in political marketing. The successful use of social media in US presidential campaign Barack Obama has established Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and other social media as an integral part of the political campaign toolbox (Tumasjan, et al., 2010). Obama used fifteen social media sites to run his

campaign. He understood the power of complementing offline work with an online campaign. He systematically linked the online community to offline activities such as fundraising (Effing, et al., 2011). Another positive case was the online campaign of Ségolène Royal during the French elections in 2007. She managed to connect with a massive online crowd (Effing, et al., 2011). One characteristic of this primary election was that their members were highly mobilized (Montero, 2009). On the other hand (Okan, et al. 2014) talked about political communication with voters through online campaigns in Turkey. The results of an analysis of the activities of Turkish political parties in local elections show that social media platforms used in local politics in 2014 - the first three were Youtube, Facebook and Twitter (Okan, et al., 2014).

The first significant use of the Facebook and Twitter platform for communication with the electorate in Serbia occurs during the presidential elections in 2008, when the first forms of planned digital content in political campaigns appear. It was then clear that the main actors in Serbia's political scene understood the notion of democratization as a chance to freely distribute a large amount of content, without using enough opportunity for strategic positioning of parties, promotion of their own ideas and political programs. Although the success of political parties in the elections is influenced by a number of other factors, the role of social media has become increasingly important in recent years. The empirical data (Statista, 2018c) show that the number of social media users in Serbia is constantly increasing and even predicts that the number of social media users will reach 3.5 million individuals by 2022. However, the use of social media as an instrument in political campaigns is an area that has not been sufficiently explored in Serbia, especially from the point of planning, creating and managing content, measuring the effectiveness of recruiting a voter body on social media and influencing election results.

In the continuation of work, a review is made of previous research and studies that were done by measuring the engagement of the online voter body, predicting the election results and identifying users who support a particular political option.

2.2. Measuring the engagement of the electorate on social media

Publication of online content is displayed as an important part of communication with the online business marketing community, which encourages the community to a certain type of activity. One of the early definitions of engagement within brand communities refers to it as "consumer intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with members of the community" (Baldus, et al., 2015). This term has been increasingly used in marketing literature. The results of the Ashley & Tuten study (2014) showed a high correlation of the used channels of social media by brands and consumer engagement. The same authors suggest continuous focus of marketing on maintaining social presence through social media in order to encourage consumer engagement. This is supported by research conducted by Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013), analyzing online engagement factors on Facebook brand pages. The results of their research have shown that published content encourages engagement on Facebook pages. These authors especially emphasize the impact of the media type and content type, as well as the time of publication to increase or decrease the level of engagement. The results of their research should help Facebook's moderators in implementing digital communication strategies.

But if one looks at the field of political marketing, there is a group of authors who argues that despite the growing popularity of social media and the efforts of civil and political organizations to adopt these services, there is limited empirical research on the effects of using these services on citizens' political attitudes and civic behaviours (Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012). However, there are studies dealing with the effect of political campaigns on the electorate and suggesting the application of methodologies that can predict the results of the election. For example, Williams and Gulati (2008) have found that the number of Facebook supporters can be considered a valid indicator of electoral success. Tumasjan, et al (2010) have created a methodology for monitoring the containing of the names of German political parties and prominent politicians in tweets, as well as analyzing the sentiments of the published content. The results of their research have shown that Twitter is a platform for political deliberation, and as such can be a reflection of the political mood of the electorate, as well as a predictor of the election result. The application of this methodology is also found in the research of Sang & Bos (2012), who, with some adjustments, tried to predict the elections for the Dutch Senate Election 2011. O'Connor, et al. (2010) developed the text analysis of the twitter publication, showing that the publications show the confidence of the electorate and their political opinion, as well as that the text of the analysis can foresee future election results. Chung & Mustafaraj (2011) tested these methodologies (Tumasjan, et al., 2010; O'Connor, et al., 2010) on a new set of data (tweets) from the 2010 US Senate special election in Massachusetts. The same authors found that just counting tweets is not enough to obtain good predictions and measure the effect of sentiment analysis and spam filtering. Barclay, et al. (2014) analyzed content on social media in the run-up to the 2012 US presidential elections and found a correlation between the number of Facebook 'likes' that Obama and Romney recorded on their official Facebook fan pages and the number of votes they secured. Barclay, et al. (2015) asked whether the number of likes on the

Facebook page of the party in the Indian environment could predict the results of the election. The results of the study found a positive correlation of the number of odds the party or leader had on the official Facebook page and the election results.

Analyzing political campaigns in Serbia and the digital content published by political parties, the Share Foundation, during the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2016 and 2017, monitored the activities of political actors on social networks. Monitoring was about measuring the involvement of the online political community in the course of political campaigns, and the aim of the research was to show in which official account the voters were most involved in interaction. This way, it was necessary to identify online users who clearly support a particular political option. The starting point in the research was to identify individual users who interacted with Facebook by announcing political actors, as well as the number of their interactions (likes and comments) from week to week during the campaign. Also, the posts on Facebook were explored, which during the election campaign largely caused the engagement of users. The research found great disproportion between the number of likes and comments. Twitter analysis took into account the relationship between tweets from the official orders of the parties, as well as the interaction of users with them. Their "social network analysis - SNA" method analyzed the links between actors and community structures by following the popular hashtag #izbori2016.

