**Kamil Giemza**

# CHARACTERISTICS OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS. MIXED METHODS RESEARCH ON THE EXAMPLE OF WARSAW MEPs

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to characterize the political communication process of Warsaw MEPs. It shows what type of communication tools are used and which type of communiques are most frequently used. This paper consists of 5 parts. The first two will bring an introduce to the used terms and social networks. To keep a clear framework, methodology of research will be explained further. After that preparing stage, the analysis and results will be presented. My aim is to show the methods and predominant forms of MEPs communication on the Internet using a specific social network.

## Political communication in social networks – theoretical introduction

Communication (Latin *communicatio, comunicare* – to share, to impart) is a process of imparting or exchanging information, idea or emotion. For the purpose of this paper I used the term of political communication based on the main social media platforms. There is no need for explanation of the influence

of public discourse on the decision making process in national legislatures[1] of the western societies.

How is the political communication defined? In a general view Annusewicz and Bejma see political communication as an exchange of political ideas and information on politics[2]. Grażyna Ulicka uses the definition of political communication proposed by Dominique Volton as a sphere where different ideas and views of three groups of actors who have a right to publicly speak about politics meet. These actors are politicians on one hand and public opinion on the other hand. The third group between them two are the journalists[3]. The people's voice or more specifically the public discourse highlighted by news, reports, commentaries etc. constantly affects politics. Habermas points out that: *The influence of public opinion spreads in opposite directions, turning both towards a government busy carefully watching it and the other way towards the reflecting audiences from where it first originated*[4]. Sudden policy change can be observed after an unfavorable opinion poll, so the authorities react more or less accordingly to a positive image. Even if they are not willing to change their poorly perceived decision, getting involved in a communication process is more than certain.

Journalists' position in the political communication on the Internet should be moved to the background of the process. Denying the influence of traditional media would be a mistake because of their major role in the wide

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[1] J. Habermas, *Concluding comments on empirical approaches to deliberative politics*, "Acta Politica" 2005, No.40, p. 389.
[2] O. Annusewicz, *Komunikowanie polityczne w okresie przedwyborczym*, "Studia Politologiczne" vol. 25, p. 210-225, A. Bejma, *Bariery, błędy i zakłócenia procesu komunikowania politycznego*, "Studia Politologiczne" vol. 25., p.323-336.
[3] G. Ulicka, *Wpływ marketingu politycznego na zmiany w życiu publicznym państw demokratycznych*, "Studia Politologiczne" vol. 1, Warszawa 1996.
[4] J. Habermas, *Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research*, "Communication Theory" 2006, No. 16, p. 417.

agenda-setting. Nevertheless, Internet communication between politicians and their electorate or viewers cuts the cord of exclusive news for the journalists. For the purpose of this paper, the definition of political communication as a process of mutual informational interactions between political actors connected by the relation to power, rivalry and cooperation, presented by Sobkowiak[5] is quite useful. This approach according to Ewa Marciniak[6] *takes into account the reciprocity of political relations, which can be described as an ability to understand, accept, disagree and/or to modify their own and other people's convictions*[7]. This approach puts politicians in the center of political communication, where politicians are indeed able to create messages which affect people.

The power of social media derives from directness and immediacy. Politicians can react personally and instantaneously using social media when e.g. being accused in public and they can only hope that the media will release that information in its original form.

The third valid advantage is a full content-openness, standing in opposition to the limited mainstream media access. It turns out that social media are the perfect answer to unfulfilled politicians' communication needs.

The central point of the communication process is language itself. It is the only weapon held by politicians since we are dealing with the primacy of a superstructure over the Marxist base. This emphasizes the importance of

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[5] L. Sobkowiak, *Komunikacja polityczna*, [in:] A. Jabłoński, L. Sobkowiak (eds.), *Studia z teorii polityki*, Wrocław 1996, p. 163.
[6] E. Marciniak, *Komunikowanie polityczne w ujęciach interpretacyjnych*, "Studia Politologiczne", vol. 25, p. 16.
[7] Different view comes from Blumler and Gurevitch, which conceptualize the political communication system as a set of interrelated and mutually dependent relationships between various institutions and their audiences. The four main components of the system are: 1.) political institutions, 2.) media institutions, 3.) the audience's orientation to political communication, and 4.) the "communication relevant" aspects of political culture.

a direct politician-society link without any intercessor. An interesting view emerged from a *short report* from 2007[8] *on the language of politicians at the beginning of the 21st century*. Chairman of the Council of the Polish language at the Polish Academy of Sciences Professor Markowski emphasized the originality of the communication process – *is it just valuable or valuable by all means*? This phenomenon can be seen more clearly in the Internet communication, where we observe a specific rivalry in newspeak. The conference provided a general concept of two types of political language, media- and cabinet-type, adjusted to a specific receiver.

