CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL BLOGS

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Rezumat

Ramură recentă a cercetării sociale, new media şi, implicit, termenul new media, indică unele transformări în modul în care se realizează relaţia dintre teorie şi practică sau modul în care este abordat obiectul de studiu.

Pe fondul evidenţierii impactului noilor mijloace de comunicare online folosite în campaniile electorale anterioare atât din ţară cât şi din străinătate, comunicatorii şi PR-iştii candidaţilor la alegerile parlamentare din 2012 au inclus printre mijloacele de comunicare şi Internetul, văzut ca o punte de legătură şi un mijloc de transmitere a informaţiilor între candidat şi alegător.

Lucrarea va identificarea numărul parlamentarilor prezenţi în mediul online cu site sau blog; detalierea strategiilor de comunicare pe care aceştia le utilizează în mediul online; identificarea blogurilor politice inactive ale politicienilor din actuala legislatură; exemple de bune practici în utilizarea blogurilor politice versus bloguri neinspirate. De asemenea, analiza calitativă a lucrării va evidenţia unele tipologii ale blogosferei politice româneşti.

Cuvinte cheie: blog, blogosferă, comunicare politică

Abstract

A recent branch of social research, new media and, implicitly, the term itself, indicates a series of changes in the way in which the relationship between theory and practice is realised or the way in which the research topic is approached.

In the context of the development of the new on-line communication media used in the previous electoral campaigns both in Romania and abroad, the candidates' communicators and PRs in the parliamentary elections of 2012 included the Internet among the communication mediums, considering it a means for transmitting information from the candidate to the voters.

This paper aims to identify the number of MPs present in the on-line environment with a site or a blog, to detail the communication strategies they use in the on-line environment, to identify the inactive political blogs owned by the politicians of the current legislature, as well as good practice examples in using the political blog, versus uninspired blogs. Moreover, the qualitative analysis included in this research will highlight some typologies of the Romanian political blogosphere.

Keywords: blog, blogosphere, political communication.

Résumé

Une sous-division récente de la recherche sociale, les nouveaux médias, y compris, le terme de nouveaux médias indiquent certaines transformations dans la manière dont se réalise la relation entre la théorie et la pratique ou la manière dont l'on approche l'objet d'étude.

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Dans le contexte de la mise en évidence de l'impacte des nouveaux moyens de communication en ligne utilisés dans les campagnes électorales antérieures en Roumanie aussi bien qu'à l'étranger, les communicateurs et les PR des candidats aux élections parlementaires du 2012 ont inclus l'Internet parmi les moyens de communication, un lien et un moyen à la fois de transmission des informations entre le candidat et l'électorat,

Ce travail vise à identifier le nombre de parlementaires présents dans l'environnement en ligne avec un site web ou un blog, à détailler les stratégies de communications qu'ils utilisent dans l'environnement en ligne, à identifier les blogs politiques inactifs des politiciens de l'actuelle législature, à trouver des exemples de bonnes pratiques d'utilisation des blogs politiques versus ceux non-inspires. En outre, l'analyse qualitative effectuée par cette étude vise à mettre en évidence des typologies de la blogosphere politique roumaine.

Mots-clef: blog, blogosphere, communication politique.

1. General Considerations / Introduction

Social networks, and, implicitly, blogs, have increasingly entered the daily life of every individual, leading to the emergence and development of the political blogs, which, one way or another, "will shift the gravity centre of public debates from the sterile disputes among the various ideologies, towards discussions regarding political projects and programs necessary to the citizens" (Sălcudeanu 2009, p. 40).

The socio-economic context of the 2012 elections in Romania was marked by the measures taken by the former rightist government in the context of the crisis – drops in salaries, increases in taxes, increase in the rate of inflation, etc – despite the tensions between the political parties and even between the president and the prime minister. Some of the parliamentary elections have proven that the electorate votes under the influence of the overall negative situation in the country. The campaign for the parliamentary elections in 2012 in Romania started on November 9th, and ended on December 8th, this being the second time when the Romanian MPs were elected based on the uni-nominal vote, on electoral colleges. The uni-nominal vote was first used in 2008, with a view to reduce the influence of the political parties in nominating candidates on the list and to raise awareness among the politicians, in relation to the electorate, by concluding a "contract" between the voters and the elected politicians for the highest legislative body in the state, with power of representation.

The parliamentary elections in 2012 constituted a great challenge for the candidates, who had to choose between the on-line and the traditional *face to face* communication, between the on-line political marketing with communication strategies based on Western models of the direct dialogue type with the electorate and the propagandistic model based on promises to the electorate. Despite the innovative electoral campaigns in the United States and even in Europe, Romanian politicians have not applied yet all modern political marketing methods and techniques.

This paper aims to present the dimension of the Romanian political blogosphere from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, taking into account the number of the Romanian MPs and their presence in the on-line environment. Moreover, it aims to briefly present and exemplify typologies of the blogs with a focus on the analysis of the Romanian MPs' blogs.

2. Blogs and the Romanian Blogosphere

The Internet contributes to the enormous transformation of our contemporary society, at all levels, and, unavoidable, it changed the premises and the infrastructure of the political sphere in several ways. Over time, we witnessed the "incubation of a heterogeneous universe made of a blogosphere, social networking websites, individual and collective productions, as well as the efforts made by the social movements and the activists belonging to all domains" (Dahlgren 2012, p. 180).

Without a doubt, the new strategies related to the new media are likely to have a considerable impact on the elections, but there is still certain disagreement regarding the campaigns and the elections, since their ground and execution are rapidly changing. At this point, in politics, the candidates take advantage to a certain extent of the new technologies and they try to put the new strategies into practice. Obviously, the Internet is a powerful instrument allowing its users to transmit messages to the entire world.

Compared to a website, the blog benefits from a chronological editorial structure and, in addition, it can be considered an intermediary between the personal website and a discussion forum. The relationship between the virtual and the real world, in blog terms, is even more complex and complicated, since it also involves the community (Barlow 2008, p. 51).

