

The Effects of Viral Marketing as an Integral Part of Political, Social Marketing

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Abstract

In the context of the wide-ranging changes in post-communist societies, the crisis of conventional forms of political participation in advanced democratic systems, the understanding of globalization processes in recent decades that influence political institutions and operations around the world, an intense search for new conceptual schemes analysis of the political field. The (economic) market situation is a new direction in politics very actively developed today in political science. It provides the necessary element both for analyzing the realities at the macropolitical level and for describing the concrete social and political practices at the level of the individual and of the group. The application of marketing techniques in politics and politics is often treated as a triggering factor with a negative impact since the level of influence is very high. The marketization of politics tends to deviate processes from their natural course, and by this, it would constitute an external interference to achieve individual, often selfish, goals. All these criticisms have made marketing not always a good reputation, especially in this area, where elections have an impact for at least four years. Viral marketing has had several forms throughout time. If it was initially distributed as mere rumors, currently viewed from the perspective of the Internet, it manages to provide engaging content, sometimes in the form of flash or video clips, spread at high speed, even proving in the political environment, the winning loser ". This article will analyze the current situation in Romania in terms of political marketing, how it evolved, and how it will be able to influence the European Parliamentary elections in late 2019. This analysis will be done through a questionnaire designed to highlight first of all how viral marketing has changed their decision to go / not vote and how political marketing persuaded them to vote in one way or another.

Keywords: Viral marketing, political marketing, marketing communication.

JEL classification: M31

1. Introduction

Web content and online marketing have become essential foundations for viral marketing, a phenomenon that involves the propagation of a message or content without effort

from the authors. When a material is considered useful or exciting, visitors tend to tell friends and acquaintances, usually by sending them a link or distributing the content.

One of the examples that clearly explain that viral marketing is the marketing explosion caused by a Mentos candy thrown in a bottle of Coca-Cola. The reaction generates an explosion that sprays the drink 10 meters or more. This phenomenon was popularized and distributed in the summer of 2006 through numerous videos with this experiment. Following their initial success, Grobe and Voltz made a video of an extreme demonstration to answer the following question: "What happens when you combine 200 liters of Diet Coke and over 500 Mentos Mints?" The web audience was fascinated by the result - it is crazy and has caused a classic viral phenomenon. In just three weeks, four million people watched the video, and hundreds of bloggers wrote about it. The excitement in the Mentos marketing bureaus was extreme when the videos took off online - millions of free Mento's exposures (for such an impact, traditional marketing costs could have amounted to tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars (Scott, 2007, p.82).

For marketing specialists, one of the prized things about the Web is that when an idea that takes off in the online environment can propel a brand or a company to fame in a surprising and freeway. Whether we're talking about - viral marketing, buzz or word-of-blog - the fact that other people tell your story determines the action. Many phenomena that go viral begin without the expectation of popularity. Someone creates content, a funny video, a cartoon, or a story - to entertain their friends. The phenomenon becomes viral when friends send it to other people, and these in turn to others and so on until the number of views increases considerably, while the creator could have expected to reach most tens of friends.

Nowadays, viral marketing has become a particular field of study of marketing becoming a technique in itself used in promoting its launch of goods and services. In addition to this, viral marketing techniques have also become used in areas such as social marketing and political marketing with the aim not to sell a service or product but to generate an action of the population.

2. The impact of political marketing in the online environment

Political marketing can be defined as a set of techniques that have as objective the creation and promotion of the image of a man or a political institution, depending on the public from which it is desired to obtain the vote or public confidence (Teodorescu, 2001, p.3).

Over time the election campaigns are becoming more and more complex, they are professionalized, political marketing thus becoming an important topic both among the specialists and among the public. There are several studies on potential political marketing strategies used in election campaigns. These are, however, theoretical approaches in practice change depending on the specifications given by the purpose of the elections. The diversity is provided by the different political contexts, but especially by the local characteristics can influence the marketing techniques and strategies used. There are situations in which, even within the same centrally coordinated campaign, there are differences of approach at the local level, where the subsidiaries of parties that adapt to the local population act (Rotaru, 2015).

