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NEGATIVE POLITICAL ONLINE BANNERS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

Introduction

The development of technology, particularly in well-developed countries such as the United States or some European countries, plays a key role in the success of modern political campaigns as well as the marketing campaigns that are closely related to them[1]. In his model of political marketing, Newman[2] mentions three areas of technological development which foster changes in communicating and influencing citizens: the computer (information technologies; IT), television and direct mail. Their evolution has led to a more intense and broader application of those channels in marketing practices. Moreover, they are increasingly interrelated, forming one developed and interactive communication platform or, as Gibson[3] puts it, a "cyber-campaign tool box". The percentage of the population using the Internet to collect news or to explore political alternatives has increased significantly with the diffusion of technology.

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[1] W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski, B. Newman, *The macro and micro views of political marketing: The underpinnings of a theory of political marketing*, "Journal of Public Affairs" 2012, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 256.

[2] B.I. Newman, *The marketing of the president: Political marketing as campaign strategy*, Thousand Oaks 1994, p. 44-47.

[3] R.K. Gibson, *Web campaigning from global perspective*, "Asia-Pacific Review", 2004, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 95.

The paper reviews briefly psychological knowledge on the use of internet tools in political campaigns, providing practical examples and arguing that although nowadays marketing strategists are mostly concentrated on Web 2.0, political on-line banners still play an important role. Its potential role on the Polish political market was checked by conducting an experimental study. The results indicate that the negative banners decrease ratings of the attacked party image. However, these changes are moderated by certain variables. The practical implications show, that if one decides to use negative online banners, he or she must be ready to deal with results contradicting some theoretical expectations.

Internet use and modern politics

One of the best examples is the use of the Internet during the 2010 and 2012 campaigns in the US. The American Pew Research Center[4] survey indicates that as much as 73% of adult Internet users (representing 54% of all US adults) went online to find news or information about the 2010 midterm elections, or to become involved in the campaign in one way or another. 58% of online adults looked for news about politics or the 2010 campaigns online, whereas 32% of online adults got most of their 2010 campaign news from online sources. Moreover, 53% of adult Internet users use the Internet to take part in specific political activities, such as watching political videos, sharing election-related content or "fact-checking" of political claims. Moreover, one in five online adults (22%) used Twitter or a social networking site for political purposes. During the 2012 campaign in the US, some 66% of registered voters who use the Internet (55% of all registered voters) went online to watch videos related to the election campaign or political issues. Specifically, they

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[4] Pew Research Center's & American Life Project, The Internet and campaign 2010, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/The-internet-and-Campaign-2010.aspx, 17.03.2011.

watched: video news reports online (48% of Internet-using registered voters), previously recorded online videos of candidate speeches, press conferences, or debates (40%), informational videos online which explain a political issue (39%), humorous or parody online videos dealing with political issues (37%), political advertisements online (36%), and live online videos of candidate speeches, press conferences or debates (28%)[5].

Internet use and its authority in Europe

In European countries, the use of the Internet and its role in getting informed about politics has also changed. In 2011, 29% of Europeans relied primarily on the Internet to get news on national politics[6], and in 2012 – 31%[7]. The German Research Institute YouGov indicates that for Germans Web 2.0 is still not their "first" source of political information; 38% of them declared they did not trust political information placed in social media, however 42% went online to search for political news before the 2013 parliamentary elections[8]. It is not surprising that those who rely on the Internet to gain political knowledge are younger. In Poland, for instance, 93% of people between the ages of 18 and 24 perceive the Internet as the most relevant information tool[9]. 43% of the youngest voters (18-24 years) looked for information about a party or candi-

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[5] Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, Online political videos and campaign 2012, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Election-2012-Video.aspx , 2.11.2012.

[6] Media use in the European Union, "Standard Eurobarometer" 76/ Autumn 2011- TNS Opinion and Social, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb76/eb76_media_en.pdf, 25.02.2014, p.24.

[7] Media use in the European Union, "Standard Eurobarometer" 78/ Autumn 2012- TNS Opinion and Social, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb78/eb78_media_en.pdf, 25.02.2014 , p.28.

[8] Marktforschungs-und Beratungsinstituts YouGov, *Politics by Social Media*, http://yougov.de/news/2013/08/26/politik-studie-wahlkampf-20/ , 22.02.2014.

[9] D. Batorski, M. Drabek, W. Gałązka, J. Zbieranek (ed.). *Wyborca 2.0.*, Warszawa 2012, p. 40-41.

dates online, while among all registered voters the tendency remained 27%[10]. For Polish[11] as well as for German voters[12], TV remains their preferred information source in the period before elections. Still, one should not forget that those who watch TV might do it via the Internet. 7% of European citizens did so on a daily basis in 2011, while 17% did it at least once a week[13].

