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Modern Tools in the Assembly of Political Platforms and Perception

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Abstract

Contemporary media instruments that are mainly fuelled by the internet and the social media are critical in constructing robust political constructs or platforms and should they fail to achieve this undertaking, they can undoubtedly, at least, put forward a modified perception of that political element. In other words, if the media does not have enough power to construct a solid political movement, it can, at least, make it appear to be solid and imbedded with legitimacy and representativity. The generative infrastructure required to assemble and coagulate a coherent political public image draws its strength from within an interactional paradigm that creates a bond between the political communicator and the target audience for which the political message of that communicator is designated.

Keywords: *media, perception, internet, legitimacy, dissemination.*

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The desire to achieve a normative ideal of the media system relied on a redefinition of the standard reporting of events focused on a strong synchronicity between the information infrastructure and the strategic objectives of communicating the political image. The Internet and social networks have generated a new emergence of civic responsibility at the level of demographic structures that especially target youth or people with a high degree of training and education. This re-correlation of certain categories previously passive or simply resigned to participate actively in the civic mechanism of political communication is in itself a technical achievement that derives not from the structural or ideological change of the message, but from the intrinsic methodology of disseminating a certain act of political communication.

The Internet has popularized and redefined the connection of the new generation with contemporary society, generating new procedures and approaches regarding communication in a democratic state. Through the new methodologies, information is no longer provided arbitrarily by certain opinion-formers, the Internet user becoming his/her own opinion-former, using a personal ideological filter or even personal convenience sources to access information or templates at any time of the day or night, related to information according to certain desired or personal research impulses. Forums have become the new agora of the 21st century, allowing those who previously had no voice, a free framework of expression supported and encouraged by anonymity and the total absence of any form of censorship: "New information technologies have generated alternative forms of communication during the campaign period, forms that give voters much greater autonomy. Rather than waiting passively, and most likely in vain, for the media to provide them with interesting topics, Internet users have the opportunity to search for the information they are interested in about a candidate or another. This newfound autonomy increases the overall meaning of political involvement. Moreover, the use of the Internet increases the interest in the campaign and increases the civic commitment of the runner that cannot be influenced by traditional methods of propaganda. Also, the Internet reduces campaign costs for candidates, costs that are much lower than public baths (in the Romanian space) or contacting voters by phone (in the American space). Therefore, whether it is about costs or reducing the distance between the candidate and the electorate, the Internet remains an effective form of mobilizing the electorate." (Roșca, 2007: 72-73)

The large-scale use of the Internet as a medium for disseminating political message has generated an infrastructural set designed to allocate complex mediations associated with relations between voters and the elected. The chaotic growth of the Internet does not represent a simple evolution in the establishment of socio-political connections, but rather a revolution in the manner in which individuals communicate with each other in the context of the perceived relevance of electoral interaction. Online media platforms do not represent a simple development of the effectiveness of transmitting the political message, they are synonymous with a widening of the range of interaction and the ways of implementing these functionalities. The Internet, along with traditional mass media, represent technological intermediaries that facilitate the elective ways associated with leaders and related ideologies.

The Internet is not a mere evolution of political communication, but a revolution in itself of the intrinsic nature of communication. Social networks foster abrupt metamorphoses in redefining the relationship trajectories between citizens and those who request their vote, a new selective dimension of the informational framework

being generated, the voter having the privilege of benefiting from information uncensored and unconditioned by media trusts or audio-visual regulatory bodies.

Media platforms in the online sphere have a monolithic axis of address. If before, a political communication approach generated by the candidate focused on the connective rigor between him and the receiving environment, with the advent of the Internet the receiver himself became an opinion former, thus generating a multiplicity of images impossible to quantify or control. Lăpădat and Lăpădat believe that: "Media is a means of expression and, at the same time, a means of influence and possible means of pressure. For some scholars, it acts in the sense of uniformity and conformism, for others, in the way of diversity and complexity" (Lăpădat and Lăpădat, 2019: 70). The structure of the campaign came to be supported or criticized in very complex ways in the virtual environment to the detriment of the traditional promotional messages on television or posters stuck legitimately or not on buildings.

