

The development of online political communication in Poland in European Parliamentary elections 2014: Technological innovation versus old habits



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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the methods of electoral communication during the 2014 European Parliament election in Poland. Are Polish candidates to the European Parliament stuck with the old habits and patterns of communication or have they adopted all the available technological innovations? Constant technological evolution and increasing Internet usage-rate are not only giving the candidates new possibilities to reach potential voters, but they also pose a challenge. By using content analysis, we have analyzed the structure of candidates' websites and their official Facebook and Twitter profiles. We also analyzed the level of interactivity with candidates' fans on Facebook and openness to two-way communication on websites, a "must" in the late web 2.0 era.

KEYWORDS: European Parliament, elections, online political communication, owned media, social media, web campaigning, participation



INTRODUCTION

According to communication research theoreticians, nowadays "one cannot not communicate" (Motley, 1990). Through communication one can fully participate in social groups and processes. When it comes to cyberspace, the above mentioned rule, originating from communication theoreticians of the Palo Alto school of the 1960s and 1970s, is particularly evident and relates mainly to two-way communication processes in social media. Social media are the media (Dewing, 2012) which we use to become socialized (Safko, 2010), using one of the basic attributes of the human species — communication with other members of the group. In web communication the point is also about a balance of the potential of senders and receivers of information (Castells, 2009, pp. 22–23), and a balance in content generated by the users themselves. That is why in the era of web 2.0,

the users' status ought to be symmetric and equal, which does not, however, translate into equality when it comes to the possession of resources and communication know-how.

Ever since the internet was first used in election campaigns by Polish political parties, these campaigns became the subject of research. However it was not until 2011, when the Internet was for the first time greatly applied in Polish election campaigns and empirical studies were conducted on various aspects of online web campaigning (cf. i.a. Batorski et al., 2012; Fras, 2012; Baranowski et al., 2014). Development of new technologies was accompanied by the changing face of web communication and of the campaigns themselves. So far in Poland election communication via the internet has not gone far beyond the early post-modernization stage (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Borek & Jacuński, 2014). Candidates aiming to be elected in successive elections either overestimated the role of the internet, which can be considered as an extended effect of Barack Obama's campaign in 2008 (cf. Vergeer et al., 2013), or seemed to ignore new solutions, despite the fact that their effectiveness had long been acknowledged in commercial marketing.

From the point of view of political actors, a presence in the internet, especially in social media, is aimed at organizing and extending grass roots relations with supporters and characterized by a constant willingness to gain recognition in the virtual community, which recalls M. Castells' (2003, p. 68) quest for the network or communal identity. Following this assumption some researchers (Gibson & Ward, 2000; Rainie & Horrigan, 2007; Schweitzer, 2012) have consistently considered whether a political actor's online presence is merely content-led, or also seeks to develop longer-term relationships. From the point of view of citizens/voters, their online activity can be justified by the need to participate in politically organized society, comprising of netizens and cybercitizens (Hauber, 1997), that is citizens who use the web to exchange opinions, and look for and verify information. As the architecture of participation (O'Reilly, 2007) of Web 2.0 encourages a richer experience for citizens/voters and enhance their disposition towards conversation, the ideas and opinions can be directly discussed through various blogs, microblogs and social networking sites.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Research method

Do the above theoretical assumptions translate into political practice? We decided to check this empirically during the European Parliament election campaign, by designing a test and subjecting to analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively, web communication tools employed by the candidates. The investigation period for the data lasts for the heyday (cf. Lilleker et al., 2011, p. 201) of the campaign,

therefore in the four-week run-up to the elections, which were held on 23 May 2014, we extracted research material and conducted observation of selected units in a test sample. We carried out the content analysis using the authors' codebook and categorization key. The key employed in the test allowed for categorization of the published contents into groups and types, which facilitated not only quantitative but first of all qualitative putting-together of characteristics of selected communication tools. The main content categories included the following: 1) candidates' own local activities, such as meetings, events and investments within a given constituency; 2) candidates' own activities, including information on their work and initiatives in the national and European parliaments, as well as local and international news; 3) multimedia, including a range of images, videos and animations used; and 4) entries and comments from other users. The extent to which candidates have managed to provide valuable content for supporters was proved with the number of posts and news published during the last four crucial weeks of campaigning.