Political marketing consists of the use of commercial marketing techniques and concepts in politics. Political parties conduct market research (starting from the example of marketing research) obtaining information from polls or focus groups and using them to identify how the population will vote. The parties use marketing techniques both to promote their policies and to communicate and drive the public about the strategies adopted, the elected and elected leaders as well as to identify how to communicate most effectively with the target population. Besides, during the election campaign in political marketing, not only public relations strategies appear, but also the profiling of elections, segmentation, micro-targeting, and e-

marketing to inform citizens. Moreover, political marketing can respond to market information in the way it designs the political product it offers, becoming more market-oriented than sales based on marketing principles (Lees-Marshment, 2010, p.15).

While the professionalization and modernization of political marketing represented a widely studied process, there has never been a comparative scientific analysis of political marketing behavior in parallel with the approach of sales or market orientations in traditional marketing. Of course, politicians can use tools without being framed in a global market orientation, and precisely the variation, as well as the convergence in empirical behavior, lead to the particularities of political marketing. Indeed, the success of e-marketing or online marketing in the 2016 presidential election has led parties from other countries to approach a new initiative (As we can see in Figure 1). But behind the US innovation lies market-oriented thinking, in the sense that the Internet was used not only to sell to voters but to provide engagement mechanisms that were designed to meet the varied needs of volunteers and to allow them to participate in politics in the way that suits voters rather than the candidate (Lees-Marshment, 2010, p.15).

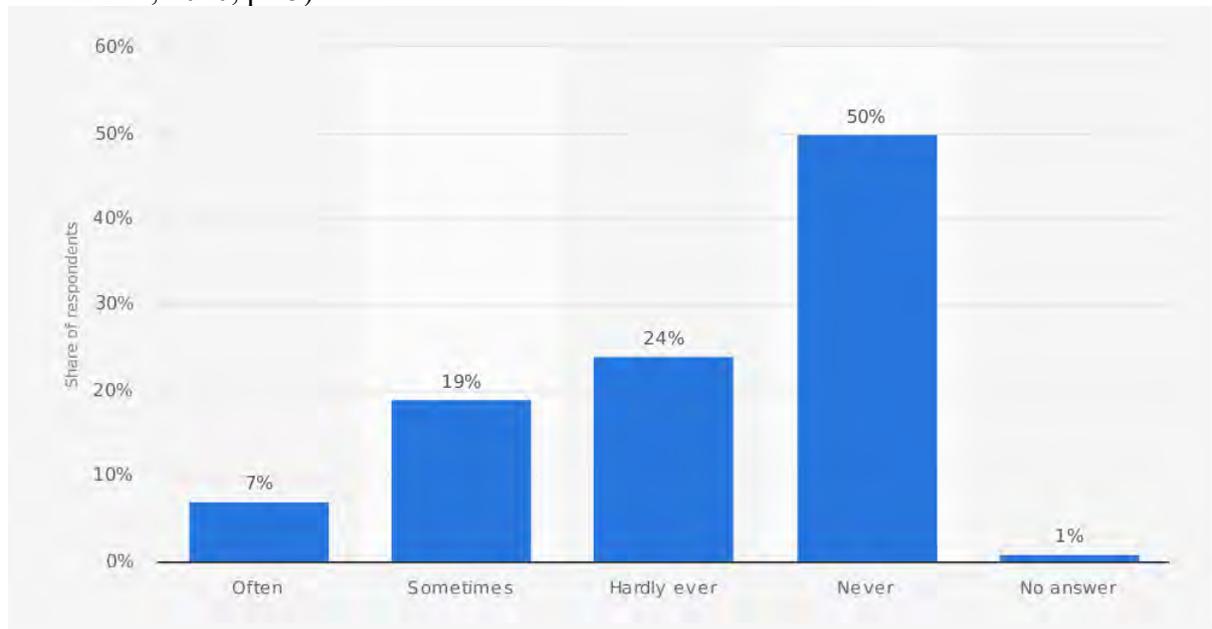


Figure 1. Frequency of social media users in the Denmark commenting, posting, or discussing government and politics with others on social media as of November 2015

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/678294/frequency-of-discussing-politics-on-facebook-in-denmark-by-age-group/>

For example, a study conducted in Denmark in 2015 on the frequency of online policy discussions on different platforms indicated that seven percent of them often engaged in political discussions on social media, while 50 percent did not comment, post or discuss anything about government and politics. The study was conducted in Denmark in November 2015 on several 1593 respondents (Kienast, 2016).

