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Cybertools of Political Competition and the 2016 American Presidential Campaign

Abstract: In the last decade, one can notice the huge interest of researchers in the field of cyberpolicy, which is primarily due to the widespread use of the Internet in the public space. This fact is also an impulse for conducting interdisciplinary research that combines knowledge from social sciences on the one hand, and uses content from technical sciences on the other. Compared to the form of conducting election campaigns in the 20th century in the U.S., during the 2016 election campaign there were significant changes in the conduct of political struggle. These changes consist above all in the use of cybernetic tools, which to a large extent, however difficult to determine, shaped electoral behavior. The contemporary political competition is more and more dependent on technology, which becomes the main element of the professionalization of election campaigns. Investigating the impact of cyberspace on electoral results is a big challenge, considering the fact that the area of cyberotechnology is extremely complex. Cyberspace has now become a field for many political phenomena that are constantly evolving and in most cases their importance is immense for the functioning of the political system. The article is intended to deal with selected phenomena related to cyberotechnology that were compared with other events from the U.S. election campaign in 2016. The article aims to investigate selected events resulting from the use of cyberotechnology, which had an impact on electoral behavior.

Keywords: *digital politics; elections; hybrid media; social media; manipulation; disinformation*

Introduction

Cybersecurity has been seen as a purely technical issue so far, but it has gained importance and requires to be analyzed as far as sociology is concerned. This seems to be a constant trend, which results from the presence of public sphere in cyberspace.

Today, one of the most politically crucial topics is cyberspace and its influence on the state. Social media, which function in cyberspace, are currently an important means of

communication for many people both in everyday life and in extraordinary situations, such as the U.S. presidential elections in 2016 (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, pp. 211–236).

This work aims at evaluating the level of influence which cyberspace had on the presidential elections in 2016. Many events that occurred during that campaign were groundbreaking not only because of the range of cybertools used, but also because of various outside political entities that were involved. In the aftermath of the elections in 2016, there were some suspicions that fake information could have been decisive in president Trump's victory. This article does not support any of the theses which either support or oppose the above.

American intelligence agencies have kept all the evidence secret, claiming that they needed to protect their information sources. This has raised doubts about the results of research which could form an unambiguous thesis. Therefore, to clarify the question of actual influence of the controversial events, that took place during the election campaign in 2016, on the polls, it is essential to juxtapose and compare the most important occurrences which happened during the said campaign.

Objectives

The presented analysis concerns the impact of political events on the process of support for both candidates during the election campaign. The analysis also tries to indicate the level of the general threat of cyber attacks that may shape the final election results. The aim of the work is to show whether the specific use of Internet affects running an election campaign and whether it can be more effective than the traditional methods of political rivalry. The article focuses also on new technology in the field of political communication, with an emphasis on the 2016's presidential elections. Another important element of this work is an attempt to analyze the negative consequences which occurred during the campaign, and the analysis of cyberthreats that can appear when using modern technology for disinformation or discrediting a given country's electoral system.

The article focuses, among others, on the importance of fake news which influences functioning of a modern state greatly. The author looks into the issue of fake news at two levels: as a form of harmless pastime and as harmful actions which bring major social damage.

The article is also aimed, through the example of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, at emphasizing the characteristic features of the cybercampaign phenomenon. Today, many political parties and their candidates devote considerable financial and human resources, as well as time and effort, to be present in cyberspace. Although the Internet did not change its policy drastically, it changed the way of conducting electoral rivalry, especially with regard to traditional action as a part of the political fight. The influence of information and communication technologies on the media and the model of political communication has made the functioning of politicians in the official public space more and more dependent on the definition of election strategy in cyberspace.

Political Competition in the Cyberspace

Using cybertechnology in such areas of life as: banking, commerce and national security is definitely convenient, although it results in direct drawbacks which result from the need of managing a fast-growing cyberspace (Thomas, 2014, p. 370). Dynamic processes result in disappearing borders between countries, because the cyberworld abolishes physical distances. As seen in many democratic countries, being online in politics seems to be the key factor to win any elections. The element which determines using cyberspace in political competing is not only the size and significance of a political party, but also the dynamics and competitiveness of the elections.

