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Creation of an image of a politician in the Internet – examples from Polish political scene

Abstract: The Internet provides politicians with new tools to build their political image. More and more politicians have their own websites and they are active users of social media. It also promotes a specialization and political actors are trying to reach to potential voters by selecting appropriate channels. The article is an attempt to answer the question to what extent politicians use the Internet to create their image, and what determines a marketing success in transmission of information via a particular channel.

Key words: media, policy, mediatization, Internet, social media

Introduction

The need to create one's image has been known for a long time. Today, the notion of political image can be linked to political marketing. In the past, it was associated with authority exercised by monarchs, emperors and kings (A. Zaręba, 2011, p. 11). In various historical periods, different tools were used to create the image, e.g. symbols, paintings, press, photography, radio, cinema films, and television.

The 21st c. provided politicians with an excellent tool that can be used to develop the image, namely the Internet. In the era of digitalization, we may risk a statement that political images of leaders are better accepted by the society than specific ideas, political opinions or social and economic concepts (Cichosz, 2005, p. 74). In the 21st c., the need to create one's image is so important, and applicable tools steadily improve, that the literature refers to such notions as the "age of the image" and "era of persuasion tyranny" (Cichosz, 2005, p. 78). Since an increasing number of ordinary activities mover to the cyberspace and services are provided via electronic channels, no wonder that the virtual world has become the scene of the war of images (Nowina Konopka, 2008, pp. 139–140).

The Internet space provides politicians much cheaper and faster means of communication with their electorate than traditional media. By using tools offered by the Internet, politicians have become the authors of medial messages. Thus, messages, otherwise ignored by the traditional media, can reach much wider audience.

According to Marek Jeziński, “from the point of view of political marketing, methodical use of new media has become a standard behavior. Thus, being institutionalized and ritualized, it is well embedded in the role of a politician. It is very important while creating a political image: a politician, who wants to be perceived as trendy, must adjust their offer to expectations of political audience and competitors in the electoral market” (Jeziński, 2011, pp. 20–21).

Every year, the number of Internet users has been steadily growing. No wonder that politicians are increasingly willing to use the Internet as a venue for exchange of thoughts, ideas and concepts with their potential electorate.

John Corner and Dick Pels wrote about a kind of paradox of citizens’ withdrawal, namely it is difficult to “get out the vote” in ordinary elections, whereas growing number of people enthusiastically vote on various reality shows (Piontek, 2011, p. 98). We witness a kind of exchange of characteristic features between politics and entertainment. Entertainment adopted political representation qualities (voting), whereas politician build their image of stars, and a political message often focuses on pure entertainment features with information replaced by *infotainment*. The interest of the public in politics increases when politics becomes a drama (Jeziński, 2011, p. 32). Similarly, a reality show follows a pre-arranged scenario and actors present strong distinct personalities. The Internet has become an excellent venue to build and stimulate such a drama. Political debates that concentrate on a merit-based arguments and discussion no longer attract the attention of the audience. Politicians woo with gestures, uniform, and controversies. The electorate have become consumers who buy ideologies and partisan brands, and are subject of continuous mobilization and matters of individual political actors. According to the polls, three factors can be responsible for the above: consumerism, celebritization, cynicism (Piontek, 2011, s. 98).

A large number of the growing community of Internet users are active in expressing their views online. The phenomenon was examined and described in 2006 by Jacob Nielsen who coined the term of *Partici-*

pation Inequality. In his opinion, 90% of users are passive recipients of messages disseminated over the Internet, 9% create their own content, whereas only 1% deliver regular messages through the web (Adamik-Szysiak, 2014, p. 112). In recent years, the trend has been rapidly changing due to social media.

The goal of the article is to present ways in which Polish politicians use the Internet to build their images.

The article focuses on the Internet activity of selected Polish political parties and their leaders. The article analyzes all political groupings represented in the *Sejm*, or the Polish Parliament (Sejm of 8th term elected in election of 25 October 2015), and parties which remained out of the parliament, such as *Twój Ruch* (Your Movement) and *Wolność* (Freedom). The fact that the two parties which did not comprise the *Sejm* aimed at correlating marketing and image oriented activity of political parties which won mandates and those who failed during the election. A preliminary analysis of the empirical material points to a major activity of both groupings in the Internet, which was decisive regarding their choice. The research sample is based on the analysis of communication strategies implemented by parties and their leaders while using social media and websites. Detailed analysis covered social media marketing tools most popular among politicians – their activity on social media portals (Twitter, Facebook) and YouTube. The empirical study covered a period from the establishing of an account by a political subject in a service until 20 October 2018. The study was based on a quantitative method with concentration on frequency and number of messages created by political entities. Only in the case of websites, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used.