The blog can also constitute a marketing engine, both for the author of the blog, which means "personal marketing" (Fievet, Turrettini 2004, p. 46), and for some companies, media trusts who can adapt to new technological conditions. If the impact is unpredictable, *the permanence* (Levinson 2009, p 19) is a major aspect of the new media, and, in particular, blogs. The blog is "une forme de mémoire vivante ou, și l'on veut, de "mémoire active" (Fievet, Turrettini 2004, p. 47); the blog establishes contacts and obtains feedback for the topics posted thanks to the visitors; the blog is also a vector of the collective expression; the blog is a "média chaud" (Ruette Guyot, Leclerc 2009, p. 53); the blog fosters on-line traffic and interactivity. At the same time, the blog has an aura of authenticity and it outruns the newspapers which started to lose ground, especially during the electoral campaigns:

"For all the history made by newspapers between 1960 and 2000, the profession was also busy contracting, standardizing, and homogenizing. Most cities now have their monopolist daily, their alt weekly or two, their business journal. Journalism is done a certain way, by a certain kind of people. Bloggers are basically oblivious to such traditions, so reading the best of them is like receiving a bracing slap in the face. It's a reminder that America îs far more diverse and iconoclastic than its newsrooms".[1]

Blogs emerged after 1990, as mere web pages and thus, the first website available was http://info.cern.ch made by Tim Tim Berners – Lee, the inventor of the Web in The European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), (Fievet şi Turrettini 2004, p. 8). In 1997, Jorn Barge, the editor at of Robot Wisdom called them *weblog*, a name that was accepted by everybody. The same year, Dave Winer started his first blog, *Scripting News*, which is "the Longest Continuously running weblog on the Internet".[2] If Winer created the first blog on the Internet on April 1, in July 1997, *Slashdot*[3] realized an information page for the community, regarded today as the most popular worldwide collaborative blog.

In the USA, in 2000 there were a few tens of thousands of blogs; in 2004, there were already 4.3 million blogs, and in 2008, their number was estimated at 133 million. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 73% of the Americans were online, 12% of Internet users had already a blog, and 50% of the users had read another person's blog (Davis 2009, p 4).

The blog was first used for last minute news in 1998, when Charlotte Observer (Janice Marie Collins) sent the effects of Hurricane Bonnie.[4]

The first personal blogs in the francophone region appeared in 2000, with Karl Dubost[5], Emmanuelle Richard[6], Stéphanie Booth.[7] In Romania, the blogs *per se* only appeared in 2002, and there are still discussions regarding the first Romanian blogger.[8] It is however agreed that George Hari Popescu[9], Alexandru-Brăduţ Ulmanu[10], Sorin Matei, Manafu[11], Alex Mihăileanu[12] are among the first who created a blog, initially manually and in HTML format.

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[1] Welch M., "Blogworld and its gravity", *Columbia Journalism Review, 42(3)/2003 – September - October*

[2] http://essaysfromexodus.scripting.com/whatisscriptingnews, 1. 02. 2011. "*Scripting News.*

[3] http://slashdot.org/recent, 1. 02. 2011.

[4] Janice Marie Collins, *Gonna take you higher! news blogging in the 21st century*, http://citation.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/3/7/5/7/6/pages375763/p375763-6.php, retrieved on 21. 05. 2013.

[5] http://www.w3.org/People/karl/, 18.01. 2011.

[6] http://www.emmanuelle.net/archives/week_2002_11_17.html, 1. 02. 2010.

[7] http://stephanie-booth.com, 18. 01. 2010.

[8] Iulian Comănescu, *Leapşa cognitivă: care-a fost primul blog românesc*, http://www.comanescu.ro/leapsa-cognitiva-care-a-fost-primul-blog-romanesc.html, 12. 12. 2019.

[9] http://www.cyberculture.ro/blog , http://web.ifrance.com/, 20. 11. 2010.

[10] http://www.jurnalismonline.ro/, 31. 01. 2011.

[11] http://manafu.blogspot.com/, 1. 02. 2011.

[12] http://subiectiv.ro/, 1. 02. 2011.

In Romania, the number of blogs increased over the last years, but bot as much as between 2008 and 2010, although very few are still active, that is, at least one article is published every week – argues the Zelist monitoring service[13]. In order to quantify the most accurately possible the evolution of the social media in Romania, Zelist developed a calculation index that monitors the weekly activity of the blogosphere Thus, according to the calculation method, eScor_week=no__active_ accounts*10+no_posts*3+no_comments,[14] it results that in Romania there are 67.058 blogs, compared to the number registered for September 2010, when there were 59.017 blogs.[15]

From a demographic point of view, in May 2013, Bucharest occupied the first position in the number of active accounts, reaching a percentage of 44.8, compared to Transilvania, with a percentage of 15.6%, Moldova 11.1%; at the opposite pole there are Bucovina (1.5%) and Maramureş (1.8%).16 The same study carried out by Zelist revealed that men are more active compared to women, recording a percentage of 54.8%, against 45.2%.[17]

At present, Technorati, one of the most popular search engines, revealed a number of 1.327.700 blogs, of which 15171 are political blogs.[18]

3. Political blogs

The political or governmental blogs first emerged in the US when the democrate Howard Dean[19] initiated his own blog in 2003. This model was taken over by John Kerry[20] and Georges W. Bush[21] for the United States of America, Alain Rousset in 2004, France[22], and, for Romania, in 2006, Ioan Mircea Pascu[23] is the first Romanian politician (PSD) who created a personal blog, EUROPOLIS, using however a nickname, Oshanu.

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[13] http://www.zelist.ro/ , 18. 12. 2010.

[14] In order to measure the evolution of this score (a number equalling a few hundreds of thousands), the reference period used was the first week of May 2009, which received the value 100. Thus, the weekly index is the ratio between the score recorded for the current week and the score registered for the first week in May 2009, multiplied by 100. roBlogs_Index=
(Score_current_week/Score_week_May_2009)*100
 Practically, this score expressed the increase in the blogosphere compared to the period of reference. For example, an index equal to 130, indicates the fact that compared to May 2009, the blogosphere increased by 30%.