Hypermedia campaign

Information technologies have played a role in campaign organization since the 1970s, but it is only over the last decade that the application of new technologies has also become an opportunity for organizational restructuring within political parties and campaigns. As a result, a completely new and different way of planning and conducting campaigns has emerged, which Gibson[14] calls a "cyber-campaign", and Howard[15] defines it as the *hypermedia campaign – an agile political organization defined by its capacity for innovatively adopting digital technologies for express political purposes and its capacity for innovatively adapting its organizational structure to conform to new communicative practices*. It is not that political campaigns simply employ digital information technologies in their communications strategies. Rather, integration of such technologies becomes an occasion for organizational adaptation, affecting organizational goals and relationships among professional staff, political leadership, volunteers, financial contributors, citizens, and other polit-

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[10] *Ibidem*, p.40-41.
[11] *Ibidem*, p.40-41.
[12] Marktforschungs- und Beratungsinstituts YouGov, Politics by Social Media, http://yougov.de/news/2013/08/26/politik-studie-wahlkampf-20/ , 22.02.2014.
[13] Media use in the European Union, "Standard Eurobarometer" 78/ Autumn 2012- TNS Opinion and Social, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb78/eb78_media_en.pdf , 27.02.2014, p.6.
[14] R.K. Gibson, *Web campaigning …*, p. 96.
[15] P.N. Howard, *New media campaigns and the managed citizen*, New York 2006, p. 2.

ical campaigns. According to Howard[16], this rising prominence of hypermedia campaigns is related to three factors. Firstly, we observed the emergence of professional political technocrats with special expertise in information technology (IT). Unlike other campaign managers, the consultants specializing in IT focus mainly on building new communication technologies for citizens and candidates. Secondly, the political consulting industry replaced mass-media tools with targeted media tools, ranging from fax and computer-generated direct mail to email and website content, which allowed the industry to tailor messages to specific audiences. Thirdly, the engineers of political hypermedia made technical decisions about political hypermedia that constrained subsequent decisions about the production and consumption of political content.

Howard[17] argues that the hypermedia campaign has replaced the mass media campaign, like the one launched in 1988 which marked the beginning of an important transition in the organization of political information in the United States. Between the 1988 and 2004 presidential campaign seasons, the political content in the Internet emerged as a critical component of American campaign strategies. Beyond the US, Internet campaigning also gathered momentum in other national contexts from the mid- to late 1990s. The British general elections of 1997 were certainly marked by the first extensive use of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by the parties to communicate with the voters. In other parts of Europe, particularly in the Scandinavian countries and in the Netherlands, but also in Southern-European states such as Greece and Portugal, political parties started to realize the need to establish some kind of web presence. As far as the Asia-Pacific region is concerned, the parties in Australia and New Zealand demonstrated first signs

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[16] Ibidem, p. 2-3.
[17] Ibidem, p. 5-18.

of taking their campaigns into the web for the first time during elections held in 1998 and 1999, respectively[18].

This new channel for mass communication provided the political parties and candidates with new means to reach the voters. Furthermore, it was expected that this could be done at low, or at least reasonable, costs and without the interference of news media. The Web also meant opening of a new, fast and direct channel for two-way communication between the parties and the electorate.

Hypermedia campaign in practice: USA vs Poland

From the perspective of candidate campaign management, the Internet and related tools have allowed a number of campaigns to make significant advances in fund-raising, volunteer coordination, logistics, intelligence on voters and opposition research. The establishment of the 'MyBarackObama.com' or MyBO sites in early 2007 introduced a new and innovative 'twist' to online campaigning that quickly came to be seen as one of the defining features of a highly successful web strategy. The site offered a wide range of Web 2.0 type functionalities such as personal blogging, social networking, video and photo sharing; all of those moved campaign web offerings forward from the largely static 'brochureware' style that was predominant in the Web 1.0 era. Users could register to access databases that would provide them with names and addresses of likely or leaning Democrats in their neighborhood whom they could visit or call. One was able to download tools to fundraise on Obama's behalf. Over one million people signed up to the site, thousands of events

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[18] R.K. Gibson, *Web campaigning …*, p. 96.

were planned using its tools, and supporters using it collected around $35 million in donations, constituting about six percent of the final amount raised[19].

Although the Internet enables great opportunities for campaign message dissemination[20], advanced and sophisticated ICT innovations remain relatively rare, unsystematic and unsuccessful[21]. The analysis of the Polish parliamentary campaign in 2011 conducted by Batorski, Nagraba, Zając and Zbieranek[22] showed that although the Internet is an increasingly important medium, its information relevance for voters is surprisingly low. It might be explained by poor web presence of candidates and the low quality of Internet campaigns. Only nearly one fourth of Polish adults managed to reach Internet information about candidates. Moreover, Internet users were not satisfied with what they found. Social networking sites (SNS) used to play a bigger role, however candidates seemed to underestimate their potential and neglect their use. Candidates missed a coherent strategy and failed to involve voters by the means of interactive tools. The lack of professionalism was evident.

On the other hand, the effectiveness of online political marketing tools is also being affected by Internet users. And those who search for information on

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[19] R.K. Gibson, *'Open source campaigning?': UK party organisations and the use of the new media in the 2010 General election*, 2010,
 http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1723329 ; J.K. Woolley, A.M. Limperos, M.B. Oliver, T*he 2008 presidential election, 2.0: A content analysis of user-generated political Facebook groups*, "Mass Communication and Society", 2010, Vol. 13, No. 5, p. 631-652; D.L. Cogburn, F.K. Espinoza-Vasquez, *From networked nominee to networked nation: Examining the impact of Web 2.0 and social media on political participation and civic engagement in the 2008 Obama campaign*, "Journal of Political Marketing" 2011, Vol. 10, No.1-2, 189-213; W.J. Miller, *We can't all be Obama: The use of new media in modern political campaigns,* "Journal of Political Marketing" 2013, Vol. 12, No.4, p.326-347.
[20] W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski, B. Newman, *Political marketing: Theoretical and strategic foundations*, Armonk 2011, p. 237-246.
[21] M. Hindman, *The real lessons of Howard Dean: Reflections on the first digital campaign*, "Perspectives on Politics" 2005, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 121-128.; S. Ward, W. Lusoli, R. Gibson, *Australian MPs and the Internet: Avoiding digital age?* "Australian Journal of Public Administration" 2007, Vol. 66, no. 2, 210-222;
[22] D. Batorski, M. Nagraba, J.M. Zając, J. Zbieranek, *Internet w kampanii wyborczej 2011*, Warszawa 2012, p. 9-12.