Two years later the Senate hosted another conference related to the Polish political language[9], where Professor Simonides touched on the phenomenon of multiplicity of interpretative statements, taking on extremely different forms – from irony to seriousness, which makes the communication process unclear. Professor Bralczyk said that politicians were trying to build a message "choose me" by saying something original or controversial by means of the media. The politician exists due to the language, when the politician stops speaking, he or she stops existing. Mass culture media reduced the language and forced a shorter communication style, where argumentation cannot be too extensive and language too complicated. Other observations were related to the relationship between the journalist and the politician as seen by society, where the politician is regularly being interrogated by a journalist, making him prevaricate. Not all of these can be transferred into a characteristics for political communication on the Internet, but it stands for a reference point.

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[8] Discussion panel in the Senate of the Republic of Poland, "short report on the politicians' language at the beginning of the twenty-first century", http://ww2.senat.pl/k6/agenda/wydarz/2007/070220a.htm, 19.02.2014.
[9] Discussion panel in the Senate of the Republic of Poland „Polish political language after 1989" http://ww2.senat.pl/k7/agenda/wydarz/2009/091027.htm, 19.02.2014.

Internet changed the rules of political communication. The campaign is not only a short time to make an influence on the voters but it is a permanent communication, which is the main aspect of the postmodern campaign[10]. Why is the political communication on the Internet not identical with other media? We can see three areas: social perception, ways of use and the scale of receivers' identification[11]. The information from social networks is received as equal or even more trustworthy than the information from traditional media. Messages should include multimedia coverage (photographs, images or video)[12] to be more appealing. Another important area that makes a real difference is the bilateral communication, which changes everything. It provides priceless information on voters or haters, useful for preparing a future communique or a wider political strategy. The other side of this solution enforces politicians to communicate wisely and in a restrained way. What is posted on the Internet, stays on the Internet, so everyone has to be aware of the possibility of being cross-checked with statements given some time ago. Additionally there is a high risk of immediate response from friends, fans or political opponents pulling into the vortex of questions and answers, defending a given discourse stand.

In order to continue, the term "social media" needs to be clarified. First of all, social media have a wider meaning, which I will show later, and is based on its social aspects, which are interaction and participation. They wouldn't be of any use without active users whom various messages can be addressed to. Secondly, they have to be open for everyone willing to participate. Overall, we can define social media as: *new information network and information technol-*

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[10] B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, Warszawa 2006, p. 247.
[11] J. Garlicki, D. Mider, *Wykorzystanie Internetu w komunikowaniu politycznym elit z wyborcami*, "Studia Politologiczne" vol. 25, p.188.
[12] A. Jezierska, A. Łada, *Siema! Tu Europa. Komunikacja posłów do Parlamentu Europejskiego z młodymi Polakami*, Warszawa 2013, p.29.

*ogy using a form of communication utilising interactive and user-produced content, and interpersonal relationships are created and maintained*[13]. Social media can distribute their content by special communication channels such as: social networks (Facebook, Google+, MySpace), mediaproducts community (Youtube, Flickr, Slideshare), blog services (Wordpress, Twitter), link sharing services (Digg, Wykop), information creation community (Wikipedia) or virtual community (Second Life). The most significant social networking services used for political communication in Poland are: widely used Facebook and Twitter[14] with rising Google+. Research shows that 60% of Polish Internet users are registered on at least one social network[15].Political communication using social networks differs from the conventional political language – both spoken and written. It must be matched with the specificity of reading from a screen, no matter whether it is a PC or a  mobile device. Though there is a major difference between Facebook (FB), Google+ and Twitter. The first two offer nearly unlimited space for all sort of content, whilst Twitter allows to "tweet" only 140 characters. It sets up a  number of communication principles, which will be shown later on.


**Use of social networks by Polish MEP's**

Regardless of  the level of politics they are active at and their role, politicians should meet the 21st century standards. One of them related to the paper's subject is to have one's own website. Perhaps a future standard will be being visible and active on social networks. Naturally, this is the social net-

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[13] A. Auvinen, *Social media – the new power of political influence*, "Centre for European Studies", 2012, p. 7, http://thinkingeurope.eu/publications/social-media-new-power-political-influence, 25.02.2014.

[14] Twitter has a wide social networking functionality, nevertheless it originates from a microblogging type of communication.

[15] CBOS, Internauci, komunikat z badań BS/75/2013, Warszawa 2013, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_075_13.PDF , 25.02.2014.

workers point of view, although supported by many NGOs[16] aiming to increase voter participation and knowledge of their representatives.

The importance of this issue connects with the democratic gap, especially noticeable and significant in the work of MEP's from the perspective of the upcoming elections in May. Let me skip the obvious problems with communication, media and public (non)interest visible for instance in the turnout, and provide a characteristic of three leading social networks. As can be seen MEPs are happy to place widgets connected with the selected social network on their official profiles on europarl.europa.eu[17].

