

Campaign American Style? Facebook Activity of Presidential Candidates in Poland before 2015 Election

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Abstract

The Barack Obama presidential campaign of 2008 was the first of its kind to use social media in a positive and efficient manner. What was a new phenomenon back then, today seems to be standard protocol. In Poland the leading social network is Facebook used by 59% of internet users every day. The paper is part of the research conducted at The Department of Communication Studies, UCLA, US within the Kosciuszko Foundation's Exchange Programme. It is focused on five candidates to Polish presidency: Bronisław Komorowski, Andrzej Duda, Magdalena Ogórek, Paweł Kukiz and Janusz Korwin-Mikke. The paper aims to explore their use of Facebook for political communication before the 2015 election. The research uses data provided by Fanpage Karma, a social media tracking tool, along with content analysis of the comments. Its aim is to evaluate the quality of political communication via Facebook during the 2015 presidential campaign in Poland and determine the relation between social media engagement of the candidates and the results of the election.

Keywords: Poland, presidential election, Facebook, political communication

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Introduction

The rise of Internet and social media has brought a new quality to the world of communication. Dutton described it as the “Fifth Estate”, explaining that “the Internet is enabling people to network... This is being achieved in ways that can support greater accountability... in government and politics... I will argue that this could be as important – if not more so – to the 21st century as the Fourth Estate has been since the 18th” (as cited in Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009, p. 146). Also Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) in their theory of three ages of political communication explain that while the first age belonged to the press and the second to the television, what we live now is the third age characterized by the multiplication of TV channels and the wide use of Internet and social media. They also stress that nowadays the political communication is no longer an “add-on to the political decisions but is an integral part of the interrelated processes of campaigning, cultivation of public opinion, policy-making, and government itself”(p. 214). According to them, the third age of political communication is a product of different factors, such as the increased competitive pressure, anti-elitist popularization and populism, which rejects the traditional top-down model of communication (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999, p. 217-225).

Methodology and data

The social media activity of the candidates for Polish presidency presented in this research was tracked between the deadline for the collection of 100,000 signatures that allows the official start in the race (March 26) and the beginning of the campaign in broadcast media (April 25). It was assumed that in this period the use of social media was crucial for the campaign as the broadcasting media could not be reached. The candidates were chosen on the basis of the public opinion polls conducted in March and April, that put in the leading position the current president Bronisław Komorowski, followed by Andrzej Duda and the three politicians: Janusz Korwin-Mikke, Paweł Kukiz and Magdalena Ogórek, who were placed on the third position in different surveys. The data for this research was collected via Fanpage Karma, a social media tracking tool, that allows real-time monitoring of the Facebook accounts. The content analysis was applied to provide the general overview of the popular topics and to analyse the feedback left in comments.

American pioneers

The first country that successfully applied the Internet as a tool of political communication was the US. In 1994 Clinton administration established the WhiteHouse.gov domain, which opened the door for the e-mail communication with the citizens. The next big step was made in 2000 during the Bush-Cheney campaign. The website GeorgeWBush.com was the first one customized to deliver a local content for the potential voters, including contacts for regional offices and news about the campaign in almost every state. Later, George W. Bush administration launched “Ask the White House” service, based on live chat that allowed people to ask their questions to the White House staff in real time. The idea was new and brilliant, however the conversations were still controlled by the government. As Jimmy Orr, White House Internet Director explained, Internet was considered back then “the safest medium in the world and the reason for that is we ask for questions from the public and then we take the questions we want to answer and we publish just those.

People don't see all the questions coming in. We just answer the questions we want to answer" (as cited in Katz, Barris & Jain, 2013, p. 26). This was in 2003, one year before the presidential campaign of Howard Dean's, who was the first one to adopt the social media as a tool of communication with the potential voters. Back then neither Facebook nor Twitter existed so the strategy employed a great use of blogs and other Internet tools. His online activity made Dean a celebrity in the traditional media and helped him to gather more funds for the campaign than any other of the candidates (O'Connor, 2012, p. 195-201). Although Dean finally did not manage to win the race, the new approach to political communication presented by his campaign was groundbreaking and managed to set new trends, developed later by other politicians.

As Katz, Barris and Jain (2013) noticed: "The fact that the campaign might not have been victorious does not diminish the importance and effects of the breakthroughs it achieved. Moreover, one must consider that even a losing campaign may have been far more competitive than without its pioneering social media effort; this was certainly the case with Howard Dean" (p. 21). What also should be noticed is that the architects of Dean's online success in 2004, Nicco Mele and his colleague Jim Brayton, formed later an essential part of Barack Obama's team both during the Senate election and the presidential race. This last campaign, conducted in 2008 is widely known as the world's most prominent example of employing the social media for political communication. Four years after Dean's campaign the range of the social networks was widely expanded. Even if both Facebook and Twitter were still in their early stage and the number of the users was not as high as today (only about 10% of the Americans were following the political race via social media), the study conducted by Pew Internet and American Life Project showed that 74% of the Internet users, which meant 55% of entire adult population in the US, used Internet to stay informed about the campaign. Fully 59% of them used new technology such as e-mails, instant messages or Twitter to share or receive the news about the political race. Also, around 38% of Internet users talked online about the campaign.