Research questions apply to relevant communication mechanisms developed by participants of political life, communication with the potential electorate through the Internet. In which social media are political parties and politicians active? Why are specific media selected? Do politicians interact with the electorate or treat social portals as a tool of a one-way contact? The preliminary analysis of the empirical material enabled to formulate the main hypothesis: Polish politicians use the Internet to create their images. At the same time, they specialize to focus their effort on one leading Internet-based medium. Consequently, a detailed hypothesis is as follows: Polish politicians adjust their message to expectations of the supporters which determines the choice of the communication channel.

Websites and Blogs

Table 1

Websites of political parties and associations and their leaders

Party/ Ugrouping	Website	Comment	Leader	Website	Comment
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)	pis.org.pl	Current news, plans for public pronouncements by politicians in media, not possible to comment	Jarosław Kaczyński	none	Historical service of presidential candidate – jaroslawkaczynski.info oraz jaroslawkaczynski.com.pl
Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform)	platforma.org	Current news, information about CP politicians present on Twitter linked to the website, not possible to comment, links to regional websites	Grzegorz Schetyna	schety-na.pl	Main information about Grzegorz Schetyna, current news based on Twitter, large time span between entries, not possible to comment
Nowoczesna (Modern)	nowoczesna.org	Current news, encouragement to participate in discussion, possibility of expressing opinion on forum and subscribing newsletter	Katarzyna Lubnauer	none	
Wolność (Freedom)	Wolność.pl	Current news, possibility to comment, links to social media portals	Janusz Korwin-Mikke	korwinmikke.pl	Possibility of opening account at website (expressing one's thoughts on forum for users), large number of recent entries, links to YouTube account
Kukiz '15	ruchkukiza.pl	Poor website, outdated, apart from general description, it contains several outdated tabs, possible to comment	Paweł Kukiz	none	
Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasant's Party)	psl.org.pl	Current news, possibility to respond on Facebook, Twitter and NK, but not possible to comment, links to regional websites	Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz	kosiniakkamysz.pl	Current news, after election frequency of entries decreased, extensive infographics, not possible to comment, newsletter
Twój Ruch (Your Movement)	twojruch.eu	Current news, links to social media portals, promotion of party agenda, possible to comment	Janusz Palikot	palikot.pl	Blog by Janusz Palikot, outdated information – “member of parliament,” current news, links to social media portals, including Instagram

Source: Author's material.

The examination included the presence of websites of political groups and their leaders, as well as whether websites are updated and type of content. The analysis of the website content shows that all political parties and movements participating in the survey have their websites. As regards leaders, the following websites can be found: Janusz Korwin-Mikke, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, and Janusz Palikot. Politicians who do not have their websites include Katarzyna Lubnauer and Paweł Kukiz. Additionally, Jarosław Kaczyński also does not have a valid website. Websites of jaroslawkaczynski.info and jaroslawkaczynski.com.pl, which cannot be found in the Internet, are historical only, developed during a presidential campaign of 2010. Their last update was made before the presidential election.

In fact, all websites examined are updated. They contain current information with reference to specific events involving a grouping or a person (Tab. 1.). An exception is the Kukiz 15' website. Its content is limited and outdated. It contains information about the Association and the "Change Strategy." It is not possible to make comments. It is not an isolated example, since opinion cannot be expressed at websites of Law and Justice, Civic Platform and the Polish Peasants Party (PPP). Some websites are fitted with additional functionalities. The Freedom Party website includes an online shop where one can buy books, coffee and bowties. The PPP website includes links to regional websites and the Nowoczesna (Modern) website enables visitors to subscribe a newsletter. The vast majority of websites examined concentrates on the image of the entire party and collective views. An exception is the Kukiz 15' website where content pertaining to Paweł Kukiz prevails. A clear change of trends is noticeable. In 2014, Law and Justice and Palikot Movement websites concentrated on building up information about their leaders, and the majority of materials was edited based on pronouncements and activity of Jarosław Kaczyński and Janusz Palikot (Adamik-Szysiak, 2014, p. 118). At the moment, the content does not focus on leaders (Palikot Movement changed to Your Movement).

