

## Politics and Leadership on Facebook During the 2012 Romanian Parliamentary Elections and the 2014 Euro-Parliamentary Elections

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**Abstract.** *This paper examines the communicational strategies used by Romanian politicians on Facebook in order to promote leadership values during the 2012 parliamentary elections and the 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign. In an era in which mass-media are commercialized, fragmented and lean towards infotainment, social media are a useful tool for politicians, where they can promote their own values and campaign topics, without following media logic. In this context, we should address the following question: to what extent online communication platforms are effectively used by politicians to interact with their followers? In the same time, to what extent do candidates use their controlled media space to promote values of political leadership, to legitimate political power or to mobilize voters? In order to study this subject, dispositive analysis was used, to reveal the way candidates interact with followers and the discursive techniques used to promote leadership. Results show that Romanian politicians do employ Facebook to promote leadership and to legitimate power, but Facebook isn't used at its full potential in terms of web 2.0 features.*

**Keywords:** *politics, leadership, political management, political marketing, personalization, professionalization, Romania.*

### Introduction

The search for the attributes of the ideal leader is an on-going preoccupation that emerged in Antiquity. Nowadays, leadership still raises the interest of researchers in several fields of study from management and organization theory to political science and political communication. The qualities and actions of a good leader can drive a business to success, or can lead to positive changes in society. As Jean Blondel (1987, p.13) notes, individuals can become leaders if they obtain a particular position in society. However, Blondel discusses the need to distinguish between position and behaviour: “A leader is someone

who influences a group whether or not he or she happens to be formally at the head of that group. Thus, not only are there leaders in informal bodies, but the real leader of a constituted organization may well be someone who does not occupy a formal position in the group” (p. 13). For example, a leader can bring together a team, find innovative solutions, create a vision and influence others to follow him. As a result, in the same organization we can have both successful managers, who make the rules and do the planning, and successful leaders who set the trends and are followed by others.

Over time, politics and leadership had an idiosyncratic connection. Many important political figures were also appreciated leaders whose visionary ideas contributed to the development of society. Napoleon’s legal codes influenced the modern legal system, Nelson Mandela’s efforts contributed to the fight against apartheid and racism in South Africa, Roosevelt’s New Deal helped the USA fight the Great Depression and the list of examples continues. Even though not all political rulers managed to bring positive changes in society, most of them had the ideas and the charisma necessary to influence the masses in a positive or negative way. Debate surrounding the values and significance of leadership in politics has stirred ample debate and there are authors (Kellerman, 2004) who separate between good and bad types of leadership. However, this discussion goes beyond the goal of the present study.

Leadership is a hard to define concept and even harder to operationalize and investigate in empirical research. As Masciulli, Molchanov and Knight (2009, pp.14-19) note, the specialized literature offers both normative and empirical typologies of leaders, but most of them reunite the same characteristics: followership and the setting of group tasks to be accomplished in an innovative manner and in a set institutional and cultural context (p.6). Therefore, when analysing this concept, one has to take into account several aspects of leadership: the character of the leader; the followers with whom he interacts; the context in which leadership interaction happens; the agenda of problems or tasks which confront the leader; the techniques used by the leader to mobilize support on behalf of her or his agenda; the effects of leadership (Gillian Peele, 2005, p.192). In other words, leadership has to be approached as a multifaceted concept that combines not only behavioural aspects but also communicational and interactional techniques that leaders employ to legitimate their status and influence others. Such an approach is even more important in contemporary politics that is increasingly influenced by marketing techniques.

The context that surrounds this discussion is set by the growing commercialisation and fragmentation of the media, the increasing competition between political parties and candidates and the emergence of a less predictable electorate that is harder to convince. In order to adapt to these realities, political campaigns have become more sophisticated, involving the expertise of trained professionals in voter targeting, opinion polls, media relations or new media administration. Therefore, political messages and even political leadership is not solely the result of the personal charisma or the behaviour of a specific politician, but the outcome of a carefully planned image strategy that matches voter expectations. Some authors subsume these changes under a larger trend known as the professionalization of political communication (Lilleker & Negrine, 2002b; Mancini, 1999; Negrine & Lilleker, 2002a; Negrine et al., 2007; Negrine, 2008; Rush, 1989).