politics online appear to represent a specific group. As Djupsund and Carlson[23] note, it seems that this group of Internet users consists in particular of citizens who are interested in or are connected to politics anyway. Hence, this fact would enhance the reinforcing rather than the mobilizing effect of the Internet presence of politics. In other words, the Internet will strengthen existing patterns of political participation rather than encourage those who are currently marginalized by the political system from participation in political discourse.

Negative campaign on the Internet

First cases and theories

Negative advertising was used in the first political campaign presented via television, in the 1952 Eisenhower-Stevenson race. Several commercials from the "Eisenhower Answers America" series overtly attacked the Democrats, although Stevenson was not usually mentioned by name. Negative political advertising serves a number of campaign functions. It creates awareness about candidates and their issue positions, helps voters set issue priorities on their political agenda, and increases interest in the campaign by stimulating interpersonal and public discussion of it and by generating media coverage[24]. Faber, Timms, and Schmitt[25] assume that using negative advertising during political elections is driven by three major goals:

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[23] G. Djupsund, T. Carlson, Catching *the 'wired voters'? Campaigning on the Internet*, "Nordicom-Information" 2003, Vol. 25, No. 1/2, p. 48.

[24] E. Diamond, S. Bates, *The spot: The rise of political advertising on television*, Cambridge 1992, p. 44-63; L.L. Kaid*, Political advertising in the United States*, In LL. Kaid, C. Holtz-Bacha (eds.), *The Sage handbook of political advertising*, Thousand Oaks 2006, p. 37-38; W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski, B. Newman, *Political marketing…*, p. 224-236.

[25] R.J. Faber, A.R. Timms, K.G. Schmitt, Accentuate *the negative?: The impact of negative political appeals on voting intent*, In P. Stout (ed.), *Proceedings of American Academy of Advertising*, Austin 1990, p. 11.

1. Negative appeals may simply give a voter a reason not to vote for the target candidate. As a result, voters choose based on whom they do not want to be elected ("negative vote" or "protest vote").

2. Negative appeals make voters compare the candidates, making the sponsor look better by comparison. As a result, the sponsoring candidate gains positive support.

3. Negative appeals may polarize voters. The existing attitudes of supporters of the sponsoring candidate strengthen and increase the likelihood of voting.

From this perspective, negative advertising can be considered efficient only in three cases: when it increases support for the sponsor candidate, and, simultaneously, lowers or keeps at the same level the support for the target candidate, and when it does not change the support for the sponsor but lowers it for the target candidate. However, the other six possible effects of using negative advertising are omitted: three of them preserve the *status quo* (support for both candidates simultaneously goes down, increases, or does not change) and three related to a backlash effect (the target gains or loses support and the sponsor loses or, if the target gains support, the voting situation remains unchanged). From this perspective, without taking into account the content of the advertising and its target audience, the probability of a negative campaign's success is 30 percent. Moreover, Homer and Batra[26] in their experimental study concluded that negative political messages are more successful in damaging overall voter attitudes toward the target candidate than positive messages are in raising such attitudes.

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[26] P.M. Homer, R. Batra, *Attitudinal effects of character-based versus competence-based negative political communications*, "Journal of Consumer Psychology" 1994, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 163-185.

Lau[27] believes that the psychological principles underlying the effectiveness of negative messages consist in the fact that negative information stands out against a positive background (the figure-ground hypothesis) and that people are more strongly motivated to avoid costs than to approach gains (the cost orientation hypothesis). The first phenomenon is defined as perceptual explanation of negativity. According to this assumption, we like our jobs, our neighbors and the people around us, and it is against this positive background that the negative information may stand out due to its relative infrequency. It may act as a simple perceptual contrast because it is unexpected and therefore more credible and more informative. The other mechanism indicated by Lau is a motivational explanation of negativity. It is related to the survival of species: it is more adaptive to avoid life-threatening costs than to approach pleasurable gains. Skowronski and Carlson[28] point to yet another mechanism that may lay the foundations of negative campaigns' effectiveness: greater diagnosticity of negative (rather than positive) information in person-related impression formation. Extreme or negative behaviors are generally perceived as more diagnostic than moderate or positive behaviors and, as a consequence, they have more influence on the process of impression or attitude formation.

