Social Networking Websites in Electoral Campaigns: the Case of Lithuania

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Abstract

In recent years social networking websites, and especially *Facebook*, have attracted millions of new users. For that reason, politicians seek to use this interactive space more and more intensively for their goals, most often during the period of election campaigns. This article analyzes the processes of political communication via social networking sites, and discusses the benefits and some negative aspects of these communicational activities. As well, the article presents the analysis of the use of social networking websites during the presidential campaign of 2009 in the Republic of Lithuania. It also presents the results of the municipal councils election campaign of 2011, which reveal various aspects of the use of social networking websites by the candidates. Finally, the article presents the results of the logistic regression model, which allows forecasting the use of social networking websites by politicians during elections.

Key Words: Political communication, electoral communication, social networking websites, electoral campaigns, *Facebook*.

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1. Introduction

Politicians and political parties try to dominate the common information context so as to increase their popularity and possibilities to win the elections. In order to spread their messages, politicians now more frequently add the Internet to the list of their communication channels. In the process of communication, social media and especially social networking websites have become more and more important during each election, and sometimes turns into the main political battle field. Therefore, politicians and political parties try to make use of the possibilities this interactive space provides.

According to the Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 60.5 % of the Lithuanian population used the Internet in 2010. This number is increasing annually and approaches the average of the European Union where 64 % of population uses the Internet.[1] It is clear that the majority of Internet users in Lithuania actively use various social media, the most popular of which is the online social network *Facebook*.

Over the past year in Lithuania, the social networking website *Facebook* has experienced a massive growth in the number of users. Currently, it has a total of over 950 thousand registered users in Lithuania,[2] this is approximately 30% of the country's population. In addition, it has been observed that the number of

politicians using social networking websites is constantly increasing and thus there is a growing need to research these increasingly active political communication processes.

2. Features of the Interactive Political Communication

The Internet is frequently called the technology that has changed communication the most since Gutenberg invented the printing press. Today the global network of networks and social media includes the whole spectrum of human communication: from scientific or political topics to personal interaction. When speaking about the role of social media and social networking websites in political communication, the Internet has broadened the usual communication channels, provided much wider possibilities for the politicians to reach society and decreased the role of media as intermediary in the processes of political communication. Unlike traditional media where journalists pick out the pieces of information for publishing, the Internet provides politicians with the possibility to directly approach their electorate.[3] Furthermore, the use of online communication tools has drastically reduced expenditure for political communication because the Internet helps to spread information with minimal costs and this information reaches a large number of individuals.[4]

Social networking websites provide the opportunity for the politicians to present authentic and uncorrupted communication to their audiences. It means that contrary to traditional media, where the journalists enclose the information received from politicians in a certain context, the contents announced by politicians in social media reaches the audience in the form and style desired by the politician. For example, the citizens read the posts of politicians in social networking websites in the authentic form they were posted on internet channels. Meanwhile the journalists designing their reports and writing articles select only certain fragments from the material presented by the politicians and therefore, the political information announced by the media is often different from what the politicians expect.

Most importantly, the Internet provides possibilities for two-way communication between the politicians and the members of society; where politicians can have a direct and reversible connection and citizens can freely create and transmit any type of messages to the politicians. The World Wide Web has reduced time and space barriers; therefore, the electors can not only observe political discussions but can actively take part in political events.

In social networking websites, the politicians may join previously created communities or various networks, where the opportunities for accidental contact naturally occur. In the broad sense, it may be considered that a community is all users of particular social networking websites as well as an abundance of societies created there for social, cultural or other interests. For example, social networking websites differ from traditional internet websites by one essential aspect: in order

to access a candidate's profile in virtual social networks, the browser must not be deliberately set to it, as it is with accessing a website, because the candidate's profile is already a part of the social networking website. Similar to a spectator of entertainment TV accidentally encountering a candidate in a talk show, the user of social networking websites may accidentally stumble upon a politician's profile while browsing his/her friends' profiles.[5]

In today's world the audience of electors becomes increasingly fragmentary and sections of it demand personal communication and new forms of individualized information presentation. Different communities and sub groups within social media networks represent different and specific parts of the electorate. Social networking websites allow the politicians to maximize the segmentation and personalization of messages; therefore, they can customize and transmit their messages directly to the target audience through reasonable forms and channels. This creates a special sense of personal communication with the electors.