Sample description

A total of 1279 candidates participated in the European Parliament election, representing 12 election committees, registered by the National Electoral Commission as national committees. Among those running for the 51 mandates were political parties, as well as election committees of voters. Nine committees registered candidates in all 13 constituencies. The process of selecting the sample covered all the candidates and involved singling out those who possessed at least one active channel of web communication. It was established that the most common units to be registered would be: 1) the candidate's website, 2) a public page on Facebook, 3) a private page on Facebook, and 4) a Twitter profile. In the test itself, three basic units appeared for the observation of a candidate to the European Parliament: an official individual website, a public fanpage on Facebook social network, and a profile on Twitter. There are a number of reasons why we decided to analyze public Facebook profiles only. Firstly, they are intended to conduct activity accessible to an unlimited number of people, while private ones only allow access to a maximum of five thousand fans. Secondly, public pages are indexed by search tools, while private ones are not. Thirdly, a public page can be promoted and recommended to other users, which helps to build a paid range. Fourthly, a public page allows those conducting regular communication to analyze the quality and quantity of visits, including demographic data, "likes" and comments.

The data from Megapanel/PBI (Polish Internet Research) presented in the report published in August 2014, lets us conclude, that the social media landscape in Poland is dominated by mainstream, foreign services such as Facebook and Twitter. The market share of the only local social network service that could be considered as politically relevant (nk.pl) has been decreasing each year since 2010. Therefore,

this study is limited to the analysis of websites and only the most popular and most publicly discussed social networks.

Because of the adopted criterion of possessing one's own and public communication channel, and the high total number of units, we selected and reduced the research material. To best preserve the cohesive and representative character of the study, the sample of websites and public profiles was collected on a random basis, while the Twitter units were obtained as a convenience sample. From among a total of 789 units registered, 511 were qualified for analysis proper, including 177 internet pages (respectively 61% of all websites), 212 Facebook sites (which constituted 82% of all the candidates' sites), and 122 Twitter profiles (50% of all the profiles we registered). The collected data is presented in Table 1 below:

Research hypotheses

When preparing the test, we formulated three main research hypotheses and one supportive hypothesis, which we subjected to further critical analysis:

H1: candidates representing small parties and independent committees do not gain an advantage on the internet over big party candidates.

The reason behind this: There exists a supposition, voiced, among others, by Margolis and other researchers (Margolis et al., 1999), that the broadly defined internet leveled the opportunities to conduct communication activities by political subjects of different political relevance:

The normalization hypothesis predicts that major parties will have a significantly greater Web presence than minor parties. The inherent equalization hypothesis can tolerate the major parties' having a temporary advantage, but it predicts that ultimately, Web presence of most parties will become nearly equal. (Margolis et al., 1999, p. 30)

So here collides two possible explanations and hypotheses: the equalization versus normalization hypothesis (Schweitzer, 2011; Gibson and McAllister, 2014).

In the Polish election campaign environment, election committees set up by parliament parties and large groups, measured by electoral support obtained thus far, achieve better possibilities in the mainstream media to present their election appeal and secure their candidates' participation in news programs. It is quite common, that candidates representing minor and non-parliamentary parties, they compensate in turn the lack of access to mainstream media by founding low-cost direct online communication channels.

H2: Social media and 2.0 web tools replace web pages and 1.0 communication tools.

Table 1. Overall share of the websites, Facebook pages and Twitter profiles

Party name	Websites			Facebook pages				Twitter profiles			
	Total	As percentage of candidates	Units followed	Private page	Public fanpage	As percentage of candidates on Facebook	As percentage of candidates with a fanpage	Units followed	Total	As percentage of candidates	Units followed
Solidarna Polska Zbigniewa Ziobro	21	0.16	14	24	12	0.28	0.33	10	17	0.13	9
Ruch Narodowy	4	0.03	4	20	18	0.30	0.47	13	13	0.10	5
Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej - Unia Pracy	30	0.23	24	36	22	0.45	0.38	23	15	0.12	6
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	64	0.49	38	23	41	0.49	0.64	30	31	0.24	14
Europa Plus Twój Ruch	39	0.30	25	37	45	0.63	0.55	37	57	0.44	26
Polska Razem Jarosława Gowina	16	0.12	13	33	17	0.39	0.34	13	28	0.22	13
Nowa Prawica – Janusza Korwin-Mikke	3	0.02	4	24	29	0.41	0.55	23	9	0.07	5
Platforma Obywatelska RP	68	0.52	34	54	42	0.74	0.44	34	43	0.33	23
Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe	42	0.32	34	39	19	0.48	0.33	23	19	0.15	13
Demokracja Bezpośrednia	0	0.00	0	8	1	0.19	0.11	1	2	0.04	3
Samoobrona	0	0.00	0	2	0	0.11	0.00	0	0	0.00	
Partia Zieloni	2	0.04	2	9	7	0.34	0.44	5	8	0.17	4
TOTAL	289		177	305	258			212	242		122