Modern use of negative campaigns on the Internet

Since the first negative advertising spot was broadcast by Eisenhower's staff, this way of appealing to voters has become one of the most frequently used marketing methods. Its goal is to undermine or even destroy the image of the rival and – by contrast – to strengthen voters' perception of the candi-

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[27] R.R. Lau, *Two explanations for negativity effects in political behavior*, "American Journal of Political Science" 1985, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 119-138.
[28] JJ. Skowronski, D.E. Carlston, *Negativity and extremity biases in impression formation: A review of explanations*, "Psychological Bulletin" 1989, vol. 105, No. 1, p. 136-137.

date's own image. Kaid and Johnston[29] conducted a content analysis of 830 American television spots from eight presidential campaigns launched between1960 and 1988. They found that 29 percent of all ads contained some negative appeals. However, there were many fluctuations in their frequency, depending on particular presidential campaigns. As noted by Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner[30], 83 percent and 89 percent, respectively, of the ads sponsored by the Democratic and Republican Congressional Campaign Committees in 2004 were negative. The researchers from the Wisconsin Advertising Project[31] found that during just one week between September 28 and October 4, 2008, nearly 100 percent of John McCain's campaign advertisements were negative and so were 34 percent of Barack Obama's. Comparing this presidential election to the one held in 2004, the researchers indicate that both campaigns of McCain and Obama, aired more negative advertisements than their counterparts did. In 2004, 64 percent of ads from the campaign of George W. Bush were negative, while (until October 4) in the case of McCain's campaign this figure was 73 percent. Similarly, 34 percent of all Kerry's ads were negative while Obama's ads amounted to 61 percent.

Why to do a negative campaign on the Internet?

Many more cases of "going negative," as Ansolabehere and Iyengar[32] define it, are related to both candidates and their political consultants being convinced that negative ads are effective and that they bring particular profits

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[29] L.L. Kaid, A. Johnston, *Negative versus positive television advertising in U.S. presidential campaigns, 1960-1988,* "Journal of Communication" 1991, Vol. 41, No. 3, p. 53-63.
[30] R.R. Lau, L. Sigelman, I.B. Rovner, *The effects of negative political campaigns: A meta-analytic reassessment*, "Journal of Politics" 2007, Vol. 69, No. 4, p. 1176-1209.
[31] Wisconsin Advertising Project, Pres. TV advertising spending continues to grow: Over $28 million spent from September 28–October 4, 2008,
 http://wiscadproject.wisc.edu/wiscads_release_100808.pdf
[32] S. Ansolabehere, S. Iyengar, *Going negative: How political advertisements shrink and polarize the electorate*, New York 1995, p. 145-158.

to the sponsor. However, the results of meta-analysis of 111 studies on negative political advertising conducted by Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner[33] clearly disprove this view.

According to their conclusions negative campaigning tends to be more memorable and therefore stimulates knowledge about the campaign. However, there is no empirical proof that negative campaigning is an effective mean of winning votes and bolstering a candidate's own image in comparison to opponent's image.

Moreover, Lau and his collaborators stated that there is large amount of evidence indicating a modest tendency for negative campaigns to undermine a positive effect for the candidates they target. Furthermore, there is no reliable evidence that negative campaigning reduces voter turnout, though it does lead to a slightly lower sense of political efficacy, trust in government and possibly overall public mood. Although the results of the analysis contradict conventional wisdom, in some circumstances negative campaigns have an advantage over positive ones[34]. It is probably easier for candidates and their consultants to fine-tune attacks, rather than positive messages and, therefore, to focus on what is more controllable and new.

An increasingly common phenomenon that can be observed during political campaigns is the emergence of negative advertising not sponsored by the candidate (so called third-party advertising)[35]. Third-party election advertising is political advertising in any medium during an election period with the purpose of promoting or opposing, directly or indirectly, a registered political party or the election of a registered candidate. These ads are sponsored by various "independent" voter or pressure groups (e.g., Swift Boat Veterans for

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[33] R.R. Lau, L. Sigelman, I.B. Rovner, *The effects of negative political campaigns…*, p. 1176-1209.
[34] W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski, B. Newman, *Political marketing…*, p.234-236.
[35] Ibidem, p. 229-230.

Truth's ad against John Kerry or the anti-Bush ad sponsored by Air Traffic Controllers in the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign). These groups spend particularly large amounts of money on advertisements when major public policies are under consideration. For example, $14 million was spent by the Health Insurance Association of America to air its "Harry and Louise" advertisement opposing President Clinton's Health Security Act[36]. In a content study comparing third-party and candidate spots from the 2004 US presidential election, Dalton and McIlwain[37] found that third-party spots were significantly more negative, addressed more issues than candidate spots, and made fewer explicit references to issues. Furthermore, Weber, Dunaway, and Johnson[38] in an experimental study found that ads sponsored by unknown interest groups are more persuasive than those sponsored by candidates or known interest groups, and persuasion is mediated by perceived credibility of the source.

Another sort of negative third-party advertising are ads, whose sponsors do not want to show their name. In 2007, Polish voters could observe on the streets black billboards criticizing the Law and Justice Party. Each billboard showed the title "Rules of the Law and Justice Party" surrounded by such words as "aggression", "contempt", "defames". The label in the end pointed out that "Polish people are ashamed of the Law and Justice government". Later it was discovered that it was the Civic Platform (competitor of Law and Justice) who sponsored these billboards[39].

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[36] K.H. Jamieson, *Everything you think you know about politics and why you're wrong*, New York 2000, p. 126.

[37] P. Dalton, C. McIlwain, *Third-party "hatchet" ads: An exploratory content study comparing third-party and candidate spots from the 2004 presidential election*, "Atlantic Journal of Comunication" 2011, Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 129-151.

