

Social media in Romania: left wing or right wing?¹

The case of the 2009 presidential campaign: Blogs and Facebook

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Abstract. Facebook was first used by the political candidates in a presidential campaign in Romania in 2009. Social media and web 2.0 changed the way people were interacting, so the politicians had to adapt their communication to these social changes. Politicians reacted mechanically to the fact that in the past years more and more Romanians started to use social media. The aim of the article is to explain how the Romanian politicians acted in response to what happened in the online communication: did the left wing or the right wing candidates use social media to convey electoral messages? Did the left wing or the right wing radicals communicate using social media?

To analyze the political speech, the content analysis method was applied on the posts in the electoral campaign on the personal blogs and on the official Facebook accounts of the candidates. This study answers the question on whether the Romanian left wing or right wing adapted its communication faster to the online environment during 2009 presidential campaign.

Keywords: social media, new media, political communication.

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Introduction

With its YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, the internet after the year 2000 is a much different internet than the one in the '90s. Politicians also reacted to these communication changes: candidates upgraded from the "display" type of website to the blog and Facebook account.

While the internet of the '90s meant Web 1.0 (World Wide Web) and implied "websites, URL addresses, domains" (Guțu, 2007, 18-19), after 2000 the online environment produced major mutations in how the internet users communicated with each other. Web 2.0 (World Live Web) meant second generation Internet services, offering the user unlimited possibilities for communication and social interaction. Tim O'Reilly defined the Web 2.0 concept as „the revolution of the businesses in the computers industry caused by the transformation of internet into a platform whose rules are intelligible, ensuring the success of this platform" (Flew, 2008: 17).

Web 2.0 era assumes the existence of a user-friendly interactive interface and includes social networking services. "Web 2.0 allowed the traditional audience to transform into an active audience" (Guțu, 2007: 105-106). Internet content is generated by the users, who have turned into online information producers.

"The audience becomes its own media producer" (Balaban, 2009: 161-162). The Internet offers the audience the possibility "to pass from the simple receiver status to the communicator status". Media behavior is nowadays consumer (user) generated content, meaning the information sent by bloggers through internet does not have to pass through gatekeepers, as it was the case of the information that had become news in traditional media (Balaban, 2009).

Once internet access increased, more and more people used social media to share and create online texts, images, videos, messages about their own personal and professional life. In December 2009 there were 7.430.000 Internet users in Romania. In December 2011, Internet Usage in the European Union – EU27 (Internet World Stats, 2012) counted 8,578,484 Internet users. That represented a virtual electoral pool, which the politicians could not have missed (Tudor, 2008).

Facebook is the second-most-visited site, after Google. "If someone use the Internet, that person is increasingly likely to use Facebook" (Kirkpatrick, 2010: 16). In November 2009 Facebook recorded 414.000 accounts originating in Romania. According to the Facebrands.ro - Facebook Pages Monitoring Service in Romania (2012), on January 1st 2010 there were only 518.140 Facebook users, while on January 1st 2011 their number reached 2.405.920.

According to the Facebook Global Monitor, published by InsideFacebook.com, in 2010 the largest number of Facebook users were in the United States, but the next ten countries were a global mix. In order, they were the United Kingdom, Turkey, Indonesia, France, Canada, Italy, the Philippines, Spain, Australia, and Colombia.

The ten countries in which it grew fastest in the year ending February 2010, according to the Facebook Global Monitor, were Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Portugal, Thailand, Brazil, Romania, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic.

The specificity of internet in the web 2.0 age is that it facilitates the interaction with the audience. On Facebook, blogs or YouTube, the voters do not simply hear or watch what they are given. They are not mere listeners, viewers or readers. The users can participate at the communication act – they can express opinions, take attitude, give a share or a like, and they can unite with their peers on discussion groups to debate certain topics. Facebook changes how people communicate and interact, how marketers sell products, how governments reach out to citizens, even how companies operate. “It is altering the character of political activism, and in some countries it is starting to affect the processes of democracy itself” (Kirkpatrick, 2010: 15).

The politicians could not remain indifferent to social media which could help the candidates reach their target audience. How did the Romanian politicians respond to this new form of citizen empowerment? Some of the 2009 Romanian presidential candidates included social media in their communicational strategy as a fast reaction to the development of social networks.

The aim of the article is to discuss which of the candidates used social media (blogs and Facebook) in 2009 presidential campaign and to explain how electoral communication was affected by social media in Romania.

Theoretical considerations

To find out what newness new media brought in electoral communication, we must focus on the communication via blogs which, together with social-networks, are the newest weapons in the online communication arsenal.

The definitions that we operate with when analyzing the new technologies are quite vague: often, in literature, concepts like social media, social networks and new media are used as synonyms. Although we commence from the assumption that all of us – researchers and users – are literate when it comes to internet, a conceptual confusions persists between social media and new media. Once, when publishing another paper, the author of this article was requested by the editors of a prestigious scientific magazine to delete one of the “new” words in the expression “new new media”, although the “new new media” concept had already been launched in 2009 by Paul Levinson. One of the objectives of this article is precisely to introduce a series of theoretical clarifications.

