

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**INTERACTIVE AND RELATIONAL POLITICAL MARKETING  
COMMUNICATION: PURSUING DIALOGUE WITH THE PUBLICS ON  
SOCIAL MEDIA**

**Bratislava, 2017**

**Mário Lapoš**

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**INTERACTIVE AND RELATIONAL POLITICAL MARKETING  
COMMUNICATION: PURSUING DIALOGUE WITH THE PUBLICS ON  
SOCIAL MEDIA**

**BACHELOR THESIS**

Study Program: Liberal Arts  
Field of Study: 3.1.6. Political Science  
Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, PhD.  
Qualification: Bachelor of Arts (abbr. 'Bc.')Submission Date: 15 February 2016  
Date of Defence: June 9, 2017

**Bratislava, 2017**

**Mário Lapoš**

### **Declaration of Originality**

I declare that this bachelor thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used academic and other sources of literature are referenced and listed in Bibliography.

Bratislava, February 15, 2016

Mário Lapoš

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

# INTERAKTÍVNA A VZŤAHOVÁ KOMUNIKÁCIA V POLITICKOM MARKETINGU: VEDENIE DIALÓGU S VEREJNOSŤOU NA SOCIÁLNYCH SIEŤACH

Autor bakalárskej práce: Mário Lapoš

Názov práce: Interaktívna a Vzťahová Komunikácia v Politickom Marketingu:

Vedenie dialógu s verejnosťou na sociálnych sieťach

Názov vysokej školy: Bratislavská medzinárodná škola liberálnych štúdií

Vedúci bakalárskej práce: Mgr. Matej Gyárfáš, ArtD.

Predseda komisie pre obhajoby bakalárskych prác: Samuel Abrahám, PhD

Členovia komisie pre obhajoby bakalárskych prác: Samuel Abrahám, PhD, prof.

František Novosád, Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, PhD, prof. Silvia Miháliková

Dátum a miesto: Bratislava, február 2016

Rozsah práce: 47 strán (13 472 slov)

Stupeň kvalifikácie: Bakalár (Bc)

**Kľúčové slová: sociálne, siete, komunikácia, vzťah, politika, marketing**

## Abstrakt

Pred poslednými voľbami do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky malo Slovensko možnosť sledovať vládnutie jednej strany, ktorá okrem prevažnej väčšiny v parlamente dominovala aj vo vláde. Niečo také nie je pre demokraciu prirodzené. Čo je viac, komunikácia s verejnosťou viazla na odmietnutí komunikovať s dvoma významnými médiami denníkom SME a Denníkom N. Tento defekt, avšak, umožnil zvyšku strán ukázať a prezentovať svoju šikovnosť v komunikácií.

Táto práca obsahuje výskum, ktorý prebiehal na vzorke strán úspešných v posledných parlamentných voľbách počas trvania predvolebnej kampane s výrazným zameraním na najväčšiu opozičnú a druhú najväčšiu stranu podľa výsledku volieb - SaS a jej lídra Richarda Sulík v súvislosti s komunikáciou s publikom na ich Facebookových stránkach.

Výskum pozostáva z dvoch častí: mechanickej a interaktívnej. V mechanickej časti zbieram dáta o komentároch, ktoré všetky strany počas predvolebnej kampane dostali a na koľko z nich odpovedali. V interaktívnej časti vyhodnocujem dotazníky

zamerané na spokojnosť voličov SaS s komunikáciou strany a jej lídra a propagácia predvolebných podujatí. Následne sa v rozhovore s hovorkyňou SaS dozvedáme akú stratégiu a aký prínos od nej očakávajú v rámci Facebooku. Jedna z najdôležitejších častí rozhovoru sa týka organizácie dobrovoľníkov a do akej miery bol pri tom využitý práve Facebook.

Od výskumu tohoto typu, ktorý na Slovensku dosiaľ nebol robený, si sľubujem prínos do oblasti politického marketingu, konkrétne so zameraním na obijstrannú a interaktívnu komunikáciu pri ktorej dochádza k diskusií medzi stranou a voličom či potencionálnym voličom na Facebooku. Implikácie do budúcnosti by mali prispieť k osвете výskumu politického marketingu nakoľko momentálny stav je nepriaznivý rovnako v aspekte kvalitatívnom a kvantitatívnom.

**INTERACTIVE AND RELATIONAL POLITICAL MARKETING  
COMMUNICATION: PURSUING DIALOGUE WITH THE PUBLICS  
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA**

Author: Mário Lapoš

Thesis title: Interactive and Relational Political Marketing Communication: Pursuing Dialogue with the Publics through Social Media

University: Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

Thesis Advisor: Mgr. Matej Gyárfáš, ArtD.

Head of the Defense Committee: Samuel Abrahám, PhD

Members of the Defense Committee: Samuel Abrahám, PhD, prof. František

Novosád, Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, PhD, prof. Silvia Miháliková

Place and date: Bratislava, February 2016

Page and word count: 47 pages (13 472 words)

Degree of qualification: Bachelor (Bc)

**Keywords: social, media, communication, relationship, political, marketing**

**Abstract**

Before the 2016 parliamentary election Slovakia had witnessed the rule of one party, SMER-SD, which held majority in parliament and government. This is not a suitable solution for democracy. Moreover, its style of communication did not appeal to the public quite well. The party refused to answer questions of the two major dailies SME and Denník N. Hence, the rest of the parties had the opportunity to prove communication with politicians can be direct.

This paper contains research done solely on Facebook pages of Slovakia's parliamentary parties in the range of 2016 election campaign with the focus on Slovakia's 2nd strongest party according to the election results – Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS). The focus was on the party's and its leader's interactive communication in the form of replies to comments and messages. The research consists of two parts. The first one and reveals how many comments were responded to during the election campaign on the Facebook Pages of SaS and its leader. The second part offers data

gathered via questionnaires on the perception of communication of SaS and its leader by their publics and stakeholders. The questionnaires also focus on Facebook Events, how the party conducted them and how it was perceived by its public and stakeholders. Finally, I sat down with spokeswoman of SaS and questioned her on organization of volunteers and whether they implemented Facebook or not.

