

Barbara Brodzińska-Mirowska

UNFULFILLED EXPECTATIONS (?): POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON THE INTERNET IN THE ERA OF PROFESSIONALIZATION

Keywords:

political communication online, professionalization, crisis of political communication, long-term communication

Introduction

The implementation of modern technologies in communication into political discourse has been broadly discussed in recent years. The Polish literature on this field focuses mostly on the scope in which the Internet is used within the actions of communication carried during electoral campaigns. Yet currently the process of political communication is being shaped in challenging conditions characterized by low level of social trust, negative effects of media-tization of political message and difficulties of managing communication in multi-channel environment. The further assessment of the process requires broader analyses¹.

In the undertaken discussion I would like to analyze two following issues. First, the peculiarity of political communication in the 21th century, which manifests in a paradox between two coexisting phenomena: (a) a very dynamic development of communication techniques, which are to some extent implemented in the political sphere, (b) a decrease in trust of the government,

¹ See: K.Brants, K.Voltmer, *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy. Challenging the Primacy of Politics*, London 2011; P.Norris, *Democratic Deficit, Critical Citizens Revisited*, New York 2011.

political parties and state institutions². Hence in the first part of the article I will concentrate on discussing two questions: professionalization and a crisis. Second, this paper will explain both the modification of political communication and its characteristics. As such this paper, aims to provide answers to the following questions: given the present social and political conditions, where are the opportunities for the improvement of effectiveness of online communication. Further what are the biggest challenges to such improvements?

Political communication in the 21th century: professionalization in the era of crisis

The core of political communication remains the same despite the significant development of new technologies to seize and maintain power. From the latter half of the 20th century politicians, media and society have consistently played key roles in this process. It means that Richard Perloff's category of the "golden triangle" still applies³. The changes of political communication are visible in the roles played by particular subjects in this process. The Internet has slightly changed the scope of influence of the three actors. Yet traditional media play a very significant role in this triangle. All in all, they still constitute the most important element in the process of seizing and maintaining power⁴. A lot of authors pay much attention to media and the role it plays

²The second phenomenon, which is indicated in this paper, manifests itself in many researches. Those conducted in the European Union show that the problem is definitely becoming more profound. Fewer and fewer people trust their governments (23%) and parliaments (25%), Eurobarometr 80, *Public Opinion in The European Union*, Brussels 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_first_en.pdf, 13.01.2014.

³Richard Perloff points out three main actors of political communications process, which are media, society and politicians, R. Perloff, *Political Communication. Politics, Press and Public in America*, New Jersey 1998, p. 8-13.

⁴Tomasz Gackowski performed some very interesting research on the way in which the media refer to political promises made by politicians, *Władza na dywaniku. Jak polskie media rozliczają polityków*, Warsaw 2013.

within the process of political communication⁵. The fact that the arrival of television as the most important medium has brought changes of a revolutionary significance, is undeniable. Thus the media has been the driving force of the development of this sector of social communication. Of course mass media significantly changed the means and scope of conducting an electoral campaign⁶ but it also provoked the centralization of the acts of communication. The Internet gave hope for further professionalization of political communication and as Sara Bentivegna indicates: *ICT's the power to destabilize the control of production and circulation of information held by traditional media*⁷. That particular component seems to be least suitable for political communication but this issue will be covered later. However, two features that best describe political communication in the 21st century are: (1) professionalization (2) crisis.

⁵ See: J. Blumler, M. Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication*, London 1995, 11-25. The mediocentral tendency can also be observed e.g. in Dominiq Wolton (see: *Political Communication: The Construction of a Model*, "European Journal of Communication", 1990 vol. 5, p. 9-28), B. McNair (see: *Wprowadzenia do komunikowania politycznego*, Poznań 1998) or R. Denton and G. Woodward (see: *Jak zdefiniować komunikację polityczną?* [in:] J. Szczupaczyński (ed.) *Władza i Społeczeństwo*, Warsaw 1998, p.193-205).

⁶ It is especially in the USA where the market of specialists in media communication, marketing, market research and survey of public opinion etc. has dynamically developed. The process of professionalization of political communication is very often related to intense involvement of political consultants in the process of electoral campaign. However, it should be taken into account that the best developed market in this field so far is the American one. See: L. Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections*. New York 1981. F.Plasser, *Party Diminishing Relevance for Campaign Professionals*, "The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics", 2001, vol. 6, p. 44-59, B.Biskup, *Rozwój doradztwa politycznego w Polsce*, [in] K. Churska-Nowak, S. Drobczyński (ed.), *Profesjonalizacja i mediatyzacja kampanii politycznych w Polsce*, Poznań 2011, p. 91-106.