Another purpose of this study is to inquire whether the parties and candidates who used social media in the 2009 electoral campaign were rather left wing or right wing politicians. The concepts of left and right also need a separate theoretical debate.

Old media and new media

Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan (2006) observed that the very denomination of “new media” contains a negative self-definition: they are not mass media, respectively they are not television – “Although depended on computerization, new media was not simply <<digital media>>: it was not digitized forms of other media (photography, video, text), but rather an interactive medium of distribution as independent as the information it relayed” (Kyong Chun and Keenan, 2006: 1).

Much debate within new media studies have centered on: What is/are new media? Is new media new? What is new about new media? Lita Gitelman, Geoffrey B. Pingree and David Thorburn (2003) argued that all media were once new media.

Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan (2006: 3) sustained that the term “new” was surprisingly “un-interrogated”: “Those debunking the newness of new media often write as if we could all agree on or know the new were not itself a historical category linked to the rise of modernity. The new is described and explained all the time and describing something as new seems a way to dispel surprise or to create it before an actual encounter (actually using the internet, for instance, is banal in comparison to its pre-mass usage filmic, televisual, and print representations).”

The internet was not new in 1995, the year it arguably “became” new. Its moment of “newness” coincided less with its invention or its mass usage (in 1995 significantly more Americans had heard about the internet than actually been on it), but rather with a political move to deregulate it and with increased coverage of it in other mass media (Kyong and Keenan, 2006). “We accepted the Internet or new media as new because of a concerted effort to make it new, because of novels, films, television news programs, advertisements and political debates that portrayed it as new, wondrous, and strange” (Kyong and Keenan, 2006: 2-3).

The internet and new media seemed to make old theories, political principles and values new again, revitalizing Athenian democracy, the bourgeois public sphere and capitalism. The Internet seemed to renew the new and the technology, with its endless upgrades.

New media refers both to the used technology (internet and devices such as: iPad, iPhone, smartphone, notebook etc.), as well as to the web 2.0 software providing the media consumer opportunities to interact, relate, upload, share content and participate. These new media features determined some authors to associate participative democracy with internet and to suspect that new media users had values that were specific to the participative political cultures.

One of the optimists regarding the new media participation is the author we have already mentioned, Paul Levinson. He introduced the difference between new new media and new media, comparing the “reading of an article on Wikipedia, whose content can be edited by the user, with reading news on the Web page of a press institution like CNN” (Levinson, 2009: 5). The author used the concept of new new media to distinguish them from the old new media, such as the e-mail of the

websites from the web 1.0 age. New new media is represented by the blogosphere (blogging being the oldest shape of new new media), YouTube, Wikipedia, Digg, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Second Life etc.

Levinson noticed that each new new media is a support for the other new media. Some new media are old new media because the user has to wait for someone else to produce their content – like when one has to wait for a book to be uploaded on Amazon or a song on iTunes before being able to order it. In turn, the new new media users can choose to produce content, and generating content is simultaneous with the process of consuming the content that was already created by millions of other new new media consumers-producers.

Social media, social networks, user generated content networks

Born in the web 2.0 age, social media offers the users communication opportunities for social interactivity, uncensored speech and socialization. The interactivity and generated content characterize the social media consumer's behavior. Social media are uncontrolled media and may be used without restraint by each user with internet access. In the web 2.0 era internet users transformed into media producers, so politicians had to take that into consideration.

The notion of social media (as well as new new media) refers both to social networks, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, as well as to content-oriented networks such as YouTube or Flickr.

Social networks like Facebook or Twitter developed online informal social groups (friends, family) or formal groups (organizational, professional etc.) Facebook is a social network launched in February 2004, while Twitter is a micro-blogging platform launched in August 2006. On Facebook and on Twitter, everyone can be an editor, a content creator, a producer and a distributor. On social networks "all the classic old-media hats are being worn by everyone." (Kirkpatrick, 2010:10).

Youtube was launched in May 2005 as a user generated content website where users could upload, share and view video/audio materials, their own productions or recordings on which the users have author or broadcasting rights. YouTube is not a social network, but it is one of the most popular sources of user generated content among those who use social networks.

The blog is not a social network, "but, unlike a website from the web 1.0 era, this online platform displays interactivity and socialization features" (Druță, 2007: 11-15). Blogs are perhaps the oldest forms of socializing in the internet age.

Online political communication

Manuel Castells (2009: 55) named online communication "mass self-communication": "Mass communication because it can potentially reach a global audience, as in the posting of video on YouTube, a blog with RSS links to a number of web sources,

or a message to a massive e-mail list. At the same time, it is self – communication because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electronic communication network is self-selected. The three forms of communication (interpersonal, mass communication, and mass self-communication) coexist, interact, and complement each other rather than substituting for one another.”

Castells (2001) observed that internet changed traditional political communication and the way electoral campaigns were organized. When candidates use online communication in the electoral campaign, parties do not play the same part that they used to have in the traditional media age, because the electoral campaign can happen also without the effort of the party that organizes it (Momoc, 2011b). In the web 2.0 era, one can mobilize people to vote communicating online, horizontally, so the massive, vertical engagement of the party members and leaders in the campaign is not needed anymore. Besides this, there are political movements or new parties that have originated in personal blogs or in discussion groups created on Facebook.