[15] http://www.zelist.ro/blogosfera, 9.06.2013.

[16] http://www.zelist.ro/monitor/insights/overview/blogosfera/2013_05, retrieved on 15. 06. 2012

[17] http://www.zelist.ro/monitor/insights/overview/blogosfera/2013_05, retrieved on 15. 06. 2013

[18] http://technorati.com/blogs/directory/, retrieved on 9.06.2013.

[19] http://deancalltoaction.blogspot.com/2003_03_09_archive.html, 15. 11. 2010.

[20] http://www.johnkerry.com/blog/, 02. 10. 2010.

[21] http://georgewbush.com/blog/, 02. 10. 2010.

[22] http://www.aquitaine-rousset.net/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=38, 02. 10. 2010.

[23] http://impascu.wordpress.com/2009/12/25/un-nou-inceput/, 02. 02. 2011.

As early as 1992, Bill Clinton and Al Gore made use of the online communication strategies for the first time in the history of electoral campaigns. However, three years later, in 1995, Senator Feinstein, D. Calif launched his first campaign site, while 1996 remains a benchmark in history since Republican Bob Dole was the first candidate who publicly announced the address of his website (Craig 2006, p. 122). Howard Dean and Wesley Clark were the first candidates to create political blogs in 2003, obtaining by means of this strategy certain notoriety both among bloggers and among their supporters. However, Barack Obama was the one who made the widest use of the internet, combining several applications developed over time; he has been in fact considered a pioneer regarding the latest tendencies in creating political campaigns.

In the landscape of Romanian politics, some politicians ensured their success and notoriety based on intuition and improvisation, which proved its "jungle-like"appearance. Ioan Mircea Pascu, Oshanu, the first politician to have embraced blogging, but not the first who assumed this role the moment the blog was created, was the one who "opened" the road to the on-line political communication. The Romanian politicians became active on the Internet, which is one of the most important means of communication used lately. Not infrequently, the blog was also an instrument leading to discussions within a political party or among colleagues, (e.g. PDL EMP Cristian Preda published on his blog that an independent politician will be elected for the Bucharest City Hall, in the person of Nicuşor Dan[24]), or used to express the bloggers' feelings at a certain moment (Adrian Năstase – *Thoughts for Friends*[25]), publish personal photographs or to present certain aspects of a public person's life (Elena Udrea – *Press-release* regarding the divorce)[26].

Far more than "transmitting" the latest news, blogging found a free niche in politics. The Internet and, implicitly the blog, are convenient instruments for politicians in emphasizing their own objectives. Emerging at the beginning of 2000, political blogs were seen as possible instruments in promoting democracy or as an opportunity for the democratic free expression of opinions (Richard Davis, 2009, pp. 5-6). Political analyst Joe Trippi argued that "*the revolution will not be televised; instead it will be blogged*" (Davis 2009, p. 6) and, at the same time, the blogosphere was considered a "mark of emancipation", as it allows formerly marginalized persons to publicly express their ideas (Davis 2009, p. 6). Called "netroots", the place of interaction between political ideas, politicians and audience, the political blogosphere takes the shape of two distinct forms: *common blogs* with a very small audience and a low, barely perceived influence, and *influent blogs* (Davis 2009, p. 35), those considered landmarks in mass-media and

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[24] http://www.antena3.ro/politica/prigoana-a-cerut-in-scris-excluderea-din-pdl-a-lui-cristian-preda-161874.html, retrieved on 01. 09. 2012.
[25] http://nastase.wordpress.com/2012/08/14/un-gand-pentru-prieteni/, retrieved on 05.09.2012.
[26] http://blog.elenaudrea.ro/category/blog, retrieved on 11. 06. 2013.

are widely read. Examples of this kind are *The Huffington Post* and *Adevărul [The Truth]*.

The creation of blogs also led to a fierce competition among political parties, politicians and even mass-media, granting in fact power to the readers and the ability to generate a series of major changes concerning aspects related to *agenda setting* and *media politics*. Besides the fact that the blog grants the politician an increase in trustworthiness and notoriety among the electorate, and also among the bloggers, the reader can offer the politician an entire range of debate topics, while interfering whenever (s)he has something to say in relation to the published materials and can influence the MP's attitude, mentality and actions. *Agenda setting* becomes crucial during the electoral campaign, when voters have to make a decision concerning the candidates.

In establishing the agenda setting, an important role is played by the audience, in direct and active relationship with the mass-media. Thus, three actors participate in the shaping of the electoral agenda, namely, the candidate(s), the media and the audience.

Political blogs are also classified based on several factors: Thus, Rebecca Blood mentions three types of political blogs: filters, personal diaries, notebooks. Filtering blogs emphasize events or things that are external to the blogger, while the blogs classified as personal diaries illustrate the blogger's inner thoughts and ideas (for instance, the thoughts of a blogger). The last category, the notebook is a hybrid between the first two categories[27].

Another category of political blogs is established according to the topics it deals with. The political blog can treat a single topic oriented towards a certain field (for example, the accession policy of the European Union, the war in Iraq, the homosexuals' rights, etc.) or it can be aimed at various political topics. Additionally, the geographical location is an important aspect of political blogs, despite the fact that the Internet is widespread. Some politician bloggers in a certain geographical area can be read or followed by persons in other areas due to their notoriety, visibility, or the function they have.

Another type of political blogs includes the electoral campaign and the electoral blogs, which are all designed to promote candidates and political parties. These blogs are highly popular during the electoral years and, especially, during the electoral campaigns, on an average term with the involvement of bloggers that provide comments and analyses. Eventually, some magazines, such as The New Republic (USA), Adevărul [The Truth] (România), created their own blogs, allowing readers a significant opportunity to participate in writing; unlike the traditional forms of mass media, print space is limited and the editor has the final say on the publication.