Research of this type has not been done in the spectrum of Slovak politics. With this paper I am hoping to spark a debate on the importance of direct interactions of politicians with publics and stakeholders and how social media can impact political culture toward higher voter turnout. The main findings include effectivity of the party's interactive communication and the ways of conducting interactive communication. The implications for the future ought to prompt further research of political marketing in Slovakia, since it is lacking in both quantity and quality.

## **Preface and Acknowledgments**

Mobilization, civic engagement, participation, voter turnout, interactions, relations. These are not terms one would associate with marketing a decade ago. When brands and companies focused on acquisition rather than consumer satisfaction it was easy to fall into apathy and adopt the attitude of scepticism towards consumerism boosted by one-way communication. However, signs of change appeared now and then and filled holes in commerce by employing the strategy of retention. Rather new acquiring new customers, which too remains important, brands and businesses focused on keeping current ones. Creating values that both attract new customers and persuade current ones to stay on is as important today as ever, with the distinction that nowadays it has become one of the most important goals. This shift is accompanied by a huge social phenomenon called social media. Networks where people can connect with each other and with brands and businesses have become the driving forces of engagement. Sooner or later, they were bound to attract politicians. After all, that's what crowds do.

Naturally, as avid student and employee of marketing company following parliamentary elections is an event which I would go as far as calling spectators' discipline.

Information began pouring in. Parties and candidates clashed for every inch of space and opportunity to attract the publics. And when Facebook, the largest and most influential social media network, announced it has reached 1 billion active users it was the place to be. With statistical tools and relatively transparent access to information and data about politicians' and parties' public profiles the decision to research their activity during the election campaign was an chance to contribute to public discourse on civic engagement and implementation of modern techniques in Slovak political marketing.

The decision to focus on relations politicians build through Facebook has a lot to do with events that took place during the previous government of SMER-SD. The leading and only ruling party back then decided not to answer questions from dailies SME and Denník N. Newspapers are one of the few sources parties have at hand to distribute information about their agenda and influence the publics, but it is often difficult to gain placements and mentions as pretty much everyone wants to be in the



news. It is a mundane task without the use of expensive Public Relations professionals and firms. However, social media do offer a lot of room for distribution of party news, agenda and other information for a fraction of the cost and effort.

Moreover, Facebook offers new ways of engagement of dialogue between party/candidate and the publics. As long as the page of a party or a candidate is updated regularly with valuable information they have a big chance of being discovered by new publics and insure their current voter base is always up to date. Pages being public anyone can comment on the information parties and candidates share. This way feedback can be accessed and their agenda improved. It is as simple as contributing to the discussion. It would be best for politicians to be everywhere and all the time, but that is not physically possible. Therefore, a channel for communication with the publics should not be omitted from marketing strategy.

Just like brands turned to building relationships with customers so did parties and candidates. While acquisition and retention models are applied to businesses political communication can be defined as static and relational (interactive). Older and more experienced democracies such as US, UK, New Zealand have seen the shift. It is important to ask, then, did it already happen in Slovakia? If so, how did it impact participation in politics? Did it influence political culture in positive or negative way? These are the question this work is attempting to answer by thorough research of Facebook pages of political parties and statistics from elections as well as providing history of relational political marketing.

I am using theoretical background from Jennifer Lees-Marshment - one of the most influential political marketing researchers who provides basic framework of relational and interactive political marketing. This is broadened by researchers and industry professionals from countries I am using as reference and navigation bar for empirical examples of relational political marketing.

Nigel Jackson and Tamara Small provide necessary requirements for political parties to fulfil in order to consider them fluent in relational marketing. Moreover, I am using my two years of experience in international on-line marketing (mainly from Czech and Canadian markets, Slovak included) to assess the results. My own contribution relies in extensive research conducted on Facebook pages of political parties. By

accessing Facebook data from election campaign you are able to find number of posts each party posted, comments they received and comments they answered. The results are compared to each other to determine how relational their communication had been. One of the parties - Sloboda and Solidarita (SaS) - and its leader had been picked for further examination in order to determine the level of relationship marketing used and if it may have had any impact on the election result. The examination does not, however, consist only of raw data obtained from Facebook and Statistical bureau of Slovak republic. For the purpose of the thesis SaS supporters were interviewed in order to peek into their perception of SaS communication. On top of which I sat down with the spokeswoman of SaS and attempted to find out more about how SaS goes about volunteer and events organization on social media.

One of the biggest challenges was to navigate the waters of Slovak political marketing without a beacon in sight. This is my way of notifying future slovak political marketing researchers of the lack of insight and academic work that would make this process easier. Hopefully, this work can help anyone who is looking into the same field with better understanding of the nature of slovak political marketing and the role of social media in it. Because, as you will find, even Slovakia is moving towards relationship communication, although it is not quite there yet.

Hereby, I would like to thank the spokeswoman of SaS Katarína Svrčeková for her openness during our interview, help she offered with any additional questions and her genuine interest in the results of my research.

Also, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Mgr. Matej Gyárfáš, ArtD. who guided me through the whole process of creating this thesis which included numerous e-mails, advises, corrections and challenging my points of view.

Last but not least, Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, PhD, who has helped numerous students to make this overwhelming experience as effortless and pleasant as possible.

<b>Declaration of Originality .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstrakt .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Preface and Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Theoretical Orientation .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.1 The history and rise of digital political marketing .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.2 Social media as a face-to-face communication substitute and the role of trust. ....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.3 Hypothesis .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.4 Conceptual and principal overview of digital political marketing .....</b>	<b>16</b>
1.4.1 Relational and Interactive political marketing communication.....	17
1.4.2 Facebook (on-line marketing) and interactive and responsive leadership communication on Facebook .....	18
1.4.3 Public Relations .....	18
1.4.4 Voter responsibility communication .....	19
1.4.5 Political Party as a brand .....	20
1.4.6 What We Know .....	21
<b>2 Terminology and Methodology .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>2.2 Facebook Overview.....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.2.1 Groups .....	24
2.2.2 Events .....	24
2.2.3 Pages.....	24
2.2.4 Engagement.....	25
<b>2.3 Methodology .....</b>	<b>26</b>
2.3.1 Exporting Facebook status updates and comments.....	27
2.3.2 Survey Distribution .....	27
2.3.3 Events .....	27
2.3.4 The Staff Interview .....	28
<b>3 Facebook (on-line marketing) and interactive and responsive leadership communication on Facebook.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.2 Jackson's principles for effective e-marketing in politics.....</b>	<b>31</b>

<b>3.3</b>	<b>Relationship marketing criteria for Facebook by Tamara Small .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Relational and interactive party and leadership communication .....</b>	<b>38</b>
3.4.1	Methodology of the research .....	40
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Survey evaluation .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Interview with the spokeswoman of SaS Katarína Svrčeková .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Results and Evaluation .....</b>	<b>49</b>
4.1	Implications and future reference .....	51
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>53</b>
	<b>Resumé .....</b>	<b>55</b>
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>58</b>

## Theoretical Orientation

It is necessary to first and foremost introduce the theoretical background of this research. In our case, the study concerns the digital political marketing field. Moreover, the specifics include relational and interactive political marketing communication (RIPMC) on the social media site Facebook.