Is modern technology vital for an election campaign? If so, then is a traditional, offline campaign pointless? An initial analysis of cybercampaigns shows that campaign teams use their websites, blogs, news bulletins, videos, text messages and social media very frequently and that these are currently the natural elements of election campaigns.

Cyberspace seems to have an influence on the politicians during elections. We cannot overestimate the way in which voters influence each other *via* social media. The virtual world has enough means of shaping the public opinion. Therefore, we may conclude that cybercommunication might function as a tool for handicapping the race for political power.

Modern technology makes it easier for the candidates, political parties and their voters to mobilize and to communicate with each other using less financial resources, which is especially convenient during election campaigns (which are the most important parts of indirect democracy). So, does modern technology strengthen or weaken democracy? The answer to this question is not obvious at all. On the one hand, cybertechnology can lead to enormous damage and breakdowns in the critical infrastructure of the state. In addition, it is a huge tool in the field of social engineering in politics. On the other hand, new technologies strengthen democracy, because they allow cheaper access to information, and also offer many ways of communication, mobilization and organization for many citizens. Small, badly-off political parties may use modern technology for political competing in the same way as the political VIPs (Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2014, pp. 206–219).

Quite often, main political parties focus media's attention thus draw the public opinion's attention away from the smaller ones – cyberspace may serve as a kind of a compensation for that. Likewise, the voters may find it easier to reach their candidates via Internet (Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2014, pp. 206–219).

Technology influences political support, so it is quite obvious that a cybercampaign is different from the traditional political marketing techniques. The influence of cybercommunication is determined by many factors, just like the traditional communication is. The content and the audience, the content's appeal and its range are analyzed each time separately. Despite many advantages of cybercommunication, there are many dangers resulting from manipulation techniques. Modern communication *via* cybernetics is in its nature global

and very dynamic which facilitates acquiring and manipulating the gathered information by various organizations.

Fake News and the Logic of Social Media

Social media has an advantage over traditional communications: it is direct and customized. What is more, it is relatively cheap; making a website appears to be cheaper and easier than preparing a convention. Websites and other cybermeans not only ease communication but can be updated immediately. Virtual space makes it possible for the voters to make donations, register new members or candidates and comment upon various events.

Technology – with the use of search engines and social networking, created an unprecedented possibility of distributing fake news in real time and on a global scale (Barber, 2017). The growing amount of fake news might reflect the overall decrease of political debate level and the public trust in state institutions. In this context it might be said that cyberspace answers the needs of expressing views and opinions of voters.

There are several reasons why it might be true that fake news play a major role. Many commentators suggested that Trump would not have been elected for the presidential chair, had it not been for the fake news (Parkinson, 2016; Read, 2016). Moreover, this kind of message was more popular on Facebook than in the mainstream news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, pp. 211–236; Silverman 2016). The obstacles of the media market disappeared because nowadays it is easy to create websites and earn money online on commercials. Fears of losing reputation and credibility discourage mainstream media from distributing fake news. Social networking, however, deprived of the above, is an ideal place for the fake news to flourish. Fake news seem to be more credible not because it is supported with direct evidence, but because it appears that other people believe it.

“Fake news” can be defined as information that are deliberately untrue, and their credibility can be verified in the face of facts. A false presentation of reality can, of course, mislead consumers and lead them to wrong attitudes and beliefs.

People who lack representation in the mainstream media do not trust any journalists, and thus they create their own image and message in social networking. That is why, as one might suspect, the disadvantaged minority releases all the grief in social media and may be seen in the mainstream media as more radical (Barber, 2017).

During election campaigns, political rivals often use satire, they mock or joke with irony. Their goal is to present the opponent in a ridiculous and disparaging way. In cyberspace a parallel phenomena are memes, emoticons, emotions, abbreviations and labels. More often, it is the form, not the content, that counts. The modern man lives in a world which cares less about facts. Twitter allows using no more than 280 characters and in practice it favors politicians who simplify their views and reduce details into simple messages, so this application is ideal both for the politicians and their supporters. This reduced form of communicating rewards emotions and simplification.

