Social Media in Politics. Case Studies on the Political Power of Social Media – **Bogdan Pătruţ, Monica Pătruţ (Editors)**

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Recent history has demonstrated that social media has a very powerful impact on politics and its scope continues to broaden as the actors on the political stage discover new manners in which this valuable tool can sway opinions, trends, options and, most importantly, votes. The linguistic dimension of political discourse has been extensively analysed (Chilton and Schäffner 2002, Cap and Okulska 2013, etc.) from various perspectives that mostly focus on the ability of politicians to skillfully use language in such a way as to construct national or political identity, to determine the audience to identify with a certain ideology or to accept a controversial political action. The efficiency of any kind of political discourse increases exponentially and succeeds in attaining its goals when it is released and guided through such channels as the social media which, through its extremely large span, manages to permeate the lives of individuals living in the most remote and otherwise inaccessible areas.

In the preface, the editors of *Social Media in Politics: Case Studies on the Political Power of Social Media*, formulate three questions which set the direction of the papers included in the volume and thus become research guidelines. The first question is whether there is a relationship between social media and politics, the second focuses on the manner in which politicians can use social media for electoral marketing and, finally, the third question centres on the use of social networks in order to mobilize citizens to participate in riots or social revolutions in their countries. In the foreword, Sónia Pedro Sebastião pointed out that individuals living in the digital context are no longer dependent upon info-communication hierarchy and, by taking control of the content that interests them, become creators with a strong voice and opinion in the framework of what she terms "participative web" (page v).

Part I, which corresponds to the first research question formulated by the editors, is entitled *The Political Power of Social Media*. Andrea Calderaro authors the section's first chapter entitled *Internet Politics Beyond the Digital Divide* which focuses on the unequal presence of political parties across the Internet in 190

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countries and on the analysis of contextual factors (i.e. Digital Divide, economic and democratic indicators) that trigger this difference. The author discovered that the online presence of political parties in highly democratic countries is more prominent whereas a low level of democracy is characterized by a lack of online presence of political parties on account of the limited party competition within such contexts. Hence, it is the country's political system that determines the extent of internet use as well as the level of Digital Divide.

Leocadia Díaz Romero analyses the trans-nationalization and maximization of involvement in social movements through the use of technology which has a unifying role for the civic society, in her article *On the Web and Contemporary Social Movements*. By means of communication technologies there is an enhancement of citizen participation in social movements that contribute to the consolidation of democracy, activism and solidarity. Among the aspects that the resort to new technologies manages to improve, mention can be made of political party management (i.e. fundraising, dissemination of ideas and electoral programs), campaigning and voting, collective action as well as the process of decision-making which can benefit from the opinions expressed in virtual public spheres.

The third chapter of the section focuses on the same topic, namely the impact of social media on social movements. Specifically, Amaro La Rosa's article *Social Media and Social Movements Around the World* examines nine protests that took place during the twenty-first century from the perspective of the role that social media has had in their unfolding. The conclusions that the author drew after the investigation of the resources used in the nine movements subjected to analysis as well as of the contextual factors that accompanied them are that social media are able to initiate social movements but other pre-existing conditions (i.e. social, political, communicational) also contribute to the outbreak of such public manifestations. Moreover, the strength of the impact that social media have on different popular movements varies according to the above mentioned contextual factors.

Bogdan Pătruț and Ioan-Lucian Popa report on the development of software used in the analysis of texts from political blogs in their article *Graph Theory Algorithms for Analysing Political Blogs*. According to the authors, the corpus analysis of political blogs – by means of mathematical models and the *Political Analyst* software – is performed on key words which enable researchers to isolate political, social-cultural and economic values mentioned in the texts, to pinpoint the main political ideas presented in the respective discursive instances and to extract specific topics among which a connection could be established.

In their chapter entitled *The Use of Twitter in 2013 Italian Political Election*, Guido di Fraia and Maria Carlotta Missaglia present the analysis of the way in which 41 Italian politicians used social media, especially Twitter, between September 2012 and April 27, 2013. The expression 'mass-mediatization of Twitter' (p.75) put forward by the authors refers to the improper use of Twitter by most of the Italian politicians whose communication strategies were subjected to analysis in

this study. Thus, the unawareness of politicians regarding the potential that social media had in building dialogue, communication, relationships or in receiving feedback from voters, eventually led to the preponderant use of Twitter as a means to convey information or, as the authors phrased it, "more like a mass-media rather than a social media" (p.76).

