

MONIKA PODKOWIŃSKA

MEDIA AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

The political communication is inextricably linked with the mass communication and media, as the “political communication does not exist in the modern world without the mass media, which today constitute the centre of all social processes.”¹ It is the area of social communication, which is often identified with public communication. However, both these concepts are not synonymous. Therefore, it is important to clearly define what social, public and political communication are, as well as what are the differences and similarities between them.

As part of social communication it is possible to distinguish the system of political and public communication. Public communication is different from the private one not because the subject of the conversation concerns the public or private matters, but the issues relating to the recipients, because its essence is the assumption that there is a collective and intended recipient. What’s more, the sender in the public situation can be individual or collective, but it is always of the institutional nature, and so the source of the message is not the private person, but represents the particular institution.²

With regard to political communication it is worth noting that it is an extremely wide and varied area of social communication, because it “contains the elements and propagandas and advertisements and public relations and finally the

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¹ Ewa SZKUDLAREK-ŚMIECHOWICZ, „Komunikowanie polityczne”, in *Komunikowanie publiczne. Zagadnienia wybrane*, eds. Barbara KUDRA and Elwira OLENICZAK (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014), 28.

² SZKUDLAREK-ŚMIECHOWICZ, „Komunikowanie polityczne,” s. 26.

so-called political marketing. It is usually a one-way communication, a kind of transmission.”³ So it is the communication, which allows you to build relations between different levels of government and citizens,⁴ However, it is worth remembering that the one-way nature of political communication changes under the influence of using modern communicative solutions. New media, the Internet allow a faster feedback and the unlimited exchange of messages. They convert the one-way political communication into two-way communication, giving the possibility of a rapid response to the citizens and recipients of the political messages. As noted by Jeziński “[. . .] new media entered the world of political games in a decisive step, while the politicians became the subjects of new media and «victims» of the methods of action of people employed in them.”⁵ Recipients at any time can – day or night – not only respond, but also comment – they become the commentators of the political life, specific events of a political nature.

While analyzing the impact of new media upon the development of civil society, the function of remarkable facilitation of citizens’ public presentation of their opinions on social issues seems very important. This type of activity may take various forms, from commenting on news sites, through participating in online debates, up to running own websites devoted to selected aspects of public life. In each of the aforementioned instances, internet users may actively contribute to the public opinion understood as citizens’ common judgment of public affairs which influences authorities and their decisions.⁶

It is therefore, worth paying attention to the importance of the media in the area of political communication.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE SPHERE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

The process of communication is an indispensable element of the actions implemented also in the sphere of politics. „An issue of overlap politics and the media is as old as the history of communication. However, models of cooperation

³ Barbara KUDRA, „O komunikacji społecznej”, in *Komunikowanie publiczne. Zagadnienia wybrane*, 21.

⁴ KUDRA, „O komunikacji społecznej”.

⁵ Marek JEZIŃSKI, „Po co politykom nowe media? O politycznym istnieniu w wirtualnej przestrzeni”, *Nowe Media* 2(2010): 11.

⁶ Jakub PARNES, “Internet Media as the Digital Public Sphere: Possibilities and Problems”, *Central European Journal of Communication* 1(16) (2016): 90.

or competition between the representatives of these two spheres are not constant.”⁷ We cannot talk about politics without communication and the media. The use of modern communicative solutions is not limited only to election campaigns, but is an integral part of the political life at every step of its development. So, “without communication it is impossible to realise the politics,”⁸ and the effects of this process of course depend on the proper selection of tools and forms of communication.