The most popular social network used in political communication in Poland is Facebook. It is created by 68% users of the Internet in Poland[18], constituting a large target audience. The communication character on FB differs from using a personal timeline[19] or a dedicated public page[20]. Public pages (also called Fanpages) are optimized for a mass communication, fans engaging and capturing new audience virally. Fanpages are useful for MEPs, however, using them as the dominant communication tool is not a rule. It is followed by Facebook's policy specifying the terms of use, which are being developed constantly e.g. a new feature enables to follow a personal timeline (when a person wants to have their timeline to be visible to others) to see updates from people somebody is interested in but they are not friends[21]. The main difference is the relationship with your viewers. When you use a personal timeline you may have friends and possible followers, whereas when you use a public page you

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[16] For example the association of 61, http://art61.pl/, 27.02.2014.

[17] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/pl/full-list.html?filter=all&leg=, 27.02.2014.

[18] Megapanel PBI/Gemius Results of research on the Internet in Poland as of July 2012: https://www.gemius.pl/pl/archiwum_prasowe/2012-08-31/01, 22.02.2014.

[19] Which can be referred to as a simple profile. A personal timeline represents individual people and must be held under an individual name.

[20] A dedicated timeline for politicians, celebrities where there is no need to be "friend-accepted" to gain access to published posts depending on chosen privacy settings.

[21] https://www.facebook.com/help/217671661585622, 22.02.2014.

have fans. It implicates other difficulties, like the impossibility to thread-reply on other politicians private timelines, being a follower if you are not friends and the timeline owner is not willing to allow such interfere from the outside. Viewing a private timeline, even used as a public timeline is not possible without a Facebook account. Only Fanpages can be easily observed by the voters which do not want to create one. On the other hand, Fanpage has some limitations in "live coverage" from mobile dedicated apps in comparison to the standard timeline[22]. Posting on a Fanpage is more friendly using a traditional device, but even then you cannot join any events. Therefore instead of the understandable division for personal or political communication use, we end up with quite a dilemma.

The second most popular[23] social medium (not necessarily social network) used by politicians in Poland is Twitter. As I indicated before, Twitter has constructed a unique communication style[24]. The term "Twitter revolutions" has been introduced due to Twitter usage connected with the political situation in Iran, Tunisia, Egypt and Ukraine (#EuroMaidan[25]). Use of Twitter is way beyond the politicians' and society's communication needs, which can be illustrated by creating official accounts by terrorist organizations[26].

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[22] i.e. dedicated to Windows Phone Facebook App cannot make or add photos to my own Fanpage, use Fanpage mailbox etc. The Fanpage from a mobile is practically limited to posts text-messages on the wall.

[23] Based on popularity measured by the number of profiles and recipients engagement (including media coverage).

[24] Tweets include a high number of specifically designed tools enabling to summarize thoughts and ideas, mainly by the use of hashtags – words or phrases prefixed with the "#" sign, and all sort of URL shortening services, mainly images and other content-hosting services. It seems to be a consequence of the text field's feature: it is by 20 characters shorter than SMS.

[25] v. https://twitter.com/euromaidan, the Official International Public Relations Secretariat for the Headquarters of National Resistance of the EuroMaidan:
 https://twitter.com/EuromaidanPR, 25.02.2014.

[26] For example al-Quaeda: www.twitter.com/shomokhalislam, which has been suspended by Twitter.

Apart from being a global trend, Twitter encounters difficulties in Poland with an insufficient and narrow group of users. Because Twitter is just not popular.

It has a substantial impact on political communication in two aspects bringing it to a vicious circle. Firstly, Twitter's active political audience consists mainly of journalists, people already involved in politics (both analyzers and decision-makers), some of them fond of innovative-gadgets. Twitter does not include an adequate audience to whom a specific message may be addressed, which means the people who are politically neutral and not very interested in politics. Secondly, because of the relatively small amount of available recipients, the need to publish on Twitter by Polish politicians in general does not exist. If there is not much to follow for politically interested citizens, politicians will not find this medium attractive enough for expanding their communication channels. A hypothetical barrier can be found in the language itself[27]. The Polish language compared to English consists of somewhat longer words, making it hard to express in a very limited form, which affects both single tweeting and tweet discussion. It is fair to stress that when dealing with social media and social behavior, nothing is surely stable and lasts for a long period, so a sudden increase of Polish Tweeters due to the popularity of smartphones is possible. Latest research shows that the number of users increased by 60% comparing to the previous year[28].