Although television was still the most popular source of political news, the Internet was almost as popular as traditional newspapers. About 26% of the voters got the information online, while 28% preferred the printed versions (Smith 2009). The Obama campaign seemed to understand this potential and managed to combine perfectly the traditional media with the use of new technologies. The website MyBarackObama.com had a user-friendly design and was ready not only to present the content, but also to interact with the audience. The supporters could use it to create groups, plan events and raise funds. In other words the site was a kind of internal social medium itself. According to the statistics, by the November election there were more than 160,000 active users on MyBarackObama.com, 35,000 groups and 200,000 offline events planned via the site. The Internet was also used by the volunteers to create fundraising websites, which in total managed to gather around 30 million USD (Katz et al., 2013, p. 31). Also, the day before the general election in 2008 Obama counted on more than 2 million supporters on Facebook and more than 100,000 followers on Twitter. For McCain the figures were respectively: about 600,000 and 4,600 (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009, 151). In 2008 the voters for the first time were offered more than just one-way communication. They were invited to participate and give a real-time feedback through the Web. The social media provided a sensation of a personal contact with the politicians facilitating at the same time communication

between the people who shared same values and goals and exposing them to the enthusiasm surrounding the political race (Bronstein, 2012, p. 185). As many scholars noted, the social media have also the priceless asset of lowering significantly the cost of the technical infrastructure needed to create and share the content with the voters (Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, 2012, p. 1277; Carlise & Patton, 2013, p. 884-885). Obama campaign in 2008 raised 745 million USD, of which half a billion was gathered online (Katz et al., 2013, p. 32). This is exactly why the social media interaction is becoming a standard protocol for the political campaign in the world. No other way of communication has the four most important qualities at the same time – it is cheap, fast, it reaches the majority of the voters (including the individuals who are not interested in politics) and allow finding and organizing the supporters to act in favour of the candidate all over the country and even abroad.

After the 2008 campaign turned out to be a huge success, a similar strategy was applied in 2012. By this time both Democrats and Republicans were already experienced in using the social networks. The online audience was much wider as the use of the social media increased significantly. For instance, the penetration of Facebook in 2012 reached already more than 50%, which means that half of the American population could have been reached via this channel. What is more, according to the studies, 48% of the social media users who were in favour of the Democrats and 34% of those who voted for the Republicans used in 2012 social networks to stay up to date with the campaign. Also, 25% of social media users claimed to become “more active in a political issue after discussing it or reading posts about it on the sites” and 16% admitted to change their political views “after discussing it or reading posts about it on the sites” (Rainie & Smith, 2012). About 25% of the registered voters were convinced to vote for one of the two candidates by family or friends via social media. Higher figures were presented only by face-to-face conversations (Rainie, 2012). It is interesting that although both candidates were aware of the importance of the social media in their campaign, the dynamics of their activity were different. For example during the second debate, Obama’s staff posted 37 tweets, which were retweeted more than 117,000 times, while on Romney’s account appeared only 2, retweeted around 6,800 times. Overall, in 2012 campaign Obama had 20 million followers on Twitter and 29 million fans on Facebook, while Romney was followed by 1,2 million users on Twitter, 8 million on Facebook (Wortham, 2012). On the election day the support on social media again matched the results of the political race.

Poland gets social

The first successful Polish social network was Nasza Klasa, designed to help people re-establish contact with their classmates. The service was created in 2006 by two college students and quickly became the main social network in the country. The spectrum of nk.pl users was, however, limited by the language, while young people tended to travel, study abroad and make friends with foreigners. This is why after the Polish version of Facebook was launched in 2008 many users switched to this platform. Especially after 2010 when Nasza Klasa decided to introduce new privacy regulations, rebranding the service to nk.pl. The controversies about the new regulations along with growing popularity of Facebook made many users abandon their accounts on Polish social network. Although in 2010 nk.pl was still a leading social network in the country, on which 89% of the social media users declared

having a profile, Facebook was already on the second position with a score of 59% (Internet Standard, 2010, p. 27). One year later Facebook ultimately dethroned nk.pl. (Gazeta.pl, 2011). The new trend was set.