“Political communication deals with the formulation of the political offer and convincing about its equity based on the marketing techniques.”⁹ It is the intentional communication of meanings relating to the sphere of politics.¹⁰ This terms is therefore extremely broad, complex and multifaceted, and the important issue in the area of considerations relating to this type of communication is to draw the attention of participants of this communication situation. The largest group are the citizens, although as it is believed by Dobek-Ostrowska “among three cells of the political communication, citizens, [...] are extremely neglected, not represented, the weakest and the worst organised.”¹¹ The author draws attention to the specific relations and networks of interactions between the participants, and so the political actors and the media, the media and the citizens, and the political actors and citizens.¹² Political actors can come both in the form of units and the institutions – politicians, but also governmental institutions. “What distinguished the political actor from other participants of the communication process is his behaviour.”¹³

The political actors begin the political communication, decide of its form and course. As it is pointed out by Krzysztof Mikołajewski, they must be aware of the importance of the communication sent, as their each communicative behaviour, regardless of the intentions, is subject to decoding, interpretation by the recipients. Just like the specific communicative behaviour is perceived and interpreted by the citizens, also the lack of messages is a kind of a message, which is subject to decoding and can bring a specific result in the form of the specific behaviour of

⁷ Bartosz HORDECKI, Dorota PIONTEK, “Journalists and Politicians in Television Interviews after Elections: A Redefinition of Roles?,” *Central European Journal of Communication* 2014, 7: 210.

⁸ Łukasz PRZYBYSZ, *Komunikowanie polityczne 2.0. Analiza amerykańskiej i polskiej kampanii prezydenckiej* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2013), 11.

⁹ Bogusława DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007), 124.

¹⁰ Tomasz PŁUDOWSKI, *Komunikacja polityczna w amerykańskich kampaniach wyborczych*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2014), 10.

¹¹ DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 120.

¹² DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 120.

¹³ Krzysztof MIKOŁAJEWSKI, „Komunikowanie polityczne w kontekście zmian technologicznych i społecznych współczesnego świata”, in *Komunikacja społeczna – tendencje, problemy, wyzwania*, ed. Monika Podkowińska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SGGW, 2014), 11.

recipients or can impact the sender's image. "Political actors, if they are not involuntary senders, have to learn how to control this process and use it in the implementation of specific political goals."¹⁴ An important issue in this regard is the ability to predict the results that in the area of the image and impact on the recipients will come from the specific communicative behaviour, or its lack. It is important to take into account the fact that in the case of the political communication of the indirect character, the interpretation of the message by the citizens will be impacted by the factor intermediating between the sender and the recipient. The indirect nature of the message may lead to the distortions and other than the intended interpretation of the message sender. Other "rules govern" the interpersonal communication, and others the indirect communication. Thus, also the way of communicating specific contents should be adapted not only to the recipients, but it should also take into account the specificity of the indirect communication and the meaning of the media in the area of the information flow of the political nature. Krzysztof Mikołajewski emphasises that "political communication is a complex process, where the message can be often reinterpreted in the «media treatment» before it reaches the final recipient, who not always has the sufficient competence, to properly interpret it."¹⁵ We should also remember that due to the increase of the importance of the visual communication, with the increase of the image in the area of communication (including political communication) senders should pay attention not only to the language of the statement but also all non-verbal communications, which determine among others the impression on the audience.

Moreover, in the case of political communication, in which the citizens are the recipients – especially in the area of election campaign – we can talk about persuasive communication, which makes the senders become helpless in the face of the quantity and quality of the persuasive message. You can even talk about the subject reference to the citizens, as "in the contemporary times the citizen is treated instrumentally. His significance is emphasised during elections."¹⁶ Politicians use the political communication mainly to realise the goal, which is to gain or to maintain the power. The function of exerting impression on the citizens is to serve the implementation of the assumed political goals. Therefore, there is no doubt

¹⁴ MIKOŁAJEWSKI, „Komunikowanie polityczne,” 22.

¹⁵ MIKOŁAJEWSKI, „Komunikowanie polityczne,” 22-23.

¹⁶ Małgorzata WINIARSKA-BRODOWSKA, *Europa Obywateli? Proces komunikowania politycznego w Unii Europejskiej* (Sosnowiec: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Humanitas”, 2014), 47.

that this communication is of the persuasive nature and although in some situations we can talk about its two-way nature, only one side is more active.

