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MEDIATIZATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN EUROPE

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Abstract

The material considers political manipulation in social networks, which is one of the important political aspects of communication in election campaigns. The aim of the study is to identify the features of the use of political manipulation technologies in European social networks based on an analysis of the presidential elections in France. The material demonstrates the different uses of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and others) in the presidential election campaigns in France in 2012 and 2017 with an emphasis on the younger generation, due to the greatest susceptibility to hidden management, because they are more impulsive and do not have distinct life landmarks. Social networks and platforms are considered as a tool for changing and complementing traditional media. Political programs are considered as a start to the stream of comments on the social network Twitter on television; joining a TV audience to a social network for a detailed analysis of the biography of politicians; considered television as a mediator of ideas in this case. The material also provides an example of an analysis of the digitalization risks of the election campaign in France during the presidential election, the use of specially created computer games, as well as bots during election campaigns. The material in some cases compares the use of social networks in France and Russia, a forecast is made regarding work in the media.

Keywords: Electoral processes, mediatisation, presidential company, social networks

1. Introduction

Social networks and other media are becoming an important political resource and at the same time a powerful tool for manipulating public opinion. Such social networks as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and others are gaining worldwide popularity. Political manipulation is a system of psychological methods that affect the masses in politics. A simple person draws information from accounts on social networks of politicians and succumbs to the influence of political manipulation. The main characteristic features were identified and considered during political manipulation in modern electoral processes (for example, the presidential election in France) on social networks, due to the fact that in election campaigns this tendency is gaining the greatest popularity. For the analysis were taken elections in France (Rodionova et al., 2019).

2. Problem Statement

Politicians have become increasingly aware that the Internet can be used as an environment of political influence. The political Internet helps create the most complete image of the candidate; provide feedback with the electorate, journalists, other political leaders and other important functions that are used in electoral processes.

This study analyzes the presidential election in France (2017) with an emphasis on the younger generation, due to the greatest susceptibility to hidden management, because it is more impulsive and does not have clear life guidelines. The problem of the study is to study the practices of applying political manipulation in social networks, comparing European and Russian experience.

3. Research Questions

The main objectives of the study: to analyze the technology of political manipulation, which are used in social networks; conduct a comparative study of political manipulation in social networks on the example of the presidential election in France.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify the features of the use of political manipulation technologies in European social networks based on an analysis of the presidential elections in France.

5. Research Methods

The paper used quantitative and qualitative methods, in particular the comparative method, content analysis and discourse analysis. The paper explores political manipulation during the presidential campaign in France (2012, 2017) Twitter, Facebook, YouTube by Emmanuel Macron; Twitter, Facebook, Snap Chat Marine Le Pen and other candidates (Le Pen, 2020; Macron, 2020a, 2020b).

6. Findings

General findings of the study:

1. A third of all time on the Internet people devote to social networks. The average user spends 2 hours 15 minutes a day, flipping through a feed and communicates on social platforms. And youth – about 3 hours. If you do not consider SMM as a channel for attracting the electorate, then you are inferior to competitors.

2. 98% of online users are registered in social networks. Quite a large part of them are adults 55-64 years old. Therefore, you need to choose the right social networks and publics in which you want to publish a message.

3. Social networks – the main source of information for consumers.

People in the age range of 16-24 years old prefer to search for information about everything on social networks, rather than in search engines. Therefore, each party leader / presidential candidate must have a page on the social network and public groups. 4. Watching a video – a favourite activity on social networks.

Video posts receive the most active response, therefore, before the election, candidates place orders with bloggers who are respected by the Internet audience (the most popular in history is the project "Thank you, Eve!").

The paper analyzes studies that relate to the whole of Europe as a whole, although France has a slightly different alignment of the popularity of social networks.

The most popular social networks by time spent in them in France (2018) are Facebook (70%); Twitter (5%); Instagram (10%); Snapchat (15%). Facebook remains the main channel of communication in social networks despite the hype that is directly related to its creator, Mark Zuckerberg. Snapchat is very popular in France, so many politicians have drawn attention to this social platform in order to attract a young electorate. According to statistics, the microblog is not so popular among the population, where the population of France most often reads the main news and leaves microposts with hashtags (Rodionova et al., 2018).

According to the results of the statistical survey "Internet users who visited social networks in the last month". Regarding Facebook, the statistics are about 65%; YouTube – 65%; Twitter – less than 20%. France by country takes the penultimate place in the ranking for visiting data on social networks (Kaminskaya, 2018).

By percentage, social networks by age in Europe are as follows: Instagram: 16-24: 37%; YouTube: 16-24: 31%; Twitter: 16-24: 29%; Facebook: 16-24: 25%. As we can see, according to statistics, the "youngest" social network is Instagram, so if campaign managers want to attract the youngest voters, they should contact Instagram and YouTube.

In Europe, in particular in France, FB and Twitter are very popular. In France, 80% of people connected to the Internet, this is one of the largest indicators in Europe. But the French Government has established a taboo on pronunciation on television of the words FB and Twitter. This is an active opposition to the use of social networks (Pyrma et al., 2019; Zubov, 2019).

Paris is the second largest city in Europe by the number of active Twitter users. The young generation aged 18 to 24 years dominates the social networks of France. The LinkedIn social network is also popular there. It is a platform for finding and establishing business contacts. It is preferred by business audiences. Twitter is well represented by an audience older than 55 years, it played an important role in the presidential election in France in 2012 and 2017. Facebook is more represented by the student audience.

Other popular social networks in France are: skyrock, MySpace, badoo.com, instagram and trombi.com (Feldman et al., 2019; Pyrma, 2019).

