TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN: FROM SIMPLE POLITICS TO VIRTUAL POLITICS

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Abstract

Recent electoral campaigns in Albania are following the trend of electoral campaigns in Eestern countries, where information technology and social networks have outpacing traditional methods of communication. Eager to introduce in Albania the latest technological practices borrweed from abroad, Albanian model comes with features and great misunderstandings. From rallies have passed on social networks, by contact with citizens have crossed in the virtual politics, from the need for transparency have passed in the exchange of selected information, from party newspapers propaganda move to tough political struggle in social networks. The paper analyzes these flows in recent campaigns, compares them with the practices of other countries and argues that this practice introduced in Albania risks misused to control information in other forms and that voters, more than candidate and the program is primarily to the choice of political image. The paper analyzes the MMB in CEC reports and reports of the OSCE, and other international institutions and appealing way and mechanisms how political parties to avoid drain of politics from citizen contact to virtual, and how information should be forwarded complete and impartial to citizens. One candidate is unable to stand 24 hours a day on social networks to communicate with voters and happens to not be really active but avoid direct communication with the citizen or someone else to be the response. This brings the wrong perception of electoral promises for the program and for the wrong response for voters questions because not everything served in social networks can be brought by a presumed person themselves. Therefore we have the phenomenon of deformation of democracy, creating the premise that the public during the campaign not informed correctly about what really happens, not to communicate with him that will vote and receive completely information on political projects of candidate or political party.

 Key words: *electoral campaigns, public information, propaganda, social networks, electoral marketing*

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Introduction:

Use of social networks in politics took off, mainly after the "Obama" campaign for Presidential Election during 2008 in the U.S. by gaining success and succeeded in making the first steps in the development of new tools and communication techniques and their large sophistication in favor of the parties/political candidates, but also in increasing the participation of citizens in the electoral process by enabling strategies to increase the transparency of information.

"Social media is playing an increasingly important role in how campaigns are run and how elected officials govern. This allows candidates not only to communicate more effectively to a wider audience, but it creates a two-way street for voters to respond and interact with the leaders. "This dynamic exchange of information and ideas makes a democracy healthier and more participatory (Curtice, 2007). Social media allow users not only to seek political information, but interact with others (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).
"Progress and development of social media, such as internet blogs, Face book, Twitter, and the development of public political relations, affects two viewpoints: the perception of the role of traditional media in electoral processes and political communication and the correlation between traditional media and social media (Piechota, 2011).
Between the 2000 and 2006 election cycles, a number of online information sources witnessed significant growth in use such as traditional news organization Web sites, candidate Web sites, state and local government Web sites, and online news portals such as AOL and Yahoo! (Rainie, Cornfield, & Horrigan, 2005; Rainie & Horrigan, 2007).

Some consider the Internet a democratizing medium, as it can increase information access and allow citizens to voice and exchange their opinions (Morris, 1999).

During the election campaign of the 2013 in Albania was an attempt to follow the trend of western models leaving behind the traditional means of communication. Studying by analyzing reports of the monitoring board of media in KQZ, OSBE and foreign reports gives the distortions that were made to the western model of electoral campaigns in the Albanian reality and the fact of creating distances between the politician and the citizen. The value of studies lies in the fact that it is the first time that social networks are used as tools to reach voters in Albania and how they have fulfilled the gap that has created the mismanagement of television media in relation to political parties.

Aim of study/research:

The aim of the study is to identify the negative effects of the use of social media in election campaigns, such as the candidate flight from rallies in squares to virtual politics, lack of transparency and use of information analyzed selected. Analizing the BMM reports in KQZ and reports of OSCE, and other international institutions appeals ways and mechanisms on how political parties avoid the escape of politics from its citizen contact to the virtual one, and how information should be forwarded as full and impartial to the citizens. Also, bringing precise figures regarding with the followers of the main leaders of political parties in Albania in social networks want to emphasize the need for legal and ethical regulation of online electoral activity given that 2013 has been a violation of election deadlines from online campaign and the electoral weight that these mechanisms have are always referring to the number of online followers.

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Research topics: Analisys of social neteork

It is known that communication is the essential element of the politics, and a more effective method and rapid communication between politician and citizen. In this way they are distributing every idea in social networks and thus the policy has become comparable as well as the society and quality of life or different institutions. Technology does not provide solutions to problems but helps to have the right question and it comes from the amount of information and the speed of communication. This innovation that was used massively in the campaign of 2013 in Albania seeks to analyze and draw conclusions and recommendations regarding the positive and negative effects that has led to democracy, transparency and closeness voter-elected. Although in other countries where social networks are widely used, there were a lot of studies and expert opinions, in Albania still do not have an in-depth study regarding this area, especially in political communication.