This paper offers a model of analysis of the leadership concept from a discursive perspective. The study investigates the way Romanian political actors tend to promote leadership values during the electoral campaign in order to win votes and gain access to economic and political resources. The standpoint in analysing leadership will be the relationship of politicians with followers. Two dimensions of leadership, as identified by Gillian Peele (2005, pp.198–199), will be investigated: *leadership dynamics* – the dynamic quality of the interaction between leaders and followers; and *the techniques of persuasion* – how politicians communicate with their colleagues and the wider public, the type of discourse used to legitimate power and influence others etc. The promotion of leadership values will be examined on politicians' Facebook pages, during the 2012 Romanian parliamentary campaign and the 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign. Politicians' profiles on Facebook were chosen for this analysis in order to reveal the communicational techniques employed by political actors on their controlled media in order to interact with followers and to legitimise their candidacy. Given the discussion about the professionalization of political communication, this approach will reveal to what extent politicians integrate Facebook as a political campaign tool in terms of the effective interaction with followers. More exactly, do they use Facebook solely to express their political standpoint on certain topics, or do they also involve in debates with supporters and resort to voter mobilization techniques? In the same time, the choice to study politicians' Facebook pages is in line with the new trends in political communication that is more candidate-focused rather than party-centred.

## **The professionalization of political communication: management and marketing meet politics**

Professionalization is a concept that fostered ample debates in the specialized literature regarding its meaning. It is also a term that shares common characteristics with concepts like modernization, Americanisation, secularization or globalization. Sociologists (e.g. Hall, 1989) and political scientists use this concept with a definite connotation – the process of development of new professions. However, political communication scholars give it a broader sense. Professionalization is an umbrella term that gathers the recent trends in political communication such as the emergence of the war room (Scammell, 1998) and the permanent campaign (Norris, 2000) or the use of spin doctor techniques (McNair, 2007) etc. As a result, political communication becomes less intuitive and campaign resources are employed more effectively in order to reach beforehand set goals.

The discussion about professionalization started in the 1980s, when political communication went through a process of modernization in what concerns the campaign techniques (Beciu, 2011, p.232). It was also the time of the consolidation of neoliberalism, which encouraged entrepreneurial liberty and individual initiative as the guarantees of economic safety (Harvey, 2005). In this context, competition and risks have increased and a new type of citizen was born – *homo oeconomicus* (Foucault, 2007).

In politics, these changes manifested in the growing competition between political parties and in the loss of traditional electoral allegiances of voters. In the same time, with the rising number of private mass communication outlets, political parties have lost control over political messages and resorted to campaign professionals in order to find the most effective strategies to communicate with constituencies and journalists. Political strategy is no longer the sole attribute of party leaders but also of trained professionals. Today, political consulting is an important business that plays a key role in shaping and managing political campaigns (Johnson, 2010, p.3).

As Fritz Plasser (2010, p.24) notes “The annual worldwide election market can be roughly estimated at \$6 to 8 billion depending on the respective election calendar and elections cycles”. Moreover, “In the United States, nearly \$2 billion flowed through consultants in 2003 – 2004 federal elections. About

600 professional consultants were paid more than a combine \$1.8 billion, according to a review conducted by the Centre of Public Interest. (...) In Russia, the grey market for elections is almost \$1 billion a year. In the Asia-Pacific region, more than \$1 billion is spent on campaign communication every election cycle. In the United Kingdom, Labour and the Tories spent more than \$2 million on outside consultants in 2005” (Plasser, 2010, p.24). These figures show that politics is far from being strictly the realm of ideological debate and has transformed into a multi-billion dollar industry. According to Dennis W. Johnson (2010, p.XIII), these trends are better explained by the term political management, which is a form of applied political communication. From a commercial point of view, political management can also be referred to as political marketing.