Asymmetry of the entities is related to the essence of political communication, where politicians and political organisations are active entities (political parties, institutions) or quasi political (interest groups), which through the process of communication seek to achieve the impact in the citizens (electors) directly or indirectly through the media.¹⁷

Of course, political communication has several important functions. It allows you to maintain contact between the political actors and citizens, and this to transfer feedback to the politicians. It is to inform the politicians on the expectations and problems of citizens. It also allows to impact the behaviour of the voters. Therefore, we can indicate a few basic functions, which are played by the political communication. These are:¹⁸ cooperative function, homeostatic function, conciliation function, imperative function, creative function, cognitive function.

When considering the issues related to political communication it is also worth paying attention to a kind of divergence of interests, which arises between different participants of the communicative situation, which is the political communication. These participants, who are in a situation of conflict, we can include both the citizens, politicians, journalists and the owners of the media. As it is noted by Płudowski, “the conflict between journalists and citizens includes the fact that the former would like to produce a more sophisticated form than most citizens can accept, and especially pay for it. Journalists are in a conflict with the politicians, which core is the control over the content of communication.”¹⁹ We can talk similarly in the case of the conflict between journalists and the media owners and the citizens and politicians. In the case of citizens and politicians we can see this conflict in relation to issues related to the responsibility for own actions and behaviour. Citizens expect that the politicians will show this responsibility and maturity in actions, thus confirming their reliability and credibility. “While politicians (it is hoped that some of them) can strive to the avoidance of such a responsibility.”²⁰ Their goal is to convince the citizens to some arguments and specific behaviour, what will allow the implementation of the main political goal, which is to maintain or gain power. Of course, the level of activity of political actors is disproportionately greater than in the case of citizens, who although have the possibility to transfer the feedback and thus to impact the politicians and modify

¹⁷ MIKOŁAJEWSKI, „Komunikowanie polityczne,” 11.

¹⁸ MIKOŁAJEWSKI, „Komunikowanie polityczne,” 10.

¹⁹ PŁUDOWSKI, *Komunikacja polityczna w amerykańskich kampaniach wyborczych*, 70.

²⁰ PŁUDOWSKI, *Komunikacja polityczna w amerykańskich kampaniach wyborczych*, 70.

their behaviour, still the range of tools and communicative forms used by the political actors is incomparably wider. Moreover, it is worth noting that “the primacy of political actors lies in the fact that they initiate and determine the goal and nature of communication. Citizens, depending on their involvement and susceptibility to the impact, react to the flowing messages, providing valuable feedback on the efficiency of the impact, modifying the behaviour of political actors.”²¹ However, the process of political communication is mainly initiated by political actors who give it the proper form and direction with the use of specific communication tools.

THE MEDIA IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

It is difficult to talk about political communication now without paying attention to the media. At the core of the political communication lies the mass communication, because “in modern societies people get information and shape their political opinions mainly through the media, primarily television.”²² You could say that the media have become a tool in the hands of political actors, serving influencing citizens. The media mediate in passing specific political messages, serving not only informing, but most of all influencing and building the specific public image. “To impact the minds and will of people, the opposing political options, embodied in the parties and candidates, are thus used by the media as a kind of basic communication means for impacting and persuasion.”²³

But can you limit the role of the media only to a tool for political actors to realize their political goals? Certainly not. It is obvious that “in case of political communication the role of the mass media is reduced to the role of intermediary in the transmission of messages of political parties, institutions, public authorities and political elites to the citizens.”²⁴ Without the media it would not be possible to quickly and immediately reach the wide audience, however, we should remember that the media are an active participant of political communication. On one hand they act as an intermediary, who pass the political message to the citizens, but on the other, they are an entity of the political stage, which decides about the subject and form of the sent messages, interprets, subjects to criticism and

²¹ MIKOŁAJEWSKI, „Komunikowanie polityczne”, 11.