Source: authors.

The reason behind this: The basic factor differentiating 1.0 internet tools from 2.0 is user participation in the process of creating internet content. Previously web pages had the form of notice boards, where the administrator would place information making it available to internet users while no interaction was possible. When web pages started to feature guest books and comment facilities, the 2.0 tool era began. The development and growing popularity of social applications, which allowed users free creation and exchange of contents did not go unnoticed by politicians, who — when setting up their official profiles — could communicate more directly with potential voters.

Currently we are witnessing the arrival of the web 3.0 concept, where the main emphasis is on customizing services and advertisements. Here the interaction happens on the computer-computer level as well, whereby sophisticated algorithms allow to match the internet contents to a particular user, based on their geographical location data and their previous internet activity.

H3: Candidates to a limited extent employ their own media as a two-way communication platform with voters.

The reason behind this: Candidates' two-way communication based on web 2.0 solutions is understood as a set of functions and solutions which allow the following in particular: 1) one-to-many and one-to-one communication; 2) distribution and easy share of various types of contents, such as video, text, image etc.; 3) the use of a return mechanism, including subjecting the published contents to users' rating; 4) various individually selected ways of engaging the users; 5) development of networking; 6) direct communication outside of the web; and 7) pro-active communication.

Supportive hypothesis SH1: There exists a connection between the employment of online communication tools and candidates' election potential.

The reason behind this: The candidates' web activities can be put down to a universal desire to translate them into electoral support and to enhance one's chances of obtaining a mandate.

The results of the research into the websites of European Parliament candidates will be set against an analysis of their official social media profiles. This will allow the establishment of the choice of communication tools by candidates and their campaign teams, and will go towards proving whether the above mentioned trend in election campaigns in Poland has undergone a change. For comparison purposes in this study the issue of technological advances during the online election campaign was confronted with several variables, among others, the status of candidates (we chose incumbents and challengers) and party affiliation.

EMPIRICAL WORK

Websites' structure

As indicated above, candidates still tend to use websites more often than public pages on Facebook (Table 1). In terms of structure and the scope of content, websites might be more complex than pages on Facebook. Among the followed websites we identified four features that allow carrying out extended web activities in addition to standard parts of the menu like news, galleries, about me and contact and these are:

1) Widgets, that is, active windows allowing the visitor to automatically get familiarized with updates on web portals — over 35% of candidates possessed those. Two categories were singled out from the test population: the incumbent candidates, currently holding public posts (members of the European and national parliaments, senators), and challenging candidates, running for EP mandates who did not currently hold posts in Poland or Europe. Candidates from the former group tended to more often post widgets to Facebook pages (over 22%), while those running for EP mandates from the latter group slightly more often posted Twitter widgets on their pages.

2) Politics-oriented blogs. Blogs provide a platform for discussion and the possibility to obtain valuable feedback from potential voters (Fras, 2008) in the form of either criticism or support for one's actions or policy statement. Only a rather limited number of MPs and MEPs ran blogs (fewer than 5% in 2012), and they did not generate socially or politically valid messages that would be of significance comparable to that of the traditional media, especially television. Despite this fact, over 27% of all candidates included blogs on their websites, on which they shared with visitors their thoughts and accounts of the ongoing election campaign (Table 2). Those running for mandates and currently holding public posts resorted to this method more often than others.

3) Links, that is references to other landing pages. They are an almost indispensable element of the majority of internet sites, and are used to connect one's own activity with party activities, to redirect visitors to pages of other candidates one is on friendly terms with, or to attempt to point the visitors' attention to the candidate's activity outside the internet site. To this end, the links on web pages directed visitors especially to profiles on the leading social networking sites. Facebook links were used by over 58% of candidates, and Twitter links by almost 33%. Interestingly, the links were more often employed by challenger candidates.