Through social networking websites politicians can reach such audiences that would never search for any information about politicians or politics. One traditionally difficult audience to reach is young people. Social networking websites are visited by thousands of young people and those open to innovation every day. Virtual communication for such people is extremely important; therefore, social media enables the politicians to reach youth through the most acceptable communication channel.

One of the main advantages of the Internet and social networking websites to the politicians is the possibility of personal communication with the electors.[6] The communication style in social media is significantly different from the traditional communication through the means of mass communication. Communication in the electronic space is informal and immediate, usually spontaneous and sometimes anonymous. In this space a distinctive language is used: stiffness and formal sentence structures, complicated words and terms are avoided. Instead, short phrases, corrections, abbreviations, preteritions, bywords, and unofficial vocabulary are used.

Because of the personal style of communication social networking websites create an unrestricted discussion spirit where politicians can simply become friends with the audience. The content of communication of politicians interacting with the Internet users through online social tools is not only of a political nature. Frequently politicians share their personal remarks, funny experiences from their daily life, travel impressions, opinions on the books they have read or movies they have seen. This creates an immediate and friendly atmosphere where no distance is left between the politicians and the audience and this leaves the participants of the process of communication feeling more confident with each other.

Social networking websites liberate the candidates participating in an election from the traditional format of presenting political information, which prevails in

traditional means of media. The biggest attention of an internet audience is attracted by controversial and witty contents, which often reveals unexpected aspects of politicians' lives or conveys political ideas in non-traditional forms of expression.

More importantly, information and news in social media are presented more interactively and much faster. The means of traditional media are limited by the periodic cycle of information publicity (e.g. TV news schedule, regularity of newspaper publishing) while information spread and communication through social media can take place in real time. Furthermore, the content of traditional media cannot be altered (e. g. alterations of content in a printed newspaper are not possible) while the content in social media can be easily changed and corrected at any time.

It is important for the politicians to not only spread their beliefs and ideas as widely as possible but also to influence the potential electors to become loyal supporters. Social networking websites, microblogs, portals for photo and video sharing provides politicians with the new possibilities to involve and mobilize their supporters. However, this does decentralize the process of political communication and information distribution, as the politicians lose the possibility to control and influence the further process of message dissemination. The diversity and number of easily accessible channels of social media make it difficult for the politicians to form and keep their positive image. Nowadays politicians can be filmed or photographed at any place at any time and then the movies or pictures can be rapidly spread through the different channels of social media. Therefore, as several researchers of politics assume, the interactive nature will encourage politicians to be more honest, behave themselves in public and try not to entangle in ambiguous situations.

Anyone can upload any type of information through the means of social media; and as a result, the political communication can be in a negative form for a particular politician. The Internet also provides channels where opponents can publish adverse information which can contravene reality. Especially as in the interactive space much of the content can be published anonymously, making it impossible to identify who is the author or the contracting authority of the communication attack. Thus with the information they publish through social media tools, faceless and nameless, anonyms can ruin not only the run-up to the elections campaign but even the whole political career. However, social media makes it possible to not only organize communication attacks against the opponents but to retaliate in the same manner and through the same channels.

Moreover, the nature of social networking websites means there is an information multiplication characteristic which helps the politicians to spread political information. Active Internet users like quoting interesting or controversial information; therefore, if politicians manage to engage the users, the snowball

effect starts when the users of social media voluntarily start sharing the links to the content they like.

Social networking websites are characterized by interactive convergence of contents, combining different forms of media, e.g., press, radio, television, etc., which is very useful to politicians and electoral campaigns. In the interactive space, the politicians may extend the lifecycle of campaigning material created for traditional media, for example, post campaigning videos created for television in social networking websites, where they may attract even more attention and views than in traditional television.