The political consulting market has also grown in Romania in the last 20 years (see Toader, Grigorași & Frunză, 2011; Tudor, 2008). Even though party leaders still have a powerful word to say when it comes to setting the campaign strategy, political consultants are approached to share their knowledge and experience during electoral campaigns. Consultants usually come from the journalism realm and have both strong media relations skills and knowledge about the electorate. In the same time, Romanian politicians work with opinion polls specialists and in some cases choose to double the services of local consultants with advice coming from international campaign professionals. Therefore, the costs of electoral campaigns have risen in post-communist Romania. As an example, during the 2009 presidential campaign, the actual president of Romania has spent over 170 million euros for the campaign. The amount of money spent can vary according to the stake of a campaign, or the dimension and resources of the party.

As a consequence of these trends, some authors state that nowadays voters are seen as political consumers (Hamelink, 2007, p.182) that can be influenced through persuasion techniques. Moreover, political actors present themselves as the best managers of society’s resources. However, in order to receive votes, politicians also need to mobilize and influence voters. And in this context the promotion of leadership values becomes important. Politicians need to sell the image of competent and strong leaders, who have the knowledge to solve the country’s problems. Therefore, a question that this paper will answer is: to what extent leadership values are promoted during Romanian electoral campaigns and what are the techniques employed to do so?

### **The personalization and mediatisation of politics. Candidates between managers and political leaders**

As Peele (2005, p.198) notices “the contemporary political world is less party-centred and more candidate oriented than ever before”. This is the result of the changes in the media system and the political and social transformations. As a result, attention is shifted from political debates and issues to image and personality. Researchers subsume these developments under the concepts of personalization of politics (e.g. Jebril, Albæk & De Vreese, 2013; Kriesi, 2012; Rahat & Shaefer, 2007; Van Aelst, Sheafer & Stanyer, 2011), privatization or emotionalization (Van Santen, 2009). This also had an impact over the way leadership is defined and promoted by politicians. As Donatella Campus (2010, p.219) notes “in contemporary democracies the ascent of political leaders cannot be explained without making reference to their communication style and media strategies”. Politicians have learned to use media outlets to their own advantage. They have specific members of the staff who prepare them for the live appearances on television, and who train them to escape uncomfortable topics journalists bring into discussion. Their staff also creates events that attract media interest and spin the attention from certain topics.

From this point of view, leadership is no longer indicated only by the individual's position and behaviour, or by his capacity to influence others. It has become the subject of media attention and broadcasting. Scholars define this trend as the mediatisation of leadership (e.g. Campus, 2010; Isotalus & Almonkari, 2014). In this case, image becomes more important than substance and personality tops ideology. As a result, leadership nowadays is the result of building an appealing image, establishing an emotional connection with voters, creating media events, and going personal (Campus, 2010).

Mass-media and television had an important role in the mediatisation of leadership. According to Campus (2010, p. 221), because the media can't present viewers with a full image of the political world, it resorts to specific aspects, which can be transformed into “good media products”. These are stories that attract a big audience. As a result, politicians have become so called political celebrities (Davis 2010). They have the same status as rock stars, and because so much personal information regarding their family lives or preferences are shared, they are perceived as intimate strangers (Stainer, 2007).

The relation between politicians and mass-media has become symbiotic. Media need politicians' declarations, events and stories and politicians need media in order to gain popularity and to establish a bond with voters. However, the media-politicians relation isn't always without hardships, considering that political actors don't always have control over the political message. This relation is also difficult in countries where there are politically affiliated (avowed or tacit) media trusts. To escape this pitfall, politicians have the opportunity to use their own controlled media in order to communicate their messages. In this context, new media and social media offer political actors an opportunity to bypass traditional media and to share the information they consider important for the electoral campaign. Moreover, the personal and familiar way of communication of social media sites offer important opportunities for politicians to directly interact with voters and to create an emotional bond with them. Therefore, social media sites are a good tool to promote leadership values.