As for today, there are around 13 million active social media users in Poland, which represents the 34% of the total population (We Are Social, 2015). In 2014 90% of Internet users owned were connected via social networks, of which the most popular was Facebook, used by 74% of the internauts. (We Are Social, 2014). In January 2015 around 35% of the population claimed to have Facebook account and the second most popular service turned out to be is G+, mainly due to the popularity of Gmail. (We Are Social, 2015). The largest group of social media users are no longer teenagers, but rather people between the age of 25 and 34, more women than men, living in big cities. However, the dynamics of growth of the new profiles was in January 2014 highest for Internet users from medium cities between 100,000 and 200,000 of inhabitants. The data for Facebook itself was quite similar. Women represented 53% of the total users and the largest age group was between 25 and 34. What is also important, the majority of Facebook users visited their accounts on a daily basis and about 66% of them admitted relying on friend's recommendation, which is an important data for the political communication via this channel (IRCenter, 2014).

The candidates

On March 27 it was confirmed that the total number of the candidates to Polish presidency was 11. All of them were present on Facebook. According to the public opinion polls, in March and April the leader was the current president Bronisław Komorowski with the result between 42 and 46% of votes. He was followed by the candidate of the leading opposition party "Law and Justice" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) – Andrzej Duda, who could count on 26-31% of votes. Later positions were not clear, however, usually three politicians were set on the third position: Magdalena Ogórek – an independent candidate backed by the left wing, Janusz Korwin-Mikke - the leader of the right-wing party "Korwin" and Paweł Kukiz – a musician, not affiliated to any political party (tvn24.pl).

Although all the candidates were present on Facebook, during the campaign Bronisław Komorowski was the only one with a verified site. The rest of the candidates seemed not to be concerned about the fact that the voters were confused in many occasions. For example there were many accounts on the name of Andrzej Duda and only the number of followers could suggest which of them was the official one. As for Magdalena Ogórek, the situation was even more complicated. On December 21, 2014, she posted on her private profile that she did not plan to change it into a site and later, on January 12, she confirmed that her official Facebook site was different from the profile. However, while the site was describing her as a politician, her private profile was made public and was describing her as a candidate to the Polish presidency. The posts published on her private profile were copied from the site and addressed not to her friends, but open to the public. In fact, since the begging of 2015 she has not placed any personal information there. As both accounts were not verified, it was hard to determine which of them Ogórek wanted her supporters to follow.

The sites of the candidates were usually run in first person to create a virtual bond with their supporters. The only exception was the account of Bronisław Komorowski, which most frequently used third person. Only from time to time there were posts in first person, mostly with the greetings from the president. As for the language, the sites of Duda, Komorowski and Ogórek used formal style, while the accounts of Kukiz and Korwin-Mikke were much more casual. Especially Kukiz tended to use colloquialisms and populist rhetoric. In his Facebook posts he often called the president by a nickname “Bronek” or distorted the phrase “okrągły stół”¹ (the round table) into “okrągły stolec” (round excrement). While the rest of the sites appeared to combine private messages of the candidates with the posts placed by their staff, the one of Kukiz seemed to be run directly by him.

Fans

In terms of fans the leader was Janusz Korwin-Mikke, whose site registered 628,612 fans on the election day. This fact might be surprising as he is known for his controversial beliefs, describing himself as sexist, claims that women are less intelligent than men and therefore should not vote, urging for the right to bear arms in Poland or criticizing Paralympic Games because according to him only healthy people should be watched on TV. The second best score – 144,151 fans belonged to the president Bronisław Komorowski and the third one to Paweł Kukiz, whose site was followed by 137,699 users. Andrzej Duda had 104,946 fans and Magdalena Ogórek only 37,119. It should be noticed that the day before the start of the campaign in broadcasting media the number of Kukiz’s fans was 65,074, which means that it doubled within the last week before the election.