Research questions:

During this study as mentioned above arise research questions regarding the positive and negative effects of social networking in politicians' communication in the campaign's of 2013. The first question is whether we have a distortion and concealment of information conveyed to the citizen by the politician? İs the voter choosing the program through social networking and thoughts of the candidate or his transformed image in social media and opinions of counselors or people close to him? Have social networks helped discriminated subjects from the media television to introduce their program online to citizens? Have they been equally successful online campaigns as those used in 2008 in America and 2009 in Germany and how much difference have had prosecutions in social networks with the votes received by parties or candidates.

Scientific methods:

Initially, the study seeks to analyze the use of technology innovation in the election campaign citing theoretical researchers of the field, analyzing parallel similar campaigns in Western countries and finding the differences between traditional campaigns. As to the study methods I have used comparative analysis between the presenting political subjects parties in traditional media and social networks presentation. Also, i have studied professional studies as tha of the bakers company which has earned the right to generating FB reports, using data for the followers of the main leaders of political parties at the time of the electoral campaign. A profesional orientation which is worth to this study is the reviewing and analyzing of three reports, that of the BMM in KQZ and OSBE report which highlight the shortcomings of television channels broadcasting in the time required for the political subjects and their discrimination by some televisions including here the TVSH, too. Also, analyzing these reports we highlight the need for such a new regulating law in terms of television time, appeals and online campaigns.
Finally after all the studying steps there will be presented the relevant findings and recommendations.

Data analysis:

Political parties and political candidates at the 2013 election campaign used social media to inform the electorate.
There are some companies, which provide information about the use, statistics, measurements and indices of social media usage, data and reports illustrated through the charts listed below are processed by official web of the Social Bakers. Social Bakers is a company that provides

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monitoring, tracking and analyzing of social networks in connection with the use, comparison and generation of statistical data of Face book, YouTube, Twitter, Google, and LinkedIn.

Here we have an overview of the statistics of the pages of the main leaders of the two political parties, Sali Berisha of the Democratic Party with 781,943 fans and Socialist Party leader Edi Rama 539,107 fans. The most important part of the study is how people talk about issues that leader of the parties throw for discussion in social networks and as we see there is an influx of 100000-150000 fans who speak about election topics in a day, especially on days before elections.

Figure 1. People who talk about certain topics posted on the Face book page of former leader of the Democratic Party, Sali Berisha
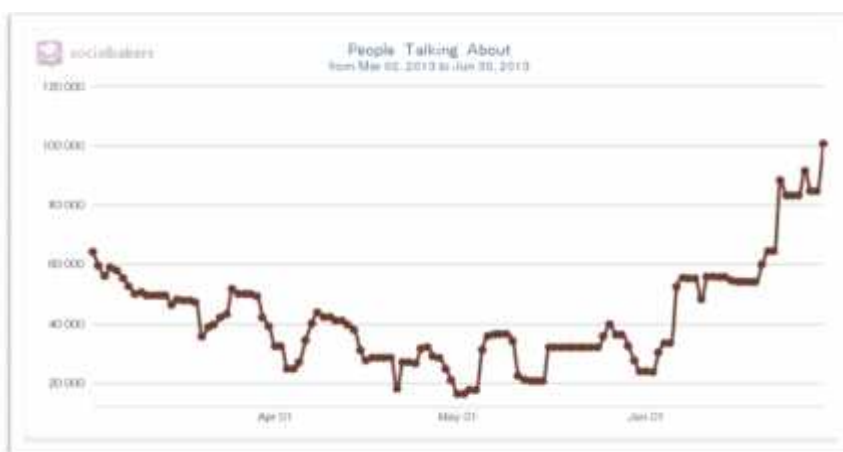
Figure 2. People who talk about certain topics posted on the face book page of the Socialist leader, Edi Rama.
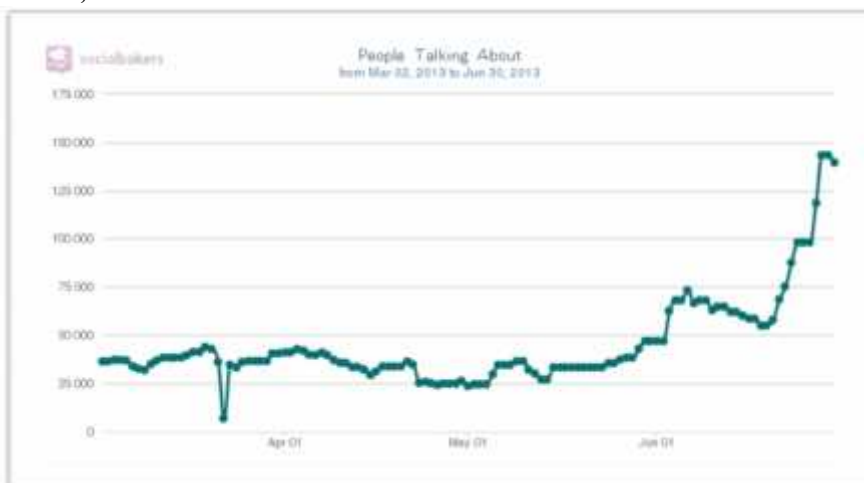
By analyzing the three reports of the Media Monitoring Board we notice an inequality of showing the political subjects in television and this part discriminated subjects. FRD has had 0 minutes of broadcasting on TVSH, or the discrimination of the PBDNJ as a parliamentary party, which gap was filled by social networking use.

