

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: MEDIA, LANGUAGE, AND POWER IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

Ştefan Radu Bogdan Stănescu

PhD Candidate, University of Craiova

Abstract

The article analyses the profound transformations in political communication amid the development of the internet and social networks, highlighting how the online environment has redefined the relationships among politicians, the media, and citizens. Digital platforms have become central tools for promoting political messages, mobilising the electorate, interacting directly with the public, and monitoring public opinion in real time, thereby facilitating the personalisation of communication and expanding civic participation. At the same time, the study highlights the risks associated with this environment, in particular the proliferation of fake news, disinformation, and scandal politics, which can influence public perceptions and contribute to a crisis of legitimacy of the traditional political system. From a linguistic and discursive perspective, the article highlights the essential role of language in constructing online political messages, including the use of rhetorical strategies, emotion, message simplification, and multimedia elements. In conclusion, the relationship between politics, media, and the online environment is complex and dynamic, offering significant opportunities for the democratisation of political participation, but also significant challenges that require a critical and responsible approach from political actors and citizens.

Keywords: political communication, social media, political discourse, online environment, civic mobilisation

Introduction

The expansion of digital technologies has reshaped the public sphere and altered the conditions under which political communication takes place. The emergence of the internet and online media has not only diversified channels of information but has also reconfigured the temporal, spatial, and symbolic dimensions of political interaction (Chadwick, 2017; Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018). Communication is no longer confined to institutionalised media outlets or clearly defined political arenas, but unfolds within networked environments characterised by speed, connectivity, and constant feedback.

Within this evolving context, political communication increasingly operates according to the logic of digital media (Appel et al., 2019). The immediacy of online platforms, the dominance of visual and audiovisual formats, and the pressure to capture public attention have influenced how political messages are constructed and disseminated (Weismueller et al., 2021). Political parties began strategically integrating social media platforms into their campaign communication to maximise outreach and voter engagement (Gossner et al., 2004).

These changes raise important questions about the nature of political discourse, the role of language, and the balance between information, persuasion, and emotional appeal in contemporary political communication.

At the same time, the growing visibility of political processes in the online environment has intensified public scrutiny of political actors and institutions. Political communication is continually evaluated, reinterpreted, and contested by diverse audiences. This heightened exposure affects not only political strategies but also citizens' expectations regarding transparency, accountability, and participation in democratic life (McNair, 2017).

Scholarly debates in political communication and media studies have increasingly focused on the implications of these transformations (AlAfnan, 2025). Researchers have examined how digital media challenge established distinctions between producers and consumers of political content, between public and private communication, and between national and transnational political spaces. The online environment thus emerges as a complex communicative ecosystem in which political meanings are constantly negotiated.

In this broader theoretical and social framework, the present study situates its analysis of political communication in the digital age. Rather than treating the internet merely as a technological tool, the article approaches it as a communicative environment that shapes political language, discourse practices, and modes of participation. By exploring these dynamics, the article seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about the changing nature of politics in a mediated and networked society.

Politics and social media

With the advancement of technology and the rise of the internet and social media platforms, political communication and debate have migrated mainly to the digital space (Popa et al., 2019). This is due to the many advantages the online environment offers in terms of access to audiences, direct interaction and distribution of content. Social media platforms, blogs, videos, direct interaction with thousands of people at the same time, the seamless flow of political discourse - all create a new conglomerate for the political sphere. Politicians, political parties and organisations are actively using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), Instagram and LinkedIn to promote their messages, attract supporters and interact directly with voters. These platforms allow for rapid distribution of information, organisation of online events and real-time responses to questions and concerns. Some politicians and parties even have blogs and websites where they publish articles, speeches, policy positions and other relevant information. These can give voters more insight into the political platforms and visions of candidates. Videos and podcasts are frequently used to present their platforms and policy positions, and these formats can be more attractive and accessible to younger audiences and make complex issues more straightforward to understand.

In the case of election campaigns, paid advertisements on the internet to promote their candidates and political messages can be segmented to reach specific audiences, allowing a high degree of personalisation. In addition, social media offers the opportunity for direct interaction with voters through comments, private messages and live broadcasts, increasing the level of transparency and connection between politicians and citizens. Political debates take place on online platforms, where people express their opinions and argue their positions (Fortunato et al., 2016). The online environment also makes it easier to mobilise and organise protests or political events. Last but not least, monitoring public opinion in real time is made much easier online by analysing discussions and trends on social media.