Websites and blogs of particular political leaders are to a large extent outdated and new messages are rare. After the election, the frequency of records also dropped at the website of Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz. Very active at their websites remain J. Palikot and J. Korwin-Mikke. The latter websites have a large number of entries which are made regularly. Both politicians use plugs which link to other Internet tools, such as Instagram and YouTube.

YouTube

YouTube becomes increasingly important as regards the dissemination of messages over the Internet. It provides political bodies with the possibility to develop their messages in the various forms and diverse content which depends on their authors only. The fact that comments are often blocked shows that politicians usually use YouTube as a one-way communication tool.

Table 2

Polish parties and association in YouTube

Channel name	Established	Number of posted films	Number of subscriptions	Number of views
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	17.11.2010	1899	7,682	6,991,062
PlatformaRP	24.02.2011	1263	3,894	9,585,172
PSL Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe	06.02.2014	106	149	61,252
KORWIN vs UE	24.05.2014	596	35,674	18,090,532
Wolność	13.12.2017	179	3,542	135,377,
Nowoczesna	29.05.2015	740	2,186	1,710,080
Kukiz 15	12.10.2015	921	1,155	342,001
Twój Ruch	29.10.2013	654	1,290	2,900,727

Source: Author's material.

So far, the Law and Justice posted the largest number of videos on YouTube. This is the result of the operation of the official account of the party (since 17.11.2010 – longest operation of all parties and movements). Both Law and Justice and Civic Platform have similar content. In their channels, they present pronouncements from press briefings and conferences. The Civic Platform channel includes additionally education videos on “Local Governments.” These are short videos on the operation of regional parliaments, city councils, and mayors. The most popular grouping on YouTube is Freedom (considering their new account and channel of “Korwin vs UE” in operation for quite some time). The account is subscribed by over thirty thousand Internet users, and videos posted have been viewed more than eighteen million times (Tab. 2.). While analyzing the age of KORWIN supporters, we may notice that the majority of them are very young. According to the election poll, in parliamentary election, J. Korwin – Mikke grouping attracted votes of 16.8% of voters at the age of 18–29, comparing with only 0.6% of people 60+ (<http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/wybory-jak-glosowali-mlodzi-a-inni-wyborcy,589048.html>, 10.01.2018). The largest group of YouTube users are also young people. As many as 45% of portal users are between 15–35 years of age (<http://www.brief.pl/>

artykul,1045,sila_youtube_w_polsce.html, 10.01.2018). Strong, often controversial audio and video message is addressed mostly to young people. No wonder that the Freedom Party is much ahead of its political competitors on YouTube. Nowoczesna (Modern) has been growing in terms of the number of subscribers. From July 2015, their account has attracted more than nine thousand followers (Tab. 2).

Twitter

Another tool that politicians use to contact their voters is Twitter. All groupings analyzed have their official accounts in the service. Law and Justice and Civic Platform were the first to establish their accounts on Twitter. The two groupings are also leaders regarding the number of subscribers. The ruling party attracted the largest number of subscribers. Much fewer subscribers follow the Freedom account, i.e. over twenty thousand Internet users. At the moment, in Poland, Twitter is used by 3.3 m people. As much as 32% of Twitter users are 45+, usually well educated. Every fourth Twitter user lives in a city of population in excess of twenty thousand (<http://biznes.pl/magazyny/media/fb-to-przekroj-uzytownikow-internetu-twitter-jest-dla-starszych-i-wykształconych/qhf03d>, 10.10.2018). The largest number of followers of the Civic Platform and Law and Justice are in this age group. This explains the large number of subscribers and frequency of twitts (Tab. 4.).

Table 3

Polish political parties and groupings in Twitter

Account Name	Established	Tweets	Followers	Following
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość @pisorgpl	August 2008	43,100	154,000	1,361
Platforma Obywatelska @Platforma_org	July 2009	60,400	93,000	796
Twój Ruch @TwojRuch_	October 2013	12,800	8,121	674
Kukiz'15 @Kukiz15	Unknown	7,918	33,200	313
Partia Wolność @Wolnosc	Unknown	10,300	28,500	130
.Nowoczesna @_Nowoczesna	Unknown	39,000	68,300	400

Source: Author's material.