The Internet drastically lowered the standards of entering the modern media market and that led to radical changes in people's reading habits. The technology of spreading messages in real time greatly helped to strengthen the positions of certain people. Every person can speak her mind; every person can be a citizen journalist. However, the technology creates an illusion of all kinds of content being equal. It makes possible for any person to create and spread news that looks credible. And when people think that all content is equal, they also believe it is true. Fake news gain more audience and acceptance when they correspond to things many people are against. Verifying the news and providing evidence are no longer needed in this world of alternative facts (Barber, 2017). Social networking sites, like Facebook, have different structure than the traditional media. The content may be spread among its users without any surveillance or professional comment. An inexperienced individual is able to reach such audiences as those of *Fox News*, *CNN* or *The New York Times* (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, pp. 211–236).

The network effect allows to generate news on the most emotional topics such as religion, political views or subjective opinions on certain event, which encourages the users to take part in the discussion. The role of the so-called *bots*, software applications that run automated tasks (scripts) over the Internet, is also important when discussing how fake news are born (Barber, 2017).

Cybertechnology allows creating and spreading large numbers of fake news, and their author usually remains anonymous. Up until now, it was easy to point at a person creating propaganda. Today, because of recent advances in modern technology, it is almost impossible to do so. Creating fake news during the U.S. 2016 election campaign makes one think about the role and the meaning of cyberspace in a political system. Social networking turned out to be a better place for fake news than the online message boards, and the elections turned out to be almost a perfect background. One may suspect that the most popular items of fake news were more popular than the true ones, especially during the election campaign. Most of fake news items, e.g. "Pope Francis endorses Trump" or "WikiLeaks confirms Hillary sold weapons to ISIS", were in Trump's favor (Schultz, 2016, p. 9).

The U.S. campaign is also a pretext to reflect on the exchange of information between citizens and its impact on the shape and level of political support. It turns out that content which is uncompromising and in opposition to political correctness is more popular than other messages. With regard to the candidates, this has led to a focus on the personality of politicians and their stories, which were constructed as a spectacle. Regardless of the actual history of both candidates, Trump appeared as a billionaire, whose wealth is the result of his hard work. As a result, he presented himself as an opponent of political and economic elites, while Clinton appeared as a woman who fought sexism all her life. Of course, this type of campaign is not new, but nowadays social media, to some extent, replaced previous forms of communication with voters (Sava, 2017, pp. 68–81). Such a way of communicating in a pictorial way, referring to emotions, is more effective than arguments or multi-layered justifications of one's views. It is easy to confirm this phenomenon by observing the content

issued by radical and extreme politicians who have more supporters on Twitter than people representing moderate views.

Selected U.S. Presidential Campaign Events in 2016

It is difficult to judge the course and the outcome of the presidential race in the context of the events that took place. It is so mainly because the effects of cybercampaign are hard to evaluate as there are many tools and people taking part in it. The margin of error in the polls was big and the public feeling was constantly changing. Also, it might also be true that Trump supporters were not honest when talking about their choices (Schake, 2016, pp. 33–52).

There are many variables to take into account when assessing the changes of political support level. Important political events often may have consequences only a few days after, therefore one should not always associate selected events with given changes in political support. Moreover, quite frequently, a campaign is full of many events that may have overlapping results.

The *domino effect*, worth mentioning here, is a situation when an event that happened a few days earlier might influence political support levels in a longer period of time, while some other events might serve as a mere background. Therefore, the changes in political support levels may have many reasons which can be unclear at first glance.

Every political campaign has a story that needs to be put as the main topic, and every campaign has its minor and major cliff-hangers. Connected with emotions, they become embedded in voters' memory and cause unexpected plot twists in the campaigns' scripts.

These include: Trump-Moscow relations; the 22 July, 2016 scandal when WikiLeaks published 20.000 hacked emails which were kept on DNC's server and revealed political divisions in Hillary Clinton's campaign team and her connections with Wall Street.