⁷ S. Bentivegna, *Rethinking Politics in the World ICT's*, "European Journal of Communication", 2006, vol. 21(3), p. 335.

Professionalization

The term of professionalization refers to all the changes that have occurred in political communication from the latter part of the previous century. This term is sometimes simplified and identified with the implementation of new solutions in communication into the political sphere. In particular it refers to the support that politicians and parties receive from political consultants and specialists in communication, the media and research on public opinion. Among many approaches, professionalization is presented as the process which concerns increasingly advanced communication tools. That's especially the case with political marketing in the context of electoral campaigns⁸. It is worth remembering that this is a very complex process, which exceeds the aspect of electoral campaigns. As Christina Holtz-Bacha emphasizes, the process of professionalization is strongly related to two parallel phenomena such as modernization and globalization. Thus, professionalization is an integral part of social development⁹. The approach of Christina Holtz-Bach and Ralph Negrine is to present the process of professionalization in a broader way¹⁰. A broader look on professionalization as a process of a long-term change consists of several stages, analyzed on several levels: (1) organizational, (2) media, (3) technological, (4) marketing, and (5) human resources¹¹. Characterizing the

⁸ See: K. Churska-Nowak, S. Drobczyński (eds.), *Profesjonalizacja i mediatyzacja kampanii politycznych w Polsce*, Poznań 2011, B. Dobek-Ostrowska, R. Wiszniowski, *Teoria komunikowania publicznego i politycznego*, Wrocław 2007, p. 135-166.

⁹ See: Ch. Holtz-Bacha, *Professionalization of Political Communication: the Case of the 1998 SPD Campaign*, "Journal of Political Marketing", 2002, vol. 1(4), p. 23-37, after: D. Lilleker, *Key Concepts of Political Communication*, London 2006, p. 32, Ch. Holtz-Bacha, *Professionalization on Germany* [in:] R.Negrine P.Mancini Ch.Holtz-Bacha, S.Papathanassopoulos, *The Professionalization of Political Communication*, Bristol 2007, p. 63-79.

¹⁰ R. Negrine, *The Transformation of Political Communication. Continuities and Changes in Media and Politics*, New York 2008, p. 1-14, R.Negrine P.Mancini Ch Holtz-Bacha., S.Papathanassopoulos, *The Professionalization of Political Communication*, Bristol 2007.

¹¹ More: B. Brodzińska-Mirowska, *Marketing międzywyborczy w teorii i praktyce. Przypadek Platformy Obywatelskiej*, Toruń 2013, p. 73-75.

process of professionalization by only focusing on new communications techniques and efficiency might lead to contradictory conclusions, especially if we take the following trends into account:

- The phenomenon of dynamic development of knowledge and communication skills is accompanied by a simultaneous decrease in trust towards politics and involvement in politics¹².
- Look at the professionalization of political communication from the perspective of a political campaign. I wanted to emphasize that we might get the impression of professionalization of the process of political communication by measuring it only from the perspective of electoral campaigns. It is much more precise to speak of professionalization of electoral campaigns¹³ than of professionalization of political communication, as this complex process is not only limited to campaigns. A significant part of communication takes place in the interelectoral period. Professionalization of political communication (or rather the necessity of professionalization) has been attributed a new significance, which exceeds greatly the issues of electoral campaigns.
- Reactivating communication actions in the field of direct communication¹⁴. The increased interest in direct communication does not contradict the idea of professionalization. In contrast, a long-term implementation of communication, which is based upon this form,

¹² Sara Bentivegna emphasizes that we can also consider it a certain paradox in the context of democracy, because as the author indicates, the development of democracy is accompanied by negative phenomena such as the constantly increasing discouragement of citizens towards politics, see: S. Bentivegna, *Rethinking Politics in the World ICT's*, "European Journal of Communication", 2006 vol. 21(3), p. 333-336.

¹³ See more: R. Gibson, A. Römmele, *Measuring the Professionalization of Political Campaign*, "Party Politics" 2009 vol. 15(3), p. 265-293.

¹⁴ E. Marciniak, *Relacyjna teoria komunikacji, a marketing relacji w polityce*, „Studia Politologiczne” 2012 vol. 24, p. 92. See also: B. Brodzinska-Mirowska, *Marketing międzywyborczy...*, p. 132-152.

seems to be a very reasonable solution. Online communication tools may support this process to a significant extent.