Twitter is indeed almost a perfect tool for political communication. Short messages require more attention from the politician to synthetize thoughts leading to a better understanding and low risk of a bummer. Research indicates that Twitter reacts quicker than Facebook but discussions are

[27] M. Wachnicki, Dlaczego Polacy nie lubią Twittera?, "Newsweek",
 http://polska.newsweek.pl/dlaczego-polacy-nie-korzystaja-z-twittera-newsweek,artykuly,270698,1,2.html, 21.02.2014.
[28] http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/twitter-rekordowo-popularny-w-polsce-jacy-sa-jego-uzytkownicy/page:1, 27.02.2014.

not continued after a period of time, while FB statuses are delayed at the beginning but are more of a long-life type[29].

Other types of political communication in social networks are relatively insignificant. Nonetheless Google+ (also called G+) should not be underestimated. Although G+ is not currently used in the Polish political communication, the majority of Warsaw MMEPs has already created G+ profiles. Actually it turns out that they are probably being run by MEPs offices, because two of them added only MEP-related multimedia content without any comments and one only created a profile in order to book a web place and did not risk losing any potential voters. G+ is political friendly, it is based on circles – where we can develop "alternative identities", having our family, friends and followers (politicians) apart but together at the same time. It prevents the mixing of the information stream comparing to the leading services. As I have pointed out before, trends in social media change dynamically and MEPs seem to be prepared for a potential change in order to keep up the communication process with the people whom they represent.

**The methodology of research**

As we identified the main political communication tools, the next step is to specify the research methodology. In order to show the differences and similarities I chose the mixed methods research, which "recognizes the importance of traditional quantitative and qualitative research" and provides the most informative, complete, balanced and useful research results[30]. I concentrated on Warsaw MEPs[31] elected in 2009 from Warsaw and contiguous coun-

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[29] A. Łada, M. Fałkowska-Warska, *Europoseł w sieci*, Warszawa 2012, p. 53.
[30] RB. Johnson, A. J. Onwuegbuzie, L.A. Turner, Toward a Definition of Mixed Methods Research, "Journal of Mixed Methods Research", 2007, p. 129.
[31] They are: Danuta Hübner (EPP), Michał Kamiński (ECR), Wojciech Olejniczak (S&D), Rafał Trzaskowski (EPP) and Paweł Zalewski (EPP).

ties[32]. Their activity should be larger than in other regions, especially because of Mazovia Province has the biggest number (more than 26% overall)[33]of active Internet users in Poland.

The results of Warsaw MEPs use of social networking, which are the subject of further deliberations may be overstated to the national result, however could be a broader trend, especially in the 2014 election year.

The quantitative analysis results in neutral, calculable use of all keywords, which cannot be reached in an overall qualitative approach. The research includes a comprehensive data gathering from members of the European Parliament. The analysis should emphasize the participation, language usage and overall characteristics of social network services at a supranational level. The selected data contained every post from 2013, starting on the 1st January and ending on 31st December, so we received reliable full time results. To maintain clear standards of the data selected from Facebook, all data from a MEP's Fanpage was taken into account. Additional data from a personal timeline would not be accurate even despite the vagueness of strictly political – private/public communication[34]. There was no MEP with a personal timeline who didn't run a Fanpage, some even transferred their timeline to a permanent Fanpage making the communication process political and more relevant to the recipients.

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[32] Warsaw MEPs are a number of the MEPs elected from the Warsaw electoral district, which includes Warsaw and contiguous counties.

[33] Ranking is updated weekly by pages viewed from IP geolocation database on gemiusTraffic inquiry: http://ranking.pl/pl/rankings/regions.html, 6.02.2014.

[34] It is difficult to separate private from public, especially when analyzing a politician's activity in social network. In order to keep the research valid, a stout differentiation had to be done. In a technical way, of course you could observe (with or without inviting to friends) the private profile which is used as a public-private but then, every post would count as a public social activity, even a comment about a new movie, because it is connected to overall perception by friends, likely voters. It would be difficult to clearly identify what is and isn't a political communique. It is hard to find a politician in larger municipalities without an FB account, which is not equivalent with communicating with voters, not only friends.

I focused on two selected aspects which are: information introducing the MEP's profiles and added posts in the selected period of time without comments and activities conducted on other timelines, groups, pages etc.

Secondly, the analysis of content gave replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use by the use of interpretational study based on symbolic interactionism. I pointed out meanings of the communication context related to types of messages and types of recipients (international, national or local). Emphasizing the symbolic nature of social life allows to explain the specificity of political communication on the Internet. The two key terms in symbolic interactionism are interactions and symbols[35]. Symbols should be understood as characters, images and anything that has meaning. These meanings are constructed in the course of social interaction. Symbolic interaction is a creative process of transferring meaning between the sender and the recipient. The dynamism of interaction is emphasized by the fact that it is always open to redefining and is based on, inter alia, confrontation and indifference. Not every message must be answered, so it implicates the creation of a message drawing enough attention for it to be replied. Public space is filled with various interpretations of each fact. The message is the driver's seat, for example winning a bronze medal in the Olympic Games could be either a historic success or nearly upsetting because of losing to two better teams or athletes. Facts depend on the interpretation status and on the symbolic meaning added to the facts[36]. That is why, the political communication and attributing symbols to facts on the Internet is so important.