The inclusion of marketing in the political sphere stimulated the debate of the many consequences led by voters or market-oriented. The principle of market orientation is used in business all over the world to reach and maintain market share and is the basis of capitalism; but in politics, responsibility is decisively transferred to the voter to decide what are the preferences of the policy and the suitability of the leaders, which raises fears of populism and the abandonment of the collectivist ideals informed by the ideological opinions of the world. The abandonment of the political direction of a country in the path of the electoral market has significant implications for the functioning of representative democracy (Lees-Marshment,

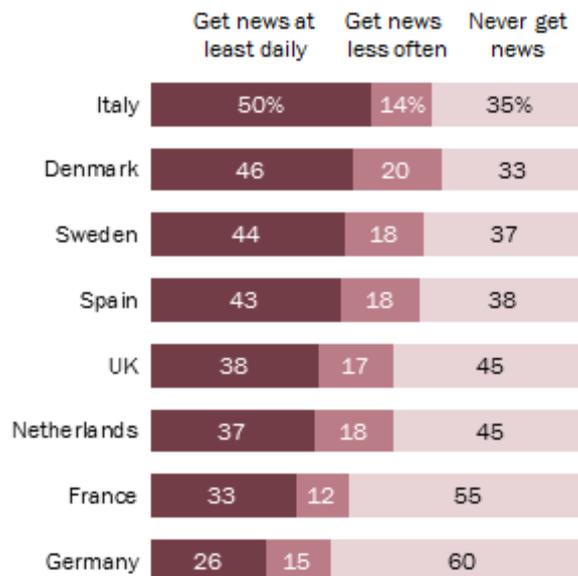
2010, p.15). Based on the American model, within the European Union, the population's involvement in politics through social media is also representative. For example, according to a study in the months leading up to the European elections that took place on May 23-26, 2019, spending on promotion and activity in the online environment has increased considerably, the country with the highest expenditure for political advertising targeted on Facebook in the European Union. (EU) being Germany (3.5 million euros), the second place was the United Kingdom (Great Britain), where the expenses totaled 3.3 million euros (Kienast, 2019).

According to Statista Research Department, who conducted numerous studies in 2018 on the socio-demographic characteristics of the population involved in discussions about politics in the online environment, they obtained as broken down by education level, during the survey period, it was found that television was used for national political news by the majority of Europeans from all education groups, the most significant by the people who finished their primary level of education (85 percent) and the people who completed their high school level (81 percent). The Internet (ie, websites and social networks) was used by 77 percent of Europeans still studying in 2017-2018.

In the studies carried out by age categories, it was found that 75% of the population aged between 40 and 54 years and 81% of the people over 55 years old, appreciated and used as a means of information the European political problems television. In contrast, the most popular medium among Europeans aged between 15 and 24 years old was the Internet (websites and online social networks) with a percentage of 65%.

A follow-up to another study on the influence of online social networks on the interest in political affairs in 28 EU countries in 2017-2018 found that, on average, 59% of EU citizens considered online social networking to be a source of information and debate. of political ideas and can produce changes in the election ideas of EU citizens

% of adults in each country who ___ from social media



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2. Majorities in most European countries get news from social media

Source: <https://www.journalism.org/>

We can thus see that it is possible to discuss politics are increasingly common in the population of Europe, the studies also reflect the idea that through social networks designs can be created to promote, debate, discuss and influence certain factors so much. Political bodies to achieve desired results.

Based on these results and facts the communication and public relations specialists belonging to the political organisms became aware of the impact that social media can have on the population and developed new tactics and communication strategies designed in the online environment and through the networks socialization, even trying to produce a viral marketing phenomenon.