Now, a question arises: to what degree has the Internet increased the professionalization of political communication? The answer to this question is not so obvious since it depends on the approach taken. There are three possible answers to this question: (1) if we analyze the problem narrowly, we will conclude that professionalization proceeds because political parties and politicians are supported by specialists in new technologies (2) if we perceive it from the perspective of technological possibilities, we will provide a positive answer as well, (3) however, if we take into account the necessity of multi-dimensional assessment of the transformations in the field of political communication as well as the effectiveness of long-term action, then some new doubts appear as to the scope and degree of professionalization of political communication. That is not to claim that political communication in the 21st century is unprofessional. It is only suggested that a more detailed analysis of this incredibly complex process encompasses a very specific type of communication.

The crisis of political communication

Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in *The Crisis of Public Communication*, wrote about the crisis in political (and public) communication¹⁵. Recently, researchers have been more frequently and precisely referring to political marketing as one of the main means of political communication¹⁶. There are two factors which encourage the theses of the crisis: (1) a difficult and com-

¹⁵ See: J. Blumler, M. Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication*, London 1995.

¹⁶ See: A. Kasińska-Metryka, R. Wiszniewski (eds.), *Kryzys marketingu politycznego*, Toruń 2013.

plex environment, which under many views is not beneficial for political subjects (e.g. tabloidization of politics, scandalisation) (2) taking into consideration the decrease in the interest in politics among citizens, a reduced faith in the efficiency of these communication means is inevitable.

It is assumed that we should not so much speak of a crisis of political marketing as such (I find the word 'crisis' too serious in comparison to the extent of the phenomenon which we observe) but rather of some deficit in the awareness of the purpose of marketing means as well as the lack of ideas (and possibilities), or simply the lack of needs to use the available means¹⁷. As Marek Jeziński argues, the crisis of political marketing results from *the excess of some goods, which cannot be effectively processed and which function according to the rules of market and – as a result – cannot be understood by the target group*¹⁸. The difficulties indicated by Jeziński are particularly severe if take account of the necessity to implement marketing actions into the periods between campaigns, by making use of modern communication technologies.

The concept of means of communication has not been fully explored, rather we are running out of ideas as to how to make use of them. Additionally, some new requirements have appeared as a consequence of the means of communication being implemented automatically after 1989, with no reflection upon their nature. This has led to a very pragmatic and over-simplified attitude in a political communication field¹⁹. As a result, the nature of political

¹⁷ The crisis of political marketing as the main means of political communication has been described in detail by: L. Sobkowiak, *Marketing polityczny: kryzys czy pragmatyka?*, p. 9-20, R. Wiszniowski, *Deficyt e-marketingu rządowego w Polsce*, p. 86-95, T. Goban-Klas, *Kryzys marketingu politycznego, czy kryzys mediów?*, p. 96-102 [in:] A. Kasińska-Metryka, R. Wiszniowski, *Kryzys marketingu politycznego*, Toruń 2013.

¹⁸ M. Jeziński, *Kryzys marketingu polityczne i jego kontekstowe uwarunkowania* [in:] A. Kasińska-Metryka, R. Wiszniowski, *Kryzys marketingu politycznego*, Toruń 2013, p. 26.

¹⁹ Hence I find it fair that Mariusz Kolczyński speaks of 'propagandization of political marketing' M. Kolczyński, *Komunikacyjny >>efekt jojo<< propagandyzacja polskiego marketingu politycz-*

communication has warped, especially in such aspects as political marketing which aims to *create the ground for a two-directional flow of information*, as emphasized by Agnieszka Kasińska-Metryka and Robert Wiszniowski²⁰. The central issue here, is the crisis. It is therefore a consequence of the so-called 'trap of instrumentalisation of marketing and communication'. Although, it is rather more proper to speak of a crisis in relations between political parties, politicians and society resulting from incompetently created communication. Or are these the costs of the centralization of communication? Increasingly reduced participation in politics and trust towards politicians constitutes measurable indices of the crisis of these relations. The following part of the article I will refer to the question of whether it is possible to work upon these relations by means of modern technologies and if so, how this could be pursued.

Hopes and expectations of the 'new era'

Over 2 billion people from all over the world use the Internet²¹. According to 'Diagnoza Społeczna' around 64% of Polish society are part of this movement²². It is of no surprise that these new channels of communication have raised so great hopes among both practitioners and theorists who deal with political communication.

In the beginning of the 21st century the Internet and its potential influence upon the improvement of the quality of political communication was the object of enormous optimism. Today television continues to dominate as a medium, especially when it comes to obtaining information on politics. How-

nego [in:] M. Kolczyński, M. Mazur, M. Michalczyk (eds.) *Mediatyzacja kampanii politycznych*, Katowice 2009., p.347-360.