4) Newsletters, in the form of an internet bulletin, circulated through e-mail. Despite the fact that mailing is quite a popular tool in commercial marketing, EP candidates seem to neglect it. This feature, enabling subscription to newsletters, is to be found on a mere 12% of websites. This is one of the premises leading to the conclusion that while communicating, candidates do not exploit the possibilities of database tools, which allow to maintain periodic and relatively permanent contact with voters, and to narrowcast to target groups.

We learned that candidates who hold public positions five times more likely used this feature than the challengers. Perhaps it is the result of a high level of awareness that while being in office one has to grow and maintain relationships with voters and grass roots.

Table 2. Structure of the websites (in per cent)

	Widget Facebook	Widget Twitter	Blog	Facebook Link	Twitter Link	Share	Newsletter subscription feature
Incumbents	22.4	8.9	12.5	27.6	15.6	11.9	2.1
Challengers	13	9.3	15.1	30.7	17.1	10.4	10.4
Total	35.4	18.2	27.6	58.3	32.7	22.4	12.5

Source: authors, *n* = 192.

Multimedia

In the analysis of the test material, a comparison of multimedia potential was conducted between websites and Facebook profiles run by EP candidates. This potential is understood as the possibility to combine and exploit various formats of expression, such as written texts, graphics, motion images etc.

The first feature that goes to prove the bigger multimedia potential of a social media portal is the bigger profusion of these three elements: photographs, films, and links (Table 3), with the slightly more substantial test population of public Facebook profiles (*n* = 193 to *n* = 213). The data points then to undoubtedly greater activity of candidates on social media portals than on their own websites.

Table 3. Multimedia potential of internet websites vs that of Facebook (as a percentage)

	Photos	Films www	Links www	Photos fb	Films Facebook	Links Facebook
Incumbents	55.6	50	55.6	63.3	31.9	33.3
Challengers	44.4	50	44.4	36.7	68.1	66.7
Total	<i>N</i> = 692	<i>N</i> = 170	<i>N</i> = 198	<i>N</i> = 1826	<i>N</i> = 713	<i>N</i> = 1110

Source: authors.

As regards to the type of published materials on websites, our analysis of multimedia potential shows a balance between INC (incumbents) and CHL (challengers). Candidates currently holding deputy positions posted on average 5% more photos and links than the other group. Activity on the most popular social media portal paints a different picture. Photographs were the most popular content posted by the first group (Table 3), while the other group showed a tendency towards publishing video materials and links.

Sharing potential

Users/potential voters sharing the available materials is the one activity most coveted by candidates. Generating web interactions and grass-roots spreading of candidate information enhances their popularity and recognizability, and naturally extends the lifespan of information posted by the candidate.

Table 4. Comparison of user interactions generated on websites and Facebook

Quota size: <i>n</i> -www, <i>n</i> -Facebook	No. of posts shared through website (<i>n</i> = 193)	No. of posts shared through Facebook (<i>n</i> = 213)
Solidarna Polska (<i>n</i> = 14, 10)	0	341
Ruch Narodowy (<i>n</i> = 4, 14)	0	984
SLD-UP (<i>n</i> = 24, 23)	0	405
PiS (<i>n</i> = 38, 30)	1	2437
Europa Plus (<i>n</i> = 25, 38)	29	914
Polska Razem (<i>n</i> = 13, 12)	0	258
KNP (<i>n</i> = 4, 24)	0	3079
Platforma Obywatelska (<i>n</i> = 34, 35)	0	1091
PSL (<i>n</i> = 34, 22)	2	341
Demokracja Bezpośrednia	n.a.	n.a.
Samobrona	n.a.	n.a.
Zieloni (<i>n</i> = 2, 5)	0	32
TOTAL	32	9882

Source: authors.

Websites were almost entirely passed over in the process of information sharing. The candidates of the Europa Plus coalition enjoyed 29 shares of contents posted on their websites, however, considering the scant number of shares, it can be safely assumed that it was not the effect of activity by visitors to the website.