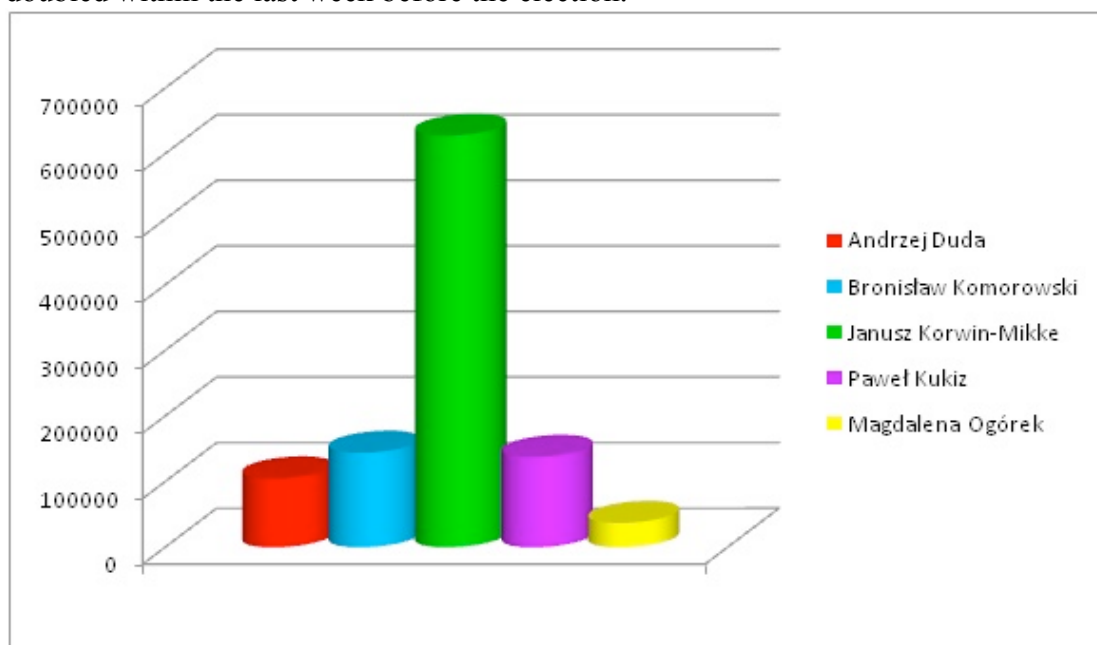


Figure 1: Number of fans on the election day.

The majority of fans were Polish, however there were also supporters from other countries where Polish communities are big and active. These included mainly the UK, Germany and the US. The users registered in the UK formed the second biggest

¹ “Okrągły stół” is a popular name of the negotiations between the communist government and the trade union Solidarność, held in Warsaw in 1989, which led to the abolition of communism in Poland.

group on the sites of all the candidates. The percentage was 1.1% for Duda, 2.1% for Komorowski, 3.1% for Korwin-Mikke, 4.8% for Kukiz and 2.4% for Ogórek. It is not unusual, considering the fact that in 2014 there were around 700,00 Poles in the UK (Slack, Drury & McTague, 2014).

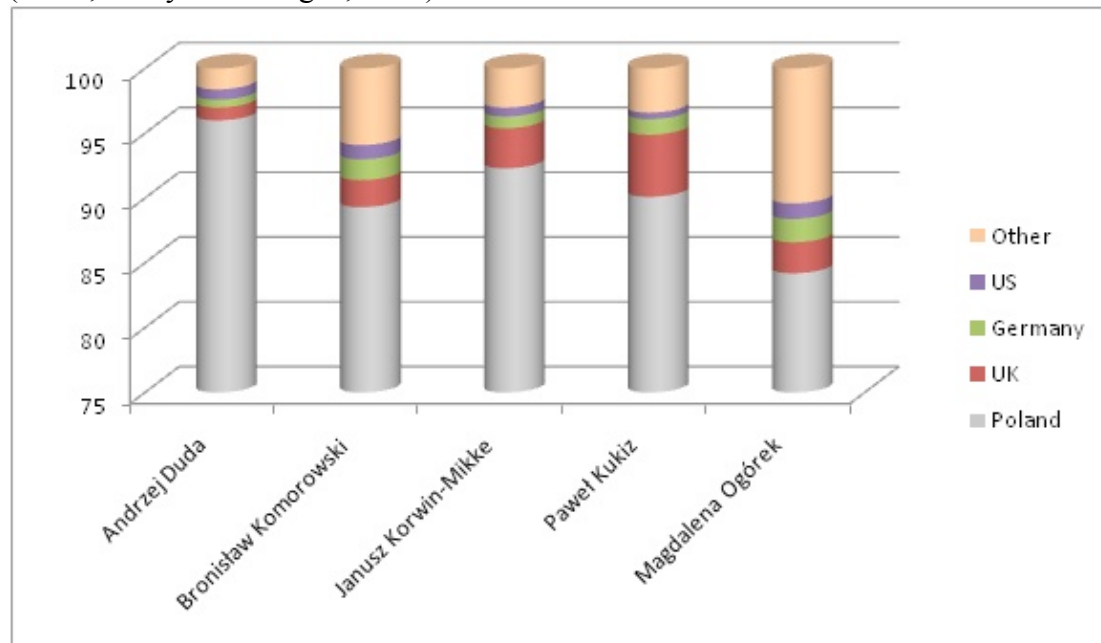


Figure 2: Fan origin.