Another important event, which led to many speculations, was Paul Manafort's resignation from being the chairman of Donald Trump's campaign, officially due to poor polling numbers. Eric Trump, the president's son, said in an interview with Fox News that the main reason of Manafort's resignation had been controversy around his connections with Viktor Yanukovich, the former president of Ukraine, who believes in pro-Russian politics. The charges against Mr. Manafort concern a \$12.7 million bank transfer from Yanukovich's political party into Mr. Manafort's bank account (Murray Brown, 2017).

On August, 29, the Senate minority leader, Harry Reid, sent a letter to the F.B.I. director, James B. Comey Jr., expressing a concern that Russia was trying to influence the presidential elections and requested the F.B.I. to open an investigation. Mr. Reid said that the threat of Russian interference "is more extensive than is widely known and may include the intent to falsify official election results" (Murray Brown, 2017).

Hillary Clinton's use of e-mail for private use turned out to be an event that seriously undermined the candidate's chance of winning the election. As it turned out, e-mails contained classified information, but more importantly, it was likely that the materials were

not handled properly and that they were leaked (Hennessey, 2017, pp. 39–46). Clinton during the campaign tried to ignore the main problem, but the issue of e-mail and the F.B.I. investigation was a key issue for her in the eyes of the public, especially during the ongoing election campaign.

It is worth to emphasize that there is a need for further research on the impact of cyberspace on politics, because there is a number of other, important variables, such as the characteristics of the candidate, which may affect voters' support for him. According to some commentators, this was the worst and most aggressive campaign in the U.S. history. Does this show the end or crisis of political culture or the culture of democracy we have known so far? Does this trend of dealing with “dirty matters” continue in the pursuit of politics? In 2016, Americans had the choice between a candidate who offended – sometimes vulgarly – nearly 300 public people on Twitter, and a candidate who may have broken the law and who will not avoid F.B.I. investigation. Trump proposed the deportation of one religious group and spoke with disdain about other national groups. Regardless of the views people have and regardless of whether someone is a supporter of Clinton or Trump, many commentators said that this political competition was the most brutal, unpredictable and harshest campaign in which everyone used insults, slanders, and personal issues on a scale never seen before (Vasile, 2017, pp. 23–31). Of course, Clinton's supporters said it was because of Trump while Trump's voters accused Hillary Clinton's staff.

The reasons for brutality in the conduct of political struggle can be seen in many attitudes, both on one side and on the other. Donald Trump is not the only one guilty of the political struggle becoming more brutal; one might conclude that his election team started to use this brutality as its trademark in the campaign. It is worth to note a special moment in the election campaign when Michelle Obama, after hearing Trump saying unpleasant words about women, said: “when they go low, we go high” (Serfaty & Bradner, 2016). Hillary Clinton tried to deliver speeches at electoral conventions in a high, pathetic and endearing style. Her staff also tried to present a candidate who distances herself from the controversial ideas and statements of her rival. However, when there was an e-mail scandal affair, Clinton started using brutal rhetoric in response to her opponent's attacks.

The media played a major role here. Had it not been for the media, Trump would not have been where he was and where he is today. The media created him because he was attractive for them. The topics which he raised, by their very nature, were already quite controversial and evoked many emotions. Therefore, his frequent presence in media was due to the fact that thanks to this he increased the audience ratings. At the very beginning of the campaign, it could be seen that the media promoted him very much, and then Trump had a sharp exchange with the media, because he accused the media of conspiracy and that they were siding with Clinton. The fact is that Trump came so far and won the primaries in the Republican Party, and what is interesting, without much financial effort, thanks to the media. Summing up, in the U.S. to win the elections one needs to have money, and Trump's campaign is the first such case, when the candidate did not invest as much money in the

campaign as his competitors, and he reached very high, because the media, reporting on his critical and often shocking public comments, gave Trump free airtime.

Both audience and click-through rates were important for the campaign. That campaign was primarily focused on social networking that has its own character. Whatever is posted there, it adds popularity to the author's statements in accordance with the principle "the worse, the better". The more vulgar and definite a criticism, the more noticeable a comment. So the narrative was focused on Trump and this is also the source of his success. In the public discourse, Clinton's proposals and the ideas for the functioning of the state and the economy were unlikely. It was also difficult to understand what vision of international politics she had as a candidate for the office of the president. Only what Clinton said in response to Trump's content was present. In this specific electoral discourse one can notice an extremely small number of political topics, no political questions were mentioned. There were also few public discussions on what would happen and what the consequences would be if one of them won, but the topic of Trump and his controversial statements dominated: what he said, how he behaved, how he saw the world. Therefore, against the background of the ongoing election campaign, a narrative about one candidate was created, and what appeared in the comments, opinions and discussions referred to him only.