²⁰ A. Kasińska-Metryka, R. Wiszniowski, *Kryzys marketingu politycznego*, Toruń 2013, p. 6.

²¹ Data from 2012 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats9.htm>, 20.02.2014

²² The Report *Diagnoza Społeczna* 2013, p. 325.

ever, it is worth paying attention to the research in 'Diagnoza Społeczna': most of the users of the Internet in Poland are young people. Two very important issues appear at this point: (1) it is the group least interested in politics and they use the Internet the most; (2), the Internet is not a substitute for television, which confirms the statement about a dominant role of traditional media²³. As Ralph Negrine argues, political communication in the times of modern technologies, indicates that:

- *Mainstream news media are still dominant as sources of news,*
- *Although elites can create and control their own media space (...) these are of little use unless they are accessed. However, the potential for interactivity exposes elites to interrogation and contradiction,*
- *Websites compete with, and link with, other websites so creating a network of information,*
- *With many sites on the Internet providing tools for interactivity, individuals can not only feed back comments but create their own network of information,*
- *Lastly, the networks of information can open up discussions beyond what is made available through elites or traditional media outlets²⁴.*

Therefore the characteristics of the Internet can be subsumed under two basic categories: (1) those broadening communication opportunities and managing this very process (2) those constituting the potential of generating socially valuable activities. The details are gathered in the table below:

²³ The Report *Diagnoza Społeczna* 2013, p.321-329.

²⁴ R. Negrine, *The Transformation of Political Communication. Continuities and Changes in Media and Politics* New York 2008, p. 175.

Tab. 1. Communication and social potential of online communication means.

1. Those broadening the communication potential	2. Those increasing the social potential
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Various channels addressing the diverse sociodemographic groups of addressees (precise targeting of the message)▪ Significant reduction of communication time (lack of barriers related to space and time)▪ The possibility of permanent communication (without the necessity of involving traditional media)▪ The possibility of increasing the attractiveness of messages▪ The medium is very interactive▪ Possibilities of quick and easy acquisition of information on the addressees▪ It is a source of communication that provides various information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The possibility of rapid interaction▪ Many possibilities to encourage activities▪ Democratic nature of the medium (diversity of information, sources, the possibilities of co-creating the announcements)²⁵▪ The possibility of building communities through particular actions or projects▪ Making a connection with one of the most difficult groups of electorate, i.e. with young people

Source: own elaboration.

The Internet has significantly broadened the opportunities in terms of communication in politics. Some of the features of this medium, which are enumerated in Table 1, pose the following questions:

5. How can communication actions conducted online and undertaken by Polish political parties and politicians electoral campaign be characterized?
6. What might be the role of online communication means in the process of building a long-term connection with the electorate?

²⁵ Jakub Nowak represents a similar attitude that *digital information technologies have been perceived from their beginnings as potentially very democratic*, see: J. Nowak, *Zrób to sam – Web 2.0 jako sfera politycznej aktywności Internautów* [in:] M. Jeziński (ed.), *Nowe Media i polityka: Internet, demokracja, kampanie wyborcze*, Toruń 2009, p. 165.

Planning and conducting electoral campaigns

The high expectations about the application of the Internet in political campaigns have been intensified in the course of the American presidential campaign in 2008. As Colin Delany points out, the success of Obama's staff lies in consequence of consistent and integrated communication activities, setting precise and easily measurable goals, mobilizing online users to actively engage in the campaign, developing precisely targeted message to segmented groups of voters and facilitating communication with those groups by using diverse communications tools. Obama's 2008 campaign was also a breakthrough in collecting funds by massive usage of online tools²⁶. During the election cycle in 2008, according to Pew Internet & American Life Project, more than half of the people entitled to vote used the Internet in order to take part in or gather information about the campaign²⁷.

There is no doubt that the Internet has facilitated the process of carrying electoral campaigns via the organization of the team, distribution of tasks and internal communication, analysis of data and their transfer, monitoring the course of a campaign etc. As far as the process of external communication is concerned, which aims to appeal to a selected group of electorate and to mobilize their activity, online means bring many possibilities. To what extent do Polish politicians and political parties make use of online communication means in electoral campaigns?

The application of new communication techniques depends on many factors. These are the types of elections, financial means, the size of electoral

²⁶ C. Delany, *Learning from Obama: Lessons for Online Communicators in 2009 and Beyond*, 2009, www.epolitics.com, s. 5-10, 30.03.2014, see also: T. Towner, D. Dulio, *An Experiment of Campaign Effects During the YouTube Election*, "New Society & Society" vol. 13(4), s. 626-644, L. Sabato, *The Year of Obama: How Barack Obama Won the White House*, New York 2010.

