

# *The challenges of new media and the influence of politics*

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## Abstract

*Nowadays communication has taken on momentum like never before in human history. We all aim to be informed faster and easier through technology. The extensive use of social media attracted the attention of many companies, organizations, and political entities to conduct their online campaigns thus being closer to their target groups in meeting the objectives. The Internet and social networks are forcing public communicators of all fields, to change, alienate and adapt. Internet was expected to be an instrument of 'empowerment', with the ability to nurture political life and facilitate political mobilization. And while today we are aware that this digital divide has brought inequality to political life, we are also aware of the role that the new media is playing in elevating important political figures.*

*Key words: technology, media, political campaigns, politicians, fake news.*

## 1. Introduction

We can see the current world situation as the result of a silent, dual revolution of cultural norms. The post-materialist revolution, described by Inglehart (1977: p. 3), linked to the digital revolution, influenced by the openness, collaboration, sharing and informality of information. Digital media today allows the citizen to live his citizenship in a more independent, fuller and richer civic engagement, away from traditional political attitudes. Such media hybridization has made individuals on social networks express themselves freely in a personal and independent way. Of course, social networks facilitate "click-through", ie virtual engagement, which involves very little of the individual approach. So if we will express it in a more general way: the desire to follow someone, the likes, the distribution of texts or images related to politics, the signing in favor of a digital campaign are small acts, previously unseen in the pre-digital era...

They have allowed ordinary people around the world, with only a mobile phone in hand, to oppose, fight for political change or against a regime, and expose corruption and the inefficiency of public life. (Margetts, 2019, n.90 (S1).

The considerable density of the media environment at the beginning of the XXI century brought a multiplication of opportunities for internet access. Every day we see more and more an "all food" audience in terms of information. The various technologies implemented in election campaigns, referring to Internet-related practices, are typical of the postmodern era. So here the notion of 'e-democracy'

leads us to the idea of developing political participation using electronic networks. This even when we mean citizens who can interact with each other or even with their representatives through exchanges of opinion.

## **2. Politics and the impact of new media**

Nowadays, politics is undergoing some changes, especially due to the increasing use of social media by politicians, who are using these virtual platforms as tools to gain more and more approval. (Alberti, De Siero, 2020). It is beyond any discussion to ignore the technological shock and its social impact. Communication has become a resource, where the media have increased their strategic character with the rapid production and mass dissemination of information. We therefore acknowledge that political communication operates in a universe of differences and inequalities. Real-time transmission of information over distances is transcending temporal and spatial aspects, which undoubtedly ‘infects’ political behavior as well.

From this point of view it is true that communication is becoming more and more interactive, being closer to the form of conversation and ordinary social communication. On the other hand, this shows that the practice of communication towards being one-way, is found today competed by the multiplication of networks, the exchange of information and the facilitation of contacts.

The next stage in the development of new media was the application of new digital communication technologies in politics, which enabled entirely new platforms and systems for the dissemination of information content. The public became more involved in creating materials and disseminating news content with political content.

From the mid-2000s, a new digital environment emerges, a typical example of which is the Barack Obama campaign in 2008. The Obama team revolutionized the use of social media: personalized cell phone messages, Youtube videos, networks social media like Facebook or Twitter complemented the repertoire of blogs, forums and emails, in elections they thought were impossible to win using traditional techniques.

## **3. Politics in the new media**

Political communication is a fairly fashionable object of discourse. We owe it to Blumler (1990) for his definition of political communication, which is “a race to influence and control, through the mainstream media, public perceptions of

major political events and issues.” Such a conception allows us to see political communication as a space where the discourses of the main actors (politicians, journalists and public opinion) are exchanged, as an open struggle to influence and control the collective representations up to the rule of the media.

In communication theories, the term media means any means of communication that allows the transmission of a message. If we refer to everyday language, by the term media we mean an environment which is characterized by the dominance of the means of collective distribution that enable the achievement of both large and diverse audiences (heterogeneous) and at the same time anonymous.

Contemporary social developments have produced a common interest in influence and influence between the media and politics as two important social actors who through this interaction also shape public and political figures.