Therefore the board has proposed these compensations in media:

1. TVSH has to compensate according to the Article 81, paragraph 1, SP political entities with 23 minutes.

2. TVSH to compensate according to the Article 81, paragraph 1, PR, PDIU, PBDNJ political entities to the same extent that has given to the LSI entity.

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3. Unparliamentarily coalition parties ASHE 9 minutes.
According to the OSBE report this inequality has come as a result of lack of effective enforcement of regulations on media, and the lack of an effective remedial and regular process to resolve electoral complaints, or to regulate and also check online election campaign. On the other side if we analyze the introduction of political program in social networks of discriminated political parties by Albanian public television we have a balance with other parties that have a high television time due to the ease of use of the social network face book. FRD with 0 minutes of time on TVSH has had 6,000 followers and its leader Bamir Topi has 10,000 followers on face book. Also, by studying the leaders of the main parties in Albania we noticed a deviation from the questions of citizens, use of edited pictures of the rallies in order to concealment their failures, it is also observed a decrease of the communication with the civics after the election campaign is over. Online interviews of the two main leaders on twitter and face book are to be evaluated and this are defined as key moments of the campaign and give an importance to social media as a very important factor in politician-citizen communication.

Findings:

The study is focused on the use of online technology in the campaign of 2013 and one of the findings is that political parties discriminated by television media can find compensation on social networks by prezenting their political programs. The study also claims that success in followers in social networks may not always be translated into votes of the electorate because despite differences of the DP leader to those of the SP leader in social networks presented in the graphs above, the voting process showed the opposite. Electoral campaign began in social networks before the date fixed by the Central Election Commission and this is an innovation not only to political parties but also for legislators who must provide adjustment of the legal information. We have a censorship of information and avoidance of debate from political program towards politician's image, way of dressing and its virtual behavior. On TV we have a candidate with image and voice and his words documented in this context, in social networks candidates posts may not be completely theirs, because of the short time that they have to answer to the whole voters on the internet during the campaign time and due to continuous communication with counselors. We highlight that we have more than propaganda with image than detailed presentation of political programs in social networks, also we highlight that we have a lack of public information and classified information due to the time available and the lack of direct confrontation. We also have sidestep of direct questions because of the delete option that the social networks offer. These features and findings make the field of using social networks as interesting and exploring and analyzing them in the context of election campaigns.

Conclusions:

As a conclusion of this study regarding the use of online technology in campaigns we can say that 2013 was the first year in which social networks were used for political purposes and as a result they had positive and negative effects.
The positive effects of using social media in politics are:
   -The speed of sending the message to the electorate is greater.
   - Low-cost of communication.
   -Motivating political supporters through the created image and photo-slogans.
   -Increasing participation in politics through facebook advertising.
New and unparliamentary parties that do not have the necessary funds to produce and run expensive TV advertisments or if television stations refuse them, they compensate this

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impossibility by using social networking, realizing videos and uploading them on Youtube, or sharing on Facebook etc.. so that through social connections that they have through social media they have created the network and the distribution of information through the network to the target.

The negative effects of the use of social networks in politics are:

-The use of social networking and lacks information transparency and the use of the information selected

-Unlike Obama and Merkel campaigns where the subject of discussion in social networks were electoral promises, in Albania we concentrate on photo-montage of rallies and image of politicians, it brings misuse of social networks to manipulate the public, control information and hide flaws of electoral programs and popular support.

- Information on social networks is transmited unilateral while in traditional media it is relatively neutral

- Using social networks, political parties violated the 30-day deadline set by the KQZ to develop the campaign.

Recommendations:

This study highlights firstly the need for approval of the laws and regulations on media time to political parties in the campaign for not having discrimination as happened in 2013 with some subjects. Secondly, based on the use in high percentage of social networks required an adjustment and involvement in the electoral law and the management of social networks by the political subjects in terms of time of starting the campaign, distortion and concealment of information, transparency and communication with citizens. This can be achieved by including monitoring of official social networking sites of political subjects from the KQZ and authorities. Another recommendation regarding other political parties would be the consideration of social networking just as a small part of campaigning and not everything, because in this way secede direct links between the candidate and the electorate and their use should not be confined only during the time of the campaign but it should continue throughout the year as communicated in a transparent manner with traditional media.

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