A functional deficit of the Internet is constituted by the correlation of the reception of the informational flow on the principles of an informational recycling of an ideological nature that is consistent with one's own desires or political affinities. The purpose of the Internet was to provide a substantial amount of information to somehow detach itself from the worn-out trappings of television and newspapers. An exponential increase, both quantitative and qualitative, of access was supposed to be synonymous with an ideological liberation of the receiving mass. Despite the undeniable qualities of the Internet in terms of quantity and speed of dissemination, there has been widespread over-indoctrination of political message consumers. Although the amount of information present online is huge, presenting and representing in its entirety and absolutely uncensored all political perspectives, the individual has shown a paradoxical vulnerability to self-indoctrination, selecting from that huge mass of information strictly those data that fit his own set of values, leading thus towards a consolidated limitation of the availability of versatility of the ideological variations of reception: "The existence and accessibility of a huge amount of information online puts traditional media in the background. People now have the opportunity to directly reach a multitude of information sources, bypassing conventional channels. Facilitating access to different and often opposing viewpoints should encourage communication between ideologies. However, things are not quite like that. The abundance of information generates a paradox: society's capacity to produce information exceeds people's capacity to consume it. Thus, individuals select about the same set of information that they were used to selecting. Moreover, there are voices that claim that the possibility offered by new media platforms to personalize the online environment will lead to the isolation of individuals from opposing viewpoints. Therefore, the question arises whether the virtual public space facilitates the polarization of society on ideological grounds." (Sălcudeanu, Aparaschivei and Toader, 2009: 24)

The methodology of the information dissemination functionality proposed by the traditional media systems offered a communication paradigm based on the passivity of the receiver, on the technical inability to strengthen an interactive network through which the public itself becomes a secondary communicator capable of holding accountable the direct generators of the information. The information proliferation mechanism was quite simply built, focused on an agglutination of polemics between the opposing candidates, and the resulting ideas reached the receiving sphere of the passive media consumer who chose to agree or disagree with one or more points of view presented. Another compromising factor lies in the membership of the political message

facilitator at the level of a trust or state apparatus. Televisions or newspapers, whether independent or state-owned, are controlled or at least guided based on as real political or economic realities as possible. This direct control has the potential to compromise the veracity or relevance of a message, often offering truncated or out-of-context perspectives, and sometimes even refusing to offer certain viewpoints or realities. When the facilitator of the political message is controlled, then that control will also translate to the media product, thus being the case of a compromise of the purpose and ideals of communicational deontology.

The new research in the media field tends to explore the solution potential offered by the use of the Internet as a fair and representative alternative because we are dealing with an information sphere that has thousands or millions of users, being, at least theoretically, impossible to control or to subjugate. Although this state is actually a reality, we can still talk about a structural deficiency of the online environment that cannot be corrected or limited because it is an imperfection of the collective social mind. Just as in the case of television people choose to watch only those stations that are in harmony with their own grid of ideological values, the same danger applies to the Internet, where individuals are often liable to turn to those sites, blogs or areas of social networks that mirror your own opinions and beliefs. In this respect, Sălcudeanu, Aparaschivei and Toader believe that: "We observe, therefore, that in practice, political blogs can sometimes shape the media agenda, but, in order to succeed, the information transmitted must obey the logic of news selection, typical of traditional mass media. The rediscovery of the Internet has given rise to hopes and opinions that the new medium of communication represents both a panacea for the problems generated by the inequity of the classical public sphere and a solution to increase political participation among citizens. On the other hand, a major problem that threatens the political blogosphere is represented by the principles behind the coagulation of online communities. It turns out that many of the laws that govern the behaviour of the electorate in the real world are also found in the online environment." (Sălcudeanu et al., 2009:23)

The advantage of the Internet in political communication lies in the fact that it is not under the limiting spectrum of censorship, existing even outside of any regulatory formulas. Any receiver can in turn become a transmitter of a political message, requiring only basic access to the Internet and some knowledge of the field of communication. Social media platforms have become a powerful unifying force, encompassing the communicative energies of millions of people. This very organization, however, can be a sign of a vulnerability, as there is already an organized framework that can be subject to content management and censorship in accordance with the privacy terms and conditions regarding access to that site.

The versatility of communicational circularity at the level of the Internet, the potential of transiting both message generating and receiving areas means that every person who accesses the Internet or a certain social network can choose to be a simple message consumer, a pseudo- administrator who evaluates and may manage access to certain information or may even be an independent or organized creator of media content. The lack of a centralized system of control constantly expresses the concern that the content of political communication may fall into ridicule or focus on irrelevant spheres of ideological proliferations. This, however, represents the true vector of legitimacy of the Internet, in that there is no longer a question of centralization based on the plutocratic criteria provided by the elites.