The second part of the volume, *Using Social Media in Electoral Marketing*, begins with the presentation of another facet of the use of Twitter during the 2012 local elections in Belgium. *An Intermedia Understanding of the Networked Twitter Ecology* uses a multi-modal approach in the examination of the manner in which debates on Twitter mirror mainstream media. Evelien D'heer and Pieter Verdegem argue that "through the incorporation and secondary circulation of the hyperlinks on Twitter, visibility of existing mainstream media outlets increases" (p.87). The video content broadcast by television channels is more easily distributed via social media than, say, newspaper articles to which reference is not often made.

In Chapter 7 entitled *The Social Media Usage and the Transformation of Political Marketing and Campaigning of the Emerging Democracy in Indonesia*, Nyarwi Ahmad and Ioan-Lucian Popa explore the extent to which the use of social media changed both the marketization of politics and campaign strategy during local elections in Indonesia. The research is conducted on a series of interviews of campaign volunteers, political consultants and candidates. The crux argument that the authors posit is that the '*integrative participatory political marketing* (IPPM)' and the '*mixed-mediated and online political campaigning* (MMOPC)' can be used to consolidate the personal and political brand of candidates during election campaigns.

Chapter 8, *Avant-garde* Digital Movement or "Digital Sublime" Rhetoric?, continues the discussion of the influence of social media on politics by referring to the spectacular results obtained in the 2013 Italian parliamentary elections by means of the *MoVimento 5 stelle* (M5S or Five Star Movement). The latter was legitimized by very efficient discourse practices or narratives that managed to occult some questionable aspects related to the movement. Its rise culminated with the movement becoming a parliamentary force to the point of being considered a noteworthy member of the political opposition without even having been constituted into a political party. The greatest danger that the authors envisage is that it will be "increasingly difficult to contest that the Internet may just be playing, within M5S, a rhetorical role: that of great legitimizer of amateurism and anti-politics, wrapped in the emancipatory narrative of the *digital sublime*. (p.140)

The patterns of Twitter use in election campaigns is the subject of chapter 9, *Twitter Campaigning in the 2011 National Election in Slovenia*, whose authors, Tomaž Deželan, Igor Vobič and Alem Maksuti, conduct an analysis of 4,610 Tweets and interviews with campaign managers in order to test three hypotheses regarding online political communication. The hypotheses are: 'the copycat', confirmed by the parties' use of Twitter, 'normalization' and 'revolution' which are equally illustrated by the politicians' utilization of this instrument.

Not only the use of Twitter but also the use of Facebook is known to make a difference in campaign results and the authors of chapter 10, Günseli Bayraktutan, Mutlu Binark, Tuğrul Çomu, Doğu, Gözde İslamoğlu and Aslı Telli Aydemir, subjected 9 Facebook accounts to qualitative and quantitative content analysis. For each account, aspects such as customization, shared information, number of posts, topics, themes, styles, linguistic practices were analysed in *The Use of Facebook by Political Parties and Leaders in the 2011 Turkish General Elections*. Among the results of the study we can mention the ends to which Turkish politicians used Facebook which are enumerated by the authors: presentation of people and discourses, updates, gathering voters' views on certain topics of interest, gaining support for offline activities of the party and its leaders. The authors argue that voters did not really have a say in the political debate during the elections and that the use of Facebook by Turkish politicians was rather unilateral and did not favour interaction.

A different approach to the use of the same social media instrument is offered in chapter 11, *Facebook Use in the 2012 USA Presidential Campaign*, where Porismita Borah compares the online campaign strategies of presidential candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. Apparently, the strategies of the two candidates were similar, the differences arising when it came to attack and contrast posts whose most frequent user was Romney. The latter's Facebook campaign was, according to the author, more aggressive.

Remaining on the American political scene, in chapter 12, *Tweets of Hope,* the authors investigate the impact that social media had on the participation of young adults in the Presidential Elections of 2008 and 2012. Theresa Renee White and Theresia Anderson pointed out that Obama had a new approach to the creation of a community of political supporters and, by means of social media, managed to mobilize a category of voters whose interest in the elections had previously been almost impossible to raise. It was the gap created between presidential candidates, who traditionally appealed to older adult voters, and young voters that did not feel involved in the political campaign. The authors add that Obama succeeded in (re) creating a sense of community in which young adults were reconnected to the election process.

