

# Political Marketing and Internet as Political Weapon

## Politički marketing i Internet kao političko oružje

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### Summary

Political marketing is a multidisciplinary field that includes knowledge from economics, social psychology, communication and political science. In countries with a tradition of political market, political marketing is a well-known and applicable discipline, while in countries in transition there is not enough developed theory and market-political practice.

Political marketing is an application of integrated marketing in the sensitive area of promoting ideologies, ideas and political goals. Politics is the process of exchanging political parties, their ideas, candidates and voters. In that sense, political marketing is the coordinator of that market, which, in addition to politically engaged public opinion, also influences the attraction of non-politicized, undecided and conformist individuals. Political marketing should be a process of democratic persuasion ("propaganda of respect" or "new politics"), not a form of manipulating people's consciousness and behavior.

Social networks have become a powerful tool for influencing millions of people around the world, which has led to their abuse with the aim of interfering in elections in other countries, to which not even the "largest democracy" in the world is immune. It is unclear to the average user of social networks how such platforms can be used for foreign interference in electoral processes, that they can very well serve to manipulate a large number of people.

Keywords: political marketing, elections, political parties, voters, social networks

### Social networks as means of election manipulation and surveillance

The main aim of scientifically founded concept of political marketing is creation of the conditions for rational behaviour in politics. Elections are public competition by which politicians are being elected, that is representatives of the election will of the voters that will apply their will and interests.

Organisation Freedom House in its annual report warns that technology that should improve human's freedom is a dangerous mean in the hands of the authoritarian regimes.

The means and tactics of digital authoritarianism, which has spread rapidly around the world, are increasingly threatening freedom, according to the annual report of Freedom House, and calls for urgent reforms, mostly in the field of social networks, because the future of privacy, freedom of expression and democracy depends on it.



Source: Demonstration in Moscow because of the restricting to internet access, Freedomhouse.org

Repressive regimes, politicians with authoritarian ambitions and unscrupulous party operatives use the poorly regulated space of social media platforms, turning them into instruments for political manipulation and control of society, according to a report by the organization, which is partly funded by the US government. Digital platforms have become a new battlefield for democracy, and shaping the flow of information is now a key strategy for those who want to obstruct the democratic transfer of power through elections.

### False news

The media are one of the basic pillars of democracy, they should be a source of truth and real information. However, the media can find an innocent person guilty, write one lie 100 times and thus manipulate people's opinions. With the growth of the Internet and social networks, thousands of information are appearing and a large number of them are unfortunately false. By creating pages on Facebook or Instagram, and fake news on those platforms, we can influence people's opinions or at least encourage them to think the way we want. Hundreds and thousands of fake news are placed on the consumers of these platforms, which in that way acquire a distorted image of a given situation or a special problem. Facebook gives the opportunity to publish paid, that is, additionally advertise so that fake news can reach several million people", that research has shown that users of social networks are the most indecisive (in a political sense), so that the placement of fake news can decide whom they will give their vote.

### Social network campaign

Therefore, large networks have launched a campaign to combat foreign influences and fight fake news intended to carry out certain manipulations, which is a commendable move, but the question arises as to how much energy and resources will be

invested in such efforts and whether social networks can be trusted to really control the posts on their services.

Professor Obradović explains that the largest social networks, in addition to the existing reports of users against certain posts of other users, have started to detect false news and political propaganda. But one cannot therefore expect that there will be no false news and political propaganda aimed at creating influence, he adds.

"The big question is whether algorithms on social networks are impartial or whether they ultimately give preference to a particular candidate and political option by detecting and removing certain posts."

In many countries, the rise of populism and right-wing extremism has coincided with an increase in the number of party internet groups that include authentic users, but also fake accounts.

In several countries where elections were held, extremist parties made better use of social networks than their moderate rivals. Right-wing groups are more successful because - as studies have shown - fake, shocking, exaggerated and emotionally charged content spreads faster on social networks. For example, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and his extreme right-wing movement, despite an earlier agreement with other political actors not to spread misinformation, gained a large number of followers by placing conspiracy theories on YouTube. They later used this to expand the base of supporters and attack opponents. Some of those trying to manipulate the election have developed tactics to defeat technology companies in their efforts to tackle fake and misleading news, the report said.

In the Philippines, for example, candidates paid "micro influencers" on social media to promote their campaigns on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, where they also inserted political messages into pop culture content.

Internet misinformation has prevailed in the United States when it comes to major political events, such as the November mid-term elections in 2018 and the hearing of Bret Kavanaugh, a candidate for Supreme Court judge. Freedom House has also found an increase in the number of governments that hire bots and open fake accounts to covertly shape public opinion or attack opponents. Such behavior was recorded in 38 of the 65 countries surveyed.

For the fourth year in a row, China is ranked as the country that abuses the Internet of freedom the most in the world after it tightened restrictions on access to information due to anti-government protests in Hong Kong and on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre.

In addition to enabling the spread of propaganda and misinformation during the election period, social networks enable the collection and analysis of a huge amount of data on the entire population.

Sophisticated mass surveillance once conducted by the world's largest intelligence agencies is now accessible to a much wider clientele. Freedom House research indicates that an increasing number of repressive governments are procuring advanced instruments to monitor social networks to identify threats and silence opponents.