Though Facebook was not designed as a political tool, its creators observed early on that it had potential: “During the first few weeks after it was created at Harvard University in 2004, students began broadcasting their political opinions by replacing their profile picture with a block of text that included a political statement.” (Kirkpatrick, 2010: 6-7).

Social media, like Facebook, turn out to be effective tools for political organizing. Facebook’s software makes information viral. Ideas on Facebook have the ability to rush through groups and make many people aware of something almost simultaneously, spreading from one person to another and on to many with unique ease—like a virus, or meme. (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

“Facebook is giving individuals in societies across the world more power relative to social institutions and that may well lead to very disruptive changes. In some societies it may destabilize institutions many of us would rather stay the same. But it also holds the promise of posing challenges to long-standing repressive state institutions and practices. Facebook makes it easier for people to organize themselves.” (Kirkpatrick, 2010:8).

The left wing-right wing gap

During the past years of governing, self-entitled social-democratic parties initiated and applied economic measures that favored the free market, privatizing mineral resources or companies built on state capital. On the other hand, self-entitled liberal parties increased the quantum of the state employees’ salaries and of the pensions in a year of financial crisis. In this context, a question arises: is the left wing-right

wing gap still useful for explaining the doctrines and the actions of the Romanian political parties?

After reading *Right and left* (1999), political specialist Norberto Bobbio's work, we believe the left-right gap has the resources to explain the political conflict in a simplified manner that is also accessible for the masses. The left-right terms help the voters to assess candidates and political parties.

Customary, each political speech assigns a positive value to one of the two terms, while the other term is automatically associated with the social-economic evil. In Romania, after the fall of Ceausescu's communism, the left wing (be it even social-democratic) has been often accused.

Criticized by the modern political science (Pârvolescu, 2000), the left wing-right wing gap is preferred by the journalists and politicians, who use it for simplifying the electoral speech. The terms left-right are applied as labels that describe the ideology of the parties. Using these notions provides the voters the possibility to predict the position of a certain candidate in relation with different social-political topics, using a small amount of information. The electors will vote for the party or candidate that they perceive as being the closest to their own position on the left-right axe.

The left wing-right wing gap was born during the French Revolution. In 1789, the Constituent Assembly of France got together to debate the issue of the royal veto. To simplify the vote procedure, the representatives who agreed with the royal prerogatives sat to the right (the aristocrats) and those against the King (the bourgeois) sat to the left of the presidium in the chamber of the French Parliament, which was shaped like a semicircle. Thus, the ones who were in favor of the Monarch's veto right separated themselves from the ones who were against it, and their votes have been easier to count.

A spontaneous procedural solution gave birth to two concepts that were going to design the political life in France and in many European states. Unlike the shape of the French Parliament chamber, in the British Parliament the parliamentarians are positioned face to face, split into Her Majesty's Majority and the Opposition. Hence, Great Britain did not experience the left-right gap, but the majority-opposition conflict.

The transfer from the topographic phase to the ideological phase of the gap happened at the end of the 19th century, when the vote based on qualification was eliminated and the universal vote was introduced. The conservative and liberal political parties were then compelled to mobilize all citizens for an extensive participation at the poll.

In France, the political scene was dominated by the Dreyfus scandal between 1895 and 1904. Alfred Dreyfus was an artillery captain in the French army, Alsatian and Jewish, who was accused of espionage and high treason. Although he seemed destined for a military career, he confronted with a major obstacle: the virulent anti-

Semitism in the French army (Momoc, 2012: 35-36). The Jew Dreyfus was sentenced to jail for life by a military court in December 1894.

In 1898, the novelist Emile Zola wrote the article *J'Accuse* as an open letter to the French President, in which he accused the Army for staging the Dreyfus trial (Winock, 2001). The public opinion got more and more tensed, by the case was reexamined. Dreyfus was brought back to France for a new trial in front of the Martial Court. His second sentence based on false evidence shocked France and generated organized manifestations, with the outcome that he was pardoned by the President of the Republic.

The Dreyfus affair developed in the context of an increasing French nationalism fever, while the country was trying to find a reason to start the war against Germany. This scandal tormented France for years, dividing it into the egalitarian left wing and the non-egalitarian right wing, and disclosing the anti-Semitism that had affected the entire French nation. The debate on the Dreyfus scandal led to the apparition of the "left wing people" and the „right wing people“, and the written press of that time was animating the passions and maintaining the social conflict.

The right wing people considered Dreyfus guilty for treason because presumably he had been defying the honor of the French army (said the nationalists). The left wing people, especially the intellectuals, claimed that a person's life stands above any type of prejudice (said the internationalists). The Army, Church and State, as victims of the scandal, positioned to the right; the cosmopolites and internationalists positioned to the left, asserting that people are equal, regardless of their ethnic origin or their religious affiliation.