²⁷ A. Smith, *The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008*,

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2009/04/15/the-internets-role-in-campaign-2008/> 29.03.2014.

district, party affiliation, political objectives, position in the political hierarchy, possibilities of cooperation with specialists in creating this type of communication, as well as the attitude of a candidate towards this kind of communication. My point of reference for these analyses is the results of selected reports and studies which concern the recent council and presidential campaigns in 2010 as well as the parliamentary campaign in 2011. Nevertheless, the analysis of the present results of the research leads to some general conclusions as to the scope of the use of online means within electoral campaigns:

The arguments above agree with the work of Dominik Batorski and Jan Zając, who together indicate that the campaign of Obama from 2008 should still be treated as an example²⁸. Iwona Grzywińska argues that *no phenomenon of professionalization of electoral campaigns as far as social media are concerned in this field*²⁹. There is no doubt that both parties and politicians choose the Internet as an information medium (for unidirectional communication). Yet, is this typical only for Polish parties and politicians? The research conducted on various political parties proves that it is quite a universal tendency. The informative nature of the Internet is most frequently used by political parties³⁰.

²⁸ D.Batorski, J. Zając, *Kampania w sieci*, Warszawa 2011, p. 19.

²⁹ I. Grzywińska, *Analiza komunikacji politycznej w serwisach społecznościowych (NK.pl, Facebook.com) podczas prezydenckiej kampanii wyborczej 2010*, "Studia Politologiczne" 2011 vol.21, p.161.

³⁰ See: A.Cardenal, *Why Mobilize Support Online? The Paradox of Party Behavior Online*, "Party Politics", 2011, vol. 19(1), p. 83-103, see also: A. Römmele, *Political Parties, Party Communication and New Information and Communication Technologies*, "Party Politics" 2003 vol. 9(1), p. 7-20.

Tab. 2. Usage of the Internet communications potential during political campaign in Poland – observed trends.

Type of Campaign	Usage of the Internet communications potential – observed trends
Local Government Campaign 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one-sided communication (websites and online profiles are treated as additional advertising space, almost half of candidates running for the seat of mayor, did not provide any contact for direct communication with voters) - small range of interaction activities focused on voters engagement - candidates showed interest in using social media, however researchers observed striking lack of consistent communications strategy in online messages - websites and social media profiles were often established only for the purpose of campaign
Presidential Campaign 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - small range of interaction activities focused on voters engagement - proactive communication activities in social media were only conducted during the campaign and only for that sole purpose - incoherence between candidates' online and offline image - few campaigns decided to develop message accordingly with the needs of targeted groups of voters (for example held 3 different websites)
General Elections Campaign 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of coherent online activities - striking inconsistency between partisan and individual candidates message - more candidates listed on the first position of a party ballot tend to use websites (however many candidates resigned from posting websites, ex. Women, most frequently websites were held by the candidates of Civic Platform) - Facebook and YouTube was the most popular social media channels among candidates - small range of interaction activities focused on voters engagement (online tools served usually as information tools) - Internet was not the main source of political information for voters

Sources: own elaboration based on: D. Batorski, J. Zając, *Kampania w sieci*, Warsaw 2011, s. 8-12, D. Batorski, M. Nagraba, J. Zając, J. Zbieranek, *Internet w kampanii wyborczej 2011*, Warsaw 2012, p. 9-14, J. Garlicki, *Komunikacja w Internecie a kultura polityczna Polaków – komentarz po pierwszej fali badań*, "Studia Politologiczne" 2011 vol. 21, p. 297-303, P. Weśółowski, *Analiza komunikacji politycznej w serwisach internetowych kandydatów na prezydenta Polski w trakcie kampanii wyborczej 2010 roku*, "Studia Politologiczne" 2011 vol. 21, p. 89-130, I. Grzywińska, *Analiza komunikacji politycznej w serwisach społecznościowych (NK.pl, Facebook.com) podczas prezydenckiej kampanii wyborczej 2010*, "Studia Politologiczne" 2011 vol.21, p.131-164.

The common feature of online communication is that it does not manifest any long-term nor strategic activity. The researchers refer to that feature very often. What is more, the negligence of online activity after the elections,

suggests two facts: (1) there is an instrumental treatment of the Internet, (2) the reason why politicians tend to neglect the necessity of regular update of their online profiles is a shortage of detailed analyses on facilitating the choice of the most efficient political online tools addressing different targeted groups of voters, used in the both partisan and individual campaigns.