Posts

The figures 3 and 4 present the activity on the sites. During the analysed period Duda placed 130 posts, of which 66 were pictures, 42 were links, 20 were videos and only 2 were status updates. The main source included in the posts was his web page andrzejduda.pl. The average number of posts a day was 3. It should be noticed that Duda was the most active candidate in calling for action. The majority of his posts included hashtags and requests for sharing. Duda was also a leader in discrediting his opponents, mainly Komorowski. Kukiz and Korwin-Mikke also used their sites to harm the reputation of their adversaries, however, it was more general, not focused on one candidate. Both Komorowski and Ogórek did not place this kind of posts at all. Komorowski published 102 posts, of which 54 were pictures, 44 were videos and 4 were links. There were no status updates registered in this period on his site. The average number of posts per day was 2.1. Korwin-Mikke was the most active politician with 235 posts, including 125 pictures, 76 videos, 30 links and 4 status updates. The most recurring source were partiakorwin.pl, the website of his political party and sklepkorwin.pl, online shop with the candidate's merchandising. The average was 5.5 posts a day. Kukiz posted 127 messages, of which 71 were links, 22 were status updates, 19 were pictures and 15 were videos. His mostly used reference was wiadomosci.wp.pl, a popular news website. His average was 3 posts daily. Ogórek placed 50 posts, averagely 1.2 a day, using often references to tvn24.pl, a website of a TV news channel. There were 24 pictures, 13 videos, 7 links and 6 status updates.

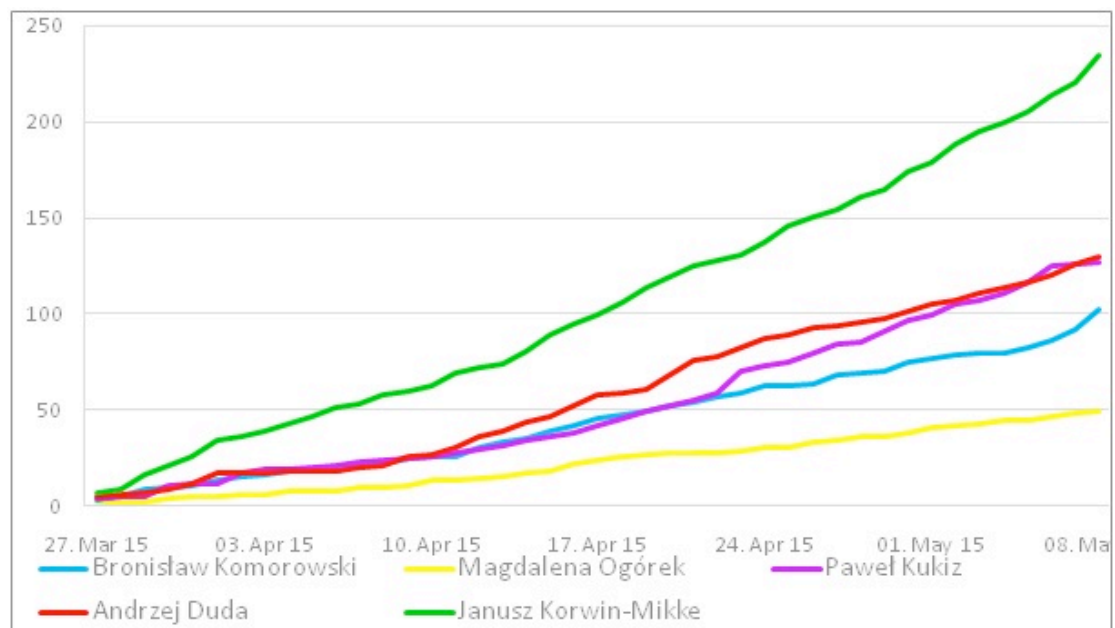


Figure 3: Number of posts.