²² Manuel CASTELLS, *Siła tożsamości* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2008), 336.

²³ Manuel CASTELLS, *Siła tożsamości*, 36.

²⁴ DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 180.

analyses the statements and postulates of the political actors, deciding what will be presented to the public. "The goal of the media is thus not to accurately transmit messages sent from the sender, but to acquire, generate or interpret these messages so they are attractive for the recipients,"²⁵ attract their attention and arise interest. Thus, the media not always pass the message in a way consistent with the intent of the message sender (political actor). It is often distorted, subject to interpretation, or used in another context or just avoided. "Indisputably the media dictate their game rules and often change the politics into a show or a play, they are sometimes accused of bias and manipulation of facts (through the proper interpretation or form of presentation)."²⁶

This does not change the fact that the media is an essential element of the political communication and without them reaching a wide audience of recipients would be virtually impossible. „Political communication, as already noted, is largely mediated communication, transmitted through the print and electronic media.”²⁷

Political communication of the direct nature is important and is still used and cannot be omitted. Politicians meet with citizens, talk to them and listen to what the voters would like to tell them. However, it is worth noting that this activity, direct communication, is reflected in the sphere of indirect communication. "However, beyond the measures aimed to accumulate funds, the main goal of these different forms of direct politics is to place the person or the message to the media, either in the news during the prime time, or in the radio talk show, or in a press commentary in an influential newspaper."²⁸

Since the media play such an important role in the sphere of the political communication, it is also worth referring to the forms of mass communication, which are used by politicians, and which are associated with different control, which is exercised by the political actors over the message sent. During the election campaign, the political actors can use, e.g., advertising, interviews, the public debate or press conferences. Each of these forms gives different possibilities, but it also allows to a various degree exercise control over the message sent. The greatest control of the political actors is visible over the advertising message, and "then the order is as follows: official conferences, press conferences or interviews. Then, in terms of the degree of message control come the television

²⁵ MIKOŁAJEWSKI, *Komunikowanie polityczne*, 16-17.

²⁶ Anna LESZCZUK-FIEDZIUKIEWICZ, "Internet jako narzędzie kreowania wizerunku polityka," *Nowe Media* 2(2011): 34.

²⁷ Brain MCNAIR, *An Introduction to Political Communications* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 27.

²⁸ CASTELLS, *Siła tożsamości*, 339.

debates. The smallest impact on the message content occurs in the case of the journalistic messages, including those reaching the largest group of recipients of the evening news programs.”²⁹

When considering the issues concerning the media in the sphere of political communication, it is also worth paying attention to the media functions. Dobek-Ostrowska lists six main functions of the mass media in democratic systems. These are:³⁰

1) Information function – the media provides the recipients with necessary information relating to the virtually every sphere of social life. Recipients of this information are not only the citizens, voters, but also political actors. Political actors receive the information concerning the public opinion, voters, feedback related to the way the message was perceived or how they are perceived by the citizens. Therefore, the media are a valuable source of information, provide knowledge on the surrounding world, and thanks, e.g., to the Internet this information is available to the recipients at any time of the night or day. Informative function thus refers to sharing information and opinions on the events and phenomena which took place in the country and in the world.

2) Educational function – it refers to the issues related to expanding knowledge, education of citizens. “The media should analyse the events and problems, educate citizens, give details and explain the complexities of the political processes, point out the importance and significance of the facts.”³¹

3) The function of the public debate platform – the media allow the flow of information, but they are also a platform, on which the exchange of views takes place, as well as different points of views on the specific problems and social conflicts. It is in the media “that the different concepts and vision should clash, this is the place where the public opinion is shaped and when the consensus is reached in a debate, which is one of the most significant features of democracy.”³² The public debate is inseparable from democracy, which requires the justification of the undertaken and considered decisions, and its inseparable goals are the information, understanding and action.³³

4) Control function – the media exercises control through indicating how to act and indicating the behaviour violating the norms and social morals. This

²⁹ PŁUDOWSKI, *Komunikacja polityczna w amerykańskich kampaniach wyborczych*, 38.