The candidates participating in an election may successfully use the social networking websites as a source of presenting information to traditional media, which more and more often uses the messages given by politicians in various social media as a primary source of information. Electoral messages having gained a lot of attention and popularity in social networking websites usually attract the attention of traditional media and are covered in newspapers or TV news. Moreover, the journalists more often use the quotations, pictures or audiovisual material of candidates presented by the means of social media.

The main disadvantage of the use of social networking websites in political communication is that the older electors, who usually are the most active part of the electorate, use the Internet in a limited way, do not take part in the discussions in online social networks, and do not look through the content published in social networking websites. Therefore politicians cannot totally reject the regular communication channels through the means of traditional media or direct meetings, however politicians have to have an interactive internet presence in order not to lose the possibility to communicate with the active and still increasing audience of social media and social networking websites.

3. Social Networking Websites during the Presidential Election Campaign in 2009

The first national elections in Lithuanian where social networking websites were used, was the presidential election campaign in 2009. In the first half of 2009, in Lithuania there still was not one dominant social networking site, and therefore the two biggest social networking websites in the world *Facebook* and *MySpace*, and the two the most popular general purpose social networking websites in Lithuania *One.lt* and *Frype.lt* were analysed. These sites were searched for information about all officially registered candidates, and their communications over these sites were monitored.

The research of the communication in the social networking websites during presidential election campaign has shown that only three candidates of seven were using social networking websites for the communication with their electors. It should be noted that only the international social networking website *Facebook*

was used, meanwhile communication in the social networking websites MySpace, One.lt and Frype.lt during election campaign was not performed.

Table 1: Political communication on social networking websites during 2009 campaign of election of the President of the Republic of Lithuania

Candidate	*Facebook*	*MySpace*	*One.lt*	*Frype.lt*
Algirdas Butkevičius	+	-	-	-
Loreta Graužinienė	-	-	-	-
Dalia Grybauskaitė	+	-	-	-
Česlovas Jezerskas	+	-	-	-
Kazimira Prunskienė	-	-	-	-
Valentinas Mazuronis	-	-	-	-
Valdemar Tomaševski	-	-	-	-

The most active was Dalia Grybauskaite of all three candidates who were using social networking websites. Nine internet pages and groups intended for the support of the abovementioned candidate could be found on *Facebook* during the election campaign. The main page used for the communication 'Už Dalią Grybauskaitę!'('For Dalia Grybauskaite!') included 4891 supporters. Continuously the most important information about the candidate, her speeches, invitations to the meeting and events, photographs and other video material was presented on this page during the presidential election campaign. In total 38 records were made under the name of the candidate during the whole election campaign, but it should be mentioned that the internet page itself was created and its communication started well before the official beginning of the election campaign. The last record on the page was made on the election day and after the election communication was not continued.

The biggest support group was that for the candidate 'Dalia Grybauskaitė. Grupė palaikymui ir diskusijoms' ('Dalia Grybauskaite. Group for support and discussions') consisted of 992 members on the day of election. The second support group by size was that of the politician 'Lietuva, rinkis Dalią!' ('Lithuania, choose Dalia!') which had gathered 564 supporters on the election day. The number of the supporters of Dalia Grybauskaite in the other groups and pages of *Facebook* was relatively low.

An internet page 'Česlovas Jezerskas' was created for the support of Ceslovas Jezerskas on the social networking website *Facebook*, which had on the election day only 7 supporters. 20 records were made under the name of the candidate during the election campaign: speeches of the candidate, media publications and reportages, announcements of the shows were presented. The last record on the page was made five days after the election and communication ceased after that.

During the election a campaign page of Algirdas Butkevicius was created on the social networking website *Facebook*, but active communication was not engaged in. During the entire election campaign no records were uploaded under the name of Algirdas Butkevicius on this page. The *Facebook* page 'Algirdas Butkevicius' had 171 supporters on the election day.