The right wing is non-egalitarian because its vision states that people are not equal even in their natural condition. The right wing favors only the freedom of property, because it supports a natural right to property (John Locke, 1999). The right wing is characterized by order, since tradition, church and state are the principles that define order. Subsequently, there are parties and candidates positioned to the political left, but to the economic right: liberalism stands for political equality and economic inequality.

The political freedoms and social equality are specific to the democratic left wing. The first democratic movements in the 17th-18th centuries were the trade-unions' movements: they have asked for the universal vote to be introduced. Social-democrats support both the economic equality, as well as the political equality.

Norberto Bobbio (1999) is the theoretician who revived the left-right gap and turned it into a valid tool for the political science. Bobbio appreciated that the value that had to be applied as a criterion for differentiating right from left is equality. According to Bobbio, the value that defines the left wing is equality.

„The left“ is based on equality meaning that the egalitarian starts from the belief that most inequalities are social, therefore can be removed. „The right“ assumed inequality as the dominant value, considering that the differences between people

are what is important for a better cohabitation; the non-egalitarian has the opposite conviction than the egalitarian, believing that most inequalities are natural, hence they cannot be socially eliminated.

Bobbio (1998) explains that liberalism is a theory about the state, while democracy is a theory about governing. While democracy is egalitarian, insuring the participation of all citizens at taking public decisions, regardless of their social-economic status, liberalism is a theory about limiting the state intervention in the economic activity of the entrepreneurs, who make profit and earn non-equally on a free market.

The “left-right” analysis grid

To classify the online speech of the 2009 presidential candidates as being to the left or to the right, I have built a grid with two levels of interpretation: economic and political. At the economic level, the left wing translates into supporting topics such as: maximal state, the intervention of the state in economy through social policies, social assistance, budgetary expenses for the education and health system. From an economic perspective, the right wing means supporting topics such as: meritocracy and, thus, inequality, minimal state, the withdrawal of the state from the economy, free market, cutting taxes for small businesses, reducing the expenses in the budgetary system.

At the second level, the political one, left wing means equal political and civil rights for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation. Right wing means order and inequality between different categories of citizens: usually, the right wing parties privilege the citizens of the ethnicity representing the majority, the heterosexuals or those who belong to the dominant religion.

Research framework

The research hypothesis

Social media were often presented as the new public (online) space, equal for all those who have internet access: the optimist theoreticians of the web 2.0 participation claim that the citizens can express democratically on social networks, blogs or content generated websites, thus influencing the decision making process (Levinson, 2009).

If social media ensures the frame for the equal participation of all the citizens at the public debates, are the candidates of the left wing parties more present on the social media? The research hypothesis is that in the 2009 presidential campaign there was a bigger interest for the communication on social media on behalf of the left wing candidates, namely the social-democrats and not necessarily the radical left wing, represented by the ex-communists. We expect that mostly the candidates of the left democratic wing would cultivate the political dialogue and the debate on their personal blog, would be interactive and would offer feedback on the Facebook social network.

Research objectives

The article intended to analyze the candidates' attitude towards the competitors' campaigns and to identify the political messages promoted by each of the blogger candidates in the 2009 presidential elections. The study intends to answer the following questions: Which of the left wing or right wing candidates were more present in the online environment in the 2009 campaign? Did the left wing or right wing radicals use social media more?

What content did each of the 12 candidates generate on the campaign blog and on their Facebook account? Did they initiate political, social or economic debates? Through their online speech, did the candidates contradict or confirm the ideology they display through the label of the party?

Research sample

The research was conducted on the 12 candidates who participated at the 2009 presidential elections. According to the Central Electoral Bureau, at the 2009 presidential elections 9.946.748 people voted (the total number of the valid votes was 9.718.840) out of the total number of voters, 18.293.277. The first ballot was won by the President in charge, Traian Băsescu, with 3.153.640 votes. The candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Mircea Geoană received 3.027.838 votes in the first ballot and finished the second.

The candidate of the National Liberal Party (NLP), Crin Antonescu, received 1.945.831 votes, reaching the third place. Kelemen Hunor, from the Alliance of the Democratic Hungarians (ADH) won 372.764 votes. The independent candidate Sorin Oprescu won 309.764 votes.

Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the candidate of the right wing radical party, Great Romania, (GRP) received 540.380 votes. The candidate of the New Generation Party (NGP), George Becali, won 186.390 votes.

The Green Party (GP) candidate, Remus Cernea, received 60.539 votes. Constantin Rotaru from the Socialist Alliance (SA) won 43.684 votes. Eduard Manole got 34.189 votes. Ovidiu Iane, the Ecologist Party candidate, won 22.515 votes. The independent candidate of Roma ethnicity, Constantin Ninel Potârcă received 21.306 votes.

The candidates' personal blogs and Facebook accounts that were active online at the date of the research (March, 2012) were investigated. The official electoral campaign took place between October 23rd and November 21st 2009, so the investigated period on blogs and on Facebook was October and November 2009.

Research method

The empirical research started from the question if the candidates did use their personal blogs and their Facebook accounts to promote left or right wing campaign themes, to mobilize the electors to the poll or to attack the counter-candidates.

