On the Use of Social Networks as a Tool for Creating Political Authority's Image

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ABSTRACT

A theoretical applied research of using social networks as a tool for creating political authority's image has been carried out, existing options are consolidated into the author's classification on different grounds: using identification opportunities of social networks, viral activity in social networks, representation of political authority, using fake accounts to fight competitors of political power. The use of social networks, medium for consolidating rebellious electorate, implementation of negative activities in a social network are demonstrated based on particular cases. The main tools and mechanisms for creating political authority's image: botnets, friending and following, are also studied. The examples of implementing different options of the use of social networks as a tool for creating political authority's image are given. The use of social networks for implementation of representation with the use of official accounts within the framework of ideological groups, pro-government groups and clandestine work with pro-government national groups is considered one of the most efficient means for creating political authority's image under conditions of informatization. Social networks make it possible to promptly arrange virtual communication with community groups of political power; and attractiveness of groups and communities for creating political authority's image is often attributed to users' initial commitment.

Introduction

Under conditions of transition to a market economy there's an increasing need to develop democracy, since it's the only way for successful modernization of all public spheres.

The development of democracy is inseparable from shaping the image of political power in public interest groups.

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Today political technologies are based on the idea of importance of political struggle practical experience integration into scientific knowledge, and vice versa. The thoughtless use of successful techniques for creating political authority's image without understanding of root causes for such a success (or on the contrary –failure) won't allow developing the used tools in the future, and their effectiveness will eventually decline. That is why communication impact managers should have theoretical knowledge, be able to use them when evaluating a situation, should set development trends of mood in the society, identify problem area in collective consciousness and motivation of people in order to change them in the desirable direction. Moreover, the use of such modern technologies as social networks for solving the problem of creating political authority's image assumes increasing importance (Sidorova, 2013).

The objective of this research is to create author's classification of the methods of using social networks as a means for creating political authority's image.

The research methods are as follows:

- theoretical analysis and synthesis of literature on the research topic;

- study and generalization of national and foreign practice;

- comparison;

- specification and idealization,

- analogy,

- classification,

- content analysis,

- processing and generalization of findings.

Today a vast number of users are registered in social networks and due to external and internal search mechanisms it's possible to find and sort people on various criteria – gender, age, place of residence, profession, interests, etc. This makes it possible to define target group for goods, services and other needs (in our case – to create political authority's image) fast and as accurately as possible, to create convenient tools of communication with electorate, to undertake surveys, etc. (Privalova, 2009; Smorgunov & Sherstobitov, 2014).

The active development of social networks, most popular in Russian (first of all, Vk, Odnoklassniki and Facebook), necessitates the presence of political authority representatives in social media, as well as efficient setting up of channels of direct communication with target groups.

Materials and Methods

All means for creating political authority's image can be consolidated into the following author's classification within the framework of the research:

1. Using identification opportunities of social networks for building communication with electorate based on age, gender, occupation.

2. Viral activity in social networks within the framework of counter-campaigns, dissemination of false rumours.

3. Representation of political power with official accounts in social networks.

4. Using fake accounts to fight competitors of political power, antifake activities.

5. Social networks as a medium for rebellious electorate consolidation.

6. Carrying out negative activities in social networks.

7. Botnets, friending and following as mechanisms for creating political authority's image.

Let's give examples of the use of these options for using social networks identified in the course of the research as a means for creating political authority's image.

Results and Discussion

In the context of using identification opportunities of social networks based on age, gender, occupation, the formation of local electoral groups, with which personalized communication is carried out, takes place. An example would be Supermoms («Супермамки») forum in Kazan, which is created for communication, discussion of issues related not only to children but also public life, joint purchases. Particularly, there's a section "News in the city, country, world. Society. Politics." in the forum page and in the social network, where groups are created to discuss the issues of current political power, upcoming and previous elections. Using this tool it's sound to exercise a hidden effect on the audience, raising problems important to political power and putting public opinion on the right track (Chizhov, 2016).