Washington, from the perspective of Trump's electorate, is very far away and is seen as the establishment that has not solved certain things yet. The citizens of the south of the U.S. said nobody talked to them nor raised their problems. Therefore, these people felt forgotten by Obama and Clinton, and Trump appeared to them as a spokesman for their interest. According to observers, the Americans from southern states did not necessarily fully agree with what Trump said. Especially the moral issues and the negative attitude towards the Mexicans were not fully accepted, however, the social and economic issues that were and are crucial for those citizens played a major role. Therefore, in this context, the perception of Washington as a distant and somewhat foreign establishment, is also understandable.

The last week of the campaign went under the slogan of Clinton's denial after what happened in connection with reports of the F.B.I. head in the case of Hillary Clinton's e-mails. Many observers asked the questions whether this event could really turn out to be a breakthrough in the campaign (Todd & Williams, 2016) and whether the declared electorate would vote for Clinton, even if it turned out that she had revealed state secrets in e-mails and sent them to friends.

However, in the last days of the campaign, the struggle was not only about the good image of the candidate regarding e-mails that probably would not change much, but about the turnout, because mobilization among the strong supporters of Trump was big, while on the Democrats' side that was a huge problem. Admittedly, quite a large turnout was recorded in the early vote among Hispanics who supported Clinton for fear that they or their families would be deported from the U.S. (Elder & Phillips, 2017, pp. 319–342). However, the struggle also involved the mobilization of the second group of voters, namely African Americans, who in 2008 and 2012 were strongly motivated to go to the election. Now, when asked whether

they are Clinton or Obama supporters, they pointed at the latter. That is why Barack Obama joined the campaign. In this context, Clinton's calling for African Americans to go to the elections was understandable. Likewise the speeches of Tim Kaine, the candidate for the vice-president, who spoke in one of the electoral rallies in Spanish and called for election. Such actions prove the thesis that on the side of Hillary Clinton's staff the fight was about the highest turnout, which was to decide on her victory. In short, the more her supporters went to the elections, the greater was the chance of her winning.

Clash of Personalities in the Cyberspace

The main hypothesis of this fragment of the work is the assumption that the content expressed in cyberspace, especially in social media, can serve as an element that allows characterizing a politician, and above all, his thoughts, actions and emotions. In other words, on the basis of the content on Twitter and Facebook, the personality of various political candidates can be defined in some way. Each candidate accepts his own communication strategy. He presents his program, convinces citizens to his leadership and motivates his supporters. Although one should be aware that many public appearances, especially during election campaigns, are directed according to a specific script. This observation raises doubts as to how much the politician is authentic in his behavior and is his image credible enough.

Differences between candidates can be observed on the example of tweets, which can be linked to psychological factors. For example, positive words referring to emotions are much more common in the texts of the Democratic candidates than the Republicans' (Savoy, 2017, pp. 1–22).

Trump's speech style in the campaign was a direct message, based on short sentences also consisting of blunt words, often repeated with many synonyms involved. Trump also used personal pronouns (e.g. "I") much more often, which was particularly evident when he spoke in the context of promises and pledges (Górka, 2017, pp. 112–134). In conclusion, Trump's style and rhetoric allowed him to emerge as a strong male figure, speaking like any American, with energy, easy to understand with a message based on frequent symbolism.

Nominated by the Democratic Party on July 28, 2016, Hillary Clinton was usually seen as the opposite of Trump; she was perceived by many Americans as a person from a political establishment (Górka, 2017, pp. 112–134). Clinton emphasized much more the role of women in the society, she also emphasized women's values in the context of family functioning. She also preferred statements in the form of longer sentences with the help of rich vocabulary. She also tried to raise more topics not connected directly with politics (Savoy, 2017, pp. 1–22).