The rise of fake news

However, the online environment also brings challenges, such as the spread of fake news or the manipulation of information (Van Aelst et al., 2017). These can have a significant impact on political discourse and public opinion (Al-Rawi & Prithipaul, 2023). Fake news often involves manipulating language to create headlines and content that grab attention and create sensation. This can include using strong words or phrases, exaggerating or distorting information and using an alarming or emotional tone. Fake news is often accompanied by stories constructed in such a way as to appear credible. These stories may include fictitious or distorted details and may use persuasive techniques to convince readers. In terms of sources, fake news uses unreliable or fabricated sources to support the claims made in the news story. This may include fictitious quotes or attributing non-existent information to non-existent or unauthenticated sources (Stănescu, 2024). It can also involve the manipulation of images and graphics to support false claims. This may include altering photographs, creating distorted graphics or using images from other contexts to mislead (Stănescu, G. C., 2020).

From a psychological point of view, fake news often focuses on exploiting public anxieties, prejudices or feelings (Vosoughi et al., 2018). It may address sensitive or controversial topics to generate strong reactions. Rhetorical techniques can also be used to create persuasion, which refers to appeals to emotions, the use of persuasive figures of speech and the construction of arguments that appear to be logically valid but are in fact false. Sometimes fake news can be presented in the form of irony or parody, making it even more challenging to interpret. In such cases, language can be used to create a mixture of humour and confusion.

In conclusion, fake news is a linguistically complex phenomenon (Grieve & Woodfield, 2023) as it involves the manipulation of language, content and rhetorical techniques to create fake news that appears credible and influences public opinion. Understanding these elements is essential to uncover and counter fake news.

Overall, the online environment has redefined the way political communication takes place, bringing with it both opportunities and new challenges.

In recent decades, politics has taken over every possible space, be it classic media or new social media. Information is propagated through all kinds of media: from TV, newspapers, to advertisements and broadcasts on all types of internet channels, and people's opinions and the way they act politically are shaped by these influences. The material promoted by the media, in all its forms, influences people. Individuals react and act on images, sounds, videos, and texts based on their own values, interests and perceptions. Politics and relations among individuals in societies across the world are being transformed by new technologies for targeting individuals and sophisticated methods for shaping personalised messages. The latest technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds - between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations.

The political process, in all its forms, is being mirrored and even exposed much more widely on the Internet, and this is mainly due to the options that the online environment offers. It is a beautiful space not only for those who work in the political climate, but also for those who consume this information, and for the media, social organisations and many other forms of manifestation that result from this field.

Media, politics and the online environment

The influence of the media on political debate has significant consequences for the political process. Media politics has its own rules and language, including simplifying the message, constructing images, personalising politics and creating narratives, and using strategies such as discrediting political opponents through revelations (whether true, false or partial) to influence public opinion (Thompson, 2000). Media politics also involves significant expenditure, particularly when conducted outside political campaign periods. It requires considerable financial investment and resources to maintain a favourable media presence, which can lead to politicians' dependence on donors and their lobbyists.

The internet has been a powerful tool for civic engagement and citizen mobilisation. Social media platforms and online groups allow citizens to express their opinions, coordinate their actions and participate in political debates. Media politics and its consequences, such as personalisation, image creation, financial dependence on self-interested donors and scandal-based politics, can contribute to a crisis of political legitimacy (Fallows, 1996; Dautrich and Hartley, 1999). Therefore, this does not imply a complete withdrawal of people from the political sphere, but instead suggests that there is a tendency to lose trust in traditional politics and politicians. Instead, people are turning to alternative political practices, such as voting for third parties, abstaining, engaging in referendum politics or exploring forms of political mobilisation outside the traditional party system.

The internet has democratised access to information, as citizens can now access news and political analysis from a variety of sources and form their own opinions. This democratisation of information has made politicians more accountable to the public and brought more transparency to the political process. Obviously, the media and the internet have contributed to the personalisation of politics. Politicians strive to create images and messages that match the specific preferences and values of different groups of voters, and this personalisation can lead to stronger engagement by citizens. There is a flip side, as with most relatively new actions in this online environment. Scandal politics, misinformation, fake news and disinformation campaigns can influence public opinion and affect political processes, requiring a careful approach and increased discernment on the part of citizens.

As the media and the internet have exposed more aspects of politics, some societies have experienced a crisis of legitimacy in politics. This has led to increased support for alternative politics, such as third parties, and the exploration of unconventional methods of political mobilisation.

