

Youtube and Political Communication Case study – Romanian’s Parliamentary Parties

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Abstract: The study aims at examining the extent to which the parliamentary parties in Romania use YouTube in order to promote the image and the political message of the certain political party as videos. This research is focused on the videos that can be seen on the official channels of the Social Democratic Party, of the National Liberal Party and of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania. It will also be taken into consideration the grouping of the videos into categories such as: interviews, statements, public debates, official meetings, mass meetings of the party, press conferences and appearances in the media, leisure and electioneering. The research was limited by the fact that not all the parliamentary parties in Romania have an official Youtube channel and by the fact that two official channels work in the Social Media for about two years, although Romania is ranked 13th in the world among the countries with the highest download speed. This occurs in the context in which there is a Youtube channel in the United States, since 2007, where citizens were debating matters of public interest with the politician / candidate.

Keywords: online political communication; social media analysis; political parties; Romania; Youtube

1. The Video-Sharing – Means of Promoting the Videos in the Political Area

The video-sharing is a field in the new media area which started to develop, since 2007 mainly, due to the evolution of the Internet networks and due to the global access to a higher bandwidth which let to the developing of the broadband Internet.

Due to a dramatic increase in number of the high-speed Internet connections, with 92% in the Quarter 2 to 3 of 2009, Romania ranked third in the world after South Korea and Japan, in top countries with access to Internet via broadband (speed greater than 5 Mb / s).

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Currently, Romania ranks 13th in the world, in top countries with the highest download speed, with an average of 25.56 Mb / s, above the EU average (15.95 Mb / s)¹. In another World Ranking consisting of 30 cities with the highest download speeds, there are found four Romanian cities: Bucharest ranks 5th (32.72 Mb / s), Iași ranks 11th (27.88 Mbps), Timișoara - 15th (27.26 Mb / s) and Constanța - 17th (28.80 Mb / s). This technological development of Romania led to the development of a new type of communication that adds innovation in the mass communication. Moreover, concepts such as “Internet”, “new media”, “social networking”, “Web 2.0”, “Facebook”, “Twitter”, “YouTube”, “blog”, relatively new concepts, have emerged in the vocabulary of the political communication, of the electoral marketing, offering new opportunities for transmission of ideas and of political message to the target audience.

The video-sharing channel with the most access and views in the world is YouTube. It was created in February 2005 by three former employees of PayPal². This site having its headquarters in San Bruno, California, uses the Adobe Flash Video technology to display a wide range of videos created by the viewers themselves. YouTube is part of the recent phenomenon called Web 2.0 or Social Media.

As a comparison, in the United States of America, this type of political communication by means of the new media has advanced so much that Youtube established in April 2007, a political blog [Guțu, 2007, p. 132] called CitizenTube³, where the electorates were debating topics of public interest with the politicians / candidates.

Moreover, in 2008, the traditional TV debates of the presidential candidates have moved online, on a platform⁴ created by Youtube together with the U.S. television channel, CNN. This had a huge impact on politicians who understood that the online is an area that should be exploited, not only because of the number of users increasing from one year to another, but also due to low cost compared to the traditional media promotion. Thus, all the candidates in the last election in the United States have created personal pages on YouTube, promoting any event organized by them.

¹ <http://www.netindex.com/>, 2012.

² http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2006-10-11-youtube-karim_x.htm, 2012.

³ <http://youtube.com/citizentube>, 2012.

⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/debates>, 2012.

Unlike the traditional television, the video-sharing “*does not imply a unidirectional producer-consumer stream but a network of interwoven streams between the community members who swapped roles, becoming both consumer and producer.*” (Meza, 2009, p. 117)

2. The Parliamentary Political Parties in Romania

2.1. The Specificity of the Political System in Romania

According to the Constitution, Romania is “a national, sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible state”¹. The form of the government in the Romanian State is represented by the semi-presidential republic. The State is organized according to the principle of separation and balance of powers - legislative, executive and judicial - in a constitutional democracy.