[38] C. Weber, J. Dunaway, T. Johnson, *It's all in the name: Source cue ambiguity and the persuasive appeal of campaign ads*, "Political Behavior" 2012, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 561-584.

[39] http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/81242,tusk-nie-musi-przepraszac.html

Research on the effectiveness of such negative advertising was also conducted by Gina Garramone[40]. More precisely, her experiment explored the roles of sponsor and rebuttal (refuting the attack by launching one's own ad or ignoring it) in negative political advertising. A 1982 political commercial targeted against Montana senator John Melcher by the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) was used as the stimulus. The video-only sponsor identification tag was removed from the original spot. Two corresponding sponsor identification tags consisting of white lettering on a blue background and an announcer's voice-over were created. The first read "Paid for by the Williams for Senate Committee" and the second "Paid for by the National Conservative Political Action Committee. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee". The newscast containing the NCPAC-sponsored ad was used in the rebuttal manipulation. For the "no rebuttal" condition, subjects viewed only this newscast. For the "rebuttal" condition, an actual rebuttal ad aired in Montana was exposed.

The experiment results showed that both the sponsor – and rebuttal-related factors determined the impact of the negative ad on perceptions of the candidates and voter intentions. Independent sponsorship was more effective than candidate sponsorship, resulting in greater intended effects against the target candidate and in reduced backlash effects against the opponent. Rebuttal by the target candidate increased backlash against the opponent, but failed to influence perceptions of the target. According to Garramone[41], campaign media planners may draw some conclusions from these results. The intended effects of negative political ads are increased by the use of an independent sponsor, while backlash effects against the opponent are decreased. The au-

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[40] G.M. Garramone, *Effects of negative political advertising: The roles of sponsor and rebuttal,* "Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media" 1985, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 147-159.
[41] Ibidem, p. 157-158.

thor concludes that *the direct implication for campaign planners is to leave the 'dirty work' to the independent organizations*[42]. However, as "The Economist" stated: *Republicans have bought up hundreds of web addresses with Democratic candidates' names and set up at least 18 websites that look supportive at first glance but then lambast the candidate*[43].

As the medium in which negative advertising appears remains an important element of negative political campaign, it is not surprising that online political campaigns are full of negative messages as well. The normalization hypothesis suggests that *political practice on the Internet closely resemble[s] politics offline and that traditional factors affecting the distribution of political resources shape the way that political actors use the Web*[44]. Druckman, Kifer and Parkin[45] found support for the normalization hypothesis; they compared data from over 700 congressional candidate websites over three election cycles (2002, 2004 and 2006) with television advertising data and came to the conclusion that candidates go negative across those media with similar likelihood.

Klotz states that *perhaps the most alluring attraction of negative advertising on the Internet is that the viewer typically chooses to see the negative advertising*[46]. In television ads, the viewer of the ad has no choice as to what information is received, if the channel is not changed. Furthermore, negative information is meticulously segregated into separate documents on the can-

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[42] Ibidem, p. 158.

[43] How to date a supermodel, "The Economist", February 15th-21st 2014, p.35.

[44] K.A. Foot, S.M. Schneider, *Web campaigning*, Cambridge 2006, p. 169.

[45] J.N. Druckman, M.J. Kifer, M. Parkin, *Timeless strategy meets new medium: Going negative on congressional campaign web sites*, 2002-2006, "Political Communication" 2010, Vol. 27, No. 1., 88-103.

[46] R. Klotz, Virtual *criticism: Negative advertising on the Internet in the 1996 Senate races,* "Political Communication" 1998, Vol. 15, No. 3, p. 362.

didate websites. More recently, Wu and Dahmen[47] conducted an experiment to test the impact differences between campaign websites of different orientations sponsored by a fictitious senatorial candidate, John Robinson, and an independent interest group. They designed six distinct sites to mirror conventional candidate home pages or websites of interest groups. Three of them appear to be official sites of a feature candidate and the other three sites are sponsored by a civic nonprofit organization called "Citizens for Change", which supports the fictitious senatorial candidate. Out of the six sites, four contain identical information and pictures about the feature candidate John Robinson, except for sponsorship. Two other websites sponsored by the featured candidate and by Citizens for Change contain only negative messages about Robinson's fictitious opponent Bill Carter. The participants in the experiment sessions were instructed to view the designated website, and after they finished, their attitudes toward the candidates was assessed. The obtained results of the experiment indicate that website message orientation – positive or negative – does lead to different support levels toward the candidates, predicting at the same time the voting intention. This is precisely why negative campaigns are rampant during elections. The study results also show that negative information about opponents can function well to the sponsoring candidates' advantage and risk little backlash. Moreover, site sponsorship only makes a difference to the credibility of negative information. If respondents' Internet literacy is not universally high, they do not always discern the sponsorship of websites.

Among many of Internet campaign tools, banners seem to be particularly interesting.

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[47] H.D. Wu, N.S. Dahmen, *Web sponsorship and campaign effects: Assessing the difference between positive and negative web sites*, "Journal of Political Marketing" 2011, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 314-329.

Political online banner ads

Obama's victory in 2008 and 2012 elections was greatly aided by his campaign's social media efforts, but few realize that his campaign dove deep into online advertising. In 2012, his campaign was using online ads even more than in 2008, and by June 2012 it generated 1.2 billion ad impressions. In July of 2012 alone the Obama campaign ran 921 million online ads, eclipsing the Romney campaign ad count by 571 million. While the Obama campaign significantly outpaced Romney's online efforts early on, the supporters of Romney ramped up their ad spending, doubling their efforts from June to July 2012. In total, spending for online advertising related to 2012 elections was expected to reach $160 million when it was all said and done. That's over six times more than what was spent for online ads in the 2008 elections[48].