It has been monitored the blogger's speech and the posts made on the Facebook account: whenever the message was about himself, his campaign, his political party, his attitude was classified as being self-centered and positive. If the post was about the political competitors or about attacking the Government, the Presidency or other, his attitude was classified as negative.

It was used the qualitative method of content analysis as explained by Alex Mucchielli (2002:38-48). The steps in content analysis are encoding, categorization and establishing the relationships (data interpretation). Encoding aims to extract the essential of the testimony posted on the blog or on Facebook by using the post key-words. Any qualitative analysis condenses continuous and abundant data. This means that the key-words or expressions that summarize the phrases of interest must be very accurate and true to the blog testimony. By simply reading the key-words, an uninformed reader should be able to reconstitute the blog testimony without having to read it. For Encoding, the questions we use are "What do we have here? What is this about?" The answers to these questions become keywords or summarizing expressions.

The categorization is illustrated by transposing the key-words into concepts. A category is a word that abstractly defines a cultural, social or psychological phenomenon as it is perceived in a data corpus. The category leads to theoretic concepts, which establish the relationships between the categories. The expression "Despair comes out in the street" is a code. The expression "Social protests", for the same extract, is a category. The first expression is extracted from a post on Mircea Geoană's Facebook account. The second expression is richer, more evocative; this is why it is strong.

Establishing the relationship refers to the candidate attitude (favorable or unfavorable) regarding the theme he is debating ("Social protests"), and also to the attitude (negative or positive) that he has related to the key-words he is using.

The research results

The 2009 campaign website of the candidate Traian Băsescu was deactivated right after the results were announced. Candidate Băsescu practiced a "get the votes and run" type of electoral communication (Ulmanu, 2011: 196). The President preferred to deactivate his Facebook account and close the campaign website (basescu.ro) after each electoral period. Politician Băsescu's electoral strategy was "to be present in the social media only in the electoral campaign" (Ulmanu, 2011: 198).

Băsescu was the only one of the candidates who never had a blog. Traian Băsescu used a website with web 2.0 interactivity elements, but just as in 2004, in 2009 he deactivated the website immediately after finding out the poll results. Anyhow, "Băsescu was the first Romanian politician to exploit the internet as political communication tool" (Guțu, 2007: 167). Although he did not have a blog, Băsescu was present in online ever since 2004 through the digital guerilla (Momoc, 2011a)

and is also present in the blogosphere due to the link-references to his campaign made by others.

In October-November 2009, the candidate of the Social Democratic Party, Mircea Geoană, used the blog mirceageoana.ro/blog. The candidate of the National Liberal Party, Crin Antonescu, used the blog crinantonescu.ro/Blog/CrinAntonescu.html. Kelemen Hunor, from the Alliance of the Democratic Hungarians, used the blog kelemenhunor.ro/blogro/ and the campaign website kelemenhunor.ro/candidatlapresedintie. As for the independent candidate Sorin Oprescu, he has a blog that was probably developed by a fan, sorinoprescu.wordpress.com/ (active, but year 2009 misses from the archive), and also a blog belonging to some of his supporting fans, <http://sorinmirceaoprescu.wordpress.com/> (last post dates from May 2008).

The candidate of the New Generation Party, George Becali, had a blog with a single post: www.georgebecali.ro/blog/. During the campaign he had two dedicated pages – it is a special case, in which the blog is formatted as a two pages website, on Wordpress platform. His old website (a page with a minimal presentation, plus links) is still online at http://georgebecali.ro/index_old.html. The candidate of Great Romania Party, Vadim Tudor's blog <http://vadimtudor.wordpress.com/> was a password protected blog, hence the archive could not be analyzed. Constantin Rotaru from the Socialist Alliance used the blog www.constantinrotaru.ro/.

The Ecologist Party candidate, Ovidiu Iane's blog, www.oviduiiane.ro/, was inactive when the research was conducted. Eduard Manole had a blog with the address: blog.eduardmanole.com/. The Green Party candidate, Remus Cernea's blog, remuscernea.ro/, was a blogging platform containing elements that were specific for a presentation website. The independent candidate of Roma ethnicity, Constantin Ninel Potârcă, did not have a blog during the 2009 campaign.

Of the 29 total posts (context units), candidate Mircea Geoană had a general campaign attitude with 16 positive attitudes, 13 negative attitudes. The used keywords (numbering units) were 4 Boc, 3 "A single Romania", 3 farmers, 3 project, 2 Romanian village, 2 values, 2 despair, 2 Traian Basescu, 2 solutions. Thus, the following themes (recording units) prevailed: 5. Agriculture policy, 4 on criticizing Boc, 3 on criticizing Traian Basescu, 3 on youth, 3 on economic stability recovery, 3 on a single nation, 3 on pensioner, 3 on Romania project, 2 on cultural national values. The posts of the social-democrat candidate Mircea Geoană positioned at the economic left wing, his main debate topics being: the rural environment issues, the farmers' issues, the employees' economic issues and the social issues of the youth. The candidate of the social-democratic left wing had the biggest number of posts on his campaign blog, after the candidate of the Green Party.