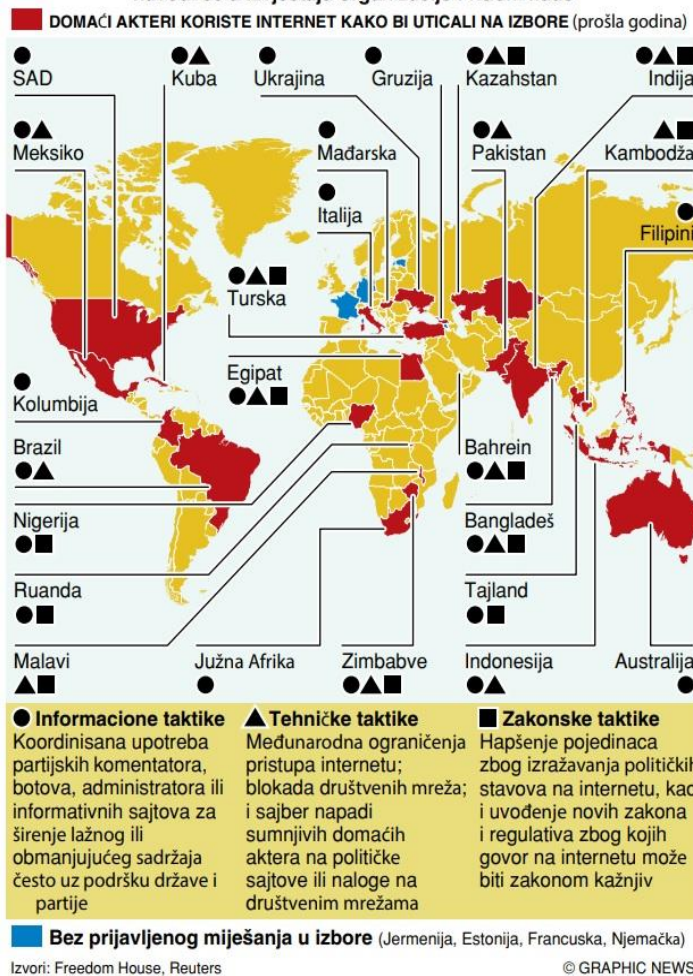
Even in democracies, government agencies apply such mass surveillance without adequate regulations. The result is an increase in violations of civil liberties and a reduction in the internet space for civic activism. Of the 65 countries analyzed in the report, 47 are making arrests for expressing political, social and religious views online.

Activists and the media in at least 18 countries covered by the survey have reported hacker attacks, the most popular being DDoS in which simultaneous requests from a large number of computers overwhelm and disable a portal or system. These types of attacks have become an easy and relatively inexpensive way to deal with those who report on sensitive topics.

Although authoritarian powers such as China and Russia, according to Freedom House, have played a key role in preventing technology from bringing greater human rights, the largest social media platforms are in the United States, and

## Internet kao oružje za manipulisanje izborima

Internet dezinformacije, propaganda i cenzura su korišteni u uplitanju u 26 od 30 nacionalnih izbora koji su analizirani protekle godine, navodi se u izvještaju organizacije Fridom haus



Domestic governments and local actors used the Internet in an effort to influence the outcome of 26 of the 30 national elections analyzed by Freedom House for the purposes of the report. Spreading misinformation and propaganda has proven to be the most popular and effective means. Domestic state and party actors have used Internet networks to spread conspiracy theories and deceptive content, often working in tandem with government-friendly media and business figures.

"Many governments have found that propaganda on social media gives better results than censorship," said Mike Abramovic, president of Freedom House.

"Authoritarians and populists around the world are abusing human nature and computer algorithms to win ballot boxes by recklessly trampling on rules designed to make elections fair and just."

their abuse by undemocratic forces is largely the result of American neglect, it is said in the report.

Authorities in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other countries have stepped up efforts over the past year to manipulate the Internet and influence the political scene in their own and other countries.

Democrats, on the other hand, are failing to improve transparency and funding rules that are key to free and fair elections, and to apply them effectively in the Internet sphere, according to Freedom House.

### **Internet remains a powerful instrument of democracy**

Despite the space for abuse and manipulation, the Internet remains a powerful tool for reviewing state power and defending fundamental freedoms, according to Freedom House.

For example, protesters in Russia, after opposition candidates were barred from running in Moscow's local elections, used innovative means of digital communication to coordinate activities, including medical assistance, legal advice to detainees and the delivery of food and drink.

Citizens even used the Internet and the application to determine which candidates have the best chance of beating those from the ruling party. As a result of mass protests, pro-government candidates suffered an unexpected strike in the Moscow elections.

The report also cites the example of Hong Kong, where democratic protests have been held since June 2019. Aware that their activities are being monitored, protesters are using various techniques to escape Beijing's "watchful eye".

For example, they use words such as "picnic" to denote a meeting, and after reports that authorities could turn off the Internet, protesters tested networks that send messages via "bluetooth."

### **CONCLUSION**

Social networks influence users and the electorate primarily because most users on social networks do not seek truth and argumentative discussion, but confirmation of their own views and entertainment. That is why social networks in political campaigns strengthen the already existing attitudes of users, but they can have less influence on the indecisive because they also choose groups in which they are like-minded.

What is indisputable is that technology has made some progress since the last US presidential election, such as interfering in and preventing foreign elections.

With an even greater number of active users on social networks, the number and efficiency of bots, computer programs that behave like people in the virtual world, engage in online discussions and communicate with people, has increased.

Just as algorithms for detecting fake news and political propaganda have been perfected, so have bots that successfully post posts and by choosing words bypass the obstacles posed to them by social networks.

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