The basis of the efficient usage of the available means are: (1) exhaustive analysis of the needs of candidates/politicians, or of parties with reference to the objectives they have, (2) deciding which means might help to implement these objectives to the highest degree (it can as well equal ignoring certain activities e.g. on a web portal) and (3) identification of the expectations of the target group – the electorate. Point three is particularly interesting because it is important to be aware of the needs and habits of those who use online communication, namely in this case the electorate³¹. If there is any reason politicians do not make use of the potential of the Internet, one can ask why. There are two probable obstacles: (1) the fear of interaction – online discussions over politics very often provoke strong, negative emotions and what follows is the problem of control of the messages (2) interactive activities have to be strategic and both politicians and parties seem to find it troublesome. It results from the instrumental approach to this medium as well as from some organizational barriers (especially in a long-term perspective). These remarks produce further questions: is this interaction really needed? It seems to be a good question if we analyze the data: Przemysław Wesołowski indicates that only 17% of the surveyed net surfers search for information on politics on the Internet, because *in the case of some more difficult domain, such as politics, there is a tendency to choose a medium which is easy to understand and which*

³¹ P. Bickerton, M. Bickerton, U. Pardesi, *Marketing w Internecie*, Gdańsk 2006, p. 13-14.

usually presents an interpretation of events³². It might be that the requirements for interaction between the politicians and the electorate result from the fact that the Internet brought hopes and expectations regarding the intensification of democratic processes. It was expected that the involvement of the citizens would rise along with the access to information. Internet gives the opportunity of expanding and deepening the public sphere and thus, of reviving public debate³³. However, today we know that most of these expectations were exaggerated because, as Leszek Porębski explains: *ITC transforms and will transform the world of politics to no less an extent than it happens in the case of other aspects of social life*. He also adds that *there is no new quality in here (...)*³⁴. Moreover, no relation has been confirmed between the increased access to information and e.g. the participation in political life³⁵. In addition, a strongly determining factor is the so-called digital exclusion (generally understood as no access to any network or incompetence in using it)³⁶. Can we say that the Internet influenced the quality of the political debate? Zizi Papacharissi emphasizes that *the fact that the Internet provides additional space for political discussion, it is still plagued by the inadequacies of our political system. It provides public space, but does not constitute a public sphere*³⁷. On the other hand, let us remember that along with the Internet an excellent opportunity appeared for smaller social movements or minor parties, for which the

³² P. Wesołowski, *Analiza komunikacji politycznej...*, p. 126.

³³ R. K. Polat, *The Internet and Political Participation. Exploring the Explanatory Links* "European Journal of Communication", 2005 vol. 20(4), p. 435-459, see: L. Porębski, *Elektroniczne oblicze polityki. Demokracja i państwo, instytucje polityczne w okresie rewolucji informacyjnej*, Cracow 2001, p. 73-108.

³⁴ L. Porębski, *Elektroniczne oblicze...*, p. 34, 39.

³⁵ R.K. Polat, *The Internet and Political...*, p. 440-441.

³⁶ See: H. Bonfadelli, *The Internet Knowledge Gaps: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation*, "European Journal of Communication", 2002 vol. 17(1), p. 65-84.

³⁷ See: Z. Papacharissi, *The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere*, "New Media and Society" 2002 vol. 4(1), p.13.

Internet forms the only ground for functioning³⁸. An exceptionally crucial issue appears in the discussion: is it true that only the most professional communication actions have the power to increase the involvement and interest in politics? There is no answer to this question only hypotheses. In this way we have reached another issue to discuss: is it possible at all to make use of modern technologies in the process of building relations with the electorate in long-term communication? And how to do this?

Long-term communication with the voters in the era of modern technologies

All the characteristics of the Internet enumerated earlier seem to justify the expectations to use this potential in order to establish long-term communication with the electorate. As it was already mentioned it is particularly important in critical moments of these relations. According, it is necessary to increase the long-term activity which is concentrated on building an interaction with the electorate³⁹. It can be achieved by means of a constructive dialogue, encouraging the voters to participate in, discuss and even to actively pursue certain decision-making processes. Online means could be particularly useful because of their interactive nature. Such approach seems to be particularly reasonable in the era of mediatization of politics and particularly of its negative effects⁴⁰. Therefore, the assumptions of relationship marketing are

³⁸ The already cited Ana Cardenal, *Why mobilize...* p.83-103, discusses a very interesting thread of smaller political parties and their functioning on the Internet. In Poland it is perfectly illustrated by the figure of Janusz Korwin-Mikke, see: P. Wesołowski, *Analiza komunikacji...* p.126. His example confirms that the Internet has become an excellent communication platform for smaller and even marginal parties which do not function in the mainstream media, see also: M. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Cambridge 2012, p.218-244.