As can be seen from the research, Dalia Grybauskaite was the only one who effectively used social networks for the election campaign. The main page of the candidate in *Facebook* website had a significant number of supporters who constantly received actively communicated information relevant to D.Grybauskaite. It is worth noting that members of the social network themselves had actively engaged with the election campaign, and created a number of pages for the support of a candidate under their own initiative (for example, support group 'Dalia Grybauskaitė – būsima Lietuvos Prezidentė!' ('Dalia Grybauskaite – future president of Lithuania') and others). Ceslovas Jezerskas had also actively sent relevant information to his supporters but in this case the problem was that the candidate page in *Facebook* website had only 7 supporters. It should not be forgotten that communication must have objective addressees, and in the analyzed case there was almost none of them. Algirdas Butkevicius had a created channel for communication with his supporters in the social networking websites but had not used it and therefore gained none of its advantages. It was noted that all politicians who used social networking websites for the election campaign stopped communicating with their own supporters after the election.

4. Social Networking Websites during the Municipal Election Campaign in 2011

Municipal councils election of 2011 in Lithuania was the second national election, during which social networking websites were used for electoral communication. The aim of the research was to investigate what number of candidates at municipalities of different size used *Facebook* for the election campaign; to find the differences between the candidates; and to create the logistic regression model which could forecast the use of social networking websites for electoral purposes by the politicians.

For the purpose of research, all 60 municipalities in Lithuania were divided into 4 groups according to the number of population: group 1 – municipalities of the major cities with more than 100 000 of population; group 2 – the large size municipalities with 50 000–100 000 of population; group 3 – the medium size municipalities with 20 000–50 000 of population; group 4 – the smallest municipalities with population of less than 20 000. The next step was that using the method of random selection of municipalities, two of them were selected from each group in order to conduct the research. After the implementation of the selection, the 1st group comprised of Vilnius and Šiauliai municipalities, the 2nd group – Marijampolė and Telšiai regional municipalities, the 3rd group – Šakiai

and Biržai regional municipalities, and 4th group – Ignalina and Rietavas regional municipalities.

At the time of conducting the research, only the *Facebook* pages of candidates, profiles or groups were included where the election was clearly mentioned and any material related to election or political matters presented.

During municipal councils election campaign of 2011, social networking websites for electoral communication were used by 13.95% of all candidates in the election. The analysis of candidates' use of social networking websites by the size of municipality showed a distinct difference between the use of interactive channels by candidates in the municipalities of major cities and other groups of municipalities. In the municipalities of major cities, the social networking website *Facebook* was used for electoral communication by 22.14% of all candidates; meanwhile in large municipalities only by 5.72%; in medium municipalities by 2.36%; and in small municipalities by 3.24% of all candidates participating in municipal councils election.

Table 2: Total use of social networking website Facebook for electoral communication during municipal councils election of 2011

Groups of municipalities	Total (N)	Used a social networking website for electoral communication		Did not use a social networking website for electoral communication	
		N	%	N	%
Municipalities of major cities	1504	333	22.14	1171	77.86
Large municipalities	559	32	5.72	527	94.28
Medium municipalities	381	9	2.36	372	97.64
Small municipalities	309	10	3.24	299	96.76
TOTAL	2753	384	13.95	2369	86.05

The analysis of the use of the interactive channel in the electoral campaign by the gender of candidates indicated that in total, a social networking website was used for electoral communication in Lithuania by 15.69% of all male candidates and 11.49% of all female candidates. Comparing the groups of different size of municipalities a distinctive difference in the use of social networking website for

electoral campaign in terms of gender was found in the municipalities of major cities (24.30% of men and 18.95% of women) and large municipalities (8.21% of men and 2.17% of women). Meanwhile in medium municipalities, the use was almost equal (2.33% of men and 2.41% of women), and in small municipalities, the women were using the means of social media for electoral campaigning considerably more (1.74% of men and 5.11% of women).