According to the analysis of the use of presidential elections in France in 2012 and 2017 on social networks, 75% of the French population are active Internet users. 25 million users have Facebook accounts. The total population of France is 66 million. 43 million are voters. In 2012, Social Networks became the first part of the candidates' election campaign. Participants: Nicolas Sarkozy, Jean-Luc Melanshon, Marine Le Pen, Eva Joli and Francois Hollande. Let's look at this example on the campaign of Nicolas Sarkozy. He relied on Facebook — the most popular social network among the French population. The campaign headquarters of Nicolas Sarkozy has even released a phone app. What attracted the attention of the audience Nicolas Sarkozy? He posted on Facebook becoming himself a politician. The former president of France was in politics when he was a student (Lapina, 2018).

The most popular political Twitter account is Francois Hollande's account. At that time, he had 224,000 subscribers (currently 2 million subscribers). For comparison, Nicolas Sarkozy's figures were much lower (2012-157 000; 2020-2 million subscribers).

Social networks continue to change traditional media. It is worth saying that traditional media and social platforms complement each other. An interesting example is the political programs that launched the stream of comments on the social network Twitter on television. The TV audience joined a social network to analyze politicians in detail. Television is the mediator of ideas in this case: on TV politicians pronounce phrases during the primaries, and on social networks, the electorate discusses this in the comments. Citation of media and other social resources increased by almost 20% (Analitics, Macron). The most notable examples of such media are the American huffingtonpost.fr and fr.news.yahoo.com, as well as the Russians francais.rt.com and fr.sputniknews.com. It was the Russian media that refused to accredit Macron, who also accused them of distributing disproved fake news, and after last year's leak of data from his campaign headquarters, he accused the Russian media of this, which was easy to predict.

But there are risks of digitalization of the election campaign. In 2012, Nicolas Sarkozy's FB account was hacked in France. The following information was published on the page by hackers: "Dear compatriots, in connection with the emergency situation experienced by our country, I, in my right mind and firm memory, decided not to run for office in 2012" (Kaminskaya et al., 2019, p. 387). Such information was written on the policy page with spelling errors. But a refutation of this information came only a few hours later. The incident itself caused additional press interest.

An important role is played by technologies of social networks. In his presidential campaign, E. Macron used a 3-step mechanism using Big Data. Firstly, a bet was made on the geographical segmentation of the country. France was defeated on the scale of a city block. Secondly, the voting history, demographic statistics, and social survey data were superimposed on these zones. Thirdly, these data served as a distribution of priorities in the campaign, work schedule, the presence of volunteers. The vectors of Big Data and social networks are closely interconnected (Erokhin et al., 2018; Seceleanu, 2009).

One of the most interesting political moves was that Fiscal Combat was released specifically at the request of political strategists Jean-Luc Melanshon. The game was well-promoted on social networks, so it found a response among the Internet audience. The protagonist of the game is a pixel man who looks like Melanshon. He walks down the street and meets the following personalities: Nicolas Sarkozy, Christine

Lagarde, Emmanuel Macron and Francois Fillon. The objective of the game: to shake out as much money as possible from your opponents. Marine Le Pen was not involved here, because she does not belong to the oligarchic family (Kuznetsov & Rodionova, 2018).

The political strategists of Emmanuel Macron relied on bots who wrote positive information about him, but negative about his opponents. Emmanuel Macron did not forget about the young electorate, he engaged the YCM group for his political campaign. The essence of the clip is that the characters watch TV and switch from Marine Le Pen to Emmanuel Macron. The text consists of the words Emmanuel Macron, the name of the song is exactly the same (Brand Analytics, 2017). The clip scored 66,052 views, this shows that few people watched this video.

7. Conclusion

Summing up, it must be noted that political manipulation in social networks is in the electoral processes is one of the important political aspects of communication in the election campaigns. The study demonstrated the different uses of social networks in election campaigns in France (2012, 2017). In France, the more common social networks in Europe are used: Facebook and twitter, while in Russia the most traditional Russian networks are involved: VK, Odnoklassniki and Telegram.

An analysis of the work was carried out on secondary sociological studies. In France, studies were taken that concerned only the social network Facebook. In this study, the EzyInsights Center showed that Marine Le Pen was popular on Facebook due to its anti-rating (Negative mention on FB: 350 thousand times). The content analysis once again confirmed that a negative rating makes a candidate several times more popular than other candidates. The second study used in the course work was Brands-analytics analytics. The point is that advertising social networks and media on television leads a new Internet audience to the candidates' page. The study conducted its own research on the number of subscribers in social networks of presidential candidates of the Russian Federation and France, made a SWOT analysis of political manipulation in social networks.

Social networks will undoubtedly be one of the main sources of political manipulation. Yes, they have their advantages and disadvantages. But the minuses will be eliminated, as was done earlier, in connection with the development of a digital society and the capabilities of the Internet. Political strategists will have a narrower profile on social networks and the Internet. The study showed that in Russia, representatives of the opposition movement are more developed on social networks than traditional candidates. The opposition is actively using Telegram channels, Instagram and YouTube. She goes online and gives feedback to her audience (Dombrovskaya et al., 2019).

The more social networks develop, the more actively politicians will use them in their activities. This is a modern and long-term trend that will operate throughout the 21st century. Social networks are most actively used during the preparation of elections of various government bodies (presidential elections, local government elections, etc.). This case is clearly visible on the example of Russia and France. Currently, social networks allow citizens to communicate the interests of society most effectively and quickly to power. It cannot be ruled out that real politics can completely move to the virtual space, in particular to social networks.

Young people demonstrate fundamentally new formats for "reading" information, and also interpret political reality in a new way. Generation Z is the country's future. Political strategists should pay special attention to interaction with young minds and present information more interestingly, in the language of youth.

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