Thematic groups are another option of using identification opportunities of social networks: football ultras, car enthusiasts, shareholders/interest-holders. Communication with this micro-electorate is necessary in the framework of group forming for lobbying, for example, when adopting laws related to fuel charge, transport tax, draft bills on state regulation of credit relations, etc. (Kuznecova, 2011; Miroshnichenko, 2013; Smorgunov, 2013).

Carrying out viral activities in social networks is possible through dissemination of different rumours. An example would be a story of Aleksandr Khoroshavin – a politician, who had been holding a post of the governor of the Sakhalin Region from 2007 to 2015.

Following investigation, on March 4, 2015, his office had been searched by the agents of Moscow Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, who confiscated 1 billion roubles in cash. Searching Khoroshavin's Moscow apartment and summer cottage also resulted in the seizure of substantial sums of money, as well as 800 pieces of jewelry different in price.

In order to justify the politician in the public eye a rumour that this public official suffers cancer was set afloat by means of social networks and Sakh.com. In the course of investigative actions Khoroshavin's lawyers also used this rumour to obtain a permit for house arrest (Kozyreva, 2015).

The current use of social networks for political power representation by means of official accounts takes place through

- ideological groups,

- pro-government groups,

- hidden work with pro-government national groups (Morozova, 2011).

Let's consider these options for using social networks as means for creating political authority's image in detail.

Ideological groups in social networks are a place of virtual communication with community groups of political power, which consolidation is related to a certain idea. It may be a community of adherents of a political party, a leader or a certain political issue, problem or event. Attractiveness of these groups for creating political authority's image is attributed to users' initial commitment. Communication in this context

becomes initially positive for ideology itself and can be based solely on it (Molchanov, 2013; Rykhtik, 2015).

The Moya Moskva project is an example of ideological group, which was used within the framework of the elections to the Moscow City Duma in 2014.

The initial position of the civic initiative of Moya Moskva, which in its time gave the opportunity of advance voting, was that this public platform is independent. Its representatives and founders many times emphasized key public goals in the course of media campaign:

1) search for most active young candidates, who would meet metropolitans' need for a new political generation;

2) initiation for extending the electoral campaign for two month to solve the problem related to summer months, when many voters were on holiday.

The main problem of Moya Moskva was that personalities attracted as initiators were scarcely known. In particular, the first press-conference was held with the participation of 7 initiators of the public platform, among whom children's doctor Leonid Roshal, vice speaker of the State Duma Lyudmila Shvetsova and Bosco CEO Mikhail Kusnirovich were comparatively more prominent ones. To eliminate this "unknowness" of public opinion leaders, the organizing committee attracted Mikhail Barschevsky (president envoy in judicial bodies – as leader of electoral commissions), as well as Leonid Yarmolnik and singer Nadezhda Babkina (as candidates in the primary) (Merkulov & Balashov, 2015).

The measures of Moya Moskva of organization nature, as well as some measures in mass media were most often "dependent", which worked against its image. Some members of primaries, who were in the organizing committee - Aleksey Shaposhnikov, who headed Council of municipal formations, Vyacheslav Sivko and Kirill Schitov – members of the Moscow City Duma. It created distinct advantages for new candidates. Moreover, the organizing committee held meetings in private.

The carried out research of intensive media campaign Moya Moskva identified facts of lending aid to representatives of city authorities. The day when primaries were announced, advertisement posters appeared on different streets of the capital, although crowdfunding money for this advertisement could be collected not earlier than in a few days after the platform launching. Various articles and notes were released continuously within 2 months in mass media under the control of the Moscow city council (Moskva 24 channel, Vechernyaya Moskva, Argumenty i Fakty periodicals), where the initiative was represented in a solely positive light. Materials about primaries candidates were published in municipal and neighbourhood papers from February that allowed disclosing a part of "pro-government list".