3. Viral marketing used in political marketing

Viral marketing has become a method of promotion by which the material is transmitted from one person to another without the intervention of the creator or promoter. Viral marketing uses existing social connections (networks of friends, blogs) to distribute the viral message (Grosseck, 2007).

In political marketing, during the European Parliamentary elections, the attention of the voters is not directed to a candidate, but a group of candidates as representatives of the party. As a result, the promotion strategy is different, focusing on increasing the reputation of the candidates. The low interest in parties and euro parliamentary elections implies that, in this case, communication in the online environment is mainly a way of disseminating information to become acquainted with the candidates and less an instrument for mobilizing voters (Androniciuc, 2019).

It is well-known that the Internet can have a significant impact when we talk about politics, which is why specialists in the field of politics are focusing their attention on getting involved in the online environment. The creativity of the campaign managers became a challenge when the online environment became a source of influence and to obtain a considerable number of stamps on the ballot papers. The beauty of the internet lies precisely in the fact that it brings to the world transparency; all ideas and content can capture attention and go viral. In Romania, viral marketing is more by chance than forecast, and vloggers conduct viral marketing campaigns and not by campaign managers directly involved in the election process.

Relevant examples of viral marketing that propel the world to vote are few in Romania, but we can recall the mobilization that sent the population to the European Parliamentary elections. The social networks were filled with frames by which people said they vote (Voting is my superpower), who votes, whom they vote for and what their ideas and opinions are. Celebrities and simple anonymous, communication professionals and pure amateurs strove to highlight that the importance of voting attendance is vital for Romania's future and the fate of democracy. Moreover, since the favorite medium for communication and mobilization is online, some of the viral videos were made by professionals such as the "We Go to the vote" project, in which people from marketing and advertising were involved, and others were made by simple vloggers like "Grandma said this", but they had the same purpose of highlighting the right to choose and the involvement of the changing population.

4. Research Methodology

The article analyzed the current situation in Romania in terms of political marketing and what are the sources of influence that will cause citizens to participate in the vote. This analysis was done through a questionnaire designed to highlight firstly how viral marketing changed its decision to go / not vote and how political marketing convinced them to vote in one way or

another. The purpose of the research was to determine the impact of viral marketing on citizens' voting decisions.

The research was carried out among 114 respondents with voting rights and had as main objectives the identification of the most influential sources of information that determined the citizens to come to the vote, the identification of the communication medium used during the elections and which are the primary sources — Information on the electoral process.

Among the questions in the questionnaire to which the respondents had to answer are: "To what extent do you consider relevant the following sources of information used in the electoral process?"