The marginal results on websites in the category under analysis differ profoundly from those observed on Facebook. The total number of shares on this portal reached 9882. The most popular were Janusz Korwin-Mikke's New Right (NR)¹ party candidates, who totaled 3079 shares (Table 4), although the role of the party leader must be mentioned here — Janusz Korwin-Mikke, as the by far most popu-

¹ There were two names of the same party used: formal name of the candidate's list was Janusz Korwin-Mikke New Right (NR), but on the web they used their other, older party name, which was Congress of the New Right (NRC).

lar Polish politician on Facebook, enjoyed over 30% of all the NRC candidate shares. The runner-up was the Law and Justice political party (2437 shares), followed by the Civic Platform (1091). The result reached by the National Movement is also worthy of attention, since the candidates, despite relatively small representation in the test sample (14 profiles), accumulated 984 shares of material posted on Facebook. Direct Democracy and Self-defense political parties failed to qualify for the test as their candidates were absent from the internet during the election campaign.

Social media as a two-way communication platform

Feedback is an essential element of every election campaign. Interacting with potential voters and obtaining information directly from them can decide the outcome of the election. Websites using 2.0 tools and social media vitally shorten the distance between the candidate and the voter, and allow the communication to take on a more direct character. So far we have proven that a minority of candidates engage in active running of their official Facebook profiles. However, social media portals do possess enormous marketing potential, which had been recognized by some candidates running for MEP mandates. In the next part of the article we analyze the employment of social media as a tool for election communication.

Apart from the fact, that nowadays the “fan farms” or “click farms” on Facebook are a common practice, one of the basic recognized success indicators on the level

Table 5. Social media potential

Quota size: <i>n</i> -www, <i>n</i> -Facebook	Number of fans on Facebook	Number of followers on Twitter	Median of fans on Facebook	Median of followers on Twitter
Solidarna Polska (<i>n</i> = 10, 9)	16,278	18,316	702	1,589
Ruch Narodowy (<i>n</i> = 14, 5)	95,705	959	1,322	239
SLD-UP (<i>n</i> = 23, 6)	29,495	8,934	597	60
PiS (<i>n</i> = 30, 15)	53,163	28,367	881	406
Europa+ (<i>n</i> = 38, 27)	89,036	38,747	527	207
Polska Razem (<i>n</i> = 12, 14)	17,144	75,151	465	243
KNP (<i>n</i> = 24, 5)	415,645	28,126	884	1,441
Platforma Obywatelska (<i>n</i> = 35, 22)	138,570	178,582	1,260	358
PSL (<i>n</i> = 22, 13)	19,534	5,778	397	87
Demokracja Bezpośrednia (<i>n</i> = 0, 4)	n.a.	45	n.a.	12
Samobrona	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Zieloni (<i>n</i> = 5, 3)	2,331	519	373	87
TOTAL	876,901	383,522	750	239

Source: authors.

of social media is the number of “likes” on an official profile, or the number of followers of a Twitter profile and the volume of involvement measured by a number of interactions. The importance of likes is considerable with voters, or consumers, because many of them, before they choose to buy, before they make an opinion, before they finally made the decision or vote, they will check ratings, reviews, comments and thus political actors need to create appropriate online popularity. At the same time we are aware that the level of likes or followers is not equivalent with the level of supporters and those who unconditionally endorse the party or politician. But we follow many of the world’s leading providers of social media analytical tools, statistics and metrics for Facebook, Twitter, You Tube such as SocialBakers² or Sotrender,³ who find most important benchmarks of online performance as: total fan count, engagement rate and page interactions, no matter what their sentiment and tone is.

The total number of fans of candidate profiles in the test group amounted to 876,901 (Table 5) — a relatively low result considering the high number of profiles under analysis. Polish celebrities, sportspeople and commercial brands tend to attract bigger numbers of fans. The sphere of politics and its popularity is limited by many factors, including social factors such as education, public trust to political parties and political elites, and has remained at a relatively low level for the past few years, which might directly translate into the low number of “likes” on the profiles of EP candidates and political parties. In our test we established that the party with the biggest number of page fans was the New Right Congress (415,645 fans), with the Civic Platform ranking second (138,579 fans) and the National Movement third (95,705 fans).