The primaries initiators scarcely paid attention to social networks against the background of active and massive media campaigns in capital mass media, they didn't popularize the "москва2014.рф" portal. It is this website that should become a key instrument for attracting Internet audience's attention and strengthening the image of candidates' "independency" (Efimova & Makoveychuk, 2012).

Pro-government groups in social networks are micro-electorate, which was gathered indirectly. These communities, as distinct from the previous groups, are based on social ideas: sport, children, city, society, youth, etc. Reforming perception of political power by target audience for the better or worse may be implemented by means of hidden communication.

Clandestine work with pro-power national groups is the next stage for creating political authority's image. In this case already existing communities, many of which are

narrow or nation-oriented, are selected at the initial stage. Then communication takes place with the use of hidden codes for the purpose of turning interest groups to the political power's side. At the last stage these national groups may become pro-government both explicitly or continue hidden communication. An example of this approach is national groups in Chechnya and Ossetia, where political authority's image is based on national languages codes, traditions, interests and problems (Akopov, 2013; Bykov, 2013; Chizhik, 2015; Kuzymina, 2012).

Fighting competitors of political power can be implemented using fake accounts. An example of this approach is fake activity against the acting mayor of Krasnoyarsk Edkham Akbulatov. Representatives of his election campaign team filed a complaint with the police on operation of fake websites, which negatively influenced the candidate's image. These sites contained "absurd and unplausible" proposals on behalf of Akbulatov regarding city development, in particular, information that he allegedly actively supports the initiative for building a ferroalloy plant.

Representatives of Akbulatov's election campaign team also reported on agitators, who spread false rumours about the candidate's family and about him. These actions could be considered classical in smear campaigns. In such a way fake accounts allows not only building negative communication with electorate but also carrying out efficient counter-campaigns.

It is significant that Akbulatov's competitors spoke against the use of that method for creating political authority's image. In particular, member of legislative assembly Aleskey Kleshko stated that the general goal of all representatives of power and candidates is to find out views in the course of discussion to have the opportunity to choose most suitable measures to develop the city from the residents' point of view. He also insisted on termination of using "black methods of fighting" (Karpoyan, 2015).

Other examples of these methods of fighting competitors of political power are creation of fake accounts of another candidate Tolmachev S., attempts of hacking Senchenko's and Koropachinsky's pages.

To solve the problem of degrading the positive image of political power active antifake activities were opened. Theft of political activists' accounts or creation of fake accounts on their behalf, in some cases even a few pages, became another manifestation of the pre-election Internet war unleashed in Krasnoyarsk. This method is used to carry out so-called "space cleaning", increase the level of political power credibility, and reduce the impact of negative information disseminated among target audience (Nesterenok, 2013; Fomin & Akaev, 2009; Ryabushko, 2012).

The use of social networks for consolidation of rebellious electorate is implemented through the idea of protest. It is common knowledge that today's youth is prone to nihilism, which is particularly evident in social networks' groups beginning with "against…": against drugs, against garbage in the city, etc. The use of these groups is especially attractive for exercising target communication. An example would be young people in the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous District, the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District, who formed community for racial purity, against alcohol and drugs. Initially it was an informal group, but then this virtual micro socium transformed into electoral history, which was supported by KPRF and Spravedlivaya Russia parties (Krizhanovskaya, 2013).

Another example of using social networks for consolidation of rebellious electorate is so-called "anti-nickel objection" – an association of a great number of volunteers who raised an objection to nickel extraction at the Khopyor river.

In the first months of 2012 the Federal Agency for Subsoil Use announced holding of a competitive tender for exploitation of copper-nickel ores in the Voronezh Region in the near future. Uralskaya Gorno-Metallurgicheskaya Kompaniya won the competitive tender.

