Chapter 10
Political Campaign Communication in the Information Age:
Some Difficulties With Basic Concepts

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ABSTRACT

According to scholars, the use of mediatization could be understood as communicative representation of politicians. From this perspective, the concept of mediatization in politics is not an automatism, it is a functional principle of media, more preferably the social media. To understand this activity of politicians on social media, the online attributes of broadcasting media could be conceptualized as self-mediatization of politics. The chapter will look through some of the most used concepts in political communication that aim to interpret the communicative nature of politicians in online campaigns. The used communication techniques on social media set the focus of analysis on the insufficiency of above-mentioned concepts). Besides presenting the main difficulties of basic concepts, this chapter aims to introduce the phenomenon of attention-based politics as a possible solution to research on political campaign communication in information era.

INTRODUCTION

The use of media and its consequences are in the middle of academic curiosity since the dawn of mass media. The innovative use of media and the changing attitudes in the behavior of politicians during the campaigns are everlasting topics to analyze. This chapter is going to look behind these investigations, and it is going to test the used concepts to explain online campaigns. The reason behind this is that the interactions between politics and the media have been in the center of the scientific interest of the political communication research and the phenomena around this are serving as explanatory concepts for research results. There have been instances that researchers sought to determine the quality of de-

mocracy through the characteristics of the interactions. In not so recent times, there have been scientific works that have generated such debate (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, the online environment of campaigns, the broadcast media in the online domain, the different approaches to interactivity, and the self-mediatization of politics are some of the concepts that had to create multiple possibilities to interpret politicians' strategies in online campaigns. The essential characteristics of political campaigns are used in literature, as well as the researches on the new media.

The studies in political and communication sciences suggest that new forms of politicians' dialogue with citizens are born in front of our eyes, which fundamentally changes the well-known types of the public sphere (Chambers, 2009; Frame & Brachotte, 2015; Merkovity, 2018; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Narayanan et al., 2017; Ross et al., 2016). The scientific interest – explicitly or implicitly – focuses on the interactivity and explores the online forms of communications. The nature of politicians' communication is one, which analyzes the relationship between the citizens and the politics and it has gained considerable popularity with Barack Obama, after the 2008 election campaign. The presidential election in the United States has become very fashionable since, unlike in previous campaigns, the Obama campaign staff used the new ICTs consciously to organize the electorate (see Libert & Faulk, 2009). The studies around "Arab Spring" followed this path (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). However, the question arises, what about the explanations behind the political and politicians use of social media? Is there any umbrella concept that could be used for the analysis of online campaigns? The chapter will examine the role of the online environment in political campaign communication from a closer perspective, and then it will analyze the broadcast media. In the end, self-mediatization will be explained that will lead to the recognition of attention-based politics.

ECOSYSTEM OF THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

The works on the ecosystem of online campaigns, internet tools, and social networking sites often include studies on shares, likes, contacts, information exchanges, online activism, etc., and naturally on the effects of communication. Early developments of this were written in a positivist attitude because the first 'communities' worked based on direct electronic democracy.[1] The Millennium years changed this attitude towards the internet and online communities, also the aspect had changed how people use the online communities, moreover the web 2.0. The so-called dark side of the internet emerged too and became visible in research, for instance the terrorists' networks (Maréchal, 2017; Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017), the supposed intervention attempts of Russian crackers in the American presidential elections and the Brexit referendum in 2016 (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016; Narayanan et al., 2017), hate speech (Ross et al., 2016), and the spreading of fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Berkowitz & Schwartz, 2016) could be mentioned here. The list can be well expanded until it gets to the users who, for example, are also able to challenge the positivist perception by deliberately insulting other users (Cheng et al., 2017; Pongó, 2016. The fair warning of these studies is that the communicational environment has changed in the past decades, and this kind of situation influences the everyday life of people. The real question is whether there is a noticeable effect in their behavior, could it still describe by the impact of the earlier mediums?

Scholars studying the behavior of users or effects of social media are often referring to The War of the Worlds the famous radio play of Orson Welles's The Mercury Theatre on the Air company from 1938. This lesson tends to show how the media works and what effects it can have. However, since then it is known that media, as well as social media, works a bit differently. Still, the results are similar. A

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