This crisis of political legitimacy translates into a loss of trust in the traditional political system. This is partly attributed to the practice of media politics, which can generate distrust in politicians and the political process. In the context of the legitimacy crisis, the effect may be that many citizens start to engage in alternative forms of political expression. These may include social movements, insurgent politicians or attempts to connect civil society with newer political leaders. The Internet plays a significant role in this new political landscape. When used independently by citizens, grassroots organisations and political entrepreneurs, the internet becomes a platform of choice. The online environment is valued for its ability to build extensive networks at low cost. These networks are based on individual multi-directional connections and can continue to grow in an open and non-centrally controlled way. This allows it to expand indefinitely and to configure itself around overarching themes that evolve as network interactions occur.

The online zone offers significant opportunities for citizens and organisations to engage in politics in a more direct and autonomous way, countering the crisis of political legitimacy and traditional media politics. This is due to the internet's ability to create open and dynamic networks that can transform the political process through active citizen participation. The relationship between politics, media and the internet is complex and constantly changing. For all the challenges and opportunities it presents, this relationship has a profound impact on how politics is understood, communicated and experienced by citizens. A careful and responsible approach to this relationship is essential to ensure more transparent and participatory political processes. And all these exposures can be explained by the way words have played a key role in the communication process.

The way political life is presented by online media has led to multiple changes in language and discourse. The Internet has brought with it a diversification of vocabulary and speaking style in the presentation of politics. Keywords, neologisms and expressions associated with the online environment have been integrated into political discourse. The modern politician also faces pressure to communicate clearly and concisely in the digital environment, which can lead to the use of more simplified and direct language. Online media has introduced

multimedia elements into political presentation, including videos, infographics and visual presentations. These add additional dimensions of communication that do not rely exclusively on text and speech, but also on non-verbal elements such as gestures and tone of voice.

The Internet allows real-time communication, and this affects political discourse. Politicians and media representatives can use platforms such as Twitter to deliver real-time messages to the public. This requires quick and concise communication skills. Citizens can also comment and respond to messages, which can influence how politicians react and adapt to public feedback.

Finally, the internet and social media have made political discourse globally accessible. Politicians and the media can reach international audiences, which sometimes involves adapting language and discourse to different cultures and linguistic contexts. Obviously, technology also helps in this respect, to change the quality of speeches, involving analysis of tone of voice, pace of speech and how speech affects the perception of the audience.

Without going into the essence of politics as a form of social engagement, but to exemplify the power of communication, as the balance of power can influence this process, modern politics, developed in the online environment, is mass politics. Networked politics is individualised politics, trying to connect to many other individuals, and this can lead to a fragmentation of politics, a greater spread of referendum politics and an unpredictability of political opinion. Clearly, these changes can erode the stable system of political representation that has characterised democracies for the last half century, and the role not only of politicians but also of the communicating practitioners seems to be between the continuation of traditional party politics, enacted through media politics and increasingly delegitimised, and the emergence of network politics in a process characterised by the production of new actors.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article highlights the extent of the transformations brought about in political communication by the development of new media, which have changed not only the channels for transmitting political messages but also discursive practices, power relations, and forms of political participation. The online environment has established itself as a central space for interaction between political actors, the media, and citizens, where political meanings are constructed, negotiated, and contested at an accelerated pace.

Although digital technologies have expanded the possibilities for information, visibility, and civic engagement, they have also accentuated existing tensions in democratic systems. The personalisation of political communication, the dominant media logic, and the frequent use of emotional appeals and rhetorical strategies have profoundly influenced contemporary political discourse. In this context, the spread of disinformation, fake news, and scandal politics poses significant challenges to the quality of public debate and trust in political institutions.

From a linguistic and discursive perspective, the study highlights the essential role of language in shaping political realities in the online environment. The simplification of the message, the emphasis on emotion, and the integration of multimodal elements reflect the constraints and opportunities of digital platforms and influence how political messages are received and evaluated by the public.

At the same time, the internet has facilitated the emergence of alternative forms of civic mobilisation and political expression, which can help counteract the crisis of legitimacy in traditional politics. However, these forms of online participation can generate fragmentation, volatility, and unpredictability in public opinion, calling into question the stability of classical mechanisms of political representation.

In conclusion, political communication in the digital age must be understood as a complex and dynamic process, determined by the interaction between technology, discourse, and social power structures. Responsible management of this environment requires not only the adaptation of political actors' strategies, but also the development of critical thinking and media literacy skills among citizens. Future research should continue to explore the long-term impact of digital political communication on the functioning of democracy and public discourse.

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