According to some authors (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012), the use of social media or other online communication platforms deepens the personalization of politics, by the fact that it emphasizes the actions of politicians as individuals rather than as members of a political party. On their own communication platforms, politicians get to choose what type of information they emphasize, in concordance to their communication plan. Hermans and Vergeer (2012) identify three dimensions of online political personalization: home and family, personal preference and the political dimension. Previous studies (Grigorași & Toader, 2013; Toader, 2014) on Romanian politicians' Facebook pages, that investigated these research dimensions, revealed that political actors prefer to focus on the professional dimension rather than to share more personal details about themselves. As an effect, Romanian leaders tend to focus more on competence to gain voters' trust, rather than creating an emotional bond by sharing information about their private life. Emotions are still present in Romanian politics, but they are triggered by different discourse strategies which aim to mobilize voters. This study will further investigate the manner in which political actors promote leadership on their Facebook pages. From this point of view, attention will be focused on the bond that politicians establish with voters online, on the type of information privileged in order to legitimate the quest for votes and the mobilization strategies employed.

## Methodology

The objective of this paper is to investigate the way Romanian politicians integrate Facebook as a political communication tool during the electoral campaign, in order to promote leadership values and to interact with voters. The promotion of leadership values will be studied at a discursive level. For the operationalization of leadership, two dimensions of this concept will be taken into account: *leadership dynamics* – the dynamic quality of the interaction between leaders and followers (bonding strategies, mobilization techniques, the type of interaction with voters); and *the techniques of persuasion* – how politicians communicate with their supporters, the type of discourse and the type of information used to legitimate their candidacy etc. (Peele, 2005, pp.198-199). Based on these dimensions, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What type of information do politicians privilege on their Facebook pages and what is the communicational identity generated?

RQ2: What communicational strategies do politicians use on Facebook to mobilize voters and interact with them?

RQ3: What are the discursive strategies used by politicians on Facebook to promote leadership values (competence, vision, ability to solve problems, ability to mobilize others, responsibility, accountability etc.)?

In order to answer these research questions, a qualitative method was used: dispositive analysis (fr. *dispositif*) (Nell, 1999; Foucault, 1997; Caborn, 2007; Bussolini, 2010; Beciu, 2011; Springer & Clinton, 2013). Dispositive analysis was initially used to study televised and radio shows. The method investigates the way various communicational resources (discursive, material, technological, logistical and symbolic) are used strategically to create an interactional space and a discursive identity for the participants. A media dispositif is, therefore, the result of:

- a communication project belonging to the initiator of the interaction, and to the communication medium used (e.g. televised debates, talk-shows, news bulletins, social network accounts etc.);
- the practices established in time in the social and media space (Beciu, 2011, p.184).

Therefore, a dispositif defines the framework within a discussion is carried and where different types of logics mix: the media logic, the social logic the strategic logic etc.



The premise of this research is that Facebook is a dispositive, as it offers politicians the opportunity to combine different communicational resources: text, image, sound, photography, video to generate a specific interactional space and a discursive identity. In the same time, as a dispositive, Facebook combines the communicational plan of the politician with the specific of Facebook communication and the political communication practices established in the Romanian context.

Dispositive analysis was used to study a corpus consisting on the Facebook pages of four mainstream Romanian politicians, from the 2012 parliamentary campaign: Victor Ponta (the leader of the governing coalition, The Social-Liberal Union - SLU, and prime minister of Romania); Crin Antonescu (leader of SLU); Vasile Blaga (the leader of the main opposition party, The Democratic-Liberal Party – DLP, an leader of „Fair Romania” Alliance - FRA); Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu (leader of the Civic Force Party – CFP, and leader of „Fair Romania” Alliance - FRA). The time frame considered was November 8<sup>th</sup> – December 9<sup>th</sup> 2012, the duration of the 2012 Romanian parliamentary campaign.