To analyze the content, all of the MEP's posts will be grouped according to the political communicative function followed by Olgierd Annusewicz'es

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[35] E. Marciniak, *Komunikowanie polityczne...*, p. 20-23.
[36] S. Stieglitz, L. Dang-Xuan, *Social media and political communication: a social media analytics framework* "Social network analysis and mining" no. 13278, 2013.

*functions of political communication on the Internet*[37]. The proposed typology was made to describe the political communication in general, so I tested the use of these functions on Warsaw MEP's activity on Facebook. They were six functions selected: information and self-presentation, persuasion, education, integration, two-way communication and economic.

**FB's Fanpage characteristic and keywords analysis**

Let us concentrate on the appropriate way of communicating by means of a Fanpage, open for every viewer with web access. At first glance we see inhomogeneous utilization of the communication subject. The majority communicates in the first person, which makes the process more intimate implying that MEPs write personally. Running a Fanpage by assistants is socially acceptable, instead of "ghost-posting" on a personal timeline which does not give a politician credibility, seemingly engaging in direct communication, when in fact he is not interested at all. Some use a clear distinction between posts added by "the office" and the ones added by MEP him- or herself. They are tagged at the beginning of the message as [Office] or [MEP's initials] so before we start receiving the reply, we know who the message is from.

The dominant language used by the studied group is Polish, with one exception, were the entire communication is held in English enabling a wider – international audience.

Starting from the "About" section – what type of information do Warsaw MEPs want us to acknowledge? Four of five Fanpages were taken into account (three from the European's People Party, one from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament) because of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group member Fanpage absence,

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[37] O. Annusewicz, *Funkcje komunikowania politycznego w Internecie*, "Studia Politologiczne", vol. 14, p.268-279.

despite a direct link from the European Parliament website[38]. So, is European party membership important in political communication? It seems that it is not. Every MEP informs about the affiliation to a national party, their previous roles and career. Only one MEP underlines the affiliation to the supranational party in EP. In other case, that information cannot be verified in 2014 because of the MEPs was minister nominated in December 2013.

Everyone informs which EP Committees they work in and about the possibility of contacting them via e-mail/website. The fact that all of the MEPs provided information on their education proves that MEP's education status is socially high-rated. Other similarities except showing strengths do not occur in this section.

The core of the political communication process using social network is sending information from politicians to the unlimited number of recipients. The importance of political communication using a Fanpage is underlined by the *enabling to find pieces of absorbing news, which are not usually talked over in the leading media and for many will most definitely be the source of new and inspiring knowledge*[39].

What were the top five words used by the Warsaw MEP's in 2013? The quantitative analysis results was not a surprise: EU (1,53%), European Parliament, Policy (both 1,33%) Poland (1,17%) and Warsaw (0,86%). Despite the high probability of these keywords, the order is not so obvious. The acronym EU refers to so many areas of European Integration, that we should not actually consider it. The next four popular words are interesting because of placing the EP beyond the others. This indicates the prestige and a communication

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[38] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/23792/MICHAL+TOMASZ_KAMINSKI_home.html, 23.02.2014.
[39] https://www.facebook.com/pages/Paweł-Zalewski/355982117828814?id=355982117828814&sk=info, 23.02.2014.

need of reminding the audience about who actually is an MEP and what does he or she actually do. The term "policy" resulted equally is a continuation of real work related to chosen field visible by EP's committee membership. Not every parliamentary work can be presented in an interesting way, so big policies  with an impact on either inside or outside of the EU are topics worth sticking to. Members of the European Parliament as representatives of society should care about the member state they were elected from, because of the nationality and furthermore care about the specific constituency – the place were real votes and support stands. MEPs seem to fulfill the needs providing much information on Poland and less but still enough about Warsaw.

Interestingly enough, no one from the studied group "got in the way" of one another in terms of the discussed subjects. We clearly receive the image of areas of interests coming directly from the high usage of each MEP: Ukraine (1,82%), national party membership acronym (1,01%), cohesion (2,50%) and privacy policy (0,86%). Research on Polish MEPs on Facebook relating to three subjects of posts gives similar results, which are related as follows: 56 % - Europe, 36 % - Poland and 26 % - consistency[40].

The lexical density test[41] gives scores between 24% and 49% with an average of 37%. The result is more than understandable for a typical not-politically oriented recipient.

Warsaw MEPs do not prefer one communication style. The differences can be seen even in the use of welcoming phrases. Some use a  direct welcoming phrase like "Good morning, Good afternoon" or "dear friends", others go straight to the point.