There are four distinctive categories that compose the RIPMC. Although they have already been stated in the Literature Review, the repetition pre-supposes the possible lack of knowledge readers might have with this subject - given the shortage of research done in this particular region of study; Slovakia.

RIPMC, and this research, consist of Facebook Pages of the examined party and its leader, public relations and volunteer organization. All of these sub-categories fall within the definition of RIPMC and are being researched via Facebook.

The initial chapter is composed as follows. Firstly, I am narrating the history of digital political marketing on social media which dates and then I am describing the major global theories underlying digital political marketing.

Secondly, I narrow the study down to the relational and interactive political marketing communication which concerns four sub-categories. The main category - relational and interactive communication - as well as sub-categories are detailed in terms of definitions, vocabulary and theories that address them. Both global and local perspective are offered in the main body of the text.

Thirdly and lastly, the end of the chapter summarizes the accumulated knowledge in the form of key take-aways.

### 1.1 The history and rise of digital political marketing

Although it has been mentioned in the introduction as the inception and trigger of the social media implementation into the politics and election campaigning, Barack Obama's successful presidential bids in 2008 and 2010 have a couple of predecessors and a few European counterparts. I am beginning this thesis with the history and rise

of digital political marketing on social media. We are starting with the already disclosed case of 1999-2002 New Zealand Labour Party experiment with "ch@t" feature and then moving on to an example from the 2004 and 2012 American Presidential election campaign to showcase the power of then-emerging social media. However, in order to keep the agenda as close to Europe as possible I am using the 2008 Obama example only as a point of reference, while focusing densely on Great Britain.

The showcase of this history and ascend of the social media use in political campaigns demonstrates both opportunities and threats to parties and candidates. In order to have a full picture of the power social media possesses it is important to know both its advantages to political actors and how it may endanger their public efforts. In either outcome of the use of social media, whether it is positive or negative, it is not wise to omit them and as I am exhibiting, the savvier the usage and the closer relationships developed through social media the more opportunities and the better outcomes are visible for politicians and suchlike public-office candidates.

Chris Rudd's case study of the 1999-2002 term of the New Zealand Labour Party is the point in history to begin, even though the first social media like sites (e.g. MySpace, YouTube and Dailymotion) came around 2003-2004. The set-up of a website allowed the party to experiment with gathering of a newsletter distribution, basically "one could download a 'Helen Clark MP reports' newsletter highlighting the achievements of the Government,". On the very same website visitors could chat with MPs or Labour Party members via the "ch@t" feature: "the recipient of which endeavoured to respond online as close to real time as possible" (Lilleker, Lees-Marshment, 2005, p. 91). This is a successful example of early relational and interactive political marketing communication implementation.

In 2004, "the little known outgoing governor of the small state of Vermont," Howard Dean conducted his campaign through the use of websites (*DeanforAmerica.com* and a blog *BlogforAmerica.com*) and "a bold use of the social networks, such as *Meetup.com*" (Maarek, 2014, p. 16). Although his candidacy later failed, the exploration of new ways of marketing himself on the internet gained him both valuable exposure and funds to take his bid on to the next level. The evidence of his

success is backed up by the fact that Dean was then appointed the Chair of The Democratic National Committee (Maarek, 2014).

Moving on to the next chapter in the genealogy of digital political marketing I fast forward to the 2012 American Presidential elections. This time, however, it portrays the power of early social media to destroy a candidate's campaign. Afterwards, I am comparing this case to the Nicola Sturgeon, the leader of SNP in the 2015 UK General Election, crisis communication. These two cases will, again, portray the importance of relational and interactive communication on social media.

Texas Governor Rick Perry suffered from a viral video put on YouTube documenting his loss of memory during an interview which led to his "pitiful withdrawal of his candidacy" in a span of just a few days (Maarek, 2014, p. 19). The inability to react conveniently resulted in a loss. However, what he failed, Nicola Sturgeon successfully prevented in 2015 when the so-called #dollgate scandal broke out on Twitter<sup>1</sup>. The story was about Sturgeon's "childhood cruelty towards her sister's Barbie doll," (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 111) Her immediate engagement not only prevented a "a potentially damaging issue" but also turned it into a sort of a humorous event since her direct replies to the criticism on Twitter read the following:

- "For the record, I think my sister is misre- membering. I'm sure it was a Sindy doll. #DollGate"
- "@LindaFSemple I'm not proud of it, Linda, but I've changed. My niece's dolls have never come to any harm. #DollGate"

The hashtag #DollGate was used by the people who wished to highlight their engagement in the story and as we can see in the second instance the leader of SNP is replying directly to a person by mentioning her Twitter handle (username) at the beginning of the message "@LindaFSemple". The Scotland Herald announced her "the most popular party leader on Twitter during the campaign" (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 112).

Social media are often referred to as 'new media' which bring about new job titles. Newman and Mitchell quote an SNP new media strategist in reference to a research conducted by 'Bright et al.' which analysed Twitter activity in 650 constituencies

---

<sup>1</sup> Similar social media site to Facebook.

during the UK 2015 General Election and found out SNP's relationship building approach the most successful compared to another unnamed UK minor party:

"As the technological approaches change and evolve—the focus on creating and nourishing these connections on the doorstep, over the phone and at the keyboard has always been consistent to the SNP approach... Everything is about relationships. In a sense, it's the personification of the SNP... trust- worthy, conscientious, open and friendly" (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 112)

It is true, as the aforementioned contributors of the cited book 'Political Marketing and the 2015 UK General Election' point to a book by Henry Jenkins 'Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide' (2008) which acknowledges the "shift from distribution to circulation signals a movement toward a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers of pre-constructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined" (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 110).