In spring of the same year groups that were opposed to mining development appeared in Vk and Odnoklassniki social networks. After a while the most initiative part of subscribers of these groups ran a rally in Borisoglebsk– not numerous at the beginning. Their number eventually rose to 10 thousand of Borisoglebsk residents (1/8 of population), 5 thousand in Novokhopyorsk (70% of population) and 3 thousand in Elan-Koleno village. Numerous rallies were also recorded in other villages and regional centres of the region – in Peski, Anna, Povorino, Zherdevka, Gribanovka. Besides, there were no individual organizers, rallies were spontaneous.

The protesters were largely apprehensive about water drying out as a result of development. It happens fairly often and is called "cone of depression" – the level of underground waters around mined deposits is being reduced, sometimes over a large area around entries. Initiative groups appeared: Zelyonaya Lenta, Stop Nickel, V Zaschitu Khopra, Initiative Group of Novokhopyorsk.

Conviction of protest leaders as a prominent example of using social networks for creating political power became a result of these rallies.

K department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation found that volunteers of opposition movements V Zaschitu Khopra (in support of the Khopyor river), Belaya Lenta, Stop Nickel took an active part in the rallies, whose criminal activity was aimed at organization of protest movements, unauthorized demonstrations, waste of property, and other actions of a similar nature, which in some or other way discredited business reputation of UGMK-Holding JSC.

Moreover, the leader of the abovementioned movements – Rubakhin Konstantin Viktorovich – offered the management of Uralskaya Gorno-Metallurgicheskaya Kompaniya JSC represented by Melyukhov O.F. to pay 20 million US dollars to cease actions, which prevented development of Elansky and Elkinsky deposits (Ryabushko, 2012; Rogacheva, 2009).

Implementation of negative activities in social networks is build against a strong political leader. An example of this approach is a case of N.N. Koshkarova (2016), who monitored the negative work against Putin V.V. in periodical Spiegel. The researcher claimed the following:

1. During pre-election campaigns of three electoral cycles the image of Vladimir Putin changed from neutral to negative.

2. During the Putin's image formation we may take note of the shift of an emphasis from the problem of Chechnya (2000) to flaws in the work of democratic political institutions (2004 and 2008).

3. The followings factors have impact on the Putin's image formation:

- a great number of opinions of both his supporters and opponents, ratings of foreign mass media, representatives of various high-status and occupational groups;

- positive results of public-opinion polls, official statistics of changes of the condition of the national economy;

- regular interviews, press conferences, public speaking in federal mass media that allow obtaining most up-to-date data.

Thus, the use of a certain schedule of publications in accordance with occurring socio-political events allowed managing the image of political power represented by Putin V.V. in the opinions of Spiegel target audience.

Botnets, friending and following are the last option of using socials networks as a means for creating political authority's image.

Generation of botnets is used for placing a great number of negative comments of themes-discussions of some or other subjects of political power. An example of this solution would be bot attacks on the M. Oskolvo's page within the framework of the pre-election Internet war unleashed in Krasnoyarsk.

Friending and following are mechanisms for extending micro-electorate due to friends and followers of interest community groups' members (Schipitsina, 2010). However, it stands to mention that these options for shaping political authority's image in real agitation activities are useless. The opportunities of socials networks significantly bate requirements for credibility of some or other data stated by users. In this regard it's difficult to check credibility of stated data, which neutralizes the expediency of building communication network.

Conclusion

Thus, following the results of the complex research of using social networks as a means for creating political authority's image, existing options are consolidated into the author's classification on different grounds. The use of social networks, medium for consolidating rebellious electorate, implementation of negative activities in a social network are demonstrated based on particular cases. The main tools and mechanisms for creating political authority's image: botnets, friending and following, are also studied.

Following the research findings it can be stated that the use of social networks for implementation of representation with the use of official accounts within the framework of ideological groups, pro-government groups and clandestine work with pro-government national groups is considered one of the most efficient means for creating political authority's image under conditions of informatization. Social networks make it possible to promptly arrange virtual communication with community groups of political power; and attractiveness of groups and communities for creating political authority's image is often attributed to users' initial commitment.

Disclosure statement

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