Table 3: The use of social networking website Facebook for electoral communication by the gender of candidates

Gender	Total (N)	Used		Did not use	
		N	%	N	%
Men	1613	253	15.69	1360	84.31
Women	1140	131	11.49	1009	88.51
TOTAL	2753	384	13.95	2369	86.05

The analysis of candidates' use of social networking websites for electoral communication by age revealed that at the scale of the whole country, the means of social media were most actively used by younger candidates: 27.81% of all candidates in the group of 18-24 years, and 28.49% in the group of 25-34 years. As the age of the candidates participating in municipal councils election increases, their use of the means of social media for electoral campaigning decreases: 13.40% in the group of 35-44 years; 8.17% in the group of 45-54 years; 8.32% in the group of 55-64 years; and 3.14% of all candidates in the group of 65-74 years.

Table 4: The use of social networking website Facebook for electoral communication by the age of candidates

Age	Total (N)	Used		Did not use	
		N	%	N	%
18-24	169	47	27.81	122	72.19
25-34	530	151	28.49	379	71.51
35-44	567	76	13.40	491	86.60
45-54	763	64	8.17	719	91.83
55-64	481	40	8.32	441	91.68
65-74	191	6	3.14	185	96.86
>=75	32	0	0.00	32	100.00
TOTAL	2753	384	13.95	2369	86.05

When comparing the groups of Lithuanian municipalities of different sizes, similar trends were determined, i.e. in all municipalities, the candidates in the age groups of 18-24 years and 25-34 years were most active users of social networking websites for electoral communication. However, a difference was found between the senior groups of candidates in the municipalities of major cities and other groups of municipalities. While senior candidates in the municipalities of major cities used social networking websites for electoral communication, though on smaller scale, the senior candidates in large, medium and small municipalities virtually did not use these means.

The analysis of use of a social networking website for electoral campaigning by the education of candidates revealed that, in the whole country, the interactive means were most used by candidates having higher education (15.74%) and secondary, special secondary and basic education (12.89%). Meanwhile only 4.67% of all politicians having further education used the interactive channels for communication with the electorate. It is noteworthy that 16.31% of all candidates participating in the election did not declare their education, and 13.81% of them used social networking websites for their electoral communication.

Comparing the municipalities of different sizes, it was determined that in the municipalities of major cities and large municipalities the interactive channels for electoral purposes were most actively used by the candidates having higher education (23.40% in municipalities of major cities, 5.90% in large municipalities) and secondary, special secondary and basic education (22.56% in municipalities of major cities, 6.12% in large municipalities). Meanwhile, in medium and small municipalities, a social networking website was used for electoral purposes only by the candidates who had declared higher education (3.87% in medium municipalities, 3.49% in small municipalities) or by politicians who have not declared it at all (1.27% in medium municipalities, 10.53% in small municipalities).

Table 5: The use of social networking website Facebook for electoral communication by the education of candidates

Education	Total (N)	Used		Did not use	
		N	%	N	%
Higher	1748	275	15.73	1473	84.27
Further	300	14	4.67	286	95.33
Secondary, basic	256	33	12.89	223	87.11
Did not indicate	449	62	13.81	387	86.19
TOTAL	2753	384	13.95	2369	86.05

The analysis of the use of the social networking website *Facebook* for electoral communication by the candidates of municipal councils election of 2011 by income indicated that in the whole country, the interactive channels were most actively used by the candidates receiving high income (over 48 thousand Litas per year) – 18.11% of all candidates. Social networking website for electoral purposes was used by 13.56% of all candidates receiving average income (from 12 thousand to 48 thousand Litas per year) and 11.07% of all candidates receiving low income (up to 12 thousand Litas per year) in Lithuania.

Comparing the municipalities of different sizes, opposing tendencies were found. In the municipalities of major cities (low – 15.69%, average – 21.77%, high – 30.81%), a social networking website for electoral communication was most used by the candidates receiving the highest income, and in large municipalities (low – 6.85%, average – 6.91%, high – 2.17%), medium municipalities (low – 0.95%, average – 3.55%, high – 1.94%), and small municipalities (low – 5.00%, average – 3.45%, high – 0.00%), interactive channels were most used by the candidates to municipal councils receiving average or low income during the election.