The information cycle, which means the daily period between the last and next edition of a newspaper, has changed. New Internet media have re-formed the relations with politicians, journalists and recipients, which ultimately influenced the flow and significance of the news. Trump, who used social media to shape the agenda of the mainstream media, jumped on

the bandwagon. In other words, the media message was often driven by Trump's tweets that attracted the media's attention. With the help of free digital communication tools, the mood of tension or drama was built in such a way that emotions were generated that often formed the news of the day, unlike Clinton, whose election staff could not effectively change the focus of public attention.

The Russian Secret Service and the 2016 Campaign

The election campaign in 2016 leads to a broad discussion about the darker side of the Internet, and thus to the question of how the so-called "Bots" (programs imitating human behavior) and "trolls" (people who ridicule or insult others by means of comments) can affect emotions and public moods? So will these types of phenomena shape future political rivalry? Certainly, cybertechnology is subject to constant processes of improvement, so searching for more and more effective methods of influence, as well as the manipulation of voting behaviors, will be a constant element of perfecting cybercommunication. Probably the phenomena that occurred on the verge of hacking and disinformation activities were to hurt Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump defeat his opponent in the presidential election. The above thesis is the result of an investigation undertaken by three U.S. intelligence agencies. The manipulation of information as well as the suspicion of interference by a foreign state in U.S. internal policy is a serious charge that directly undermines the legitimacy of the electoral system, as a result of which Donald Trump won the presidential election.

In an extraordinary report declassified in January 2017, accusations are being made that the president of Russia ordered actions in 2016 aimed at presidential elections in the United States. The Russian services have sought to help Trump in the election as much as possible by discrediting Secretary Hillary Clinton and putting her at a disadvantage (Dale, 2017). The report is the first clear confirmation that the U.S. intelligence services believe that the person held responsible for an unprecedented operation, aimed at placing a specific candidate in the White House, is the Russian president.

Agencies – CIA, FBI and NSA – concluded that Putin initially tried to discredit Hillary Clinton who, as the Secretary of State, often criticized Russian policy on the international forum. The Kremlin then decided to support Trump, who seemed a friendly person for Russian business people and who unexpectedly appeared on the political scene as a significant candidate for the office of the President of the United States. The agencies mentioned several reasons why, in their opinion, Trump turned out to be a more advantageous partner for Putin in case of taking office as the president of the United States. The first obvious reason was the possibility of Trump's friendly policy towards Russia. The second factor was the experience of the President of Russia in cooperation with western political leaders whose business interests made them more willing to deal with Russia. Thus, it may turn out that business interests form a kind of "bargaining chip" and thus may affect the relations in the world of politics (Rutland, 2017, pp. 41–56).

In a report drawn up by the U.S. services, it was found that the Russian military intelligence agency, Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), was behind hackers who gained access to public domain information and entered the Democrats website (Dale, 2017). However, cyber-attacks were only one of the elements of the Russian operation. According to press reports referring to intelligence sources, the Russian side is accused of using social media to influence the American election by, among others, deliberately influencing other users and ridiculing or insulting them (the so-called “trolling”) (Persily, 2017, pp. 63–76). The report identifies Russia’s alleged actions as a “campaign of influence” and also bases assessments on the close links between the Russian state media and the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange. WikiLeaks published most of the Democratic Party’s e-mails, which were obtained as a result of cybercrime (Banks, 2017, pp. 1487–1513).

A journalist Adrian Chen described the existence of a mass “troll farm” located in St. Petersburg, Russia, which employed hundreds of Russians to create propaganda messages in accordance with pro-Kremlin policy. In this way, many users have built a message under a false identity on Twitter, in order to create a mass illusion of the army of Trump supporters (Karpf, 2017, pp. 198–207).

The Oxford Internet Institute, as part of the *Computational Propaganda* program, gathered data suggesting that a significant part of the Twitter traffic associated with the 2016 election was generated using automated billing in the form of “botnets”. The authors of the report indicate that 22.9% of the authors of the Trump content are probably profiles created (*Computational...*) by the political bot in order to distribute the manipulated content on the Internet. The existence of this type of manipulation leads to disturbing questions about the nature of democratic elections, one of the foundations of which is the unshaken and free will of citizens.