Given the highly focused targeting which online ads can provide, compared to offline media, political campaigns that do not have banner ads in their marketing mix are missing a major opportunity. This is especially important for candidates who lack massive financial war chests, like many grass roots movements. As Howard pointed out: *Even though banner ads are no longer a major source of revenue for Internet advertisers, they do help interested parties collect information about the people who use political hypermedia. They allow organizations to track users and their habits and create relational profiles for use as political marketing tools*[49]. Moreover, according to Mentzer[50], current local ad-targeting capabilities by national newspapers, TV channels sites, informational portals, blogs, etc., mean they can now be in-

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[48] L. Van Zee, Political banner ads in of 2012,
 http://blogs.imediaconnection.com/blog/2012/09/12/political-banner-ads-of-201222.02.2014.
[49] P.N. Howard, *New media campaigns…*, p. 94.
[50] B. Mentzer, *Banner ads: The new entry in paid political media plans*, "Campaigns&Elections" 2000, Vol. 21, No. 6, p. 69.

cluded in candidate media plans. Each site has different targeting abilities. Some target by market, others by region, ZIP code or phone number prefixes.

Persuasion capabilities of political online banners could be used to directly influence voters' attitude and decisions; they also form a tool of negative campaigns focused on opponents. During the 1998 American election campaign for senators and governors, Westhill Partners, Turtleback Interactive, and DecisionTree (three companies dealing with online marketing consulting and studies of Internet use) in collaboration with the New York Times Electronic Media Company, conducted an analysis. It considered online banner campaign of Peter Vallone, the Democratic candidate for governor in the state of New York. The authors of the research were Karen Jagoda from Turtleback Interactive and Nick Nyhan from Decision Tree[51]. Their research, called *E-Voter 98*, was focused on the influence of Peter Vallone's banners targeted at George Pataki, the Republican governor who was running for reelection. Vallone's banners, which included negative slogans about the achievements and program of his rival, were put on the *New York Times* webpage toward the end of October 1998. They were part of the media mix developed for this campaign by the consulting company Gould Communication Group. The research was conducted between October 17 and November 3 (the day of the election) in the form of a mail survey sent out to registered voters in the state of New York. 1,335 respondents replied to it, 729 of whom had at least once seen Vallone's advertising banner (the experimental group). The other 606 respondents had never been exposed to the banner (the control group). The main objectives of *E-Voter 98* were to quantify the attitudinal impact of Vallone for Governor online banner advertising;

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[51] K. Jagoda, N. Nyhan, *E-Voter 98: Measuring the impact of online advertising for a political candidate. A case study*, http://www.e-voter98.com/overview.html, 21.01.1999.

determine if the mere presence of the online advertising had any impact on favorability ratings and unaided and aided awareness; and provide the first set of empirical research data on the topic of online political advertising and its attitudinal impact on people who were exposed to it.

The obtained results suggest that Pataki's favorability rating stood at 42% among the experimental group, compared to 49% among the control group. None of the participants from the experimental group clicked on the banner, serving as evidence that the mere presence of the banners and their negative anti-Pataki message had an impact on people even when they did not click on the banner ad. Furthermore, the banners sponsored by Vallone had a significantly unfavorable impact on the attitudes of the undecided and independent voters toward the target candidate. The banners had a strong influence also on people who frequently used the Web.

Thus, despite the fact that Vallone's negative banners had a negative influence on the evaluation of his rival, they did not develop a more positive image of their sponsor. In the end, Peter Vallone decisively lost the fight for the governor's seat in New York State to George Pataki.

Experimental study

The aim of the conducted experiment was to check the influence of a political negative online banner ads on image perception of attacked party and on support for this party, when the ad is posted on a non-political website.

Participants and method

Participants. The sample consisted of 55 participants (36 females and 19 males) aged between 19 and 40 (M=24,7; SD=4,4). Most of them were students (78%), while the rest represented higher education professionals (22%).

Subjects for the experiment were selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher (so called convenience sampling method).

Procedure and method. The experiment was conducted with the use of a standard procedure widely known in the research of advertising effectiveness: before and after (stimulus exposition) measurements[52]. The study took a place in university computer rooms, where PCs were networked.

In both measurements (pre- and post-test) participants evaluated the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) with a use of eight semantic differential scales with opposing adjectives at each end (responsible-irresponsible, sincere-insincere, efficient-inefficient, strong-weak, honest-dishonest, trustworthy-untrustworthy, friendly-hostile, professional-amateurish). Each scale has 7-points, from 3 to 1 on the left and right scales' side, and 0 in the middle). The principal component analysis allows grouping these scales into two factors corresponding with two dimensions of party image: credibility (pre-test: Cronbach's α=0,92, and post-test: α=0,94) and professionalism (pre-test: α=0,57, and post-test: α=0,71). Moreover, participants were twice asked about their support for SLD. All of the measurements were transformed into a scale of 0 to 100, based on degree of clarity. The higher the rating, the more positive the evaluation.