The content analysis on Antonescu's blog showed that of the 13 total posts (context units), 9 displayed positive attitudes and 4 negative attitudes. The most frequently used key-words (numbering units) in his blog posts were: 3 Traian

Băsescu, 3 Govern, 2 PNL, 2 Johannis, 2 campaign, 2 referendum, 2 technocrats, 2 commonsense, 2 solutions, 2 vote, 2 polls, 1 PSD, 1 PD-L, 1 elections, 1 state reform, 1 communism, 1 IMF, 1 Crin Antonescu, 1 Parliament, 1 prime-minister, 1 unicameral, 1 message, 1 Gheorghe Dinică, 1 change, 1 trust. Therefore, the themes (recording units) could be identified as: 8 on the PNL Crin Antonescu campaign, 1 on Gheorghe Dinică, 1 on IMF, 3 on prime-minister, Parliament and Govern. Liberal Antonescu's blog speech (influenced by the offline electoral agenda of President Băsescu, to which Antonescu had permanently reacted) was focused on the political reform and less on the economic reform. Most of his posts were connected to his campaign activities. Then he approached topics such as the referendum for restructuring the Parliament (reducing the number of parliamentarians and reducing the Parliament to a single chamber) and the proposition made by the National Liberal Party that the potential prime-minister should be Klaus Johannis, the Mayor of Sibiu City.

Although he had daily updates on his website, Kelemen Hunor did not write more than 3 total posts (context units) on his blog. Regarding his general campaign attitude: 1 positive attitude, 2 negative attitudes. Key-words (numbering units): 1 halfway, 1 Govern, 1 crisis; Themes (recording units): 1 on visiting the counties, 1 on the vote of censure, 1 on the crisis.

The Green Party candidate, Remus Cernea had a total of 78 posts on his campaign blog: 25 in October and 53 in November. His campaign attitude was rather positive, with 60 positive posts and 18 negative. Key-words (numbering units): 11 debate, 11 dialogue, 6 guest, 6 candidacy, 5 European Greens, 5 Green Party, 5 signatures, 5 campaign, 4 vote, 4 supporters, 3 democracy, 2 press, 2 political rights, 2 undemocratic, 2 electoral law system, 2 change, 2 political class, 2 ecology, 2 environment. Themes (recording units): 25 on media coverage, 21 on electoral campaign, 8 on electoral system, 5 on Remus Cernea, 5 on debate, 5 on competitors, 2 on environment, 2 on Greens, 2 on vote, 2 on electoral reform, 1 on politics in Romania. The Green Party candidate had the biggest number of posts on his campaign blog. His posts have shown that the candidate compensated his absence from the traditional media by his presence on social media. Cernea requested a public debate on the old media and, especially, being allowed to show up on the public television and demanded the other candidates to not refuse dialogue. The topics of his speech were mainly focused on the citizens' equality and on the civic liberties, positioned at the political left wing. The Green Party candidate treated far less economic themes or topics related to ecology, such as the issues regarding the environment and protecting nature.

George Becali had a single blog post, having as theme his campaign motivation. Key-words: 1 religion, 1 tradition, 1 ethics. The candidate ignored the blog as a communication platform. His only post is subscribed to the doctrine he permanently displayed in traditional media: the conservative right wing. Although the leader of the New Generation Party made gestures that could have been considered left wing (helping people in need or those hit by the natural calamities), the candidate

represented a party labeled as the political radical right wing: they promoted the order based on Orthodoxy and ethnic nationalism, and the name of the New Generation Party reminded of the generation who had joined the Legionary Movement in the '30s.

The socialist Rotaru had 16 blog posts, with 10 positive attitudes and 6 negative. Key words: 3 economic crisis, 2 Socialist Alliance Party, 2 capitalism, 2 socialist, 2 economy, 2 Marxism. Themes treated: 3 on visiting the country for electoral purposes, 2 on economic crisis, 2 on capitalist Romania. The online speech of the radical left wing candidate was anti-capitalist and inspired by Marxism. An aspect worth noticing is that the socialist candidate Constantin Rotaru had a bigger number of posts on his campaign blog than the liberal candidate who finished the electoral race third, Crin Antonescu.

Concerning the number of comments that the candidates made to their posts, as answers to the readers' comments: Cernea had 39 comments to his blog posts, Geoană had 17 comments during the campaign, Antonescu had only 2 comments. Rotaru had 7 comments. Hunor and Becali did not make any comment. The blogger politicians refused a dialogue with their readers.

The same research method was used to analyze the candidates' Facebook accounts for the period October-November 2009. The account or Facebook page of the right wing candidate Traian Băsescu could not be identified online. Nowadays a Traian Băsescu Facebook page exists, but it presents Wikipedia content and an account of the Presidential Administration.