This detour has shown us both positive and negative outcomes social media can have on election campaigns. I am now returning back to the historical timeline. In 2008 Obama presidential bid succeeded precisely because of the employment of social 'new' media. This strategy generated him around 3.2 million followers on Facebook and 1.5 million on MySpace (Maarek, 2014). His 'New Media Director' was a man who was a part of a similar campaign 4 years earlier - Mr. Joe Rospas, a staff member of the aforementioned Howard Dean campaign.

Philippe J. Maarek noted in 2014 that while television was still a bigger and more important channel for political marketers the internet "has become an unavoidable tool of political communication in most countries holding democratic elections". The critically appraised political commentator and writer Gore Vidal used to say the one thing one [a politician] should never turn down is an appearance on television<sup>2</sup>. By acknowledging progress and taking the development toward more inclusive and intertwined communication into account a pattern of shrinking reveals the trend

---

<sup>2</sup> 33:57, Best of Enemies, Netflix.



behind compactness whether in terms of smartphones, that possess the ability to access the internet and fit into a pocket, or smart watches that fit on your wrist. Thanks to suchlike devices television appearances become formidable and less important compared to easily available and effortless social media. Numbers support this. Ofcom, a UK communications regulator, surveyed the watching habits of the state's population. It found 11% drop in the watching time via traditional TV sets among those aged under 44 (Plunkett, 2016). Moreover, in the larger US market, Nielsen TV company's vast and detailed research into watching habits of Traditional TV revealed that from 2011 to 2015 40% of US population aged 18-24 switched to different activity such as video streaming (MarketingCharts, 2016)

I am concluding the rise and the history of social media implementation as a part of digital political marketing with examples from France and Great Britain larger parties and candidates.

In the 2010 UK General Election a wider employment of social media was seen the side of one of the largest parties The Conservatives, however, it is somehow peculiar to find out that even after the evidence presented above the party did not incorporate social media to its core strategy and the movement began "within the party's younger cohorts," which Newman and Mitchell call a "latent phenomenon" (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 106). Further research revealed that this initiative had "the greatest impact in terms of Internet-based campaigning in the Conservative Party" (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 106). As an outcome, the 2015 campaign in the General Election was more internet and social media oriented particularly through videos on Facebook and YouTube where David Cameron, the party leader, and other important party figures communicated the major policies and upcoming agenda in 1- to 3- minute videos. Each of the 14 of such visuals were seen by more than 13,000 people and the party even encouraged to learn more about their movement on their new website (The Conservative Party, 2015). Such inter-connection is important and the overall social media use in the 2015 campaign was more normalized in terms of intra-party communication and political marketing, and as part of general daily activity" moreover they finally used Facebook to boost users' engagement by listening and contributing to conversation (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 106).

However, mere acknowledgement of social media in digital marketing strategy and elections in general does not guarantee success. The Conservatives won both General

Elections in 2010 and 2015, but their competitor the Labour Party was not as successful. It is not clear whether it was due to their poor engagement with their supporters on social media, but there is evidence of it and it is believed it did contribute to the loss in the final day polling. For example, when the Labour Party leader was portrayed by a major tabloid newspaper as a clumsy consumer of street food the supporters started backing him up on Twitter with hashtag #JeSuisEd. This convey triggered another event started by "17-year-old Abby Tomlinson". It "featured a unique mix of irony, teenage fandom, and political activism". Her hashtag #Millifandom was supposed to "counter" negative portrayal of the party leader Ed Milliband in the press, write Newman and Mitchell in their thorough report on Digital Marketing in the 2015 UK General Election (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 107). It was a perfect opportunity for the Labour party to jump in on a wave of consumer-generated content, much like the SNP leader did to counter a scandal, and gain a positive sentiment: "Labour made little attempt to engage with this campaign and others through the party's central social media profiles". Another evidence from Facebook suggests that the Labour party preferred "offline content by simply migrating it to the online environment, rather than utilizing the unique interactive features of the new medium" (Darren G. Lilleker, 2016, p. 107).

I have thus arrived to the end of the digital political marketing narrative of the last 17 years. It showed us how the use of internet on the turn of the century in the New Zealand Labour Party utilized its website to engage with its supporters and visitors. A few years later the little known Mike Dean, the governor of Vermont, explored the early social media to the point where it gained him enough recognition to become the Chair of DNC. On the two examples of Rick Perry and Nicola Sturgeon I have shown the impact social media activity and inactivity has when it comes to preventing and defending possible crises, or scandals. The famous case of Obama was used in order to prove that something that has started in Vermont made its way to a successful presidential bid in the form of former Dean staff member becoming the head of Obama's 'New Media' team only 4 years later. Finally, the transition of the Conservative party from not including a well thought-out social media strategy in 2010 to implementing it in 2015 and the Labour Party's failure to do the same and their loss in the 2015 election brings me to conclusion, that social media in digital marketing have evolved into a stable component in political campaigns. It is precisely

this point that even Maarek makes at the end of his paper on the evolution of digital marketing, which is that politician cannot afford to ignore the new stage of political communication which lies in mastering digital media (Maarek, 2014). The interactions that Sturgeon made on Twitter raise a question of whether this kind of communication, although still rare as we have seen on the other examples, does happen elsewhere - for example in Slovakia, where from an observer's point of view social media was not heavily utilized until the 2016 elections. Just like Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan note, social media "enables political institutions and voters to directly interact with each other," I am interested in the way relational and interactive communication is conducted in Slovakia on Facebook and whether it is as recognized by the supporters of the Party I am examining (2013, p.1289).