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[27] Rebecca Blood, "Weblogs: A History and Perspective", September 7, http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html. retrieved on 15. 12. 2012.

In our analysis we see that there are political blogs blogs that we call "watchdog" pursuing activities as other politicians or even journalists highlighting only their omissions, errors or inaccuracies presented. Finally, although this is not the last type of blog observed during our analyses, there is the political blog dedicated to the political values is promotes.

> "Bloggers interact on a regular basis with their readers, in such a way that this new communication environment can be characterised as being multidimensional, while prints are only bi-dimensional. Political communication in the blogosphere is unlimited in scope and extent. This aspect of political blogging contributes to the revival of the political discourse compared to other modern mass-media." (Pole 2010, p. 5)

4. Research concerning the Romanian political blogosphere

Objectives

From the point of view of the established objectives, this research was aimed at: identifying the MPs present in the on-line environment with a website or a blog; detailing the communication strategies they make use of in the online environment; identifying the interconnections between the Romanian MPs' blogs and the way in which virtual networks of political communication are established; quantifying the active blogs at the level of the entire country (Romania) (on counties and political organisations); identifying the inactive political blogs of the MPs of the current legislature; good practice examples in using the political blogs versus uninspired blogs; specific analyses starting from the blogroll, etc.

Research hypotheses

Within this research, we aimed to test the following hypotheses:
1. Among the Romanian MPs, active blogs usually belong to the younger members (lower age range).
2. The public function held (senator/ deputy) is associated with the status of the blog (active/ inactive).
3. The opening to other blogs through specific links is associated with the political orientation of the bloggers.

Research methodology

Considering the novelty of such an approach in the study of the on-line communication in Romania, and, more precisely, the parliamentary elections in 2012, this research can constitute an exploratory research and, subsequently, a starting point for further research.

This study comprises two complementary analyses: a quantitative and a qualitative one. The quantitative analysis was aimed at quantifying the number of

politicians present in the on-line environment with a site or a blog. Thus, of the 588 Romanian MPs, only 214 corresponded to the selection criteria. The focus of the qualitative analysis was placed on the notoriety of the politician and his/ her blog, the content and comments transparency, the confidence in the target audience as well as the type of blog or site, all based on the on-line communication strategies.

In order to demonstrate the three hypotheses, as well as for the qualitative analysis, we took into consideration only the active networks, that is the blogs or websites that had published at least one article until May 22, 2013; additionally, factors such as political party, county, age, gender, number of visitors on the site and blog, links to other links or bloggers they followed were also considered. The data was processed with the SPSS program.

Data analysis

Following the elections in 2012, the number of Romanian MPs increased from 470 to 488 representatives, of which only 214 are present in the virtual environment with a site or a blog, which proves the fact that politicians are still attached to the *face to face* communication, and have not yet made a central objective to capture the on-line public in their electoral campaign. Moreover, due to the reduced number of on-line MPs, we believe that the younger audience has not been targeted either, since, it is well known that the youth is more and more active on the internet and, implicitly, on the social networks.

The active websites and blogs represent 52% compared to the inactive ones (48%), which proves the fact hat only 112 politicians prefer the new on-line communication technologies. Despite the fact that the Internet also provides the highest visibility to the political environment and political structure, and given the weight it has through the word and the image, following this analysis, it results that politicians still prefer to avoid this communication means. This may be due to the nature of the electorate (they consider to be bot ready), or to the politician him/herself, who is not open to a direct communication with the electorate. Generally, the active candidates' official websites or blogs were created by the candidates' electoral staff, according to the standard definition, with a view to increase the quality of their interaction with the electorate, without, however, reaching their audience on a regular basis.

Following the analysis carried out, of the total number of on-line MPs, only 139 deputies and 75 senators, equalling 65%, respectively 35%, own a website or a blog on which they publish their electoral and parliamentary activity, their hobbies, open letters, Parliament debates, etc. The politicians who are active on the internet have understood that the political communication strategies should be combined with the need to reduce absenteeism in the polls, which led to increased civic participation in the state public affairs by identifying the age segments reluctant to political involvement. Generally, the objectives of the on-line electoral campaign in Romania are aimed at accomplishing three functions specific to the electoral

campaigns, namely, to mobilize voters to vote, to convert voters to a particular party, and to enhance trust among supporters. Studies in the field have shown that the impact of the internet on the political attitude and the behaviour of an individual during elections is focused particularly on the on-line dissemination of news among the potential electors and on persuading the hesitant electors to participate in the polls, rather than on recruiting political followers. (Gibson, Mcallister, 2006, p. 246)

As far as the politicians' gender is concerned, the results have shown that men (82%) were more responsive to the on-line environment and to blogging compared to women (18%), and, at the same time, are more active on social networking sites. This difference in the virtual environment is also explained by the higher number of men compared to women in the Romanian Parliament.

The Social Democrat Party (PSD), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Conservative Party (PC) and the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR) joined their forces and created an alliance called the Social Liberal Union (USL), sharing common governing objectives and priorities. Following the elections in 2012, the alliance gathered most votes both among the deputies and senators, so that, based on the analysis we can argue that it enjoys 65% of the politicians active in the online environment. PSD politicians outran the PNL politicians, with 37% compared to 28%, a rather significant difference also noticeable in the number of politicians in the Parliament; this also showed a higher interest in the on-line communication and information dissemination and a higher emphasis on the younger electorate.
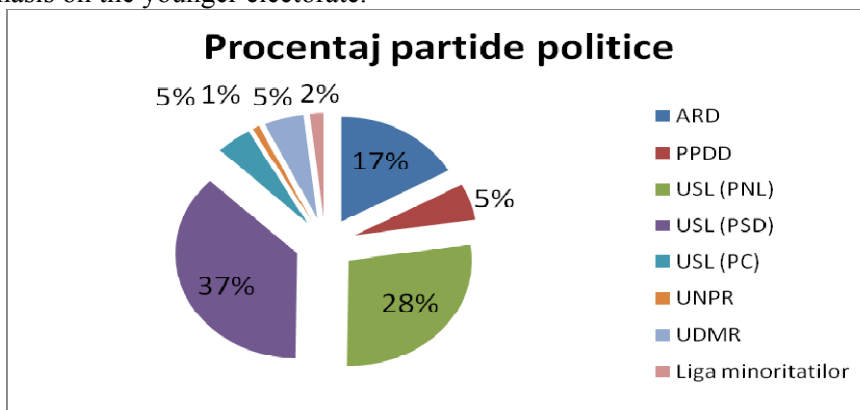
Figure no. 1. Results concerning the percentage of on-line communication for each political party