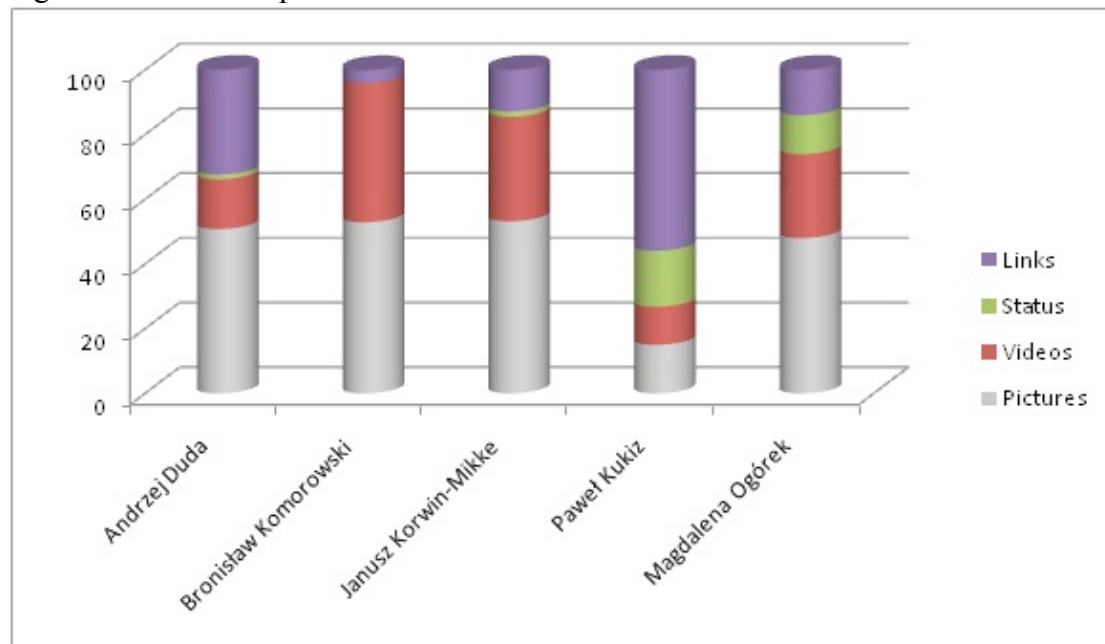


Figure 4: Type of posts.

The most successful post of Duda was the one published on April 12, with a statement “Obiecał i oszukał” (He promised and lied), referred to the president Bronisław Komorowski. This post reached 9,269 total reactions by the election silence. As for Bronisław Komorowski, the top posts were not related directly to the campaign. The one that gathered an impressive number of likes – 12,878, along with 1,302 comments and 2,092 shares was expressing a sorrow after the death of Władysław Bartoszewski – a prominent Polish politician and academician who died on April 24. Another successful post was placed on April 4 and contained Easter greetings and reached 10,792 total reactions. Janusz Korwin-Mikke’s top posts was his election spot, in which he claimed he would “force Ewa Kopacz [Polish Prime Minister] to work”. The post reached 25,026 total reactions. Kukiz’s top post was the one on the TV debate in which the candidate expressed his discontent about the decision of the current

president Bronisław Komorowski, who had denied his presence during the event. The posts reached the total number of 26,747 reactions. Ogórek's top post was a presentation of her campaign spot on April 18, that gathered 2,175. The majority of the weakest posts placed on the sites of all the candidates were the ones that promoted the offline meetings with the supporters. However, it might be surprising that among the weakest posts of Komorowski there was one published on April 15 with an invitation for live Hangout with the president.

User engagement

As for the user engagement the leader was again Korwin-Mikke with a score of 4,564 total reactions, including 3,872 likes, 506 shares and 186 comments. Second most active fans were these of Komorowski. The total reactions for his site were 2,419, of which 1,870 were likes, 374 were comments and 175 were shares. Duda's fanpage registered in total 1,722 reactions, including 1,367 likes, 97 comments and 257 shares. At the same time Kukiz's site had 2,233 total reactions, including 1,869 likes, 163 comments and 200 shares. Finally, Ogórek's site registered 524 likes, 98 comments and 74 shares, 696 reactions in total. Although all the candidates had some negative comments, the sites of Kukiz and Korwin-Mikke registered mainly positive ones from their supporters. Ogórek's site had mainly positive feedback too, however not always related to her work, but in many occasions to her beauty. To the extent that male users were proposing to her, while women were praising her outfits. It is interesting that Duda and Komorowski, the strongest candidates, had mainly negative comments on their sites.