## 1.2 Social media as a face-to-face communication substitute and the role of trust

Groupings of people, associations, communities and other forms of civic bonds are bound not by mere kin, geographical, or ideological relations, but by trust. By trusting each other, people in groupings allow for a development of a pattern that triggers collective action in that subject in which the grouping has its own justification. For example, a trusting relationship within a group of a political party supporters would portray itself in the form of participation in elections and rallies. Zhang et al. from Texas Tech University in their paper on Networking via social media sites approve, that trust has a direct impact on actions of civic society - the "social capital increases" and so does the possibility of political action. In another instance, consider a group of neighbours whose common trusting relations give a way to the discussion of whom to support in an election and vote for that candidate. Putnam's research then approved of this thesis, by finding out that "trust and civic engagement have formed a virtuous circle" (Zhang, 2010, p 77). Subsequently, Sidney Verba's notion about healthy democracy can make a use of Putnam's theory. Democracy, from the Greek word 'demos' literally translates to the 'rule of people'. Therefore, a political action and civic engagement are imperative to the maintenance of a healthy democracy. Zhang et al. sums up: "Increased interest in politics has been linked to higher levels of political activity" (Zhang, 2010, p. 81).

As mentioned above, a grouping of people does not have to be necessarily tied to a geographic location, but can be founded on the bases of ideas. Here, social media come into play, that have the ability to provide ground for such groups of people. A real-life example in this case would be once again the mentioned 2008 Obama campaign that used social media sites such Facebook and MySpace to attract like-minded people and groups of people in order to boost the brand and participation on promoting it whether through financial aid, volunteering or promoting campaign events (Zhang, 2010).

In this sense, it is logical to interpret communication of a candidate on social media as a substitute of face-to-face communication. Although, Carlyne L. Kujath reports communication via social media has negative effects when it is a substitute of face-to-face communication and positive when it supplements face-to-face communication it is in the realms of personal relationships. However, when it comes to political action the exact opposite can be the case and social media communication where the same agenda as at rallies is communicated actually positively substitutes face-to-face communication. This assumption is based on the fact that rallies have limited capacity and not every supporter is always able to make it to the venue. But, the author also reports that higher social media sites usage correlates with increased contact with distant social partners (Carlyne L. Kujath, 2011). Moreover, discussions lead to better understanding of politics which enhances political involvement, found McLeod (Zhang, 2010). And place for a discussion is something that Facebook provides. Every agenda and issue a party or a candidate talks about on social media can be discussed directly among people who choose to be active on social media. This, in return, provides a party or a candidate with exposure, because party and candidate profiles are by a rule always public.

*"Information-oriented use such as information acquiring and exchange on the Internet provides users with opportunities for civic recruitment and further encourages political participation."*

*- Weiwu Zhang*

This is the same principle only refurbished, because back in the days when television was the main source of information and discussion material: "exposure and attention

to public affairs programs on television have actually been found to enhance political participation" (Zhang, 2010, p. 77).

Additionally, in 2006 K.M. Lee pondered that the "Internet could provide a relatively easy way for users to be involved in the political process" and Postelnicu and Cozma discovered two years later, that in the case of MySpace people visited candidates' profiles in order to find out more information about them and "to engage in discussion with the candidates" (Zhang, 2010, p 80).

### 1.3 Hypothesis

Although it would be a formidable task to prove there are links between civic engagement, engagement on Facebook and relational and interactive communication, nevertheless an attempt to survey Slovak political culture in terms of engagement on social media is possible and on the upcoming pages that is what I am looking at. To be more specific, the party Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS) seems to be far more advanced in terms of relational and interactive communication and it seems to be working well for it in the election results, however, other parties with what seems to be far lower engagement on social media got similar results in the election results. Therefore, Slovak citizens who engage in discussion on Facebook and parties who engage in these discussions as well, at least to some extent, drive voter turnout percentage up and this trend can be seen since approximately 2004-2005 when popular social media emerged.

In the next part I am looking at the theoretical background supporting digital political marketing.

### 1.4 Conceptual and principal overview of digital political marketing

The state of theory in the political marketing field is well researched, although in case of digital marketing there are fewer sources at hand. Nevertheless, it did not pose an issue to the upcoming research. In fact, advertising in politics has become a very popular subject of academia since the 2008 US presidential election.

Nowadays, one would expect an all-inclusive type of research with definite results, terminology and techniques implemented. Thanks to widely known and praised

capacities such as Jennifer Lees-Marshment and David G. Lilleker who have prepared the academic ground for the newcomer – social media.

#### 1.4.1 Relational and Interactive political marketing communication

In her college textbook *Political Marketing: Principles and Application* Dr Lees-Marshment explores all aspects of political marketing. The ‘Relational and Interactive political marketing communication’ Dr Lees-Marshment introduces consists of e-marketing (on-line marketing), public relations (PR), interactive and responsive leadership communication, voter responsibility communication, and reputation manager in government. I will not be dwelling into the latter component of interactive political marketing communication because my research will focus solely on the election campaign, thus logically omitting the part where the party is a part of a government.

The reason for grouping together these ways of communication is their similarity: “Communication becomes more about relationship building than product selling; about maintaining or enhancing support in government instead of just getting votes in the first place” (Lees-Marshment, 2014, p. 206). By including relational and interactive communication Dr Lees-Marshment acknowledges techniques political marketing practitioners have been implementing in their workflows since the 2008 US presidential campaign: “Political marketing communication is rapidly developing to become more interactive and to build relationships, holding prospects of lifting the citizen from passive consumer to active participant in the communication process and enhancing the public sphere” (Lees-Marshment, 2014, p. 206). The author also refers to the “technological developments in Web 2.0” to take heed of social media and its importance in this part of political marketing. In their conference paper Štětka, Lilleker, Tenscher and Jalali also recognize the importance of social media: The Web 2.0 soared and new opportunities arose in the field of social media, thus making way for interactive and relational political communication (Štětka, Lilleker, Tenscher, Jalali, 2014). Respectively, the rise of social media is noted in *Public Relations Review Journal* (2013, p. 38) by L. Vesnic-Alujevic who says that “the emergence of new interactive technologies has contributed to an active role of Internet audiences through discussions, participations and voting” (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, p. 467). What is it about social media then that interests researchers so much? In this particular case,

we can take the Obama example a bit further and suggest thanks to his 2008 campaign political marketing's purpose and techniques will lean towards interactional and relationship approach (Lees-Marshment, 2012).

#### 1.4.2 Facebook (on-line marketing) and interactive and responsive leadership communication on Facebook

I will be looking at the on-line marketing first and foremost. It is a vast subject, but for the purpose of this work I will focus on social media. To explore the whole online marketing segment would be a task worthy of a whole new thesis.