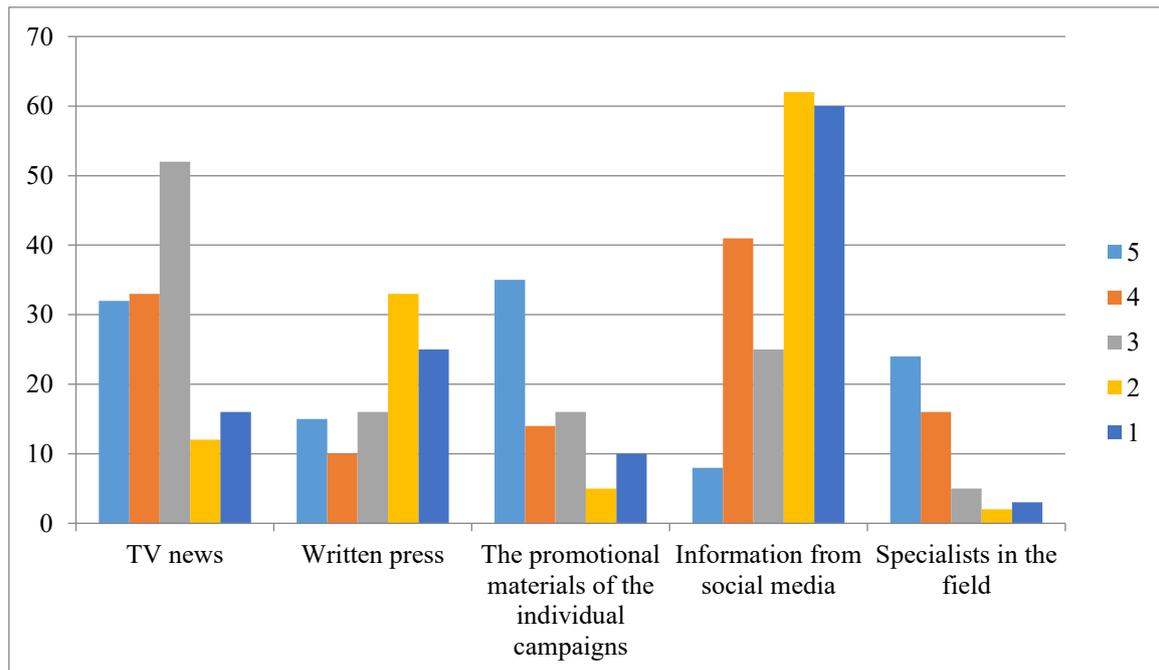


Figure 3. Sources of information in the electoral process

Source: made by the author in the research

Following the results, we can see that the most used source of information among the respondents is represented by social media networks, followed by TV news. Referring to the average age of the respondents, we can also observe that people between the ages of 18-35 have chosen mainly social networks as the source of information, arguing the presence of all political identities in the online environment and the possibility to debate various ideas. And thematic. At the opposite end, TV news and the Written Press were chosen by people over 45 years of age.

Another question in the questionnaire referred to the notoriety of the campaigns that went viral in the electoral process: "Do you consider that viral marketing campaigns contribute to increasing the presence of citizens at the vote?"

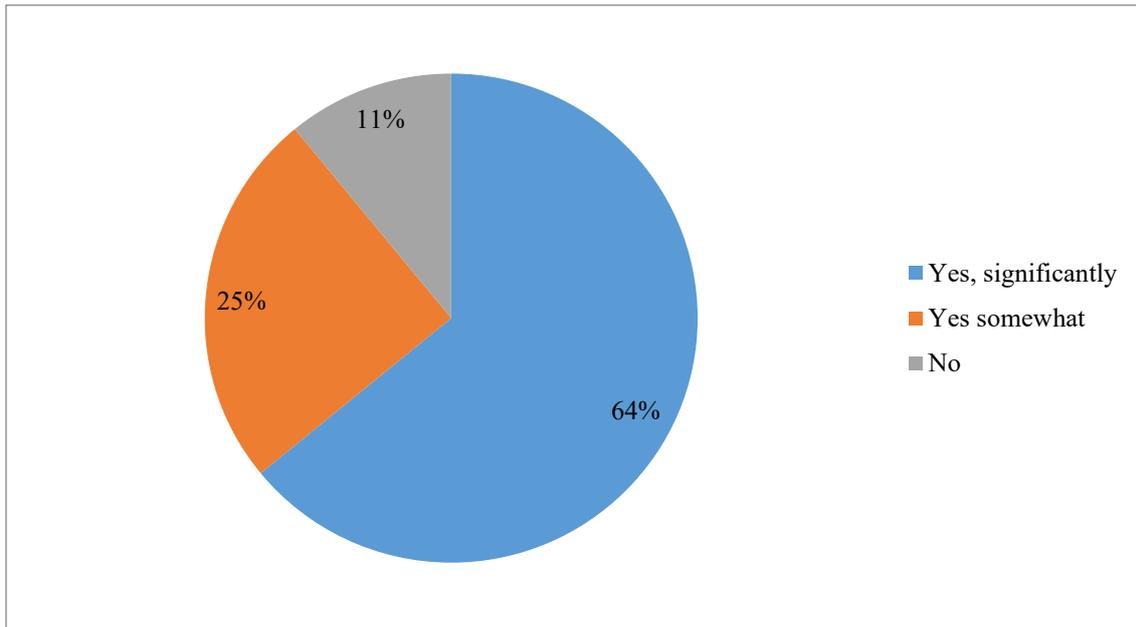


Figure 4. Influence of viral marketing

Source: made by the author in the research

The next question was structured on the structure of a semantic differential in which respondents were asked to what extent viral marketing influenced their decisions and preferences in electoral campaigns.