The quality or content of political communications will be regulated strictly according to the desired reception and generation of internet users. In terms of media communication, the Internet thus becomes the fairest and most representative form of mirroring the concerns of a society. The quantitative and qualitative complexity of the material distributed and redistributed expresses a superior dimension of inclusion, ensuring that no voice remains unheard or unrepresented, each political current having its own descriptive and analytical area, and if it does not exist, the potential recipients of the political message they can become content creators themselves, acting as legitimate compensators for potential representational imbalances in the online sphere.

The disadvantage of carrying out the political image campaign through the use of the Internet lies in the still low level of this form of communication at the level of the masses of voters. Another clear disadvantage is that brought about by the fact that only certain categories of age and professional training consider the Internet to be a viable source of communication and information. There are a number of monolithic categories of individuals who have a strong impact on the political scene, but cannot be influenced by the online environment because, deliberately or not, they have no connection to it. In the opinion of researcher Viorica Roșca: "The only downside to Internet campaigning is the relatively small number of voters who use this source of access to political discourse. In the US, only a third of voters use this means of information. Electronic communication offers a degree of exposure of the candidates close to that obtained through the technique of party propaganda, but much lower than in the case of telephone communication. In Romania, the Internet usage rate is even lower. The question of whether the Internet can contribute to the democratization of political communication does not have a certain or affirmative answer. Electronic communication can expand the deliberative practices of political actors and media institutions, but there is a risk that the Internet will only provide new visibility practices for political actors and increasingly diverse private spaces. On the other hand, Internet web pages of political parties or candidates attract a relatively small audience. When we consider the role that the Internet plays in the democratization of political communication, one of the main issues that arise is that of political content." (Roșca, 2007: 73)

The future of political communication via the Internet is almost guaranteed by the propensity of the new generation to accept a very fast system of transmitting information independently of the traditional constraints of mass media. The emergence of this new communication infrastructure facilitates the creation of a global community according to new ideological cultural criteria or political interests. The fact that we are talking about an independent global network, which is not under the jurisdiction of a particular country or interest group, turns the Internet into a communication system as close as possible to the ideals of independence and rejection of manipulation or censorship. Though the media is fundamentally designed as a conduit for information, it is often misused to distort and reshape political perspective: "The media is a complex mixture but it is very clearly delimited by communication factors based on manipulation and subjectivity, which are hidden behind ideological mirages such as deontology or professional integrity" (Lăpădat and Lăpădat, 2020: 125-126). As a first impact, the Internet meant a counter to the political messages provided by traditional mass media that were under the financial jurisdiction of trust interests or internal control mechanisms. There is also a strong downside to political communication via the Internet. If enhanced freedom and lack of centralized censorship or regulation means

superior access to democratic ideals of communication, then we must also accept the other side of the coin.

The total freedom of ideas applies including to negative or extremist ideologies, generating a fertile communication field for harmful policies that in the traditional media environment would have been eliminated by means of the regulations in the audio-visual field. Correlating this appetite with the almost normal status of the Internet, which involves not assuming communication, there is already a strong framework of democratic dysfunctions at the level of political communication. Ideally, the concealment of the identity of the online political communicator reflected strong considerations focused on enhancing the need for anonymity as an absolute guarantor of freedom of expression. This anonymity, however, correlated with the absence of regulatory courts and the elimination of state authorities in the online environment, meant the generation of an environment conducive to the development of harmful reflexivity in terms of political addressing.

The development of the Internet and the blogosphere can be associated with the correlations of meaning related to the notions of rural and urban. When the online environment was in its infancy, communication of any nature, including politics, was done in a natural way, the actors of communication knew each other and acted exactly as in a small community of people. The exponential development of the online phenomenon produced, in addition to the advantages of increasing the informational beach, also an ideological segregation or isolation, giving birth to groups or groupings that communicated in opposition to each other: "Interestingly, the same trend of polarization is directly proportional to the size of the blogosphere. However, it is a natural tendency, especially if we draw a parallel with the evolution of a village, which over time becomes a city. If, initially, the inhabitants all knew each other, with the increase of the locality, the community also atomizes. The same happens in the case of political blogs, especially since here the criterion on the basis of which a group is formed is very clear: ideology. I specify that the isolation between the two groups is not total, there are a number of links based not so much on agreement as on the exchange of information." (Sălcudeanu et al., 2009:75)

The final product of the restrictive mechanisms for accessing the Internet is constituted by the arbitrary composition of a new plutocratic class argued by the fact that the individuals who preoccupy themselves with political content through the Internet are generally those who benefit from a higher level of education and prosperity. These individuals are generally active middle-class people of a young age, often prone to active involvement in political movements, engaging in civic communications, and mobilizing almost instantly using the Internet or social networking sites.