The rather limited number of on-line politicians is also reflected in their classification by county. Bucharest remains leader as regards the number of on-line active politicians with 34 blogs and websites, of which only 23 are active, remotely followed by Iaşi, with 15 on-line MPs (of which only 8 are active), Cluj with 9

politicians (6 active) and Constanța, Timiș, Dolj, Dâmbovița with only 7 presences (of which Constanța counts one active presence, while the other counties preserve 4 presences each). The rest of the counties present an insignificant number, as it can also be noticed in figure no. 2, which proves once again that the Romanian politicians opted for a traditional electoral campaign, and did not want to excel through innovation.

Figure no. 2. Bloggers' profile by county

In terms of blogs distribution and websites by gender and political parties, it should be noticed that in PSD men are more active (39%) compared to women (31%), while in PNL the situation is reversed, the women registering a higher percentage than men, namely 29% against 27%. A significant difference is noticed for PDL, where women prefer to be active and keep in closer contact with the electorate, by means of the on-line communication.

In order to analyse the first working hypothesis: the active blogs belong to the younger MPs (lower age average), we computed the age of each politician, and then, using the SPSS program, we carried out an average comparison parametric statistical test (Independent sample T-test). Thus, following the calculations, Hypothesis 1 is confirmed: there is a significant difference between the age averages of the MPs who have active blogs versus those who have inactive blogs (F=0.06, t=-1,8, p=0.05). The average age for the active blogs owners is 46.7, while for those with inactive blogs the average is 49.1 years old.
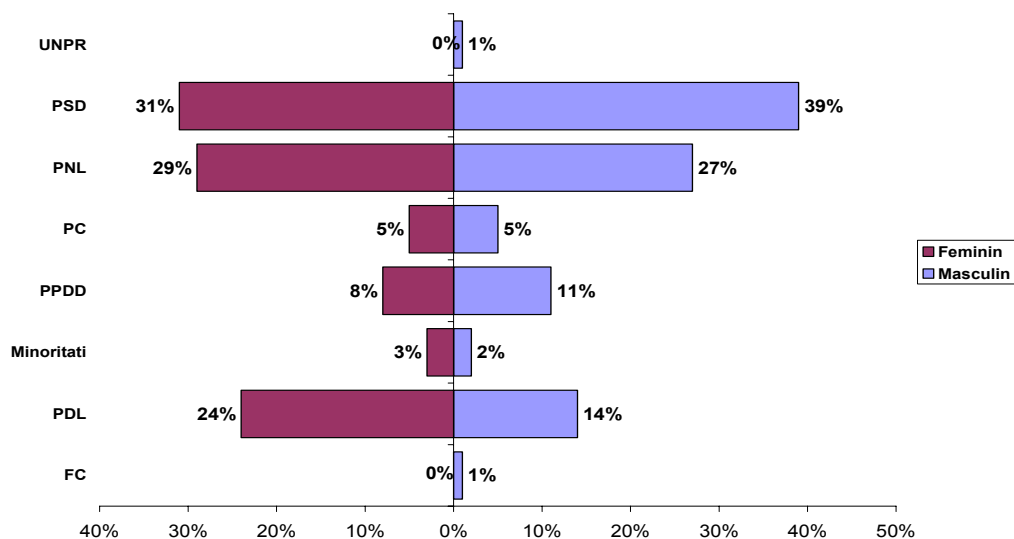
Figure no.3. Blogs distribution by gender and political party

4. Hypothesis 2 - Political function held (senator/ deputy) influences the blogs status (active/ inactive) - is rejected: the variable *type of political function* is not associated with the variable *type of blog* (χ^2=1.3, df=1, p=0.24). The threshold is > 0.05, which means that we have to admit the nullity hypothesis, and that the two variables are not associated. Had the threshold been < 0.05, then the hypothesis would have been accepted and, implicitly, it would have been a significant association. To conclude, it cannot be stated that the political position held influences the type of blog (active/inactive).

Legend:

χ^2 - association coefficient

df – degree of freedom

p - threshold

5. Hypothesis 3 - The opening to other blogs through specific links is associated with the political orientation of the bloggers - is rejected: the variable *political orientation* is not associated with the variable *blog opening* (χ^2=5.1, df=4, p=0.27). Thus, we cannot conclude that a certain political grouping is more open towards various blogs compared to other groupings.

5. Qualitative analysis

For the qualitative analysis of the sites and blogs owned by the Romanian MPs, we examined the communication strategies used in their relationship with the electorate, the chromatic used, as well as the types of messages approached.

The internet has spread rapidly in all fields. However, from a certain point of view, the political class adopted in a first phase with high enthusiasm the new medium of communication, leaving it shortly aside and not fructifying it sufficiently in relation to its effectiveness. Most Romanian MPs connected to the on-line environment publish especially press releases/ press conferences[28], Parliamentary debates[29] and, possibly, some open letters and questions addressed to ministers.[30] Very few Romanian politicians publish articles related to current political issues. The politicians were among the first who created blogs, but not all blogs have regular posts, related to the present-day political agenda. Most of them post messages only on occasions such as Easter, Christmas, March 8th, or other celebrations. In this case, the communication strategy is not the best because there is no consistency in the blog posts, nor can we talk about interactivity, dialogue with their own electorate. It is as if the politician checks the online action without thinking about the consequences produced by this versatility on short, medium and long term.