Among party leaders, J. Palikot attracted the largest number of subscribers, sine his account is followed by 489 thousand users (Tab. 5). The result is much ahead of Your Movement. It highlights that the Internet creates heroes to a much larger extent than individual organizations, parties or movements.

Table 4

Polish politicians in Twitter

Account name	Established	Tweets	Followers	Following
Grzegorz Schetyna @schetynadlapo	November 2015	1,665	166,000	999
W.Kosiniak-Kamysz @KosiniakKamysz	November 2012	5,800	66,000	1,185
Palikot Janus @Palikot_Janusz	January 2010	14,534	566,000	367

Source: Author's material.

Facebook

The last web-based space examined used by political bodies is Facebook (Tab. 6). It is the most popular social medium in Poland. It is used by twenty million users, mainly young people. The 7–24 age group includes 32% of Facebook users (<http://biznes.pl/magazyny/media/fb-to-przekroj-uzytkownikow-internetu-twitter-jest-dla-starszych-i-wyksztalconych/qhf03d>, 10.10.2018). The largest number of likes was given to Kukiz 15 (over 297 thou) and Freedom (over 189 thou). The low ranking of Modern can be surprising (over 99 thou).

Table 5

Polish political parties and groupings on Facebook

Facebook account – parties	Likes (as of 15.01.2019)
Civic Platform	169,000
Law and Justice	204,000
Polish Peasants' Party, PSL	29,000
Modern	99,000
Freedom Party	189,000
Your Movement	71,000
Kukiz '15	297,000

Source: Author's material.

As regards accounts of political leaders, J. Korwin-Mikke account attracted the largest interest. The second in the ranking is P. Kukiz, whereas the only politician examined without a Facebook account is J. Kaczyński. The fact that the leader of the ruling party does not have a Facebook account and his own website may indicate that for politicians the Internet is still mere complementary channel to traditional media. Internet-based communication channels are chiefly used as a complement to traditional forms of political influence and direct and indirect marketing.

Table 6

Polish politicians on Facebook

Facebook account – leaders	Likes (as of 15.01.2019)
Jarosław Kaczyński	No account
Grzegorz Schetyna	33,000
Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz	30,000
Katarzyna Lubnauer	29,000
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	751,000
Janusz Palikot	40,000
Paweł Kukiz	418,000

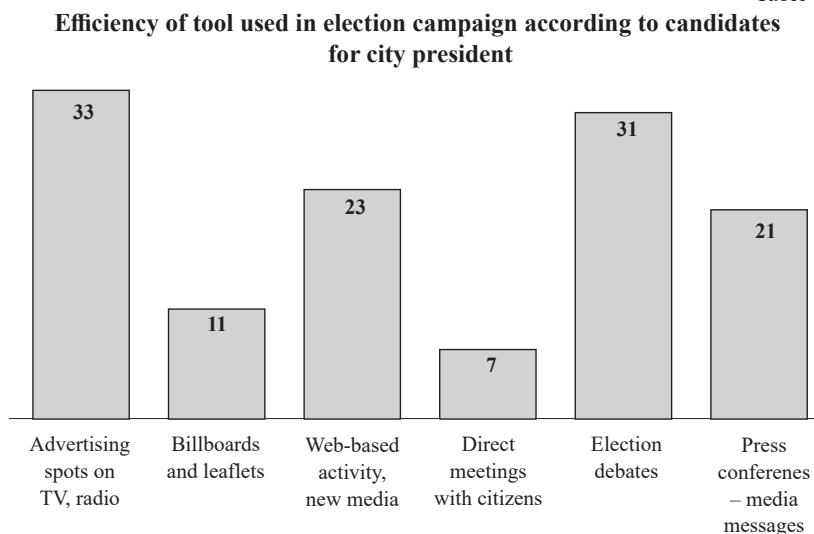
Source: Author's material.