³⁰ DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 183-184.

³¹ DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 183.

³² DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 183.

³³ Agnieszka KAMPKA, *Debata publiczna* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2014), 4.

function “is expressed in communicating information on the responsibilities of the units, groups and organisations, on the violations of these obligations and their results.”³⁴ Thus, political actors must carefully choose their words in public statements, being aware of this control and the fact that they can be held accountable and judged for these promises, statements or comments. The Internet plays a special importance in the sphere of implementation of this function.

5) Promotional function – through the media the political actors, especially in the period of electoral campaigns, have a possibility to present themselves, their views and their program, in order to win the acceptance and sympathy of voters. The media can become the tool helpful in the formation of the proper political image, which will induce the voters to vote for the given political actor.

6) Function of an advocate/attorney – the media should constitute the platform of the communication of information, views, programs and opinions, which senders are all the political actors, so that the recipients have a possibility to get to know all political actors, and not only the largest and strongest entities on the political market.

Therefore, the media constitute one of the more important elements of social communication, providing the recipients with important information, from their point of view, learning, indicating the reprehensible behaviour and contradictory with the accepted rules of conduct. They are also a tool used by the politicians for creating the proper image, which becomes helpful in the implementation of the political ambitions and goals. What’s more, the media integrate the recipients around important matters and problems, although in some situations they can also lead to disintegration. Filipiak observes that “the media can be a binder of the atomised societies (they are usually conformist and maintain the traditional values); but – opting for certain values of the dominant layers of the society, they can also disintegrate. Instead of, as part of own correlation function, acting for the social consensus, they can be a source (often a tool) of social divisions.”³⁵

It is also worth noting the fact that the media often provide the recipients with entertainment, they serve relaxation, resting, fun. Therefore, the issue remains to provide the recipients with the attractive information so to attract the attention of the viewer and listener. This in turn leads to the need for the choice and selection of information and paying attention to these events (also in the sphere of politics) and those political actors, who lead to the attractiveness of the informative offer presented to the public opinion. Today, information is a precious commodity,

³⁴ Marian FILIPIAK, *Homo communicans. Wprowadzenie do teorii masowego komunikowania* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2004), 101.

³⁵ FILIPIAK, *Homo communicans*, 105.

which determines which program will be watched by the viewer and what he will want to listen to or read in the press and on the Internet. Therefore, the case is for this selection of information, for example, in the case of television, to lead to the increased viewing of specific programs.

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Political communication is inextricably linked with the media, which on one hand are becoming a tool used by political actors for the communication with citizens, and on the other, they are an active entity of the political market, where the political information attracts the attention of the viewer and recipient of the media messages. Therefore, we can talk about two types of activities of the participants of the communicative situation, which is the political communication. These are political senders (politicians) and the media senders (professional media personnel).³⁶

Political and media senders are of course dependent on each other, because on one hand politicians need the media to reach a wide group of recipients with the message, and on the other, the media need the current, interesting and attractive information and subjects for the mass recipient, which is provided by the politicians. "Both groups of actors shape some patterns of mutual interactions. These can be interactions on the horizontal or vertical nature."³⁷

It is also worth emphasising that regardless of the possibility of using the direct communication, the political communication is most of all based on the tools of indirect communication and possibilities which are currently provided by the media. Personal contacts with politicians do not allow the complete satisfaction of informative needs in the sphere of political communication. "Informative needs of the society are met by the press, radio, television and more often the Internet, providing political information and guidance to the citizen. Knowledge on the politics, gained thanks to the media experience thus becomes the basic source for the citizens."³⁸ Therefore, we cannot consider the issues relating to the effective strategies of the political communication without paying attention to the role, which is played in this scope by the media, including the Internet. Because the Internet is a tool, which currently allows the constant, regular and uninterrupted access to the current political information. What is more, it provides the political communication with the two-directional nature, enabling the citizens the presen-

³⁶ DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 182.