The popularity of all candidates was undoubtedly increased by the inclusion of party leaders, or the “number ones,” in the test sample. A particular celebrity status among candidates on the biggest social media portal was enjoyed by Janusz Korwin-Mikke, who collected almost half (47%) of all the “likes” obtained by those running for mandates under analysis. In addition, subsequent positions in the classification were occupied by the “number ones” on the constituency party lists, namely: Jerzy Buzek of Civic Platform (50,046 fans), Ryszard Kalisz of the Europa Plus coalition (49,244 fans), Krzysztof Bosak of the National Movement (49,121 fans), and Stanisław Żółtek of the New Right Congress (28,339 fans).

The absolute dominance of the New Right Congress president in the context of popularity on Facebook can distort the results, which is why an additional analysis has also been conducted taking into consideration the result median of the “likes” test and the number of followers on Twitter (Table 5).

Another topic worthy of analysis is the candidates’ popularity on Twitter. The service is less popular in Poland than Facebook, which is reflected in the test sample.

² <http://www.socialbakers.com/elections-2015/uk/>.

³ <http://www.sotrender.com/>.

The total of those following EP candidates in the test sample reached 383,522. The highest popularity was enjoyed by the Civic Platform, whose members were followed by 178,582 people. Subsequent positions were occupied by: Jarosław Gowin of Poland Together (75,151 followers), Europa Plus coalition (38,747 followers), and Law and Justice (28,367 followers). Again, the popularity of candidates in the test sample was influenced by the inclusion of the parties’ “number ones.” The two most popular candidates represented the Civic Platform. Jerzy Buzek is the first of them, followed by 92,000 people. The runner-up is Jan Rostowski with the result of 38,700 people. Subsequent positions were held, among others, by Jarosław Gowin of Poland Together (38,100 followers), and Janusz Korwin-Mikke — the most popular Polish politician on Facebook — at that time, followed on Twitter by 24,000 people.

Trends in popularity which transpire through social media portals justify the claim that the world of politics revolves around several dozen most popular personalities. Despite the results differing significantly from what is defined as success using commercial marketing criteria, a small fan base has its advantages. It permits the shortening of the distance in electoral communication, allowing potential voters to comment on candidates’ entries and to directly ask them questions regarding their plans or policy positions.

Fans’ activity constitutes the indicator that will allow to verify the hypothesis on the use of a candidate’s own media as a platform for two-way communication with voters.

Table 6. Fans’ activity on candidates’ Facebook profiles

	Comments	Posts added by other users	Posts without comments (in %)	Direct enquiries to candidates
Solidarna Polska (<i>n</i> = 10)	267	13	50.6 (<i>n</i> = 231)	5
Ruch Narodowy (<i>n</i> = 14)	975	24	32.6 (<i>n</i> = 312)	7
SLD-UP (<i>n</i> = 23)	383	42	38.1 (<i>n</i> = 451)	10
PiS (<i>n</i> = 30)	643	45	52.1 (<i>n</i> = 656)	20
Europa Plus (<i>n</i> = 38)	1501	66	50.1 (<i>n</i> = 746)	25
Polska Razem (<i>n</i> = 12)	208	4	55.1 (<i>n</i> = 223)	6
KNP (<i>n</i> = 24)	5649	80	38.5 (<i>n</i> = 581)	17
Platforma Obywatelska (<i>n</i> = 35)	1773	37	50 (<i>n</i> = 979)	17
PSL (<i>n</i> = 22)	135	17	64.4 (<i>n</i> = 304)	7
Demokracja Bezpośrednia	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Samobrona	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Zieloni (<i>n</i> = 5)	37	2	66.6 (<i>n</i> = 87)	2
TOTAL	11571	330	48.2 (<i>n</i> = 4570)	116

Source: authors.

In order to research fans' activity on Facebook, all comments appearing underneath the candidates' entries were counted. In the test sample under analysis, internet users commented on candidates' entries 11,571 times (Table 6). The entries that generated the greatest number of comments came from the New Right Congress representatives (5,649 comments). Subsequently, in order of popularity, subsequent positions were held by the Civic Platform (1,773 comments) and Europa Plus coalition (1,501 comments). As in other analyzed categories, the popularity of the party "number ones" was very significant. As before, Janusz Korwin-Mikke surpassed other candidates and — thanks to his personal score of 3,495 comments — the New Right Congress acquired almost half of all the comments in the test sample (49%). Individually, with regard to the number of comments, he is followed by Artur Dziambor (786 comments), also of the NRC, Krzysztof Bosak (567 comments) of the National Movement, and Ryszard Kalisz of the Europa Plus coalition, whose entries generated 382 comments.