The Romanian Parliament is bicameral, consisting of the Senate with 137 members, and the Chamber of Deputies, with 314 members. A total of 18 additional parliamentary seats in the Chamber of Deputies are reserved for the representatives of the national minorities. The Parliament of Romania has a legislative role, debating and voting the ordinary and organic laws, both in the specialized committees and in plenary. The members of the Parliament are elected by a mixed uninominal vote, universal, direct and secret. The electoral system is a proportional one (the members of the Parliament are elected from all parties that have exceeded the threshold of 5% of the total votes, based on an algorithm). Elections are held every four years, the last taking place on November 30, 2008, and the next elections will be held on December 9, 2012.

2.2. The Current Political Configuration of the Parliament of Romania

According to www.cdep.ro and www.senat.ro, the political configuration of the Parliament of Romania has undergone some notable changes compared to the results of the last election in 2008, as follows: The Liberal Democratic Party has 140 MPs, compared to 166 in 2008. The SDP, NLP and CP parties have formed an alliance called the Social Liberal Union, having together 215 MPs. The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania has, at present, 27 MPs, compared to 31 in 2008 and the Group of the National Minorities has 16 MPs, compared to 18 in 2008. The

¹ http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?den=act2_1&par1=1#t1c0s0a1, 2012.

major change in the Parliament of Romania was created by the migration of the NLP, DLP and SDP MPs in the group of the non-partisan MPs. Subsequently, of the 33 independent MPs, 24 have formed a new political party called the National Union for the Progress of Romania.

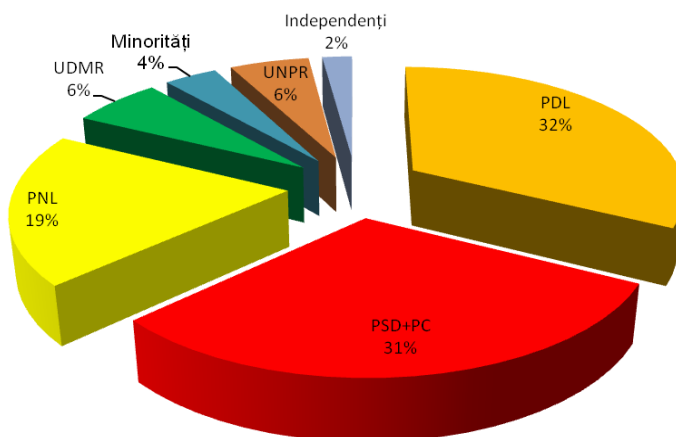


Figure 1. The current political configuration of the Parliament of Romania

3. Promoting the Parliamentary Political Parties in Romania by Means of Youtube

3.1. The Research Objectives

O: Analyzing the manner in which the parliamentary parties in Romania use YouTube in order to promote the image and the political message of the certain political party.

3.2. The Research Hypotheses

H1: It is assumed that the main videos submitted by the parliamentary political parties on the official Youtube channels are taken from electioneering, press conferences or retransmission of certain television shows.

H2: It is assumed that the political parties with the highest extent of representation in the Parliament of Romania promote their image and the one of their candidates by means of YouTube in the best way possible.

3.3. The Research Method

The research method in order to achieve the objective is represented by the quantitative analysis and the instrument of it is the device analysis of the videos that can be seen on the official channels of the parliamentary parties in Romania. In a first instance, we identified the parliamentary parties that have an official Youtube account (which they also promote on their official website), and of the six parliamentary parties only 3 have such a means of promotion. This was also the main obstacle in this research.

With the help of the Youtube analysis website, www.vidstatsx.com, we analyzed the average length of the most watched, the most quoted and the most recent 50 videos broadcast on the Youtube channels of the parliamentary parties surveyed. Another point of analysis refers to the number of posted videos, the number of the YouTube channel subscribers, the number of views and the number of comments. Also, the videos distributed by the parliamentary parties were grouped by several variables, namely: interviews / statements, public debates, official meetings, party mass meetings, leisure, mass-media/ press conferences, campaigns / meetings with the voters and others.

3.4. The Data Collection and Analysis

Data were obtained as a result of centralizing information and statistical figures on the official Youtube channel of the parliamentary political parties in Romania. Thus, the entire research was based on the analysis of the multimedia content distributed by the political parties surveyed.