In addition, for the 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign another set of four pages was selected: Corina Crețu (vice-president of the Social Democrat Party, and vice-president of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament), Norica Nicolai (member of the National Liberal Party and member of the European Parliament, vice-chair in the Subcommittee on Security and Defence), Theodor Stolojan (member of the Democrat Liberal Party, member of the European Parliament), Cristian Preda (member of the Popular Movement Party, and member of the European Parliament). The time frame for the analysis was April 25<sup>th</sup> – May 25<sup>th</sup>, the duration of the 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign. The results gathered were compared.

Three emergent dimensions of analysis were investigated:

- The thematic orientation of messages, photos and videos posted on Facebook, in order to establish the information privileged by the four politicians. This dimension will reveal the level at which politicians choose to relate with voters and the identity they create through their Facebook pages;
- The practices of interaction with the visitors. The second dimension will reveal the quality of the interaction between politicians and their supporters;

- The type of discourse used – the enunciation strategies and the techniques of persuasion used by politicians on Facebook to promote leadership values and to legitimate their candidacy, or to mobilize/to bond with voters.

## Data presentation and discussion

The results of this study show that Romanian politicians share leadership values on Facebook, but in a limited manner. This trend is influenced by the overall communication plan of the candidate, by his campaign staff's level of Facebook literacy or by the stake of the campaign. There are politicians (such as Victor Ponta) who extensively use Facebook to communicate their position on a variety of campaign topics. These politicians follow a well-established communication plan that combines several types of messages (political stands, political vision, mobilizing and "go out to vote" messages, informative messages and videos, messages of thanks for the supporters etc.) in order to create the image of competent, strong, accountable, and mindful leaders.

In the same time, there are politicians (like Crin Antonescu, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Corina Crețu, Theodor Stolojan or Norica Nicolai) who extensively use Facebook during the electoral campaign, but their primary goal is to promote their campaign events or televised appearances, or political stands expressed on traditional media. As a result, an effect of *live broadcasting of the campaign* emerges, but their campaigns lack in tactics of bonding with voters through direct communication. Bonding is indirect, through discursive strategies such as inclusion (Grigorași & Toader, 2013). This strategy materializes in the use of an "us *versus* them" type of discourse. In the same time, there are politicians (e.g. Vasile Blaga) who use Facebook as an accessory communication outlet for their campaign. They share few messages on Facebook and they do not follow a communication plan. Consequently, the promotion of leadership values is limited.

Finally, there are politicians (e.g. Cristian Preda, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu) who redefine campaign communication, by promoting a multidimensional identity – the candidate/politician, and the private person and observer/commentator of the campaign. These politicians juggle between their official image as candidates and ordinary citizens and try to both promote their political knowledge and identify with voters. All these patterns of Facebook use during the 2012 and 2014 electoral campaigns resulted in specific ways of building

leadership and legitimacy online, which will be further discussed in this section.

***The thematic orientation of messages: creating the image of efficient, empathic and competent leaders***

Regarding the thematic orientation of messages, photographs and videos posted on their Facebook pages, candidates in both 2012 and 2014 elections shared the same range of information: political stands on important topics, elements of their political program, photographs from electoral events, photographs from meetings with officials or supporters, critiques towards opponents, direct political attacks. Consequently, the largest amount of information privileged by politicians on Facebook refers to their professional dimension, which creates the image of *strong, competent and efficient leaders*. They do not focus as much on personal information, preferring to stress their *achievements, initiatives, and vision*. This approach resonates with the expectations of the Romanian electorate, who usually prefers leaders with exceptional qualities and the power to change their lives for the better (Teodorescu, Enache & Guțu, 2005, pp. 197 – 210).