Stimulus material. Between both measurements, the subjects were asked to navigate through a popular-science website (named "Knowledge and Human") for ten minutes. The site was made up especially for this experiment. One group of subjects (*the casual Internet users*) did it without additional instructions (this experimental condition was supposed to simulate an accidental

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[52] W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski, L.L. Kaid, *Role of advertising in forming the image of politicians: Comparative analysis of Poland, France, and Germany*, "Media Psychology" 2000, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 124.

or incidental connection with the site from a browser), while the other group of participants (*the intentional Internet users*) received instructions to pay a particular attention to information (articles) posted on the website as well as on its attractiveness and functionality.

The created website consisted of a main page with short articles and scientific facts (three short facts about nature) and a "Do you know..." section (five questions with answers). Moreover, the website offered four main sections (topic of the day, physics, technology and entertainment), each presenting one different article with a picture. The homepage of the website is shown in Figure 1.

**Fig. 1. Homepage of popular-science website created for an experiment.**

Source: Own elaboration for experimental purposes.

The website contained a negative political banner, without a sponsor's name, presenting SLD in an unfavourable manner. The banner consisted of Leszek Miller's picture and quotations: "self-polished concrete" (*„Beton autoszlifowany"*) and "the SLD staff is a deeply dishonest community" (*„kadry SLD-owskie, to zbiorowość głęboko przeżarta nieuczciwością"*). The picture as well as quotations were taken from the Polish daily newspaper "Gazeta Wy-

borcza" (September 17, 2001)[53]. The ad was an animated flash banner with quotations presented alternately. The banner ad is displayed in Figure 2.

Fig. 2. Negative banner ad used in experiment.
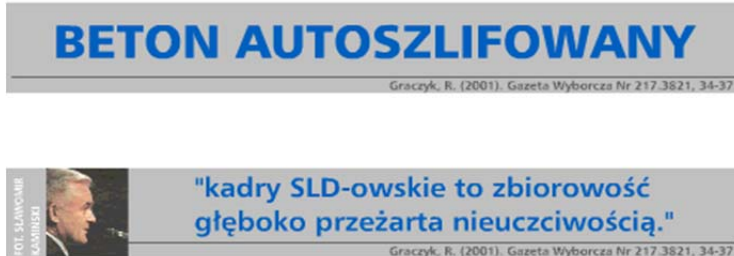
**Source: Own elaboration for experimental purposes.**

Results

According to the intensity of Internet use, participants were divided into two groups: heavy users (N=30), that is those, who use Internet on a daily basis, and non-heavy users (N=25), who use Internet less frequently. The indexes of the party image change were counted for every participant by subtracting the first measurement from the second one. The indexes responded to change in perception of SLD credibility, change in perception of SLD professionalism and change in support for this party. The experimental design for these three variables was: 2 (intentionality of WWW use: intentional vs. casual) × 2 (frequency of the Internet use: heavy vs. non-heavy).

An analyses of changes in perception of credibility and support for SLD have not revealed any statistically significant results (means for all subjects, respectively: M=-0,85 and M=-1,52; F<1). However, the perception of SLD professionalism was significantly influenced by an interaction of WWW use and Internet use frequency (F(2, 51)=7,32, p<0,01), which is graphically presented in Figure 3.

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[53] http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,436813.html, 15.03.2014.

Fig. 3. Intentionality of Website use and frequency of the Internet use in changes in perception of party professionalism.
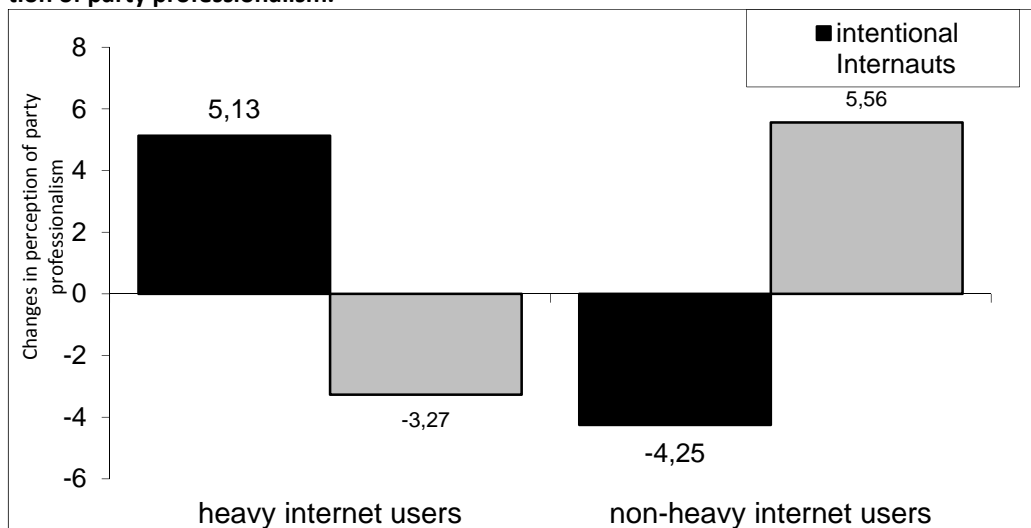
Source: Own elaboration.