The Washington Post reported in December 2016 that the C.I.A. and other agencies came to the conclusion that Russia is trying not only to disrupt the election and dispel doubts about the legality of American democratic institutions, but also to help Trump win (Miller, 2017, p. 4). The U.S. intelligence agencies based their assumptions on a number of interrelated intelligence elements, including identification of well-known persons who have links to Russian intelligence services and who are likely to have provided WikiLeaks with stolen e-mail files.

The U.S. intelligence also monitored communication in Moscow after the U.S. elections, which showed that senior officials in the Russian government, including those who thought they had knowledge of the hacking campaign, celebrated Trump’s victory and congratulated each other (Miller, 2017, p. 4).

FBI director, James Comey, revealed that the bureau is not only investigating the efforts of the Russian government to interfere in the presidential elections in 2016, but also the nature of all connections between the staff working in the electoral teams of both candidates (Burke, 2017, pp. 574–596).

The uncertainty of Clinton’s staff concerned e-mails that were reported to have been discovered on a computer owned by former Democratic Party congressman – Anthony

Weiner. The head of F.B.I. initiated an investigation in which the main proof was an e-mail address and which, illegally, the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, used from her private server as the Secretary of State. E-mails related to the case come from devices seized from her assistant, Huma Abedin or her husband – Anthony Weiner. Clinton and her deputies were convinced that there was nothing confidential in these e-mails that could jeopardize national security. Assuming that the Russian intelligence was behind this scandal, one might suppose that Russia's goal was to destroy Hillary Clinton as a candidate, and who Putin personally blamed for the inciting of protesters at the Moscow demonstration in 2011, when she was the Secretary of State (*The Trump...*).

The case of the delegitimization of the elections in the U.S. was based on the question – which often appeared in public space – about the cooperation of Trump's electoral staff with the Russians in order to carry out the sabotage action. Trump's electoral campaign was marked by business connections between former electoral staff employee Paul Manafort and Russia's friendly people in Ukraine. NBC television announced a few days before the end of the campaign that the F.B.I. is conducting a preliminary investigation into Manafort's foreign business connections (McGrane, 2016, p. A.1).

Russia's main goal was to undermine the importance of the democratic process in America by means of condemning Hillary Clinton by American public opinion and thereby diminishing her chances for victory in the campaign and for potential presidency. It was the first recorded case of the Russians breaking into the resources of the National Democratic Party Committee's server in order to obtain sensitive data, the disclosure of which would reveal internal information on cross-party competitions and thus discredit the leading politicians in the state (*The Trump...*).

American media services, as well as hackers, worked in parallel with automatic bots, additionally strengthened and spread Russian propaganda among unconscious citizens. Such hidden activities could have influenced the views of recipients and undermined confidence in elected leaders, public officials and the democratic system itself.

Conclusions

Research on cyberspace, which exists between the world of politics and technology by nature, is a new field and certainly requires many analyses that will allow us to better understand the interaction of both of these spheres. Certainly the topic of distribution of digital media and its impact on the functioning of the political system will become one of the key research areas of social sciences. It can be assumed that in the future efforts in cyberspace to conduct election campaigns will be undertaken, and their intensification will be greater and may be treated equally with activities in reality. An important challenge for the state and its organs is the question of what should be done with the phenomenon of fake news and the damage which it causes not only to journalism but also to politics.

Trump's victory was a big surprise for observers of the American election campaign. Like most referendum opinion polls in June 2016 in the United Kingdom, Brexit was an unexpected result. The events that took place in the United States during the elections are also crucial for other democratic countries. There have been numerous fears that disinformation trends that are created by foreign intelligence services may also exist in other democratic countries. One might wonder whether in future election campaigns the elements of social engineering in cyberspace will be as effective as traditional actions. It will certainly be more difficult to separate reality from virtual reality. And every single election campaign, carried out also at the level of cyberspace, is and will be an opportunity to launch and popularize slogans that defy the existing political system.

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Annex 1.

Electoral declarations for candidates (Trump, Clinton) in US presidential elections 2016