We have reached our goal of budgetary deficit. The actual government has spent less, and still managed to raise salaries and pensions. (Victor Ponta, 2012 Parliamentary elections)

I advocated in the European Parliament against divergences and national or political egoism, constantly stressing the need towards solidarity and vision to reduce the differences between Romania and the rest of the European states, with a greater economic development. This objective can be reached through foreign investments, economic growth and creating jobs. (Corina Crețu, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

I have addressed today an open letter to the British member of the European Parliament, Nigel Farage, following his statement that he wouldn't want to have Romanian neighbours. (...) I have addressed to this euro-sceptic politician the invitation to visit Romania and confront his fears towards its citizens. (Norica Nicolai, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

There are also politicians who share personal information, preferences or thoughts about the campaign on Facebook. As a result, they present them-

selves as both political actors and ordinary citizens. Cristian Preda, and to a lesser extent Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu and Victor Ponta are such politicians, who redefine political campaign communication on Facebook. They dissociate from their official image, and from time to time combine the official tone of the campaign with their own evaluations of current events, or they talk about personal preferences or experiences (that don't always relate to the campaign). This is a humanizing strategy meant to reduce the social distance between politicians and voters, inducing the feeling of *similarity* and *empathy*. While mimicking an equal position with the voter, these politicians maintain the control over communication, and have bigger chances to influence and mobilize their supporters. As a result, they present themselves as political leaders.

Humour at Chisinau. (Shares a picture of a gate on which it is written: "Do not park! A donkey lives here) (Cristian Preda, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

Today I'll focus less on politics and more on education: two of my PhD candidates are presenting their thesis and I'm there to support them. (Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

Eight years ago I was just a young man who wanted to be involved in politics and who was helped by the people of Târgu-Jiu, Gorj County to become a deputy for the first time. (Victor Ponta, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

Nevertheless, the share of leadership values isn't always a primary goal of Romanian politicians when using Facebook during the electoral campaign. Each Facebook dispositive initiated by the candidates revealed different approaches to online electoral communication. While politicians such as Victor Ponta followed a communication plan meant to inform, mobilize and convince voters of his political competences, other politicians (Crin Antonescu, Norica Nicolai, Corina Crețu and Theodor Stolojan) gave a bigger importance to campaign events and political stances on different topics. This indicates that Facebook is a useful tool for the promotion of leadership values, but politicians only exploit this opportunity to a limited extent.

### ***The practices of interaction with followers. Between web 2.0 and web 1.5 interaction***

Concerning the interactivity of Facebook electoral communication, the study revealed that Romanian politicians hardly use the web 2.0 features of this social

network. Among all the analysed politicians, only Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, Victor Ponta, and to a lesser extent Vasile Blaga invited followers to ask questions about the campaign. Moreover, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu was the only candidate who organized question and answer sessions on his Facebook page, where he answered voters' questions in real-time. Altogether, followers were seldom invited to get involved in the online campaign by sharing politicians' campaign materials (photographs, badges, statuses, go out to vote messages). This tactic was rarely used during the 2012 parliamentary campaign and completely lacked in 2014. Nonetheless, the usage of such techniques shows the intention of some candidates to present themselves as political leaders, by exercising an influence over their followers. In this respect, politicians try to create a bond with voters by reducing the social and physical distance between them, or by trying to create unity among specific ideas of their campaign.

A unique trend regarding interactivity revealed by this study is that sometimes, the lack of interactivity of a politician's page also translates in sparse messages designed for Facebook communication only. In this respect, either candidates prefer to reiterate statements made in traditional media, by citing them on Facebook, or skip writing messages altogether, and just post pictures and videos from events, or share other colleagues' statements and Facebook posts, without adding their own interpretation. These are strategies largely used by politicians like Crin Antonescu or Theodor Stolojan, who create a communicational paradox. Even though they are very active online during the campaign, by sharing several posts a day, they are absent from the discussion, creating a *silent Facebook communication effect*. As a result, the interaction with voters is minimal, and Facebook is only an accessory communication outlet for the campaign. From this perspective, Facebook communication helps with the better dissemination of messages, but lacks the natural and direct characteristics of online interaction, which are also necessary dimensions for the promotion of leadership.