After reviewing the official Youtube pages of the parties, the situation on the using of the video-sharing channel is:

Political party	Youtube channel	Youtube link
PD-L	0	N
PSD	1	http://www.youtube.com/user/VictorPontaPSD
PNL	1	http://www.youtube.com/user/liberalii1
PC	0	N
UDMR	1	http://www.youtube.com/user/rmdsz
UNPR	0	N

Only three of the six parliamentary parties (the Social Democratic Party, the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania) use YouTube as a means of promoting the message and the political activities by means of the videos. However, we see a relatively small number of users who have subscribed to the YouTube channel of the three parliamentary parties (68, 53, 60). As it can be seen in the table below, the NLP and the DUHR have recent activities on the Youtube channel, the last activity being recorded on August 21, 2012 (the NLP) and August 30, 2012 (the DUHR). The SDP had no activity on the Youtube channel since June 22, 2012, i.e. for more than two months.

Given the fact that the DUHR has opened an account for almost 5 years ago, compared with the other two parties using Youtube for 2 years, we find that the average of the videos uploaded by the DUHR is of 0.3 videos per day. The Social Democratic Party has a rate of 0.03 videos per day, the National Liberal Party rate of 0.25 uploaded videos per day. The average of the views per a video is of 944.16 for the Social Democratic Party, of 174.36 for the National Liberal Party and of 405 views for the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania.

By reference to the average length of the top 50 most viewed videos, the most popular and latest official Youtube websites of the parliamentary parties, the situation looks like this:

Political party	Top 50 viewed (avg length. – min:sec)	Top 50 rated (avg length. – min:sec)	Top 50 most recent (avg length. – min:sec)
PSD	3:22	3:22	3:22
PNL	19:00	20:23	16:57
UDMR	2:56	4:02	6:27

According to the analysis Youtube site, www.vidstatsx.com, we find the average of the videos posted by the Social Democratic Party of 3 minutes and 22 seconds, those of the National Liberal Party have an average of 19:00 (for the most viewed videos) of 20:23 (the most popular) and 16:57, and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania an average of 2:56 (for the most viewed), 4:02 (the most popular) and 6:27 (for the latest).

Even if YouTube is an essential instrument of the social media, characterized by generating a high feedback from users, we observe a very low rate of comments on the videos uploaded by the three political parties. Moreover, the National Liberal Party has restricted the received comments and the Social Democratic Party

received only 11 comments for the 18 videos uploaded. The 510 videos of the DUHR generated 183 comments in total.

Political party	Mandates	Joined	Last activity	Subscribed	Videos	Views	Comments
PSD	163	27.09.2010	22.06.2012	68	18	16995	11
PNL	93	17.06.2010	21.08.2012	53	207	36094	0
UDMR	18	11.10.2007	30.08.2012	60	510	206984	183

Relating to the categories (interviews / statements, public debates, official meetings, party mass meetings, leisure, mass-media/ press conferences, campaigns / meetings with the voters and others) that include the videos posted on the official Youtube websites of the three political parties under study, the situation looks like this:

Political party	Categories							
	Interviews statements	Public debates	Official meetings	Party mass meetings	Leisure	Mass-media / press conferences	Campaigns / meetings with the voters	Others
PSD	4	1	3	3	3	1	2	1
PNL	16	2	0	33	0	153	2	1
UDMR	55	3	10	21	8	185	224	4

Given the fact that the official Youtube page of the Social Democratic Party is, in fact, the personal channel of the President of the party, Victor Ponta, the SDP chose to promote more its political image through interviews and political statements (22.22%), by promoting its free time activities (16.67%) via video from the national congress of the party (16.67%) or its official meetings with the senior European officials (16.67%), and less videos from television, recordings of press conferences and public debates (5.55%).