Vesnic-Alujevic pointed out in 2012 that “electoral campaigning on social media is a considerably new phenomenon, which was introduced on Facebook during the electoral campaign for the 2008 US elections” (2012, p. 466). It is precisely Facebook that will take up most of the researched material.

Facebook is aware of its place in the game of politics and even offers a guide on how politicians can utilize it to their advantage. The social media site states it “is a culture of conversations, giving politicians and political campaigns/organisations a huge opportunity to get immediate feedback on various issues” (Lees-Marshment, 2014, p. 209). Not only that, Facebook also offers politicians and parties the opportunity to interact with the public via private messages and comments. I will explain this part further in the chapter on methodology.

#### 1.4.3 Public Relations

Lees-Marshment writes that Public Relations (PR) aims at creating a continuous chain of events with the goal of initiating and maintaining relationship between political parties and their stakeholders.

Before we move on to the definition of PR it is important to distinguish terms it may involve. When we talk about stakeholders we mean the part of public that has some ties to the political party. They can be voters, sympathizers, employees, volunteers, or likeminded groups and individuals. Anne Gregory in her book *Planning and Managing Public Relations: A Strategic Approach* (2010) writes that stakeholders are those who are affected by, or who can affect an organization. The other part of the party's possible source of influencers comes from a broader selection which is the

public: "publics are those for whom an organization has created a problem or an issue" (Gregory, 2010, p. 23). Thus, publics are future stakeholders.

Moving on to the definition of PR it is important to note that there is literature focused solely on this issue.

The most renowned definition by Cutlip and Center reads the following:

"Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Watson, Noble, 2014, p. 6). I chose this definition because it considers the publics rather than just stakeholders. Political parties should always consider the publics and never only the stakeholders. Lees-Marshment

aforementioned explanation offers us a peek into the research. Events of a political party in the election campaign are widely attended only by the stakeholders and the publics can choose to observe from the distance before joining. Therefore, the publics always need to be considered. Strömbäck and Kiouisis definition

says public relations is "the management process by which an organisation or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics" (Lees-Marshment, 2012, p. 210). Nigel A. Jackson has a similar idea, he states that PR is not about advertising a product (policy and ideas in political terminology), but about creating a connection between the publics with the focus on positivity of the messages the party or the candidate sends out and mutuality (Jackson N. A., 2012).

#### 1.4.4 Voter responsibility communication

The last component of my research can be summed up in one word – volunteerism. Lees-Marshment argues that "there has been a move from transaction-based campaigning to transformational whereby voters are called to action to get involved in campaigning" (Lees-Marshment, 2012). As an example, she uses Obama's presidential bid in 2008. She points at the use of slogan 'Yes WE can' and his 2012 remark: "If there's even one thing we can do – even one life we can save – we have an obligation to try" - her focus, even in this component, is again on the use of the internet: "They [volunteers] can share their ideas online with candidates, talk with



others, share their experiences and feel a sense of ownership” (Lees-Marshment, 2012, p. 208).

#### 1.4.5 Political Party as a brand

Just like brands political parties are no strangers to the services of advertising companies. The UK Conservative Party had used Saatchi & Saatchi in the 1980s and in her 1990 campaign the Irish President Mary Robinson picked the same agency. Similarly in Slovakia, political parties are also familiar with the concept of branding a party. Slovakia's most powerful party Smer-SD has used the firm Donar in the beginnings to communicate its message and image<sup>3</sup>. In 2013, the little known entrepreneur Andrej Kiska began his bid to become the 4th Slovak president. He assigned the advertising agency Komplot with the task to create branding that will help him achieve the campaign objective. By the time the election night approached in 2014 Kiska conquered every channel from radio to TV to internet and social media. Thanks to thoroughly carried out strategy and consistency in the usage of campaign visual and text materials. By communicating the same set of messages and using the same set of visuals with the same mix of colours, it has proven to be one of the decisive factors in Andrej Kiska's road to the presidential palace. He overcome his rival, the prime minister of Slovakia, Robert Fico by almost 20%<sup>4</sup> (Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, 2014).

The Chief Strategy Offices in Saatchi & Saatchi, London, UK, Richard Huntington compared The Labour and The Conservative party to akin soft drinks Coke and Pepsi, not only because they are both so powerful it is difficult to distinguish which one has bigger scoop, but also because they meet the standards of brands in terms of qualities such as "authenticity, product, purpose, meaning and the ability to live richly in people's minds" (Cassidy, 2015). To clarify and perhaps not to confuse, there are two important features to branding in politics. First, both companies and political parties offer products. However, the political product, writes Lees-Marshment, is not the same as a TV or a mobile phone, products that are manufactured and purchased as

---

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of 'image' points to inward and outward appearances rather than a picture or a photo.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Fico gained 40,61% and Andrej Kiska booked 59,38% of all casted votes.

they are. On the contrary, the political product is the party's behaviour itself and it consists of several aspects (e.i. the leaders, the candidates, ministers, MPs, members, staff, symbols, constitution, activities, policies) (Lees-Marshment, 2014, p. 4-5). What is more, this product needs to be flexible and highly adaptive to the changing environment. Which brings us to the second point parties and companies share in the conduction of branding. It is crucial that both parties and companies follow the trends in communication to let the publics know about their product.

As the review of digital political marketing suggests, the transition to Web 2.0 and heightened social media activity require companies and parties (e.g. brands) ensure presence and engagement on social media. What is more, the recent research into current and upcoming trends in maintaining social media presence for companies by social media company Buffer conducted among 1,200 marketing professionals has shown a lack of customer support on social media. The exact data say only 1 in 5 marketers advise their clients to use social media for customer support (Buffer, 2016). In reality, Facebook offers plenty of functions for brands to carry out customer support on social media. I am using the common name 'brand' to indicate the similarity in parties and companies. Because customer service on social media is done by direct engagement with the publics I am using it to draw an analogy<sup>5</sup>. While it may be a reclamation, complaint or a question of refund that brings the customer to seek support on company's Facebook Page it may be a question, a comment or an opinion that brings a member of the public to a party's Facebook Page. In both cases, it is important these actions are met with an equal action. Thus, if a Page receives a comment on its content (status update, video, photo, shared link) or a message it needs to respond with a reply to the comment, or the message<sup>6</sup>.