The results of means comparison (Duncan tests) show that in the case of *intentional Internet users*, if they were heavy Internet users, their evaluation of SLD professionalism increased following the exposure to the banner, but if they were non-heavy users – it decreased (respectively, M=5,13 and M=-4,25, p<0,05). *Casual Internet users* displayed opposite effects: ratings of SLD professionalism increased among non-heavy users, but decreased among heavy users (M=5,56 and M=-3,27, statistical tendency p=0,06). On the other side, if heavy users used the website intentionally, their ratings of SLD professionalism increased, whereas if they did it accidentally (without purpose) – their ratings decreased (statistical tendency p=0,08). On the contrary, non-heavy users concentrated on information posted on the website perceived SLD as less professional, rating SLD more professional in case of no instruction (statistical tendency p=0,06).

The second aspect of data analyses was focused on specifying predictors of change in support for SLD (dependent variable), separately for groups divided

according to their intentionality of WWW use. Two regression analyses were conducted using changes in perception of SLD credibility and changes in perception of SLD professionalism as the predictors (independent variables).

Among *intentional Internet users* (R^2=0,17), the change in perception of SLD professionalism was the only significant predictor of change in support for this party (β=0,41, p<0,05; for change in credibility – β=0,01, *ns*.). Among *casual Internet users* the pattern was reverse (R^2=0,25): change in credibility perception emerged as the only significant predictor of change in support for SLD (β=0,49, p<0,05; for change in professionalism – β=0,13, *ns*.).

Conclusions

The study results supported predictions about the effectiveness of negative banners ads on party image perception. Nonetheless, although negative banners ads influenced change in perception of credibility and in perception of professionalism, only the second change was statistically significant. Furthermore, the influence of negative banners depended on website use intentionality as well as on Internet use experience. After negative banner exposure, *intentional Internet users* who were also heavy Internet users evaluated SLD professionalism as higher, while non-heavy users – lower, contrary to *causal Internet users*, whose ratings on SLD professionalism increased as long as they were non-heavy users.

The findings of the current study also suggest that change in party image perception influenced by negative banner ad affects support for that party as well. If Internet users go online intentionally to check a site they are interested in, and encounter a negative banner which lowers their ratings of party professionalism, their support for that party would get lower as well. However, the changes in party professionalism perception do not play a significant role

here. On the other hand, people who go online without purpose and see a negative banner accidentally, would change their perception of party credibility, but not in party professionalism.

The results support the prediction about the influence of negative banners on the attitude towards the advertised object, but do not stress the impact of negative ads. As assumed by Faber, Timms, and Schmitt[54], negative advertising might lead to different effects. In this case, negative banner ads would have fulfilled their expected role. Losses in support for SLD and changes in party image could cost the candidate party some points. The results, however, go along with what Wu and Dahmen[55] found in their research: negative messages lead to decreased ratings – in the presented study, to lower level of perceived professionalism, especially. It seems, that perceptual explanation of negativity might have played a role, because the negative banner ad was surrounded by rather neutral content. Further research examining the influence on heavy *vs.* non-heavy users is warranted. The current experiment has confirmed what Jagoda and Nyhan[56] showed in their work, that people who use the Web often are also under the influence of banners.

The relationship between ad negativity, Internet use intentionality and Internet use frequency requires deeper research. Better understanding of negative political online banners could help politicians and marketing specialists use the tools more professionally and enable psychologists to examine the negativity effect on the Internet. As for now, the findings of the experiment as well as the research on the persuasive role of political banner ads seem to be perfectly summarised by the president of Gould Communication Group: *online*

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[54] R.J. Faber, A.R. Timms, K.G. Schmitt. *Accentuate the negative…*, p. 11.
[55] H.D. Wu, N.S. Dahmen, *Web sponsorship and campaign effects…*, p. 314-329.
[56] K. Jagoda, N. Nyhan, *E-Voter 98*.

advertising should not be the main but additional element of candidate's promotion in his political campaign[57].

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Abstract

Modern and technologically advanced political marketing campaigns are making increasing use of the Internet. Although now one can observe a growing interest in particular in Web 2.0 (social networking, YouTube, etc.), it is also the "old" online tools (e.g. banner ads) which play an important role in marketing strategies. The article presents the results of an experiment whose purpose was to evaluate the effect of a negative political banner on the image and support for the attacked party. The results indicate that the negative banners decrease ratings of the attacked party image. However, these changes depend on both the intentionality use of the particular Web page on which a banner was placed, as well as on the level of Internet "experience" of affected individuals.

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[57] J. Deane, A vote for political ad banners. ZDNN News, http://www.zdnet.com/, 16.04.1999.

NEGATYWNE POLITYCZNE BANERY INTERNETOWE:

BADANIA EKSPERYMENTALNE

Abstrakt

Nowoczesne i technologicznie zaawansowane polityczne kampanie marketingowe w coraz większym stopniu wykorzystują możliwości Internetu. Chociaż obecnie szczególnie wzrasta zainteresowanie Web 2.0 (sieci społecznościowe, YouTube, itp.), to jednak również „stare" online'owe narzędzia Internetowe są istotnym elementem strategii marketingowych. Artykuł przedstawia wyniki eksperymentu testującego skuteczność negatywnego baneru politycznego w zmianie ocen wizerunku i poparcia dla zaatakowanej w nim partii. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że negatywne banery obniżają oceny wizerunku zaatakowanej partii. Przy czym zmiany te zależą zarówno od intencjonalności korzystania ze strony Web, na której umieszczony był baner, jak również od internetowego „doświadczenia" badanych.