Table 6: The use of social networking website Facebook for electoral communication by the income of candidates

Income	Total (N)	Used		Did not use	
		N	%	N	%
Low	813	90	11.07	723	88.93
Average	1261	171	13.56	1090	86.44
High	679	123	18.11	556	81.89
TOTAL	2753	384	13.95	2369	86.05

The analysis of the use of a social networking website during election by political affiliation revealed that in the whole country, the means of social media for electoral campaigning were most used by the representatives of the parties in Parliament – 14.88%. 11.15% of candidates of the parties represented in local governments, and 14.62% of candidates of non-represented parties and non-affiliated candidates used the interactive channels for electoral communication.

Table 7: The use of social networking website Facebook for electoral communication by political affiliation of the candidates

Political affiliation	Total (N)	Used		Did not use	
		N	%	N	%
Parties represented in Parliament	1512	225	14.88	1287	85.12
Parties represented in local governments	646	72	11.15	574	88.85
Non-represented parties and candidates	595	87	14.62	508	85.38
TOTAL	2753	384	13.95	2369	86.05

Comparing the municipalities of different sizes, a similar proportion of use of social networking websites for electoral campaigning is seen everywhere, except for medium municipalities, where no candidates of non-represented parties and non-affiliated candidates used the interactive channels, and in small parties, all candidates who used the means of social media for electoral campaigning were affiliated to parliament parties.

The analysis of the use of interactive channels for electoral campaigning by the institutional position of the candidates revealed that the candidates already in power, i.e. the politicians seeking to be re-elected, used the social networking website *Facebook* for electoral communication more. In total in Lithuania, 16.83% of all candidates seeking to be re-elected were campaigning via interactive channels, and 13.71% of the candidates seeking to get in power used social networking websites for electoral communication.

Table 8: The use of social networking website Facebook for electoral communication by the institutional position of candidates

Institutional position	Total (N)	Used		Did not use	
		N	%	N	%
Candidates in power	208	35	16.83	173	83.17
Candidates seeking to get into power	2545	349	13.71	2196	86.29
TOTAL	2753	384	13.95	2369	86.05

Comparing the groups of municipalities of different sizes, a distinct difference was determined between the candidates already in power and the ones seeking to get in power in the municipalities of major cities (36.84% in power, 21.36% seeking to get in power) and medium municipalities (6.82% in power, 1.78% seeking to get in power). Meanwhile in large municipalities, the use was almost equal (6.52% in power, 5.65% seeking to get into power) and in small municipalities, the candidates seeking to get in power were using the means of social media for electoral campaigning even more actively (2.38% in power, 3.37% seeking to get into power).

5. The forecast of use of social networking websites by politicians during election

When creating the logistic regression model, which seeks to determine the main characteristics of politicians that allow forecasting of the use of social media for electoral purposes by the candidates, the main demographic and social-political characteristics of the candidates were used: gender, age, income, political affiliation, state of power, and size of municipality. The characteristic of education of candidates was not used in the logistic regression model, as the data here is incomplete (as mentioned above, 16.31% of all candidates participating in the election did not declare their education) and essentially distorts the results of the model.

Table 9: The results of the logistic regression model foreseeing the use of social networking websites for electoral communication by the candidates

	B	p	Exp(B)
Gender	0.2739**	0.0313	1.315**
Age	-0.0602**	<.0001	0.942**
Income	0.0156**	0.0345	1.016**
Institutional position	0.3066	0.2848	1.359
Political affiliation 1 vs 3	0.6553**	<.0001	1.926**
Political affiliation 2 vs 3	-0.0830	0.6528	0.920
Political affiliation 1 vs 2	0.7383**	<.0001	2.092**
Size of municipality 1 vs 4	2.1865**	<.0001	8.904**
Size of municipality 2 vs 4	0.7344	0.0502	2.084
Size of municipality 3 vs 4	-0.1627	0.7300	0.850
Size of municipality 1 vs 2	1.4521**	<.0001	4.272**
Size of municipality 1 vs 3	2.3492**	<.0001	10.477**
Size of municipality 2 vs 3	0.8971**	0.0207	2.439**
% correct 81.5			
N 2753			

B – model coefficient with the respective independent variable; p – the p-value of the independent variable, which shows that when p<0.05, B significantly differs from 0; Exp(B) – the expression indicating how many times the likelihood that one dependent variable is equal to one increases (decreases), when the value of the independent variable changes.