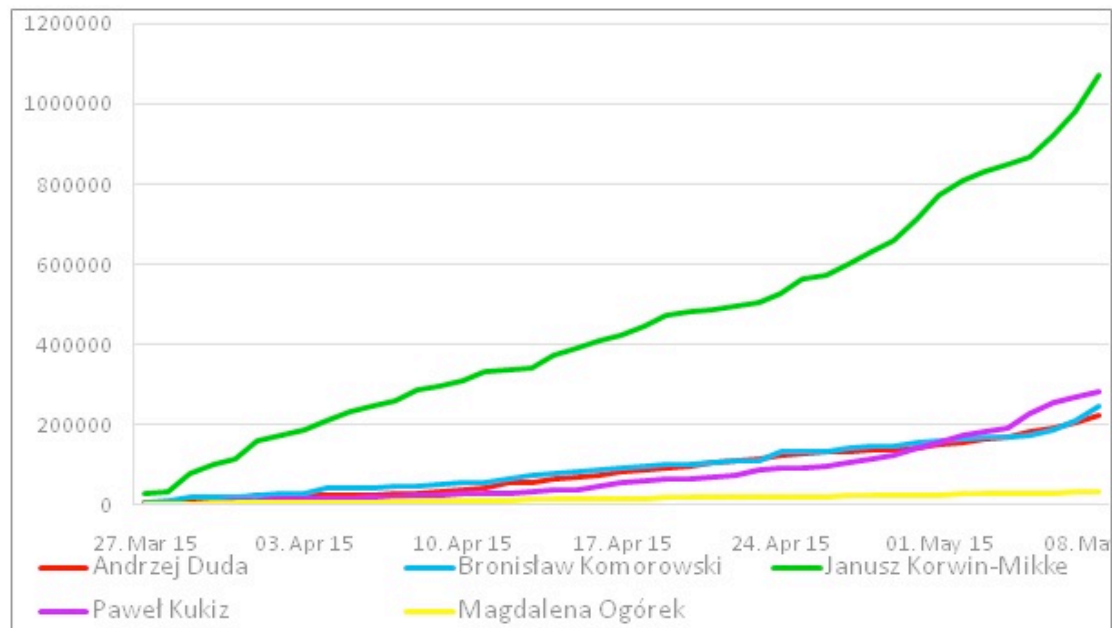


Figure 5: Total Reactions.

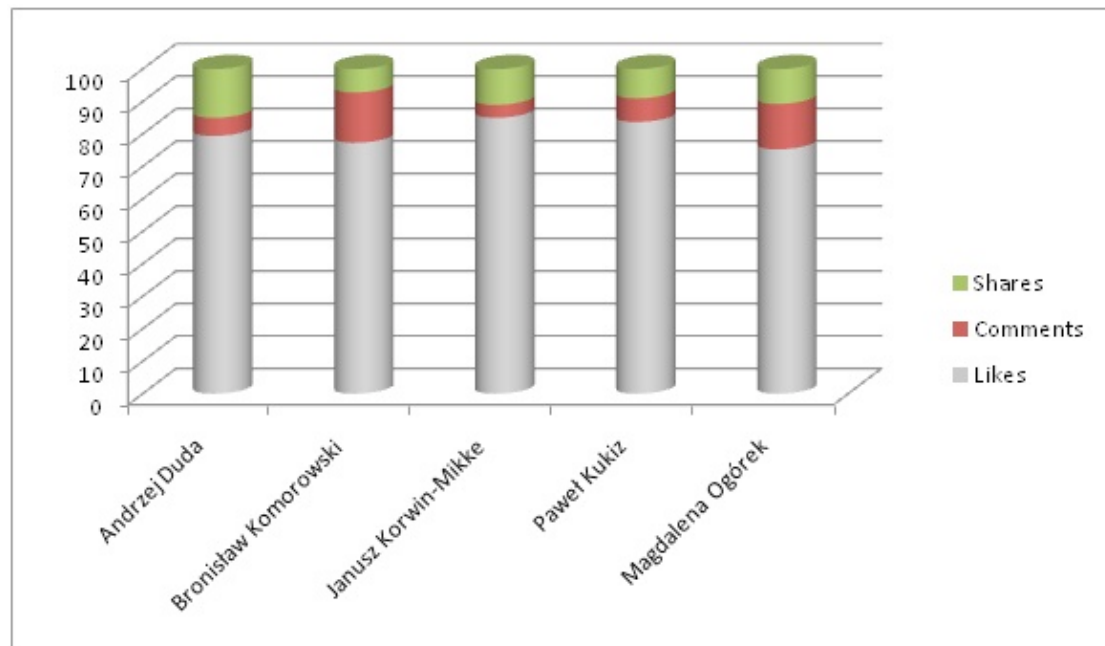


Figure 6: Likes, shares and comments.

Keywords

As for the keywords, Duda used most frequently the hashtags #AndrzejDuda2015 and DrużynaDudy (Duda's Team). However, the highest engagement was related to the phrase "podajcie dalej" (pass on), which means that his calls for action met their goal. Komorowski's most used words were his name and surname, which also generated high level of user engagement. For Korwin-Mikke, abandoning the prepositions and other words that have no meaning alone, the most popular word was "godz", which is a shortcut for an hour. It seemed to be related to the interest in candidate's activity in traditional media. On Kukiz's site the highest engagement was generated by the use of word "Polska" (Poland), while the keyword that was related to the highest engagement on Ogórek's site was "prawo" (law). It referred to her idea of reforming the legislation in Poland.