Such communication patterns limit the share of leadership values on Facebook, or better said, they promote a *reiteration of leadership values* promoted through offline campaigns. Politicians still depict themselves as competent, empathic and influential leaders (by posting photographs surrounded by supporters or by sharing news about their achievements), but Facebook is just another way of disseminating an already aired message. Still, without the help of Facebook, some campaign events wouldn't get the same amount of media coverage.

Some possible explanations for such trends is either the lack of online communication literacy of politicians and their staff, a smaller interest in online communication, or an attempt to maintain control over communication. As a result, politicians resort to a web 1.5 (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009) type of communication, where they share political messages but limit interactivity in order to avoid critiques and conflict. Facebook political communication becomes one-directional, and the opportunity to share leadership values is affected.

***The type of discourse used. Creating the image of accountable and knowledgeable leaders***

The premise of this paper is that the promotion of leadership values and the legitimacy of a candidate's actions can be achieved through discourse. The results of this study show that indeed discourse is a powerful resource for politicians in online electoral communication in terms of promoting leadership values. Politicians often operate with *declarations*, in order to present their campaign actions, and thus underlining the importance (Beciu, 2011) of each of their initiatives.

I have addressed today an open letter to the British member of the European Parliament, Nigel Farage, following his statement that he wouldn't want to have Romanian neighbours. (...) I have addressed to this euro-sceptic politician the invitation to visit Romania and confront his fears towards its citizens. (Norica Nicolai, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

Romanian needs representatives who can bring European funds. (Corina Crețu, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

Each time we set such an objective, we said clearly what needs to be done to accomplish it, and what are the consequences. (Victor Ponta, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

We worked at this budget project for over two months with a team of reputable economists and sophisticate programs. (Vasile Blaga, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

In the same time, through speech acts like *obligation* and *promise* candidates create the image of *accountable* leaders, who have the necessary skills to solve Romanian citizens' problems. They set the boundaries and the stan-

dards of their actions and prove that they have the vision to promote new solutions.

I feel that we, as Europeans, should become more united and strong because only this way we can solve crisis situations efficiently. (Norica Nicolai, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

One has to invest in the education system in order to see later results. (Victor Ponta, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

I guarantee farmers that the SLU government will make agriculture a national priority. (Crin Antonescu, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

As a senator, I will promote an Ethics and integrity Code for congressmen. (Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

Accountability is also an effect of the *assurances* that politicians give, that they can solve problems. By promoting their achievements, candidates also gain credibility and legitimate their candidacy and their status.

We kept our word, we gave back 15% from the public sector wages. (Victor Ponta, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

We will do it. We will do it with all Romanians, for all Romanian citizens. (Crin Antonescu, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

Legitimacy is furthermore consolidated through *interpellations*, *value judgments* and *warnings*, towards political opponents. In this way, candidates assume a position of power, where they can evaluate and sanction others for their mistakes, and can identify the right solutions to citizens' problems.

We inherited a disaster from the former government and we managed to redress in the last six months. (Victor Ponta, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

I want to see reaction towards plagiarism cases of those politicians who signed in 2008 the Education Pact. (Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

When a plagiarist who has become prime minister qualifies a reputed academic as an “old fascist”, the country is fragile. (Cristian Preda, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

If the president doesn’t respect this vote, we will suspend him. (Crin Antonescu, 2012 parliamentary campaigns)

Through *confession*, politicians establish an emotional bond with voters, by erasing social distance. Candidates gain credibility, and followers get the privilege to listen to statements that aren’t usually expressed. An *authenticity effect* (Beciu, 2011) emerges, which consolidates the status of the politician, and reinforces his leader charisma.