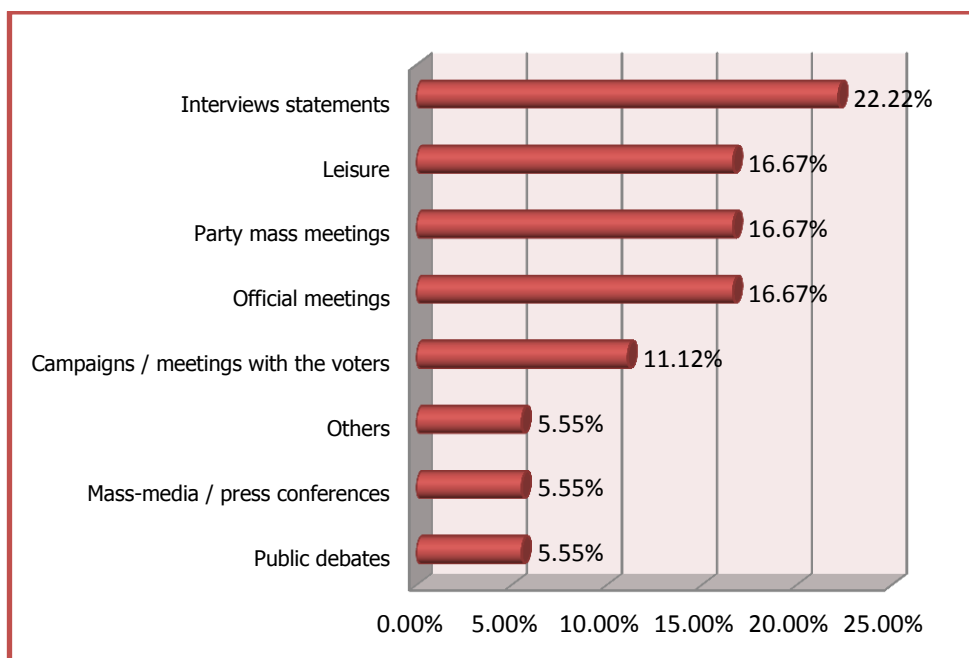


Figure 2. The categories of videos on the Youtube channel of the SDP

The National Liberal Party promoted its image and message in a ratio of 73.90%, through recordings of press conferences or television broadcasts. The party mass meetings represent a percentage of 15.90% of all the uploaded videos and the interviews and statements of the prominent leaders of the party, a percentage of 7.70%. From this analysis we notice that the party does not promote or does promote, in a very low ratio, its image and messages through the videos taken from its electioneering, meetings with the voters, the politicians' leisure or during the official meetings with certain officials.

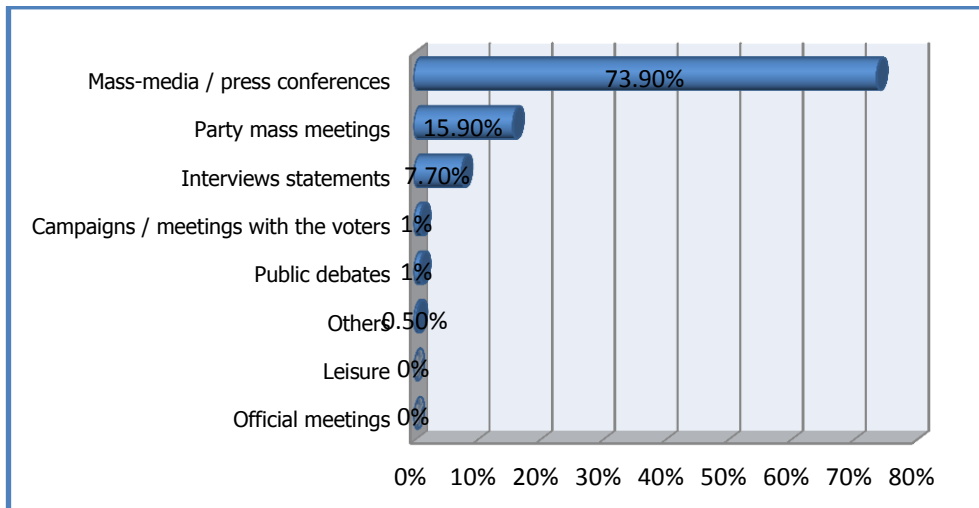


Figure 3. The categories of videos on the Youtube channel of the NLP

The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania focused on promoting the image and the political message of the party more in its electioneering (43.91%), by means of the candidates' campaign statements from various elections, by means of electioneering commercials or videos that presented the candidates from several perspectives. Also, a percentage of 36.27% of the videos posted by the DUHR is represented by the TV records from Transylvania TV broadcasters, Duna TV public broadcaster and TVR1. The interviews and the political statements represent a percentage of 10.80% and the party mass meetings represent 4.12% of all the uploaded videos. The public debates do not represent a category that the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania focused on in promoting the image of the party.