³⁹ Political communication based on mutual relations: see: E. Marciniak, *Relacyjna teoria komunikacji a marketing relacji w polityce*, "Studia Politologiczne" vol. 24, Warszawa 2012, p. 87-103, as well as B. Brodzińska-Mirowska, *Marketing międzywyborczy ...* p. 129-180.

⁴⁰ M. Castells, *Communication Power*, [Polish Edition], Warsaw 2013, p. 244-257.

worth paying attention to in this context⁴¹ and so are the possibilities of implementation between elections. A key element of communication based interaction is authenticity, trust and, moreover, a coherent, consistent dialogue on equal terms. The quality of this communication is increasingly important for citizens and is significant for quality of governing⁴².

At this point a significant problem occurs: the research so far proves that (1) political parties (including politicians) use the Internet above all as an informative channel; (2) some serious difficulties can be observed in the long-term, strategic inter-electoral activities. It means that despite all the advantages it brings, it still remains a difficult objective to accomplish. So what are the barriers? In this situation Ana Cardenal's statement seems to be acceptable: *if parties are not fully exploiting the Internet in order to mobilize political support, it is probably because it is not clear what they will gain from it. In fact, one of the main arguments is that exploiting new technologies for political mobilization has uncertain benefits for parties while it has very certain costs, both communicational and organizational*⁴³. Parties make use of their organizational resources mainly during electoral campaigns. This is due to the centralization of political communication. This is reasonable if we take into account the role of television in the process of electoral communication. Communication from the central level might, however, fail in a long-time perspective. In a long term political parties should also focus on grassroots activi-

⁴¹ The assumptions about relationship marketing are broadly covered by J. Otto, *Marketing relacji. Koncepcja i stosowanie*, Warsaw 2004, see also: A. Drapińska, *Marketing relacji – istota i czynniki sukcesu*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego", Ekonomiczne Problemy Usług" nr 41, 2009, p. 39-45.

⁴² See: T. Sasińska-Klas, *Kryzys marketingu politycznego a zarządzanie jakością*, [in:] A. Kasińska-Metryka, R. Wiszniewski, *Kryzys marketingu politycznego*, Toruń 2013, p. 78-85, see also: J. Wilkin (ed.), *Jakość rządzenia w Polsce. Jak ją badać, monitorować i poprawiać?*, Warsaw 2013.

⁴³ A. S. Cardenal, *Why mobilize support online? The Paradox of Party Behavior Online*, "Party Politics" 2011 vol. 19(1), p. 84.

ties. This also triggers the necessity of low-level partisan structure reactivation and engaging them in the process of party-voter relations building⁴⁴. Online tools may facilitate local community building through leveraging the issues of natural interest for local communities. It is hard to accomplish that goal by shaping the message in the central level. Low-level partisan structure can turn out to be helpful in the process of creating relations between electorate, politicians and parties. The ITC tools enable a coordination of work, so the transfer of some of the communication tasks to smaller units is much easier⁴⁵. Long-term, inter-electoral communication actions are not a trend but necessity and at the same time, the greatest challenge for political parties and politicians who are used to centralized communication⁴⁶.

Yet the key factor, which determines the interaction and activity, is the motivation and willingness of the electorate. The new media has the communication potential to create long term relations with voters and party members and followers. This potential may be developed by undertaking the following activities:

- shaping the communication by using diverse tools, often in more attractive and accessible form,
- conducting activities aimed to inform and educate about the decisions made by the government,
- building communities around meaningful issues,
- creating additional and more diverse content targeted to different groups of voters,

⁴⁴ See: B.Brodzińska-Mirowska, M.Winclawska, *Organizacja, funkcjonowanie i komunikacja w polskich partiach politycznych w oczach członków. Wstępne wyniki badań* [in] M. Winclawska, A. Paczeński, *Partie polityczne w Polsce i Europie*, Wrocław-Toruń 2013, s. 197-220.

⁴⁵ A. Römmele, *Political Parties...*p. 10.

⁴⁶ Decentralization of information and communication is a consequence of using the Internet. This phenomenon is noticeable but not so dynamic, yet. See: J. Garlicki, *Komunikacja w Internecie...*p. 298.

- building communication apart from mainstream media.

The instrumentalisation of the Internet as another medium of political communication will not provide the desired effect of the restoration of relations between the politicians and citizens. According to Blumler and Coleman, *citizens of democracy do not want to be asked their opinion only to allow their government to say it has asked them their opinion. They want to see an authentic relationship between speaking and being heard*⁴⁷. Every act of communication, which violates trust mentioned by Coleman and Blumler, provokes scepticism. The restoration of these relations and trust constitutes another challenge faced by politicians. The usage of modern technologies can only support this process but in no way does it guarantee any success.