Alexandru Brăduţ Ulmanu, an expert in *social media*, argues that the political class reluctacy to the on-line communication is caused "on the one hand by a technological barrier, since many MPs were born in an era when the Internet did not exist, and they just do not feel comfortable using the new communication technologies. On the other hand, there is a psychological barrier. Many of these politicians cannot see the usefulness of this medium, they do not understand it, or they understand it to a very limited extent. This includes the lack of habitually to enter a real dialogue with the electors, which should be consistent and permanent, not just focused on the campaign duration. And I believe that image advisers are highly responsible for this situation, since they do not explain their clients that the *social media* instruments can be extremely efficient in creating a stronger connection with the public."[31]

Analysing the political websites and blogs and the MPs performance and use of the virtual environment in the political communication, we should add the fact that the Romanian politician are afraid of the on-line visitors' reactions and comments, which can often be acid, other times using bawdy, even trivial language. At the same time, they resort to blogging to create an image that complies with the new tendencies, although they do not consider that a systematic effort (far from insignificant in fact) to convince their own supporters, future voters, convinced that the blog strengthens already existent electoral options rather than changing them.

The notable performance of the politicians on the social networking sites, such as blogs, brought them a congeniality capital turned, during the electoral

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[28] http://www.romeoradulescu.ro/blog/, retrieved on 02.04.2013

[29] http://popgheorghe.ro/category/activitate/interpelari-adresate-primului-ministru-pdf/, retrieved on 02.04.2013

[30] http://www.raduvasilica.ro/, retrieved on 02.04.2013

[31] Florin Ciocotişan, *Politica în social media* http://impactnews.ro/Politic/Politica-%C3%AEn-social-media-49210retrieved on 25.02.2011.

campaigns, in political capital. In the context of a society under the influence of the digital and the information era, as called by M. Castells, a politician not having a webpage or a blog, a Twitter or Facebook account constitutes a major political error, since any indecision can become permanent at some point, not reaching the on-line environment (Boşoteanu 2012, pp. 140-141).

The degree of Internet usage in the electoral campaign, emphasized by the studies of B. Villalba (Gibson, Nixon and Ward, 2003), in that most candidates and parties used the internet solely for information transfer to the visitors of the websites, in other words a unidirectional communication, was subject to a major change during the European electoral campaigns in 2007 and 2009, by introducing multi-directional interactivity and communication due to the video dissemination websites such as YouTube and social networking sites.

The Romanian politicians' reluctance to the on-line communication is noticeable both in their reduced presence in the on-line environment with a website or blog, and in the fact that many of them do not want to publish materials, and update likely to stir discussions, comments and reactions. Moreover, not even the politicians who have blogs are eager to answer the comments others post on their pages, which shows that there is a direct dialogue with the electorate and the communication is unidirectional. The interactivity level is very low, lacking the *user to user* communication, since politicians do not answer their voters' comments. Generally, political blogs have been equally used for dialogue and information exchange, but also for promoting video recordings, but only during the campaign.

Since only 214 of all politicians are active on-line, we should point out the fact that most of them are political blogs that do not approach deep topics, the bloggers preferring instead the political blog/ site only during the political campaign, the candidate promoting his/ her campaign for a short period of time. Therefore, the preferred chromatic for these blogs was based on juxtaposing or joining the colours characteristic to the political party the bloggers belonged to, suggesting thus the their political adherence[32] However, in most political websites or blogs desplayed the party's logo, with a view to familiarize the audience from the very beginning

Generally, those who created political blogs only for the electoral campaign had the homepage structured as follows: Home/ About us/ Parliamentary activity/ Biography/ Events/ Program/ News/ Contact, often failing to allow users to post comments to the articles published, which proves the total lack of interactivity. The strategies used for preserving a direct contact with the electorate, through the website or blog interactivity were undoubtedly taken of their campaign plan.

Political communication has a double dimension: *discursive and institutional* (Beciu 2011, p. 227), available in most of the benchmark definitions. Thus, we notice that political discourse reveals, among others, the way in which political people relate to different "systems", such as: the electorate, the mass media, other

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[32] http://www.raduvasilica.ro/, http://andreigerea.wordpress.com/tag/andrei-dominic-gerea/, http://ion-raducanu.ro/, http://popa-octavian.blogspot.ro/, http://guduvasile.com/, http://tigaeru.ro/ etc.

political factors. The new media, the Internet foremost, claims even more from the political individual: forming the political message as an "interaction" with the voter – the social distance between the politician and the elector diminishes, the image of the politician – "friend" prevails over the image of the politician as a statesman.

A small part of the Romanian politicians have revered in the their discourse the standard norms that they need to observe and have understood the role of the new technology to the purpose of political communication. The greatest part of the political class uses the blog or the website only as a technique of type *spin – doctor* in order to turn the situation in the politician's favour , even if this entails appealing to false information, distorting certain contexts or creating false, artificial contexts, only in the service of the political individual's positive visibility. During electoral campaigns, we may notice how the phenomenon named digital guerrilla is developing progressively and helps shaping this *spin-doctor* strategy. Furthermore, many blogs in Romanian politics are used mostly to attack other persons, seeing that the politician cannot attribute direct incriminations to its contender. Press conferences, and even statements, are heralded on blogs just to create a good relationship with the journalists, but, at the same time, politicians forget what are the blog's functions and, maybe, most importantly, they forget about the electorate with whom they must maintain a relationship of "friendship". Their strategy of posting only the press statements is not one of the best because they don't offer an objective feedback, it cannot constitute a strategic content, and moreover it is not possible to obtain a position in the online political environment. Creativity, critical judgement, and knowledge are totally missing form the politician's communication strategies.