Andrzej Duda

Trzymam się oraz Bronisław chwilę :-)) Gdańsk wyników internetowej najlepszych miejsca dalej Proszę wezmę dzisiejszego przez jak udostępniania [AKTUALIZACJA] zadawania Trzeba za Obiecał DudaBus Zmiana Faktach **AndrzejDuda2015** tych internautami zobaczenia DrużynaDudy Dziś udział Maja sklepy podnieść od Zapraszam spotkanie pomorskie po zobaczenia Podajcie byłem dzisiejszej Oszukał Komorowski wysłuchania godz mojej

Bronisław Komorowski

videobloga Dialog Polsce też Prezydenta się Prezydent wizyty jak mieszkańcami Bronisław Odwiedziłem kolejny debaty od Razem podczas maja zobaczcie Komorowski Polaków są bezpieczeństwo młodych Proszę tym mojej :) spotkania Komorowskiego Spotkał dzisiaj maja poparcie Zapraszam Więcej Bronisława polskich videoblog mówił odcinek Dzień ludzie zagłosuj Polski spot dla jestem za że

Janusz Korwin-Mikke

sondaże oraz Wiele można tutaj teraz bez Prezydenta ze więc tylko Polska nawet mnie że po jak był tego od są Przy tak będzie Proszę jeszcze tym za Janusza bo też wielkie jestem osób dla się przez Korwin-Mikke bardzo więcej KORWIN czy Spot godz ludzi państwo już jeśli Polski tej

Paweł Kukiz

bo Dobrego jest że Po przez mówił panie mojej Dobrej Czy czas Jutro mnie już Pan jestem więc przed od za prezydenta tylko kandydata Bardzo Dziękuję mi tym dla będzie jak :-)) głosy są Nasz ze ale jeśli Tutaj tak się Polska tego ... wszystko mam nas Dziś jakie Potem

Magdalena Ogórek

kobiet dlaczego Dzisiaj dla że tym godz spotkania Kwota Zapraszam oraz mieszkańcami się obejrzenia jest może Nasz Rynek które prawa tak państwa będę za obywateli programie pracy nowa wywiadu który tys. po iż nas programu ul ale czy tys maja chcą gościem Prezydent serdecznie miejsca od podatkowe prawo jeżeli podatku

Figure 7: Keywords

Conclusion

The campaign of Barack Obama in 2008 set a new trend in political communication. Although the presence of the candidates in traditional media is still essential, it is limited by time and money, while the social media allow reaching wide audience at low cost and in real time. In Poland, after a period of Nasza Klasa domination, today the most popular social network is Facebook, where the politicians are very active. This research on political campaign on Facebook during the 2015 presidential election in Poland resulted in several observations.

1. In terms of professionalism the best turned out to be the site of the president Komorowski. It was the only verified one and its use of formal style and third person was consistent with the image of a serious and respected politician. Also the site of Kukiz seemed to match his image of an outsider who challenges the system. His Facebook posts were emotional and casual, written in first person to maintain a personal relationship with the fans. The least professional site seemed to be the one of Ogórek, mainly because of the confusion generated by the use of both a site and a private profile open to public.
2. All the candidates posted regularly and the site of Korwin-Mikke even seemed to be oversaturated with the average of 5.5 posts a day. As for the content Duda, Komorowski and Korwin-Mikke posted mostly pictures, while Kukiz was more focused on links. The most balanced offer was presented by Ogórek,

however it did not translate into fan engagement as the highest number of total reactions was registered by the site of Korwin-Mikke.

3. The relation between frequently used keywords and the fan engagement was best for Komorowski and Ogórek, while the most unsuccessful in this field turned out to be Duda, whose most used keyword was his name in a form of hashtag, which did not generate important engagement.
4. The number of fans and the feedback left by Facebook users turned out not to correspond neither with the public opinion polls, nor with the election results. Korwin-Mikke, whose site was the most popular, was placed in the surveys between the third and the fifth position and managed to gather only 3,26% of the votes on the election day. At the same time the most successful in the first round turned out to be Duda, whose number of fans was lower than Korwin-Mikke's, Komorowski's and Kukiz's. What is even more interesting is the fact that the candidates with mostly negative comments on their sites: Duda and Komorowski were leading in the public opinion polls and had the best results in the first round (34,76% and 33,77% respectively), which let them meet in the second voting. This phenomenon can be possibly explain with the lack of "don't like" button on Facebook. The supporters tend to "like" posts, while the critics use the comments to express their discontent as there is no other possibility to "dislike" the posts.
5. The fact that the number of Kukiz's fans on Facebook doubled after his TV exposure leads to the conclusion that television is still the most important channel for the political campaign in Poland, especially for less known politicians like Kukiz. His final result in the election was much higher than predicted by the surveys, reaching 20.8% and it can be attributed mainly to the success of his TV campaign.

Although the social media are essential for political communication nowadays, their impact on the voters during the presidential election in Poland turned out not to be crucial. Facebook was definitely a useful tool for maintaining the supporters up to date with the campaign, however, the number of fans and their engagement failed to match the real tendencies among the voters. Nevertheless, the research on the role of social media in political communication in Poland should be continued as the future elections can bring different tendencies.

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