#### 1.4.6 What We Know

It has been established abroad that political marketing communication must not be transactional (think of a money transaction and the usual buyer – seller relationship) but relational. This is precisely because of the opportunities on-line marketing, public

---

<sup>5</sup> Details on the meanings of Facebook communication and Facebook features can be found in Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> Further information on customer support is in Chapter 3.

relations and volunteerism offer. The conclusion based on Dr Lees-Marshment's observations would be that relational and interactive approach to political marketing communication allows political leaders to show they listen and relate to the public's interests.

Consequently, Claire Robinson argues in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Marketing* (2012) the importance of showing the leaders' interaction with voters because "this can impact on how voters perceive politicians" (Robinson, 2012). This opportunity that I speak of is best and most popularly taken advantage of on Facebook: it "has become the almost global social network of choice" (Štětka, Lilleker, Tenscher, and Jalali, 2014, p. 15).

Here we get to the first component of the relational and interactive political marketing communication – on-line marketing and interactive leadership communication. In my paper, I am conducting a research on how responsive is the only Slovak party that claims to be liberal in the parliament Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS) and its leader Richard Sulík in their Facebook communication. It will be done through analytical tool Facebook offers – Graph API – and I will be interested in the percentage of comments both of my subjects responded to. I will also conduct a survey among the public of SaS and Richard Sulík asking how satisfied they are with their party's and leader's relational and interactive communication.

In the next component, PR, I am researching how effective for the party was announcing events on Facebook. I am doing this from the point of view of the stakeholders. I am asking them if they found out about the events on Facebook, how attractive they have found the copywriting and visualizations, and grade the catchiness, or engrossing, of the event on a scale from 1 – 7 where 1 is the lowest and 7 the highest, thus the best, mark.

Finally, in voter responsibility communication I will be researching the party's conduction and management of volunteers. This will be done in an interview with one of the party's employees. I will be interested whether the volunteers' activities and recruitment happened via social media or not.

## 2 Terminology and Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

The introduction to the history of digital political marketing has shown the important place on-line communication had established for itself over the years. Facebook, the largest and most influential social media network in the world, is only 12-years old yet as of September 2016 1.18 billion daily active users connect on average. What is more important is the fact, that "approximately 84.9%" of all users are outside of the US and Canada. The company has outgrown its two prior markets by more than 650 million users. With such influence on inter-connectivity and networking Facebook is inevitable for businesses, non-governmental organizations, politicians, promotions etc. According to Facebook Audience Tool Slovakia has approximately 2,400,000 registered users. That's almost half of the population. Needless to say, its popularity is undeniable. What is Facebook then, exactly? What opportunities does it offer to businesses and aforementioned subjects? This chapter is divided into two parts. First and foremost, looking at the network's interface, functionalities and terminology it carries. Secondly, there is the methodology to introduce and review.

### 2.2 Facebook Overview

Facebook's basic functionalities are described below according to the official Facebook guidelines<sup>7</sup>. I am reviewing: News Feed, Groups, Events, Pages. Additionally, I am using academic and research material to piece the puzzle<sup>8</sup>.

The basic Facebook feature, the page that shows upon the user's log-in or sign-up is News Feed. According to Facebook News Feed is periodically refreshed and updated collection of updates from your friends, family, Events, Pages and Groups one follows. Plus, Facebook also shows advertisement on everyone's News Feed.

---

<sup>7</sup> Available at <http://newsroom.fb.com/products/>.

<sup>8</sup> Based on my professional 2-year experience of working in international digital marketing and public relations I am updating the overview with my own inputs

Everything is managed by an algorithm that shows users' first updates from their friends, family and Groups, followed by updates from Pages and Events.

Advertisement is shown in-between. The algorithm works based on one's preferences, likings and commenting. Facebook then shows what it thinks is of your interest. For instance, if one follows a lot of sports Pages and clicks on sports news then Facebook will show her this content in the future. Conveniently, users can tag Pages, Groups and Events they want to see from at the top of their News.

### 2.2.1 Groups

Facebook *groups* allow users to group based on similar and identical features. Creating Groups is available to everyone on the network. For example, supporters of a team can create a *group* where they share information about the team, players and club affairs, share files, organize events. Groups have their own News Feed that shows posts from members not based on an algorithm, but on when they were posted. These posts then show up on general News Feeds of each user so they don't miss anything and can engage with other members. Groups can be public or member-based. For example, if there is a vast group for a large sports club then it makes sense to make the *group* public so every supporter can join in without having to wait to be accepted. Subsequently, each *group* can customize its privacy settings. We will see that supporters of the party I am examining have their own Facebook *group*.

### 2.2.2 Events

Another Facebook feature I am examining is Events. This is also available to everyone and it offers users the ability to create invitations with descriptions, visuals, venue and organizational information. When it comes to politics, Events are usually used to inform about protests or party gatherings such as rally and discussions with the leaders. I am also researching the use of Events in the party's digital marketing strategy.

### 2.2.3 Pages

The last and the most important component of Facebook are Pages. Pages, or a Page, is a business, political, venue, organization's profile. It is always public for everyone to see, follow or like. The main difference between personal profiles and a Page is that when you want to see someone's personal profile they have to accept your friendship request. Other differences include functionalities such as advertisement, shop, customer service and analytical tools that are available only to Pages. Thanks to

this public policy Facebook has for Pages I am able to extract information I need for the quantitative research, evaluate and interpret them. Pages offer exposure and because Facebook has such a vast user base this exposure is usually very valuable, hence expensive to maintain at high rate. That is why Facebook itself encourages organic engagement through comments, likes and shares:

"When someone likes or comments on a Page post, that activity may be shared with their friends, increasing the Page's exposure and reach". This means that Pages need to encourage such engagement and one of the ways of doing it is joining in on conversations by commenting and replying to the fans' comments and posts. This is the core of interactive and relational political marketing communication on Facebook. The other actions a Page can take to enhance its relational and interactive communication is to create Events and respond to messages.

#### 2.2.4 Engagement

In 2013 Facebook came with a big feature to enhance brand communication on Facebook. Pages became able to respond to comments from customers and potential customers. Facebook lists a few possible uses for its new function: questions, conversations, and open Q&A (this concept is basically the same as posing questions to candidates during a rally or a debate except it is done on social media where anyone from anywhere can participate).