Figure no. 4. Dan Cristian Popescu's blog screenshot

The language used by the candidates has expressed the data necessary to use a perception on his/ her identity, through biographical elements and those pertaining to the political and ideological platform. The function and the role of the blog and the website isn't completely grasped and, for this reason, we were able to find in the posted articles the polite pronoun, the third person, singular, the impersonal tone, even for the blog's owner: *"PSD Senator Florin Constantinescu drew a short economic analysis of the Romania's situation."*

Romanian politicians are not eager to create online communities or to realise certain connexions among politicians, as those who own a blog either don't have a blogroll, or they only make references to the party it belongs and its structures, One of their advantages would be the references toward certain journalists, but in this respect as well the strategies of collaboration with the entire mass media are infringed, as the blogroll presents only those in the already positioned televisions. Frequently, a strategy that awards notoriety seems to be used by the politicians that wish to break through anonymity, and it consists in making references toward as many links as possible containing the structure's top politicians. This system has a very important role when we discuss political blogs, as in this case the bloggers at the top of the political structure experience a certain pressure due to the relentless supply of fresh, relevant and first-hand information (Sălcudeanu, 2009, p. 37). Once the popular bloggers receive and transmit important news, these get to the entire mass media, which feels bound to publish them.
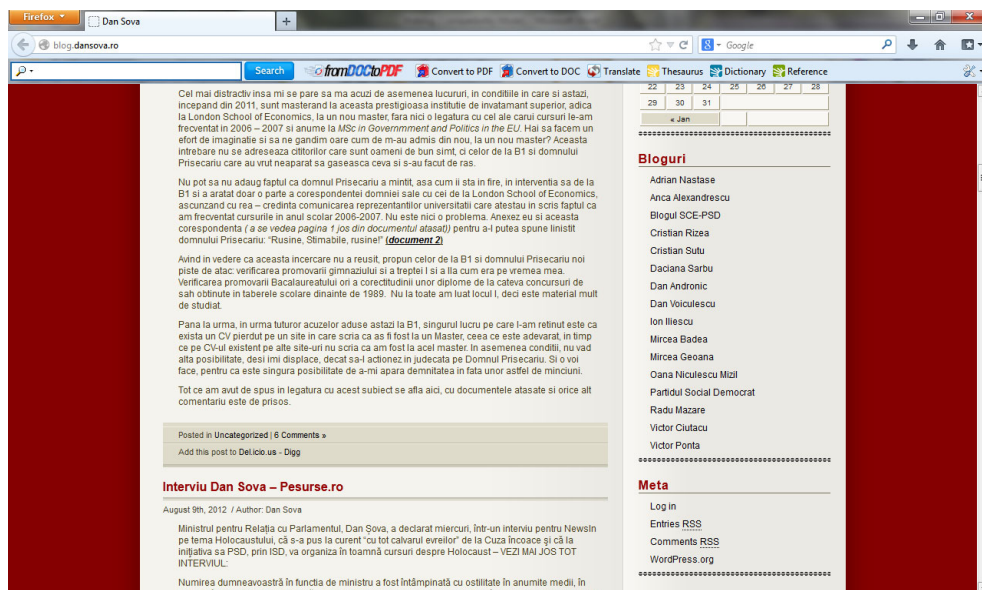

Figure no. 5. Deputy Dan Șova's blog

Figure no. 6. Deputy Dan Șova's blog with blogroll

From the total number of online Romanian politicians, we may construe a few blog typologies that, one way or another, fall into the great classifications, despite the multitude or the lack of *information* they display. Thus, we are presented with blogs where the profession and the hobbies (music, fishing) are more important than the political activity (deputy Mihai's blog, deputy T. Ciuhodaru's blog, deputy Alexandru Petru Frătean's blog). Politicians in this category discuss with their own electorate on medical subjects or musical subjects, hence giving them the possibility to be more informed in these domains. The most numerous of their postings don't benefit from comments, as they lack their associated box.[33]

Blogs dedicated to *gossip* or *entertainment* are very much accessed by the Romanian political class. Even the categories where they place their posts have funny names (for ex., Wings, bricolage, Demos, Crack the bell, Gourmand/ Gourmet, and so on) which actually emphasizes certain defining features of the politician (deputy Alexandru Petru Frătean's blog). Politicians frequently prefer to name their blogs using words with a certain connotation and implication, like deputy Cristian Badea – *Bad Dog*, or Radu Zlati: *Welcome on* **Radu Zlati's Blog,** *follower of* **Gondolin's Yellow Blog***. It's a* **blog** *because it is… the which is (quoting the eternal Vanghelie: "carele" instead of "care"). It's* **galben** *because yellow is one of the colours of the Liberal National Party… and it is yellow also because gold is yellow, and* **Zlati***'s root contains, in Slavic languages, the term*

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[33]http://cameliabogdanici.ro/, http://marinburlea.blogspot.ro/, http://medicalnet.ro/blog/ciuho/, http://www.mihaisturzu.ro/blog/

gold (golden). The blog belonged to **Gondolin** *because the person writing for you has chosen, many years ago, to use the name Gondolin for its apparitions in the web space. Gondolin was me... but I am somewhat more than him (or at least I hope so).*[34],[35]