Dependant variable: 0 = the candidate did not use a social networking website for electoral communication; 1 = the candidate used a social networking website for electoral communication. Independent variables: gender: 0 = female, 1 = male; age – the age of a candidate in years; income - annual income of a candidate (measurement unit - 10 thousand Litas); institutional position: 0 = the candidates seeking to get in power, 1 = the candidates already in power; political affiliation: 1 = the candidates of the parties represented in the Parliament, 2 = the candidates of the parties represented in local governments, 3 = the candidates of non-represented parties and non-affiliated candidates; size of municipality: 1 = municipalities of major cities, 2 = large municipalities, 3 = medium municipalities, 4 = small municipalities.

The results of the logistic regression model indicate that all forecasting variables, except for the institutional position, are significant in forecasting the use of social networking websites for electoral communication by the candidates. The strongest forecasting variables are the size of municipality and political affiliation.

The essential forecasting variable is the size of municipality, which indicates that the use of the means of interactive media for electoral communication by the candidates of the municipalities of major cities is considerably higher in comparison to large municipalities (Exp(B) = 4.272), medium municipalities (Exp(B) = 10.477), and small municipalities (Exp(B) = 8.904).

The variable of political affiliation indicates that the likelihood of use of social networking websites by the candidates of the parties represented in the Parliament is nearly twice as high in comparison to the representatives of the parties in local governments (Exp(B) = 2.092) and of small parties and non-affiliated candidates (Exp(B) = 1.926).

The forecasting variables of gender, age, and income indicate that it is more likely that the means of social media would be used for electoral campaigning by male candidates more than female (Exp(B) = 1.315), interactive technologies would be used by younger candidates more than senior candidates (Exp(B) = 0.942), and social networking websites would be used during election by the candidates receiving higher income more than by those receiving low income (Exp(B) = 1.016).

6. Conclusion

With the development of social media and increase in the number of users of social networking websites each year, these interactive tools are becoming

increasingly attractive to various groups of people or organizations pursuing their interests. Different means of social media are perhaps most widely used for business needs in organizational and corporate communication. The discussion of their processes can also be found in this edition. Another increasingly growing utilization area of social media and social networking websites is political and electoral communication.

Social networking websites were first used in Lithuania for electoral communication in 2009, during the presidential election in the Republic of Lithuania, though the scope of the use was relatively small during that election. Social networking websites were used considerably more during the municipal councils election of 2011. The analysis of this election revealed a considerable difference in the use of interactive means for electoral purposes by politicians between the major cities and other municipalities of the country, which allows presuming a certain manifestation of digital segregation of politicians.

In major cities, people have a higher level of education and a higher income, and at the same time they are more receptive to technological innovations. Moreover, the municipalities of largest cities have higher internet penetration and easier technological accessibility, and due to this reason they have a higher percentage of the total number of social media and social networking website users. In smaller municipalities, there still does not exist a sufficient critical mass of social media users, whereas existing ones lack skills of using interactive technologies, thus we may state that the use of social media tools in most cases is still in an early adoption stage.

The presumptions of digital segregation are partially confirmed by the results of the analysis of demographic and social-political characteristics of the candidates who used social media during the election. It was determined that social networking websites were more used by the candidates in the municipalities of major cities than in small municipalities. Moreover, they were more actively used by male candidates than female, younger candidates than senior ones; the candidates receiving higher income were using social networking websites more than the ones receiving low income, and the politicians already in power were using interactive means more than those seeking to get into power.

The results of the logistic regression model revealed the main demographic and social-political characteristics of the candidates and their significance, which allow forecasting the use of social networking websites for electoral communication by politicians. The strongest characteristics forecasting the use of interactive means by politicians are the size of municipality and political affiliation.

Notes

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