The Internet is creating an eclectic new sphere of journalism or evaluation of the political message. An opinion on the Internet cannot be censored, and the independent voices of analysis that do not find their representativeness or access in traditional media systems, find in the virtual environment an unrestricted or intimidated communication bridge. If in traditional mass media censorship or attempts at censorship can lead to the elimination or limitation of certain communication packages, this restrictive approach can transform online communicators into modern martyrs of political dissent, doing nothing more than popularizing their voice, generate an augmented area of online dissemination aimed at counteracting the abuses of the traditional media apparatus.

Political communication facilitated by the information infrastructure of the Internet has experienced a structural advantage in the free dissemination of specific messages and ideologies. The communication system and the creation of correlations and dissemination links means an intrinsic difficulty in controlling a system without a leader. The arbitrary elimination of a communicator will bring about a counter-reaction that will produce a hundred other similar communicators, perhaps even more virulent and motivated in the composition of the act of communication. If we add to this framework of systemic benefits and the dimension of the new element of the Internet, then we are dealing with an event framework that is difficult to control or at least to quantify. It is a very difficult challenge to control something built not to be controlled, incompatible with this by its very structure, and if the respective sphere of communication is new and almost unknown, then we can talk about an almost impossible endeavour.

The Internet's substantial impact on political communication, and especially its demographic relevance among young people and intellectuals, has nonetheless attracted intense energies, resources, and concerns from parties on the political scene. Clearly, the future of political campaigns will be determined and decided online and not by worn-out methodologies such as the printed newspaper or election posters pasted on rusted shacks. This means that political forces are already acting to dissect the essential functionalities of online communication and design new image and campaign strategies capable of seizing this medium that is not yet exploited to its full potential. The strategy deficiencies will initially be compensated by allocating substantial, human and financial resources that can create opinion nuclei on the Internet capable of mimicking the naturalness or idyllic freedoms of this address area. Researcher Paul Aparaschivei notes that: "The online environment has seen a spectacular evolution worldwide, translated into millions of new users every year. The Internet was quickly adopted by the advertising, public relations and, inevitably, political marketing industries. At the same time, traditional media messages have adapted to the characteristics of the online environment, acquiring values such as relevance, brevity and, very importantly, interactivity. Starting in 2004, the blog began to be used as a means of unconventional promotion of the politician on the Internet. The first to quickly adopt this new media were American politicians. With the success shown by some as bloggers, the interest of other political people around the world in spontaneous communication, characterized by naturalness, has increased significantly." (Sălcudeanu et al., 2009:78)

The potential for success based on a strong hub of communication and innovation has turned the online environment into a focus of analysis for traditional mass media. The natural tendency to adopt those functionalities capable of dominating the political communication landscape of the future has determined a vast transition of traditional communication structures to the virtual space. Some newspapers have completely abandoned the printed version, opting for a strictly virtual existence. Televisions have chosen to coexist, at least at the moment, in both spheres of communication, but increasing their presence and relevance on the Internet with each passing day. This redefinition of political communication vectors is synonymous with the creation of new political communication strategies based on re-examining the role of the Internet in influencing democratic mechanisms. Civic movements are fuelled by social media conglomerates, with sites like Facebook and Twitter promoting or legitimizing collective perceptions of social action in the name of shared political ideologies.

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The multiplicity of perspectives offered by the online environment has forced candidates or even elected politicians to be much more careful in cultivating their own image. If in the traditional media there were perhaps a few dozen journalists who made up the voice of civil society, in the current conditions of representativeness through social networks we have millions of receivers who can at any time turn into independent voices capable of criticizing or supporting the measures or actions of candidates who request or they already have the popular vote. The Internet tends to balance the scales of surveillance and legitimacy from the voters to the elected, from the receiving table to the so-called elites of the political class. The explosion of new online media paradigms is not a simple revolution in the mechanisms of dissemination and evaluation of the political message, but also a systemic transformation of political life in general.

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