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[40] A. Wronowska, M. Wnuk, *Europosłowie na Facebooku*, Warszawa 2014, http://blog.mamprawowiedziec.pl/2014/02/europosowie-na-facebooku.html, 20.03.2014.
[41] The lexical density of a text tries to measure the proportion of the content (lexical) words over the total number of words. Texts with a lower density are more easily understood.

I focused on the similarities in my research. All MEPs realize the need of multimedia content attached to the text. The data shows a range from 34% to even 224% overall shared images when compared to the number of posts. The average is about 104%, which clearly sets the primacy of image communication to text coverage[42]. Frequency of adding content is also varied but the average word usage in each post seem to be close as the majority of MEPs used 61-71 words per post, (which makes 56 words on average in each post).

MEP's regularly shared links to their mainstream or social media activity. Half of Warsaw MEPs redirected their followers to an external blog with a rate of 15 – 23% of overall posts. Having summed up it gives nearly one of five posts related in a straight line to a prepared message. Linking to an online newspaper or TV interview or even a short commentary on current affairs in traditional media indicates a strong link between them. The aim is to reach as many recipients as possible and mainstream media appearance is high-rated as appreciation of the politicians position. Social network still does not have the indicator status of politicians' popularity[43].

Quantitative analysis alone is not enough to understand Warsaw MEP's political communication in social networks. Further research was taken referring to the functions of the communication by Annusewicz mentioned before in this paper. The effects of the analysis are shown in the figure 1.

**Fig. 1. Warsaw MEP's Fanpage activity according to the functions of political communication on the Internet.**

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[42] Where each post and added image were counted as 1:1.

[43] It also refers to Internet political polls, which do not correspond to the real polls at all. The largest deviation could be noticed in the declared web-support for Janusz Korwn-Mikke, populist leader of the Congress of the New Right (a conservative libertarian political party) with 200k fans on FB. Internet non-representative surveys gives him a presidential election chance and the support always overcomes a threshold to the parliament. While in fact he and his party didn't pass through any elections since 1991 and his electorate is approximately about 2%.
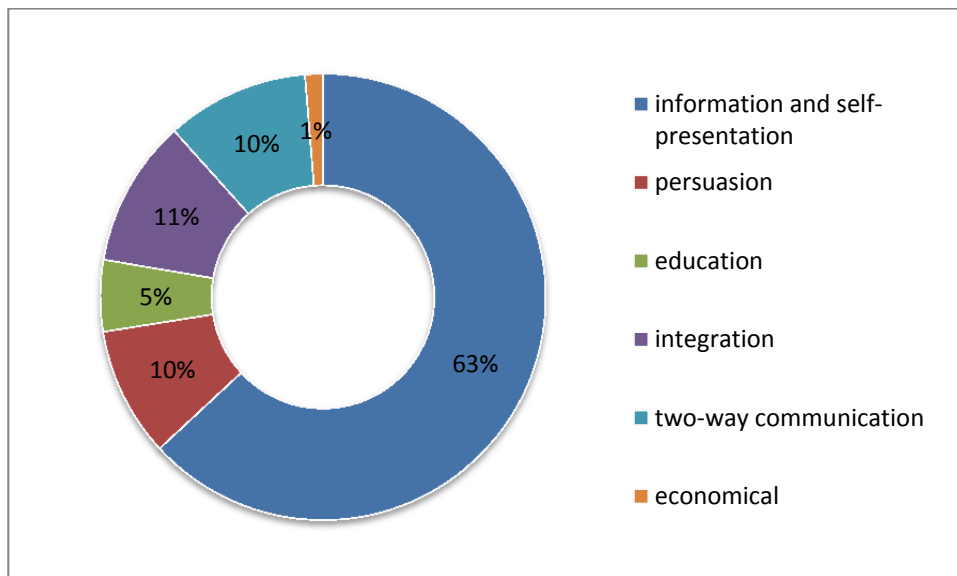
The analysis of the political communication functions based on MEP's activity should give a comprehensive overview of the political communication process on Facebook. The results will be explained in six functional sections.

### *Informational and self-presentation function (63%)*

The largest part of the figure is occupied by the informational and self-presentation function. Differentiation of this function surprisingly ranges from 39.24% to 73.13%, where only one result was under 70% of posts. MEP's keep informing about almost everything, starting from their political aims, achievements, through commentary on varied topics or sports events important to society, including leisure activities. Even using an official Fanpage, MEPs communicate simple things and common topics. That is why analysis of politicians private timeline could be misleading because of the non-political related communication. It also depends on the researchers' view on what a political communication is and what it is not. Can politicians communicate anything

without a political context? This deliberation cannot be unambiguously answered because of the general complexity. Perhaps non-political communication is available for a politician who is not active in the public sphere?