In recent years, the relationship between the media and politics has changed significantly. Politics has become much more mediated. In practice, the distance between politics and the media has become much shorter. It is the media that have radically changed the ways in which political leaders communicate. Already, owning a social network by a politician is a necessity, owning and using it has turned into a political action. In a democratic system, the media and politics are in a symbiotic correlation, because they need each other and, at the same time, benefit from each other. (Barner, 2010, 4)

In this way the politician transforms himself into the media. They use social networks to communicate through comments but also live videos. Therefore, the politician has constantly tried to master the media as a form of political influence, or even to have a personal media channel. An indication of such a change is the creation by Prime Minister Rama of the ERTV channel, as a government media channel.

The Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, often uses social networks to stir up controversy. During the 2018 student protest, the Prime Minister of the country called the students protesting “lagging behind students” while attacking the media for misinformation (Express, 2018). And if we refer to the current protest against the price increase, the strong statement of the Prime Minister that: “The price increase protests serve Russia”, also creates dissatisfaction and a significant impact of the new media on the organization and mobilization of citizens, because such communication of Prime Minister Rama cannot be taken easy when he declares that it is a protest that disfigures Albania and shames the Albanians during this untypical times.

Excessive dependence on a personal social network as a source of information can create “filtering bubbles” (Pariser, 2011) characterized by highly homogeneous political opinions, colonized by fake news (Egelhofer, Lecheler; 2019, 1-20) or commanded by algorithms controlled by powerful companies.

#### **4. “The power” of the new media**

It is therefore very difficult to claim an authentic discussion on social media and have expectations about ideal communication, in the Habermasian sense of the public exercise of reason. The popularization of the term “Fake news” ( McNair, 2018) started in 2016. The definitions on it were numerous, describing them as: intentionally false information or as intentionally false and misleading content, published as genuine articles to lead the audience towards wrong evaluations.

But unlike the ideas created, the exposure of Americans to fake news in the 2016 campaign had a weak impact. However, the strong media coverage of the phenomenon, since this year, only undermines the credibility of the information presented on social media.

In Albania, the synonym of “fake news” is “trash can”. The Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, in “Zone e Lire” TV show, described the media as a trash can (Tema, 2017). Or the case when former Prime Minister Berisha, during his first term, immediately after the explosion of the ammunition factory in Gerdec, while speaking on the rostrum of the parliament, called the investigation and the facts made public by one of the most famous and serious newspapers in the world, “The New York Times” as a “toilet paper.” Syrian President Bashar al-Assad also described the era we live in now as a fake news era in an interview with Yahoo News in 2017. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is also critical. This is after President Trump in one of his statements said that “every option is on the table regarding Venezuela”, while the country was involved in political and economic unrest in which the US blamed its socialist leadership. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in an interview for RT in July 2017, stated that the country was “being exposed to harassment by the world media”, and said that the foreign media “spreads many false versions, many lies” and that “this is what we call it fake news today, don’t we?” (O’Connor, 2018).

#### **5. Conclusion**

It is increasingly acknowledged and accepted that media plays an important role in both national and international political life. This growing role of the media in society is also seen as a consequence of technological revolutions, mainly related to electronic media, which as a function in themselves tend to make the traditional forms of communication look older.

Today is considered to be a time of information explosion and may contain many labels such as: 'third wave infosphere' (Toffler, 1980), the concept of communicative wealth (Moles, 1986, p.116). We see that the real time broadcasting of events far away from us, is going beyond the concept of time and space, and such a thing has no way of sparing the infection of political behaviors.

We need to be clear about the democratic role of the media in being an instrument of critical education, and recognize the importance of television in political life by encouraging and urging information actors to become more aware of freeing themselves from the structural constraints of positioning themselves as true democratic agents. The journalist encounters processes that affect him, but that he can simultaneously influence towards a freer direction from the power relations of different political camps, embracing the task of investigator and not reproduce the news without taking in analysis the facts from different sources; coming out of the cynical emptiness of circular hectic information.

We must also reflect on the consequences of the relationship between the fields of information and politics in the increasingly regulated democratic life of the media, and discuss the many issues that legitimize the audience as a truly democratic criterion for content selection and news broadcasting. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube have become arenas of public debate and at the same time have facilitated the dissemination of false information, leading to a brutalization of public debate if we refer to Badouard (2017), because manipulation increases the level not only of hatred but also of violence in society. And while the Internet was expected to be an instrument of 'empowerment', with the ability to nurture political life and facilitate political mobilization, today we are aware that this digital division has brought inequality to political sphere. If the Internet did not equalize the political race, as Dahlgren pointed out in 2001, it has unquestionably raised the level of insecurity for political elites and beyond.

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