The candidates of the big parties had Facebook accounts in 2009: Mircea Geoană (Social Democratic Party) had 75 posts on the Wall, of which only 3 were about his personal life, and Crin Antonescu (National Liberal Party) had 111 posts during October-November 2009, all political. The Green Party candidate, Remus Cernea, was active on Facebook during October-November 2009, with 156 posts. Unlike the smaller number of blog posts, liberal Crin Antonescu was more active on his Facebook account than the candidate of the social-democratic left wing, Mircea Geoană, who finished the electoral race on the second spot.

George Becali and Ninel Potârcă did not have Facebook accounts at the 2009 elections. Vadim Tudor did not have a Facebook account in 2009 either, but created one in November 2010. So, the right wing radicals Gigi Becali and Vadim Tudor did not have Facebook accounts at the 2009 elections. Neither the leftist wing Constantin Rotaru did not have an account in November 2009, but opened it in May 2010. Eduard Manole (independent) had a single Facebook post during the 2009 electoral campaign. The ecologist Ovidiu Iane had only 4 political posts on Facebook during November 2009.

Applying the method of content analysis to the posts on the Facebook account of the social-democratic candidate Mircea Geoană, we have identified the following key-words: 9 Băsescu, 9 agriculture, 8 vote, 5 Mircea Geoană, 5 PSD, 5 „We win

together”, 4 industry, 4 govern, 4 democracy, 4 president, 3 project, 3 union/unity, 3 economy, 3 PNL, 2 Crin Antonescu, 2 work places, 2 Boc, 2 crisis, 2 energy, 2 Happy birthday, 2 economic program, 2 culture, 2 elections. These words or names showed up just once: grocery store, family, subventions, IMF, protests, dissatisfactions, pensions, people, candidacy launch, viral, anti-propaganda, despair, street, press, NGO, investors, strategy, circus, mocking, debate, Elena Udrea, Mircea Dinescu, Dacian Ciolos, Johannis.

The 75 posts treated the following topics: 31 positive campaign, mobilizing for Mircea Geoană, 14 economic re-launch/anti-crisis measures, 8 attacks on Băsescu, 5 agricultural reform and support for farmers, 4 electoral debate, 3 democracy, 3 wish, 2 support for culture, 1 social protests, 1 food safety, 1 energetic industry reform, 1 help for pensioners, 1 support for families. The themes of the social-democratic candidate placed him at the economic left wing: Mircea Geoană was concerned of the farmers’ and industry employees’ situation, of the work places and the Romanian family.

The liberal candidate, Crin Antonescu used the following key-words in his Facebook posts: 25 vote, 25 Băsescu, 24 Crin Antonescu, 15 govern, president, 12 Geoană, 9 crisis, revolution, 8 common-sense, 8 Parliament/parliamentarians, 6 PNL, 5 Boc, economy, 4 Johannis, 3 project, program, state, 2 PSD, PDL, Lucian Croitoru, 1 Doina Cornea, Roberta Anastase, rural, taxes decrease, unemployed.

These key-words described the following 111 political topics: 25 mobilizing to vote for Crin Antonescu, 20 attack on President Băsescu, 12 “The revolutions on common-sense”/manifesto, 9 attack on the Boc Government, 8 technocrats govern led by the independent Johannis, 8 attack on Mircea Geoană, 4 Parliament reform, 4 TV debate, 3 censorship motion, 3 attack on the assigned prime-minister Lucian Croitoru, 2 attack on PDL, 2 PNL-PNȚCD alliance/support from G. Ciuhandu, the Mayor of Timișoara city, 2 the Revolution in December, 1 stat assistance for youth and children, 1 diplomatic relationships, 1 attack on Roberta Anastase, the president of the Chamber of Deputies, 1 the village (rural) reform, 1 rejecting a political alliance with PSD or PDL, 1 the PSD alliance due to the need to achieve parliamentary majority, 1 support for the PSD candidate Mircea Geoană, 1 decentralization, 1 political responsibility, 1 national safety, 1 the transparency of justice.

The topics were situated at the political and social left wing; the economic right wing subjects were almost inexistent. Candidate Crin Antonescu requested on Facebook that the state and Parliament reform is made and showed concern for the rural environment issues and for unemployment, social topics also treated with priority by the PSD candidate, Mircea Geoană. A single mention about taxes decrease was made in the 111 posts. Antonescu was more preoccupied with attacking the Boc Government and President Băsescu. For the liberal candidate, overcoming the crisis was equivalent with removing current power representatives and installing the independent Klaus Johannis as prime-minister.

The Green Party candidate used the next key-words in his Facebook posts: 54 Remus Cernea, 24 vote, 13 Facebook, 7 candidacy, 6 signatures, 5 supporters, 3 Mircea Badea, European Greens, democracy, 2 Florian Pittiş, 2 international, human rights, environment, 1 Doru Braia, Sorin Oprescu, 1 professors, state employees, culture, ecology, Twitter.