This communication identity issue is strongly related to uploading images. For research purposes, politicians' photographs from meetings, conferences etc., were classified as self-presentation. Even a simple portrait photo cannot be treated as an empty message. Facebook offers not only a Profile Picture but also a profile/Fanpage cover which can express what the current page is about. All MEPs use both features in a correct way and often update or change one or both for a higher purpose, for example related to the situation in Ukraine, showing their solidarity. The perception of messages including constant not indifferent graphic elements has an impact on the politicians' reception.

### Integration function (11%)

The second most frequent used was the integration function. Politicians not only divide society as many could suppose, but put an effort in integrating it. Integration was considered in the research as event creation and event invitation. There was a noticeable usage of Facebook dedicated tools in order to create an event and invite people to different events not only political but also related to sports or culture. Overall the results of the integration function were *circa* 4.76% to 21.52%.

Communicating through a standard political Fanpage does not allow to attend events created by private timeline profiles, nevertheless you can always share this information on your Fanpage timeline. That activity was also counted as an integration function.

*Persuasive function (10%)*

According to Annusewicz's description of this function, it appears to have an emotional character with the intention of gaining the recipient's specific response. Posts counted as this type of function were precisely selected because of the thin line between the persuasive and informational/auto-presentation function. Almost every message sent by politicians is a bit persuasive, so only a visibly intentional message was counted.

I found messages related to political opponents (in general, not personal using Facebook's timeline functionality), political parties and current events as persuasive, when the tested post was showing a certain point of view e.g. convincing to their views in a direct way "Do not let them tell you that…". A situation when MEP candidates benefited from the positive image of well-known politicians was considered a persuasion because of producing a positive association with one related to another. Warsaw MEP's did not show the need of being associated by another cherished person, so when common pictures with other politicians or celebrities were added, they were counted as self-presentation, because of the similar public status.

Referring to these standards, the usage of this function ranged from 0 to 15.19%, which is actually not much compared to the social feeling that every politicians word is sort of persuasive. The real difference is between informing, convincing in a not emotional way and persuasion.

*Two-way communication function (10%)*

The two-way communication is one of the most important features in social network. However, the usage of this function in my research was about 7.46% – 17.72%. The analysis could not sneak into inbox/chat messages, so it

bypasses the messages received from FB users, likes and comments. A closer look was taken into the posts from politicians to other users, politicians etc.

This type of communication leads to a reaction because there is a certain recipient. The two-way communication was either negative (criticism, call for a policy change) or positive (support, compliments, open letters).

Anniversaries were always a good occasion to greet mothers, kids etc. This kind of messages was counted in this section, which was confirmed by the positive response of the mentioned group. The wishes posted on grandmother's day made some followers raise questions like "what about grandfather's day?".

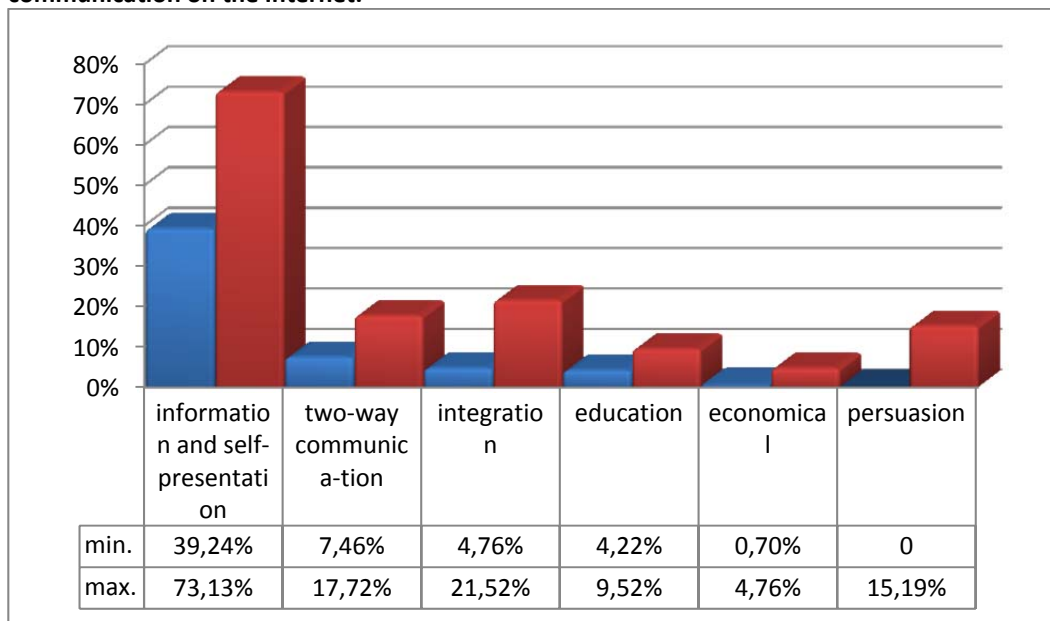### Educational function (5%)

Typical educational related posts were selected only from not persuasive and politically neutral entries. All MEPs delivered educational content which ranged from 4.22% to 9.52%. It was expressed either by sharing an external link to a full source, infographics or just written as a post. Educational posts spread extensive knowledge regardless of their views and belonging to a political party. Regular mention of the possibilities established by the EP for the citizens was not counted.