Summary

The implementation of new technologies into politics has broadened the extent of communication acts of politicians. It has displayed a certain idiosyncrasy but has also uncovered many drawbacks. This idiosyncrasy consists in the fact that the fragmentary professionalization occurs along with the crisis of trust and attitude towards politicians (and politics). The parties and politicians prefer to implement online means of communication technically. They appreciate their informative potential. However, they are more reserved when it comes to direct interaction with the electorate.

On the other hand, a rapid development of communication means has exposed drawbacks and challenges:

⁴⁷ J. Blumler, S. Coleman, *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship. Theory, Practice and Policy*, New York 2009, p. 166.

- the long-term and multi-channel communication acts within party organization (both external and internal) lack structure,
- disintegration of communication acts on many levels,
- there are some financial and organizational barriers, which aggravate or even make it impossible to organize communication acts and which aggravate efficient, complex managing of the communication with the electorate,
- a trivial approach towards communication; its means are treated instrumentally and their organizational resources are not exploited enough,
- making attempts to mobilize young voters, who regardless of being the biggest online-users group, are the least engaged in political issues⁴⁸.

The demands and requirements towards online means of communication applied into politics are far too excessive. They result in disappointment and dissatisfaction, which is observed while estimating the changes that occur over time along with the progress of the Internet use in political communication. The source of these requirements lies in a comparison between the efficiency of online actions on the commercial market and conclusions from American political campaigns. Unfortunately, I doubt whether it is justifiable to refer to the same indexes for so disparate types of communication, especially if we take into account the differences between commercial and political communication as well as legal, formal and organizational conditions that stand behind it.

⁴⁸ T. Bakker, C. De Vreese, *Good News for the Future? Young People, Internet Use and Political Participation*, "Communication Research" 2011, vol. 38(04), s. 451-470.

Therefore, neither the politicians, nor the parties and electorate have met the expectations enumerated in the title. However, as of today the greatest challenge for the former group is the necessity for a wise application and integration of the available communication means (both the traditional and online ones) in order to be able to carry out a long-term and complex communication.

Barbara Brodzińska-Mirowska – PhD, Assistant at the Chair of Journalism and Social Communication at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun

Abstract

Implementation of new technologies into political field has raised great hopes. Expectations were mainly focused on boosting the efficiency of political communication. Researchers also expected new technologies to bring the potential that would increase the involvement in political issues among citizens. Now we know that most of these expectations were not exaggerated.

As the recent research shows it would be risky to describe all the changes in political communication as revolutionary. While discussing political communication in the era of new technologies two issues should be taken into account: (1) professionalization, and (2) a crisis of political communication. Due to the contradictory importance of both of them, this seems to be a paradox of our times. Thus both the political parties and politicians as individuals are currently facing a challenge of rebuilding relations with voters, especially in a long-term perspective. The difficulties in accomplishing that goal might, however, be overcome through the possibilities offered by the application of new technologies. And yet the question remains: would they be able to use it properly.

NIESPEŁNIONE OCZEKIWANIA (?): KOMUNIKACJA POLITYCZNA W INTERNECIE W DOBIE PROFESJONALIZACJI

Abstrakt

Implementacja nowych technologii w obszar komunikacji politycznej zrodziła wiele nadziei. Najwięcej oczekiwań pojawiło się w zakresie zwiększenia efektywności działań komunikacyjnych. Wielu badaczy wyrażało nadzieję, że nowe technologie spowodują zwiększenie poziomu zaangażowania obywateli w sprawy polityczne. Dziś wiemy, że wiele z tych oczekiwań sformułowano znacznie na wyrost.

Wyniki wielu badań pokazują, że trudno zmiany w obszarze komunikacji politycznej określić mianem rewolucyjnych. Podejmowanie dyskusji na temat komunikacji politycznej w dobie nowych technologii wymaga uwzględnienia dwóch, ważnych kwestii związanych z: (1) profesjonalizacją oraz (2) kryzysem komunikacji politycznej. Współwystępowanie dwóch tych zjawisk jednocześnie jest jednym z interesujących paradoksów. Tymczasem największym wyzwaniem dla partii politycznych i polityków jest odbudowanie relacji z wyborcami w perspektywie długoterminowej. Rodzi to jednak duże trudności, które mogłyby zostać przezwyciężone m.in. dzięki wykorzystaniu potencjału nowych technologii komunikacyjnych. Wciąż jednak pojawia się pytanie, czy politycy i partie polityczne będą chcieli i potrafili z niego skorzystać?