To these types of blogs we can also add phenomena pertaining to the media discourse centred essentially on trivia: politicians publicised as "contestants" that need to pass a series of "tests" and distinguish themselves through their capacity to withstand the tests imposed by a media device (Beciu 2011, p. 242). Moreover, one more important item for the communication strategies is represented by the technique of type *storytelling* by invoking certain values, symbols that should represent them as politicians. Romanian politicians generally resort to the same strategy and technique of storytelling, that is, his position as a family man, a normal individual who shares the same interests with the common individual.
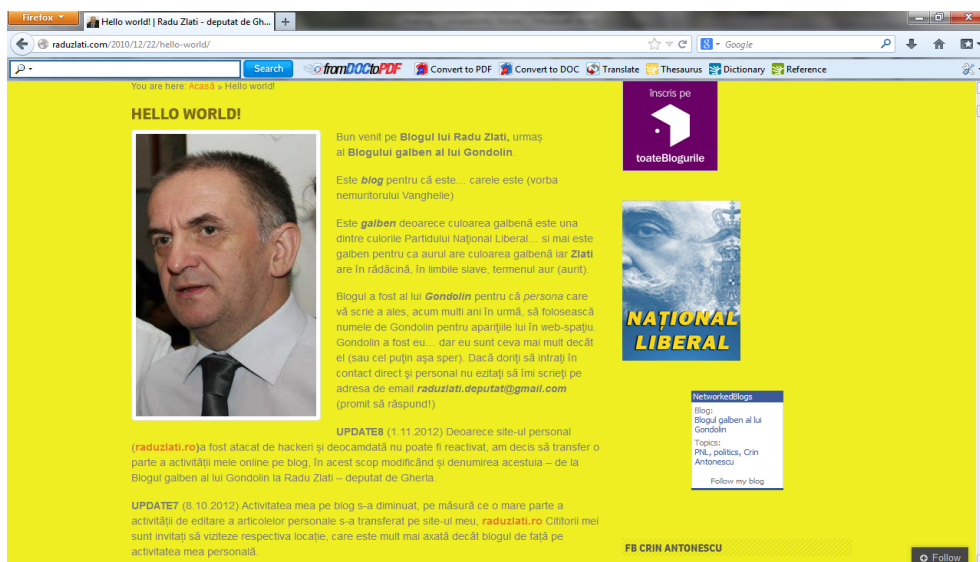

Figre no. 7. Radu Zlati's blog

However, Romanian politicians usually fall short and, after acquiring the blog domain, they block the account and fuel false hopes for the electorate by using the following post: "site under construction". We used a symbolic name for this type of site or blog: *abandoned blogs*. (Cătălin Boboc, Vasile Blaga, Liviu Codârlă).[36]

The last type of blog spotted in the Romanian politicians' blogosphere is precisely the *political blog* where the political activity is predominant. This is the

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[34] http://www.alexandru.fratean.ro/
[35] http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:j1y4EvVI2JAJ:yellowgondolin.wordpress. com/+&cd=1&hl=ro&ct=clnk&gl=ro, retrieved on 23. 05. 2013.
[36] http://dumitruioana.blogspot.ro/, http://tudorchiuariu.ro,

place where current issues of the Romanian politics are debated according to the ideologies shared by politicians. Among the names offering a certain notoriety and visibility of the Romanian political blogosphere we mention Elena Udrea, Victor Ponta, Alina Gorghiu, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, Mircea Geoană, Petre Roman, Rovena Plumb, but they often fail to provide the necessary force. The active politicians are those who reward their target audience, possibly voter, by offering "benefits" such as: Elena Udrea will go out for coffee with one of the fans of her page when she reaches the threshold of 50,000 visitors. This type of strategy attracts more readers, more fans on the blog, and offers a certain notoriety and visibility to her political page.[37]

In Romania, the blogosphere didn't have a very powerful impact, but due tot the problems existent inside political parties, between parties, or between the Government and the President, blogs were quoted more and more as sources for information dissemination. Some political activists have resigned from the party or from a political function and have announced this option on the blog, others have posted information that was considered valuable at that time.

Despite the technological evolution highly noticeable in all the domains and, especially, in politics, the Romanian electorate is not trained, adapted to take information from the blogs. At the same time, Romanian politicians don't adapt their style toward novelty and don't give the electorate their due importance. This type of example is also represented by the communication strategy embraced by deputy Liviu Codârlă, who hasn't updated his page since the parliamentary elections in 2008, when he was elected for PDL. In 2012, he won the deputy mandate in another college and for PP-DD. From the lack of interest shown by the politicians toward the electorate and toward the new strategies of communication it ensures that the stake of the proper electorate is reduced to traditional marketing. The technological advance and the expansion in the use of the Internet as a means of information, communication, and mass entertainment, the trend in electoral marketing was constituted by the premises of the online strategy only in certain candidates for the parliamentary elections in Romania 2012.

6. Conclusions

Issues related to new media and on-line communication strategies constitute nowadays a great challenge for the society as a whole, but also to a very high extent to the political life. The internet, engine and promoter of new media, revolutionised the mentality and the daily activity of the modern individual, innovating and transforming the institutional practice of our society, diversifying the techniques and strategies of political life.

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[37] http://www.alinagorghiu.ro/, http://www.tariceanu.ro/, http://blog.elenaudrea.ro/, http://blogponta.wordpress.com/,

The weblog, a website consisting of new, various writings, on-line diaries, adopted in various social environments, tends to generalise but also to acquire a more professional or specialised dimension. If initially, the opinion makers and politicians created blogs, nowadays each user who considers (s)he has something to communicate and wishes to integrate into a virtual community can create his/her own blog, both on free and paid platforms.

In Romania, politicians integrated rapidly into the new technological wave, inscribing in the application of its various forms of communication by creating sites and blogs even if their interest was, and still is not systematic. At the same time, the reluctance of the political class towards the new communication mediums is obvious, on the one hand, because of the technological handicap, age constituting both an obstacle and an advantage, on the other hand, of the mental impediment. At the same time, the Romanian MPs feel both uncertain and insecure in this on-line environment, due to their incapacity to anticipate the visitors' reactions. Acid, bawdy and direct comments of the internet users are not likely to encourage them to move past these obstacles. Not even the image advisers or the PRs managed to convince them to adhere to an intense exploitation of the virtual environment in the electoral campaign. Nevertheless, during the first decade of the new millennium, we notice an increasing tendency to fructify the potential on-line environment in the electoral campaign.

To conclude, we should point out the fact that, despite the political class emancipation through the adoption of new communication techniques and strategies, the Romanian politicians do not make enough use of the on-line environment and do not know how to communicate with the electorate by means of blogs or websites. The Romanian politicians are reluctant to the on-line communication, and, consequently, when they create blogs or websites, they prefer to be always assimilated to the political structure they belong. Even if we live nowadays in the era of technology, we cannot discuss about a professionalisation of the political communication as a specialisation process of the various activities composing the interaction among politics, electorate, media and civil society.

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