The educational function is very important, especially when speaking about MEPs. The European Union structures, institutions, decision centers etc. are so complicated to an average observer that any explanation attempt is worth attention. Although MEPs are not expected to be guides to the EU, we can assume that education related posts provide valuable input into the development of the civil society and overall understanding of the EU related issues.

## Economical function (1%)

The least visible function was the economic one. This result was expected and it is hard to imagine what could cause an increase of this function because comparing to the US, in Poland fund-raising does not exist. Furthermore, in the analyzed year there were no elections, so encouraging cooperation was not present.

**Fig. 2. MEP's posts divided from the minimum to maximum use rate of functions of political communication on the Internet.**



| | information and self-presentation | two-way communica-tion | integration | education | economical | persuasion |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| min. | 39,24% | 7,46% | 4,76% | 4,22% | 0,70% | 0 |
| max. | 73,13% | 17,72% | 21,52% | 9,52% | 4,76% | 15,19% |

Source: own research.

The economic function can either relate to a financial benefit or to any financial help. This can be seen in MEPs support for GOCC[44] in promoting the charity idea or even offering a trip with lunch in Brussels for the winners on Internet auctions[45]. The overall results of this section are shown in the figure 2.

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[44] Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, which is one the biggest charity organizations in Poland.

[45] http://aukcje.wosp.org.pl/sld-wyjazd-do-brukseli-od-wojciecha-olejniczaka-i902251, http://aukcje.wosp.org.pl/ kup-mnie-dla-idei-rafal-trzaskowski-i734653 26.02.2014.

**Summary and future trends**

Social networks constitute a serious alternative to traditional media in the subject of political communication. Warsaw MEPs are willingly using this type of communication, although not always personally. They are aware of the importance and capabilities of this type of political communication.

Political communication on the Internet requires the use of a specific language related to the chosen social media and establishes a permanent campaign. Characteristic for Warsaw MEP's political communication in social media are bilateral communication, multimedia content sharing and self-presentation.

The use of mixed methods research gave comprehensive results related to contents of MEP's communication in social network such as Facebook. Quantitative analysis of content enabled to select the used keywords, which could be compared to the political communication on the Internet function usage of MEP's. The results of the qualitative analysis comply to other results of MEP's communication points of interests, where the order of most related topics was as follows: Europe, Poland and the electoral district[46]. MEPs regularly informed about their areas of work or interests which were not identical for the whole studied group.

Research shows that Warsaw MEPs are not as persuasive as expected, however, a quite educational sharing. The vantage of the informational and self-presentation function defines the daily Facebook communication style, whether a political one or not. Overall functions of political communication in social networks on the example of Warsaw MEP's Facebook communication may be divided into three blocks. The informational and self-presentation

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[46] A. Wronowska, M. Wnuk, *Europosłowie na Facebooku*, Warszawa 2014, http://www.mamprawowiedziec.pl/file/3972, 25.02.2014.

function simply outweighs the others gaining the first position alone. The second block consists of integrative, persuasive and the two-way communicative functions which reached approximately 10%. The educational and economical functions are in the last block resulting in the lowest use.

The above structure of political communication functions use cannot be considered as stable. Further research on the subject of political communication in social networks needs to be continued or even regularly repeated in order to be up to date. Results in an election year could differ significantly.

Kamil Giemza – MA in European Studies, PhD student of human science in the field of political science at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Studies of the University of Warsaw

**Abstract**

The paper presents the issues of political communication on the Internet with particular emphasis on the most popular social network. It characterizes the selected tools used in political communication on the Internet and contains a study of Facebook activity of the Warsaw Members of the European Parliament in 2013 on the basis of own research using a mixed methodology and divides it by functions of political communication on the Internet.

**CECHY KOMUNIKACJI POLITYCZNEJ W SIECIACH SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWYCH. ANALIZA Z WYKORZYSTANIEM MIESZANEJ METODOLOGII NA PRZYKŁADZIE WARSZAWSKICH POSŁÓW DO PARLAMENTU EUROPEJSKIEGO**

**Abstrakt**

Artykuł przedstawia problematykę komunikacji politycznej w Internecie ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem najpopularniejszej sieci społecznościowej. Cha-

rakteryzuje stosowane narzędzia komunikacji politycznej w Internecie. Zawiera analizę aktywności warszawskich eurodeputowanych na Facebooku w 2013 roku na podstawie własnych badań z wykorzystaniem mieszanej metodologii i dokonuje jej podziału według funkcji politycznej komunikacji w Internecie.