Facebook and its influence on the results of political campaigns is still under scrutiny in chapter 13, *A Winding Road from 'Likes' to Votes*, as Václav Štětka, Alena Macková and Maria Fialová conduct a content analysis on 1,000 messages posted by the presidential candidates during the campaign. According to the authors, social media preponderantly mobilized young voters as well as voters from cities and larger towns. The study focuses on the one candidate, namely Karel Shwarzenberg, who opted for the most extensive use of social media. In spite of benefitting from tremendous support on social media, Shwarzenberg came second in the elections due to the low participation at the ballot. The conclusion drawn is that the strategies of social media use in presidential campaigns needs to be refined in the Czech Republic since it was the traditional approach to campaigning that prevailed.

In *Facebook Dispute Concerning the Presidency*, Monica Pătruț conducted a functional and content analysis regarding the use of Facebook during the campaign for the impeachment referendum of the Romanian president Traian Băsescu, from July 2012. The pro-Băsescu Facebook posts as well as those against him were analyzed according to specific criteria: the type of information posted; whether the accounts were used for acclaim, attack or defense; the time intervals during which the online interaction becomes more intense; interactivity. The author pointed out that attacks were overwhelmingly more present in posts than approval, and the highest degree of intensity was reached starting from the middle until the end of the campaign. The most extensively used attack strategy, the author points out, was the creation of Facebook accounts with "for" and "against" political slogans as usernames.

Joanna Kulesza's study *Social Media Censorship vs. State Responsibility for Human Rights violations* opens Part III of the volume and focuses on the international regulations on the limitations of free speech online in the context of the Arab Spring Uprising in Egypt. The author examines the operation of the "Internet Freedom" software program developed by the White House in order to filter local online information in sensitive social and political contexts. During the above mentioned events the internet was completely shut down through legitimate state directives issued by Egypt. The author questions, however, the legitimacy and appropriateness of this radical action by raising the question of a possible breach of international obligations by the US and Egypt.

Another social movement is analyzed in chapter 16, from the perspective of the contribution that social media had in its unfolding in Kamil Demirhan's article *Social Media Effects on the Gezi Park Movement in Turkey: Politics under Hashtags*. The article lays emphasis on the functions that Twitter had in the events as well as on the actors, users and forms of communication that the main actors resorted to in what started as an environmental protest and eventually became a downright social-political movement. The author postulates that, judging from the hashtags, most of the participants were individuals although the involvement of other social groups, platforms and h-activists was acknowledged.

Social unrest was also present in Africa in 2011 and the role of social media was equally significant as Admire Mare remarks in *Social Media: The New Protest Drums in Southern Africa?*. Mare highlights the different use of social media according to the four phases of the protests, namely "pre-demonstration, ignition, escalation and post-demonstration" (p.315). As the author states, in spite of having a very limited access to the Internet, Africa developed interconnected relationships between the online and the offline thus turning social media into veritable instruments of warning, of "bypassing state media blackouts" (p.316), of dismantling state propaganda and of conveying messages of solidarity both online and offline.

Chapter 18 entitled *Information? Conversation? Action?* applied Gabriel Tarde's (1969) public opinion formation model on conversations with Israeli teenage girls on the topic of their being prompted to participate in the protests of 2011. The authors of the study, David Levin and Sigal Barak-Brandes, assert that the girls were merely drawn to the spirit of the protest and did not go further in investing their time and mental energy into ensuring a genuine social movement. It was only the luring sense of empowerment and, at the same time, representation that the social network provided for them that aroused their interest in the protest.

Swati Bute, the author of the chapter *The Role of Social Media in Mobilizing People for Riots and Revolutions*, examines the constructive and destructive use of social media in India during four events: the Anti Corruption Movement (2011), The Mass Agitation Against Delhi Gang Rape (2012), the Muzzafarpur Riots (2013) and the Ethnic Conflicts in Assam (2012). In the development of these events, online networks were used either to disseminate information or to spread false messages. The latter generated a climate of instability as a result of the panic and fear created among passive users who did not have the ability to ascertain the veracity of information.

In the last chapter, *Cyber Tools and Virtual Weapons*, David Mathew adopts a psychoanalytical perspective on the use of social media in the 2011 city riots in England and refers to the Othering of social media and to the ephemerality of thermometer-like opinions expressed online which only read "the political temperature of the moment" (p.372).

This collection of articles is undoubtedly a valuable help for PhD candidates, researchers in social media, political discourse, marketing, as well as for politicians who are looking for an insight into the impact of social media of various instances of political discourse and on the unfolding of essential political and social events.

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