It was not always the case that candidates' entries were met with responses in the form of comments. Almost half (Table 6) entries were not commented on at all. The entries most commonly passed over came from the Green Party (66.6% of entries not followed by comments), Polish Peasants Party (64.4% of entries without comments), and the Poland Together party (55.1% entries with no comments posted). Entries receiving the biggest number of comments came from representatives of the National Movement, the Democratic Left Alliance and The New Right Congress.

Facebook users had the opportunity to ask candidates questions directly, an opportunity which was seldom taken up. Direct questions to candidates were recorded 116 times in the test sample alone. Most questions were directed to candidates from the Europa Plus coalition, Law and Justice, and, both in third place, New Right and Civic Platform.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the collected empirical material leads to the conclusion that despite the dominance of websites over official Facebook profiles, as expressed in numbers, candidates place more emphasis on being present in social media. Over half of the EP candidates' websites included links to their Facebook profiles. Activity with regards to multimedia material publication was several times as high on Facebook. The most important aspect, however, was generating web interactions with internet users, an activity which was virtually absent in the case of websites. In the age of the digital natives generation, it seems to be though, rather confusing, but on the other hand we realize that online communication has moved to social media portals, which allows us to confirm H1.

The potential of internet tools for establishing two-way communication with voters was not exploited by candidates in this particular election campaign. A mere 22% of researched websites permitted sharing the contents using social media

channels. Candidates' profiles, with a few exceptions, lack in popularity when it comes to the "like" markers, while the number of monologue entries not receiving comments remains high. The low number of direct questions to candidates or posts added by other users goes towards confirming the H2 hypothesis as well. Nowadays, in professionalized election campaigns web 2.0 applications and features are still considered as providing new opportunities to increase dialogue between people. But despite their availability and important, as some researchers believe (cf. Anduiza et al., 2012; Chadwick & Howard, 2008) function in participatory democracy, at least in the context of the analyzed material, in particular candidates' owned media, we did not notice the relevance of this phenomenon, and therefore we positively test H3.

Last, but not least, we assume that there is no direct evidence of SH1, and we cannot clearly confirm that the higher employment of online communication tools, the higher the chance to be elected candidates have, because there both exist challenging candidates with an excellent online presence. However, they do not past the post, and the incumbents, who to certain extent neglect the the adoption of long-term two-way interactive communication strategies. However, such a justification would cause a risk of simplification. Apart from gaining support via voting and final share of the vote, we therefore see many other detailed objectives candidates might want to accomplish through the right management of their web presence:

1. growth in political brand awareness;
2. acquiring new and maintaining current fans and followers;
3. augmenting in a longer period traffic on the website, that is, the number of visitors over a given period of time;
4. encouraging user involvement (as measured by the number of "liked" content or shared with other users, the number of re-publications, mentions, positive comments etc.);
5. increasing reach, that is reaching a bigger number of people with one's contents through owned, shared, or earned media;
6. converting visits into particular activities, such as signing up for a newsletter, volunteer applications, participation in surveys, declarations to collect signatures etc.;
7. getting to know one's web audience better⁴ thanks to on-site and off-site analytical tools, which allow one to better position contents in target groups.

List of Polish political parties:

Solidarna Polska Zbigniewa Ziobro — Zbigniew Ziobro's Solidarity Poland
Wyborców Ruch Narodowy — National Movement

⁴ Using tools like Google Analytics and Facebook Insights, one can explore, among others, users' sociodemographic characteristics, such as origin and age, and the quality of visits, in particular, their length, number of interactions with the site, etc.

Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej — Unia Pracy — Coalition of the Left Democratic Alliance and Labour Union
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość — Law and Justice
Europa Plus Twój Ruch — Coalition Europe Plus and Your Movement
Polska Razem Jarosława Gowina — Jarosław Gowin's Poland Together
Nowa Prawica — Janusza Korwin-Mikke — Janusz Korwin-Mikke's New Right
Platforma Obywatelska RP — Civic Platform
Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe — Polish Peasant's Party
Demokracja Bezpośrednia — Direct Democracy
Samoobrona — Self-Defense
Partia Zieloni — Green Party

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