The 156 topics he has treated were: 35 mobilize to vote for Remus Cernea/presenting the candidate, 11 the number of Facebook supporters, 10 attending TV shows, 7 encouraging online donations, 6 participating at the European Greens Council, 5 signature raising campaign for submitting the candidacy, 5 promoting the campaign website, 5 internet users supporting Cernea, 5 inviting the supporters to outdoor events, 4 European Greens Charta/programmatic documents/Green's Manifesto, 4 supporting the rights of the ethnic minorities and of the LGBT persons, 4 demand for the candidacy to be promoted in traditional press, 4 attracting attention on electoral fraud, 4 link to a recorded TV show, 3 attending a radio show, 3 outdoor event in Parcul Carol, 3 the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights, 3 promoting the women's rights in politics, 3 critics of the political class, 3 Romania's foreign policy, 2 Cernea as free-thinker, 2 partial electoral results, 2 climate change, 2 democratic Romania/open society, 2 "It does not matter how long my hair is", 2 blocking Cernea's access to a TV debate, 1 supporting the ecologic campaign "Let's do it Romania", 1 the position in the second ballot, 1 state-Church separation, 1 against religious traditionalism, 1 green revolution, 1 online forum, 1 stopping the Gold Corporation mining project, 1 state employees' strike, 1 attack on Băsescu, 1 sustainable economy, 1 promoting the Twitter account, 1 the Revolution in December, 1 the fall of the Iron Curtain, 1 prime-minister proposal, 1 chat invitation.

Since he could not participate at traditional media electoral debates, the Green Party candidate had to use his Facebook account to promote himself. He had political left-wing topics, supporting the rights of the sexual and ethnic minorities and accusing the gender discrimination. Cernea used Facebook to promote his campaign website, his Twitter account and to raise the attention on the fact that he did not receive enough antenna space in the traditional media (especially television). The environment related topics were less than the ones concerning the human's and citizen's rights. The economic subjects were rare and whenever they occurred, they situated on the left-wing.

Conclusions

As a general conclusion, in 2009 the political candidates used social media to mobilize voters to the poll or to inform them regarding the activities in their offline campaign. The campaign blogs constituted a medium for expressing electoral campaign themes, especially for the left wing.

The candidates with left wing messages, like the social-democratic Mircea Geoană and the socialist Constantin Rotaru, have outran the liberal candidate Crin Antonescu

in terms of number of blog posts. The Green Party candidate, Remus Cernea, also had political left wing messages, fighting for the rights of the LGBT persons and of the national minorities. While the radical left wing, used blog communication through socialist Constantin Rotaru more than the PNL candidate Crin Antonescu did, the radical right wing was less present, since the conservative traditionalist Gigi Becali has abandoned this communication platform.

As I showed on a different occasion (Momoc, 2010), although Traian Băsescu is the first Romanian politician that understood how powerful internet is and its ability to reach certain population segments, he is not today among the politicians who have a blog – as opposed to his 2004 counter-candidate, the social-democrat politician, Adrian Năstase, who is one of the most prolific Romanian bloggers. Traian Băsescu also did not have a blog in 2009, when he managed to win his second mandate.

The 2009 elections showed that the left wing was more present on the blog through social-democratic Mircea Geoană, through the Green Party candidate Remus Cernea and through the socialist Constantin Rotaru; however, the right wing was the one that won the elections through Traian Băsescu. The radical right wing candidates (Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Gigi Becali) were not so persuaded by the usefulness of blog communication during the electoral campaign.

The attack themes were used in a lower degree on the 2009 candidates' blogs. As Sălcudeanu noticed (2009, p. 138), it is possible that the politicians were aware of the small influence that personal blogs had in attracting votes and perhaps they sensed that those who read their blogs belonged to the party's hard core – the captive electors that were loyal to the politician regardless of his communication errors.

The left wing candidate, Mircea Geoană, scored third in terms of Facebook posts, after Remus Cernea and right wing candidate, Crin Antonescu, from the National Liberal Party. Even if he has used his Facebook page in the presidential campaign, today Traian Băsescu's Facebook page hosts only the news from the website of the Presidential Administration. The Green Party candidate massively posted political left wing messages and even touched a few social-economic topics from the left wing agenda. The surprise was represented by the liberal candidate, Crin Antonescu: most of his posts contained left wing social messages or economic topics. The speech that Antonescu had on Facebook in the 2009 campaign was very similar to social-democratic Mircea Geoană's speech.

In the 2009 elections, the best rated candidates, such as Traian Băsescu, Mircea Geoană or Crin Antonescu, lost the opportunity to stand out among the internet users. There were smaller candidates who were more active online, like the Green Party candidate who developed a community around his blog page. This online community determined Remus Cernea to dissociate himself from the Green Party after the elections and to set the base of an online formation (not yet legally subscribed in Court), which intends to be constituted in a political party positioned at the political radical left wing: the Democrat Agrarian Green's Movement. Thus,

there are also in Romania political parties born from the blog or Facebook account. This phenomenon has already produced in Western Europe; one of the best known examples is the one of Italian actor Beppe Grillo, who created Movimento 5 stelle, a formation that started from the personal blog of the former comedian.

Starting from Maurice Duverger's theory on the exterior origin of the political parties, in future studies we shall research whether in Romania we can affirm that there are parties born in the online environment (social media), having their origin outside the Parliament. The subsequent researches will try to establish whether the new populism is born through social media and whether new media contribute to the development of populism in contemporary Romania.

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