Eight years ago I was just a young man who wanted to be involved in politics and who was helped by the people of Târgu-Jiu, Gorj County to become a deputy for the first time. (Victor Ponta, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

I started my day at Zalău, in Sălaj County. I always come here with pleasure, as my father is here also. (Corina Crețu, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

I have told my consultants that I am not a marketing product. I am a real human being, and I don’t want to change that. (Norica Nicolai, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

In the other hand, politicians create a bond with voters through *go out to vote messages*:

Dear friends, with justice, with honesty, with honour, until the end, no mercy! (Crin Antonescu, 2012 parliamentary elections)

We are waiting for you at the polls on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May! (Corina Crețu, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)

Vote PNL, the party that celebrates tomorrow 139 years of existence, the party who brought Romania home – in Europe! (Norica Nicolai, 2014 euro-parliamentary campaign)



They also try to identify with voters, and thus promoting an *us versus them* type of discourse (especially during the 2012 parliamentary campaign):

I am one of the 7,4 Romanian citizens who voted “yes” to the referendum. (Crin Antonescu, 2012 parliamentary campaign)

Even though such strategies are used both during 2012 and the 2014 electoral campaigns, the politicians had a more passionate discourse during the parliamentary elections (2012). This might be explained by the different stakes the two campaigns had. While parliamentary campaigns mobilize a bigger amount of voters, euro-parliamentary elections are a fairly new practice in Romania. As a result, political actors might feel a bigger motivation to fight for a place in the Romanian Parliament, than in the European Parliament. In the same time, another possible explanation is that some politicians do not count as much on online electoral communication, and use it as an auxiliary form of communication. This might also explain the leaning of candidates for the 2014 European elections to extensively promote on Facebook elements and messages specific to the offline campaign.

## Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study show that leadership values are present on politicians' Facebook pages, but in different degrees. They mostly depend on the type of information candidates privilege on their Facebook pages or on the discursive strategies used to communicate with voters. Leadership on Romanian politician's Facebook pages involves less direct interaction with voters, this outcome being achieved through enunciation strategies. Revisiting this study's objective, Facebook is only partly used as an efficient communication tool, that helps promote leadership values and interaction with voters. While some politicians (Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, Victor Ponta) try to directly interact with supporters or to mobilize voters through their Facebook pages, the general trend is towards a more reserved and one directional communication.

To answer the first research question, Facebook is a useful communication tool, where politicians share information about the electoral campaign, discuss issues regarding their political program or contextual topics that emerge during the campaign. As a result, they create the image of competent and knowledgeable leaders, with constructive initiatives that can bring a positive change to society. Some politicians (Victor Ponta, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu,

Corina Crețu, and partly Norica Nicolai), double their professional identity with leader qualities. As a result, they complete their identity with characteristics such as: *accountability*, *empathy* or *efficiency*.

Nevertheless, for the most part Facebook remains a tool for the *live broadcasting of the campaign*. This trend is set by the fact that politicians tend to avoid direct interaction with voters online, either to avoid conflict, or because they use this platform as an accessory communication tool. Consequently, the answer to the second research question is that voter interaction techniques, an important aspect of political leadership, are commonly reduced to *go out to vote messages*. Moreover, interaction with voters is frequently just mimicked by the reiteration of messages and campaign actions specific to the offline realm. A so called *silent Facebook communication effect* emerges, where politicians are very active on Facebook, but fail to also generate fresh content, adequate to this medium. They either promote political stands made for traditional media, or describe their campaign events in a non-engaged manner.

Still, leadership values transpire from the discursive strategies some of the candidates use. And to answer the last research question, politicians employ speech acts such as declaration, obligation, promise and assurances in order to create the image of strong accountable leaders. From this position, they reserve the right to evaluate events and other politicians' actions and to bring the right solutions. This effect is achieved through interpellation, value judgement and warning. Furthermore, candidates create a bond with the electorate with the help of confessions, which give their discourse an *authentic effect*. However, the presence of this enunciation strategies is influenced by the overall communicational strategy of the politicians, by their online communication literacy or the amount of effort and resources they invest on their Facebook strategy.

While the results of this study show a few relevant patterns of Facebook use in Romanian politics, they cannot be generalized to the entire Romanian political landscape. The comparative analysis between the two electoral campaigns show differences in the communication of leadership values during elections with different stakes and voter turnouts. Still, for a longitudinal and more comprehensive set of results, the corpus should be extended and the study must continue with the analysis of future Facebook electoral campaigns.

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