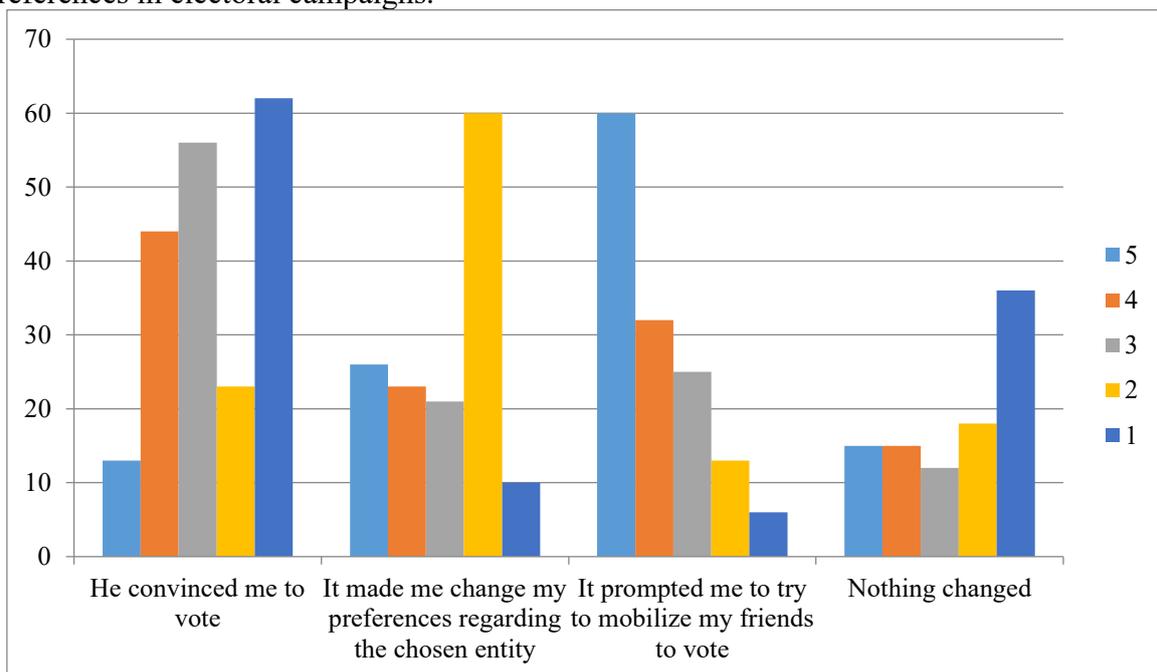


Figure 5. Impact of viral marketing

Source: made by the author in the research

Following the results, we noticed that most of the respondents were influenced by viral marketing campaigns both by changing the decision to participate in the vote and by distributing the content and trying to convince and mobilize other friends/acquaintances/netizens to participate in the ballot. Asked what they think is the reason why viral marketing has a significant influence in changing attitudes, they answered that the idea of transparency and the fact that it is not a forced message gives it credibility and impresses with emotion.

Conclusions

We can conclude by saying that viral marketing becomes effective when it combines several features that bring it closer to the target audience. Situations similar to those of people, daily activities, or emotional situations turn an irrelevant material into a viral one in the online environment. In the electoral campaigns, the technique becomes more and more used both by the specialists in the field to attract the preferences of the citizens, as well as by the simple people who only want to mobilize their peers to participate in the vote.

Viral marketing from unofficial sources of electoral teams becomes all the more credible as it does not aim to manipulate the masses and change the attitude with proofs to candidates as well as motivating the citizens to exercise their right to vote. Following the research, we could see that significant differences are depending on the age of the sources of information, noting that young people are more active in the online environment. In this sense, viral marketing becomes an object of political marketing and beyond.

Acknowledgments

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