³⁷ DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 182.

³⁸ DOBEK-OSTROWSKA, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, 182.

tation of their opinions, comments and notes. On one hand, it is used by the politicians to build a specific image, and on the other it enables the “closer” and two-way contact with citizens. Undoubtedly, the use of new media in the politics, in order to contact with the citizens, is becoming an obvious matter, and as it is noted by Jeziński it is possible to list a few factors, which make the new media an attractive tool of communication. These factors also include the low exploitation costs, the possibility to perform the party propaganda, entertainment function, indication of the media as the independent source of information, and the fashion, which is currently taking place among the politicians (and not only) for using the new media. The use of the new media can be treated as a requirement of the modern political life.³⁹

Currently, the Internet is an important element of political communication,⁴⁰ which is often the supplementation of the messages directed to the recipients through traditional channels. What is more, “the network is becoming a more and more available and interactive tool, through which it gives a lot of possibilities, and what follows – it is used for the implementation of innovative tasks, suppressing older media and replacing them in many spheres.”⁴¹ So, here we can observe not only the supplementary function of the messages passed through traditional media, but even their replacement in the sphere of the political communication and the two-way contact with recipients. The easy access and reception of messages on the Internet makes this medium become more and more important and popular in the sphere of politics. An important issue remains the previously discussed possibility of conducting the dialogue, discussion and commenting on the actions and messages sent by the political actors. The Internet “creates the space of the collective connectivity and debate. The discussion can take on different forms: ephemeral exchange of opinions, stormy and multi-vector debates, controlled artificial discussions or posting insignificant opinions on the selected subject.”⁴²

Without the media it is difficult to talk about the politics and the political communication. As noted by Castells, “outside the sphere of the media there is only the political margin. What happens in this political space dominated by the media, is not determined by the media: it is an open social and political process.”⁴³

³⁹ JEZIŃSKI, *Po co politykom nowe media?*, 16.

⁴⁰ See: Małgorzata WINIARSKA-BRODOWSKA, “Political Communication in the EU: Civic Potential of New Media (Case Study: Poland),” *Central European Journal of Communication* 1(16) (2016): 236.

⁴¹ Karolina STEFANOWICZ, “Portale społecznościowe jako narzędzie wpływu politycznego,” *Nowe Media* 2(2011): 55.

⁴² STEFANOWICZ, “Portale społecznościowe jako narzędzie wpływu politycznego,” 56.

⁴³ CASTELLS, *Sila tożsamości*, 335.

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MEDIA I KOMUNIKACJA POLITYCZNA

Streszczenie

Artykuł prezentuje znaczenie mediów w sferze komunikacji politycznej. Obecnie jednak trudno mówić o komunikacji politycznej, nie zwracając uwagi na rolę, jaką w sferze wymiany informacji między aktorami politycznymi a obywatelami odgrywają media, zwłaszcza Internet, który znacząco

zmienił charakter komunikacji politycznej. Nowe media zapewniają obywatelom możliwości w zakresie komentowania i dostarczania natychmiastowych informacji zwrotnych do nadawców przekazów politycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: komunikacja polityczna; media; aktorzy polityczni.

MEDIA AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

S u m m a r y

The article presented the significance of the media in the sphere of political communication. Currently, it is difficult to talk about the political communication, without paying attention to the role, which in the sphere of information exchange between the political actors and citizens is played by the media, especially the Internet, which has significantly changed the character of the political communication. The new media provide the citizens with the possibilities in terms of commenting and providing the immediate feedback to the senders of the political messages.

Key words: political communication; media; political actors.