Previous studies show that in certain political systems, social media has become one of the key factors in political campaigns and that it is possible to predict the results of the election by using certain methodologies (Tumasjan, et al., 2010; O'Connor, et al., 2010; Barclay, et al., 2014; Barclay, et al., 2015). Also, studies show that using of the same methodologies in other circumstances and political systems does not have to prove effective for anticipating the effects of political campaigns or engaging in social media (Cvijikj&Michahelles, 2013). A survey by the SHARE Foundation found that publishing content on social media in Serbia contributed to communication between political parties and the digital voting body, but did not show how political parties should plan, create and publish content. The orientation to two-way communication on social networks, the influence on the engagement of the "digital" voter body, and the measurement of the efficiency of engagement, is possible to plan better content and improve the overall strategy of communication of political parties on social networks.

For this reason, the focus of this paper is on analyzing existing indicators of efficiency, as well as on the introduction of new ones that would be used by political parties as feedback for the formulation of digital communication strategies. In this regard, in the continuation of the work, the measurement of the engagement of the digital community as a reaction to the published content by the political parties is explained in greater detail.

3. REAL ENGAGEMENT OF ONLINE COMMUNITY

Marketers recognize the increasing importance of Internet and consumers who are active in online communities (Felix, Rauschnabel&Hinsch, 2017; Dahl, 2018). The survey, which served as a framework for setting up a new methodology and indicators of the effectiveness of published content in political campaigns, takes into account the factors of Online Engagement on Facebook brand pages (Cvijikj&Michahelles 2013). The study analyzes the influencing factors in terms of the characteristics of the content communicated by the company, such as type of media, content type, posting day and time, over the level of online customer engagement measured by the number of likes, comments and shares, and interaction duration for the domain of a Facebook brand page (Cvijikj&Michahelles 2013). In their online engagement model, which relates to the analysis of the number of clicks that represent the reactions, the number of comments and shares of the online community, they are dependent variables.

The specified dependent variables were used as the basis for creating a new indicator of efficiency of the online content in this paper. Given the similarity in the way the online voter body reacts to the published content, the new indicator of online content efficiency refers to Twitter and Facebook.

Efficiency on social networks Facebook and Twitter can be measured by reactions to content, or by engaging online audiences gathered around specific lists and candidates. For the purposes of fully monitoring the flow of campaigns and engagement, the following indicators are required:

1. Total and average daily number of posts,
2. Number of reactions to the posted post / content (facebook reactions, comments and shares, while on Twitter were reactions, comments and retweets), and
3. Average number of followers on a daily basis.

Taking into account the different ways of responding to the published content, a survey was conducted regarding the various levels of engagement on social media. In the opinion of experts, for each type of reaction (reactions, comments and shares/retweets), weight coefficients were identified (0.2, 0.3, 0.5). Reactions Like, Comment and Share on Facebook's social network have been assigned with weightings 0.2, 0.3 and 0.5, respectively. Also, the same weights are assigned for reactions on Twitter, but with the greatest weighting attributed to the "Comment" reaction. In this way, the basis for defining a new indicator of efficiency, real engagement of the auditorium was obtained. The real engagement of the auditorium was calculated for each list according to the formulas:

$$ReF = \sum \text{reactions} \times 0,2 + \sum \text{comments} \times 0,3 + \sum \text{shares} \times 0,5 [\text{Facebook}] \quad (1)$$

$$ReT = \sum \text{reactions} \times 0,2 + \sum \text{retweets} \times 0,3 + \sum \text{comments} \times 0,5 [\text{Twitter}] \quad (2)$$

The final indicator for which all lists are reduced to a single measure of comparability, shows the Real engagement of the auditorium by one post (ReA / P), by placing the value of Real engagement of the auditorium in relation to the total number of announcements in the observed period

$$Re1f = \frac{\sum \text{reactions} \times 0,2 + \sum \text{comments} \times 0,3 + \sum \text{shares} \times 0,5}{\sum \text{posts}} [\text{Facebook}] \quad (3)$$

$$Re1t = \frac{\sum \text{reactions} \times 0,2 + \sum \text{retweets} \times 0,3 + \sum \text{comments} \times 0,5}{\sum \text{posts}} [\text{Twitter}] \quad (4)$$

One of the important goals of publishing content on social networks is the growth of the online community that follows a certain list (auditorium), but also the inclusion in promoting different reactions (engagement). Depending on the electoral list and candidates, the size of the auditorium is different, but also the reaction to the published content. By using this methodology, the results of the basic set indicators would be available: the total and average number of posts of the observed political party / list, the number of reactions on the published post / content (in the case of Facebook, social networks would be followed: reactions, comments and shares; followed by reactions, comments and retweets) and number of followers on a daily basis. If analysis were to be further elaborated, it would be possible to answer the question about the impact of increasing social networking as well as the online community. Additionally, it would be possible to identify which posts caused the greatest real engagement, with the identification of the exact date / time of publication of the post, whether the volume of announcements influenced the increase of social networkers as well as the presentation of real engagement by published posts according to the number of followers on each individual social network.

4. CONCLUSION

Existing data on the current number, as well as the constant increase in the number of social media users, are indicative of the importance of monitoring the engagement of the online community. Social media as an indispensable part of political campaigns have become the topic of various studies. The aim of this paper is to explore the existing methodologies by identifying the indicators of the engagement of the online voter body as well as the ways in which the engagement is measured. By proposing a new indicator of efficiency of the recruitment of the electorate in Serbia, political parties would be enabled to monitor political campaigns that would serve as feedback for the formulation of digital communication strategies.

The proposed methodology defined in this paper will be a quantitative analysis of the published content of political parties in Serbia on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Due to the similarity in the way the online voting body can respond to publications, the methodology can be applied to data collected on the available profiles of political parties on social media Twitter and Facebook. The results of testing and application of the methodology would generate data that would represent a comprehensive monitoring of digital campaigns of political parties and actors, as well as the possibility for strategic planning of campaigns.

It suggests further quantitative analysis of content on other social media, Instagram and Youtube and the development of a methodology that would apply to these two platforms

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