Election of city president in Poznań

The local election in Poznań showed how important Internet can be for reaching out to the electorate. All candidates running for the seat of the city president were active users of social media. The survey after the election included a question to candidates about their assessment of the efficiency of tools used during the election campaign. Candidates were asked to assign 1 to 6 points while answering to specific questions (6 – most important, 1 – least important). In the opinion of candidates for the president of Poznań, the most important tool for their 2018 campaign were advertising spots in traditional media, including radio, television and printed press. They ranked election debates second, and the Internet third. Interestingly, the latter preceded media messages conveyed through press conferences. It may indicate that although politicians still believe in the power of traditional media, messages that they create themselves are considered the most important. For this reason, perhaps, election spots and debates were ranked first, and news developed by journalists – where

a politician has a limited influence – were ranked below their activity in the cyberspace. According to candidates, the web-based activity is definitely more efficient than the distribution of leaflets, billboards and direct meetings with citizens.

Table 7



Source: Author's material.

Conclusions

The development of one's political image using the Internet has become increasingly popular in Poland. Several explanations can be offered to the growing use of the Internet in politics. A very important factor, however, generating interest in the web is growing on-line activity of citizens. Moreover, the Internet provides an opportunity to profile a message. Another very important issue is that politicians want to reach out to the younger generation, for which the Internet is a natural communication environment and the most popular medium. A major role is also played by lobbying by technological and ICT companies. A growing number of our everyday life issues have been moved to the cyberspace, and many services are provided on-line (Nowina Konopka, 2008, pp. 139–140).

Major advantages of the Internet as a means of building one's political image include speed, low cost, and no limitations as regards place and time. The author entirely decides on the message. The Internet is also a place to exchange information which has no place in traditional media.

In the opinion of candidates for the president of Poznań, campaigning in the Internet was more important than meetings with citizens or dissemination of leaflets. Moreover, despite the fact that politicians still appreciate the power of traditional media, they agreed that their activity in the cyberspace was more important in terms of reaching a wider electorate than traditional news.

The analysis of the web-based content has proven that all political groupings have their websites and use social media. However, it is not a rule as regards political leaders. Interestingly, J. Kaczyński, the chairman of the ruling party, does not have his own website and can hardly be seen in social media. It shows that Polish politicians still consider the Internet as complement in the image building process. On the one hand, still the main communication channel is the traditional media. On the other hand, the majority of politicians have their websites or blogs, which still two years ago was not a standard, shows that politicians started appreciating the marketing potential of the Internet. Social media are extensively used by political parties and groupings which cannot count of frequent presence in mainstream media. The electorate of groupings, such as Freedom or Your Movement, includes mainly young people for whom the Internet is a natural environment. Thus, parties post so many messages in the web.

The way politicians treat social media, based on interactions, as a propaganda tube remains a major issue. The majority of political YouTube channels blocks the possibility to add comments. Even if it is possible, e.g. J. Korwin-Mikke and Paweł Kukiz, politicians hardly ever respond to those comments. The same applies to Facebook, where a potential voter rarely receives any answer to his/her comment. Although Kukiz 15', Polish Peasants' Party and Modern try to interact with users in real time, Law and Justice and Civic Platform usually do not respond to posts. The majority of Twitter accounts were developed for a one-way communication. A role model for Polish politicians should be Erna Solberg, the Prime Minister of Norway, who is considered to be a politician with an ideal presence in the Internet. She responds to the majority of twitts.

Polish politicians are still in the process of learning how to use the Internet to develop their own image. Gradually, they specialize in spe-

cific media. Parties, whose electorate includes mature people, concentrate their communication on Twitter. Political groupings supported by young people are more active on YouTube and Facebook.

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Kreowanie wizerunku polityka w Internecie – na przykładach z polskiej sceny politycznej

Streszczenie

Internet daje politykom nowe narzędzia do budowania wizerunku politycznego. Coraz więcej polityków ma własne strony internetowe oraz korzysta z mediów społecznościowych. Wykształciła się również pewna specjalizacja, a podmioty polityczne

poprzez dobór odpowiednich kanałów starają się dotrzeć do potencjalnych wyborców. Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie w jakim stopniu politycy wykorzystują Internet do kreowania wizerunku oraz od czego zależy marketingowy sukces w przekazywaniu informacji poprzez dany kanał.

Słowa kluczowe: media, polityka, mediatyzacja, Internet, media społecznościowe

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