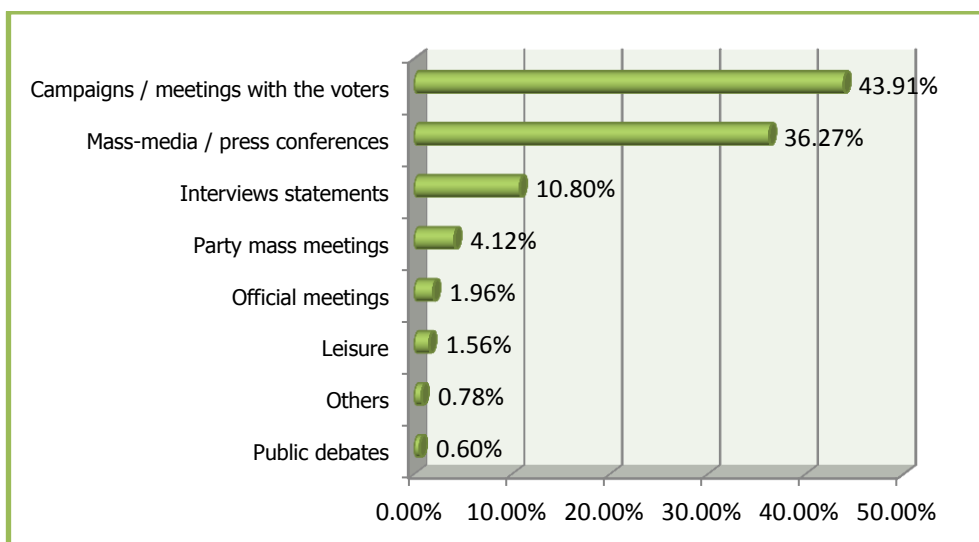


Figure 4. The categories of videos on the Youtube channel of the DUHR

4. Conclusions

Summarizing, we notice that the second research hypothesis refuted. The political parties with the highest representation in the Parliament of Romania do not promote their image and the one of their candidates through YouTube in their best way possible. Thus, the DLP, the party with the most parliamentary seats, do not promote their image through Youtube at all, and the second party in point of the number of parliamentary seats, the SDP, uses the YouTube channel of the President of the party, and does not have a channel of its own. The parliamentary parties with the fewest parliamentary seats promote better their image through Youtube: the DUHR distributed since 2007 - the year they have built their own Youtube channel - 510 and the NLP (since 2010) - 207 videos.

Also, we note that the left-centered party, the SDP, shares videos with interviews or public statements records, videos with the leisure activities of the party and of the President of the party, from the party mass meetings and the meetings with the voters in electioneering. The most videos distributed by the right-centered party, the NLP, are taken from the television broadcasts or from the press conferences. The political party of Hungarians in Romania distributes its most videos from the electioneering and from the television broadcasts transmitted in Hungarian.

In the context of the parliamentary elections in Romania, dated December 9, 2012, it is expected the increase of the number of videos posted by the candidates of the political parties. Furthermore, introducing the online communication in the communication strategy will be an imperative requirement for each candidate. Thus, the online communication has become an increasingly viable alternative in the context of the political communication, being driven by at least two factors:

- the traditional media took over and imposed the public agenda, and the politicians have increasingly less access to creating a public agenda because of the rising cost of airtime;
- The development of the Internet and the New Media in Romania led to the expansion of an increasingly larger virtual public space where both political actors and citizens are able to interact without being constrained by time, space and / or cost.

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