Who can participate? Previously, I have talked about publics in terms of current and possible supports of a party. In the realm of Facebook, I am focusing on Facebook Pages (public brand profiles) which have Audience - the publics of social media.

The more engaged a Page is, the more exposure it gains, thus the wider audience is reached. Needless to say, if a political party decides to take up social media in its strategy it needs to work toward higher engagement by, basically, imitating customer service of companies that deal with tangible products. Attaining to comments, messages, and questions improves the Page's, thus brand's, visibility and exposure necessary to gain new possible supporters.

Each and one of the aforementioned techniques is the subject of my research in order to evaluate the level of interactive communication of the largest and most influential social media network in Slovakia and in the world. The following second part contemplates the methodological steps taken in order to carry out the research. I will be researching the election campaign period only. The reason behind this is the assumption that the communication of politicians with their publics increases during the campaigning period. However, Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan write that “from the perspective of political institutions, it is important to actively participate in the political communication based on the use of social media, especially during election campaigns” and they also acknowledge and highlight the trend of politicians adopting “social media for engaging their constituents, entering into direct dialogs with citizens and enabling vivid political discussions” (2012, p. 1278).

### 2.3 Methodology

Lucia Vesnic-Alujevic researched European citizens’ political participation via new media particularly because there is evidence that “citizens feel more connected than while using traditional media” (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, p. 467). Her findings include interesting conclusions about how citizens perceive political participation on Facebook and leaders’ (or parties’) interactive communication. For example, she found out that, on a 5-point scale, “the average attitude towards the use of Facebook for interactive political communication is 3.3” and proved that “participants agreed to a higher extent that Facebook is a suitable space for interactive political communication and that an online campaign is important for campaign efficiency” (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012, p. 469).

I will explain how I plan to conduct my research of interactive communication of SaS and Richard Sulík on their Facebook pages, how the publics perceive the interactive communication of my subjects and their events and how my subjects plan their volunteer organization.

### 2.3.1 Exporting Facebook status updates and comments

I will export all of the status updates posted by SaS and Richard Sulík to their respective Facebook Pages via the Graph API analytical tool Facebook offers to developers. Thanks to this I will be able to see all of the comments posted by the publics:

“For Facebook, the most important kind of data represents the content of the “Wall” including “status updates” and corresponding comments” (Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, 2012, p. 1283).

The exported comments will end up in an excel sheet through which I will count them and filter responses by SaS and Richard Sulík. This will give me a precise number on the comments answered and unanswered. I will be looking at the percentages rather than whole numbers (they are available as well) because percentage format is more digestible.

### 2.3.2 Survey Distribution

Another task will be to distribute the survey among the publics. This will be done by posting to SaS and Richard Sulík Facebook Pages and Facebook Groups where politics are discussed. The following questions will be asked:

- Have you ever posted a question to SaS/Sulík (these will be two separate questionnaires) in comments on Facebook? yes/no
- If yes, did you get an answer from SaS/Sulík? yes/no
- Have you ever posted a question to SaS/Sulík in Facebook Messages? yes/no
- If yes, did you get an answer from SaS/Sulík? yes/no
- How important is to you when on SaS/Sulík reply to your comments/messages on Facebook? (1 – not important, 7 – very important) 1-7
- Based on your experience and observation of SaS/Sulík Facebook Pages evaluate their communication in replying to comments and messages. 1-7
- Would you or would you not say that communication on Facebook substitutes face-to-face communication?

### 2.3.3 Events

In the next step, I will conduct a research into the Events on Facebook. Events on Facebook promote real-time happenings at venues, not virtual events. They are invites anyone can create in order to promote their event. I will focus on the SaS campaign events and how the publics perceive them. I will post the survey to each one of the



events which will notify the attendees and those who showed interest for the event. I will also post it to SaS and Richard Sulík Facebook Pages and Facebook Groups where politics are discussed. The following questions will be asked:

- Did you find out about the campaign events of SaS via Facebook? yes/no
- Did the event visualization of images, graphics and slogans and writing caught your attention to the point where you confirmed your attendance or at least showed an interest? yes/no
- How did you like this form of communication (via Facebook Events). 1 – 7

#### 2.3.4 The Staff Interview

In my final step of research, I will interview a staff member of SaS about their volunteer organization and management.

I will be specifically interested in their use of Facebook in this part of campaign. The idea is to find out whether the party involved Facebook in this part of campaign at all. It certainly would not be the first case of recruiting volunteers via the social network in the 2016 parliamentary election campaign. The newcomer party #Siet' used Facebook to recruit interns as well as volunteers<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> It would be a waste if the findings reveal Facebook was omitted from volunteer recruitment. However, it is one of the possible outcomes since my initial research did not prove the voter responsibility organization was employed in the social media part of the campaign.

### **3 Facebook (on-line marketing) and interactive and responsive leadership communication on Facebook**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

When brands talk about customer care and support on social media they are talking about a space where customers can address their concerns, questions and comments and potential customers can see how brands conduct their customer care, whether by engaging in conversations and leaving customers satisfied or not. In a public space such as social media, namely Facebook Pages, it is 100% important of all customer care cases are addressed and resolved.

Consider the easiness of the steps necessary to achieve as little as attention to those who seek customer service on brands [public] Facebook Page. If it is happening in comments it means the Page's respond (a reply to a comment) will be publicly visible. It is an opportunity to show the rest of the customers and possible future customers (all of which belong to Audience) promptness and integrity in carrying out the brand's services, considering that customer satisfaction is among the top goals each business strives for. In research by a social media company Hootsuite 'Social Customer Care: The Future of Customer Satisfaction from 2014' the company found out that customers "who have received customer service on social media are willing to pay 21% more for excellent service" and " people who have received customer service on social media tell an average of 42 people about good experiences and 53 people about bad experiences" (Hootsuite, 2014). This is something such entity as a political party cannot miss out on. Since political party products differ in that they are not tangible and tend to change in their content it is even more important that parties stay on top of their relations with the publics by being present and engaging on social media.

The research into relational and interactive political marketing communication begins with comments on Facebook Pages of the party Sloboda a Solidarita and its leader Richard Sulík. I am interested in the number of comments the audiences of both Pages posted to content (status update, video, photo, shared link), because this is where

engagement happens, and to how many comments the Pages replied. The consensus among social media professionals is that 100% of comments should be answered, but with numbers of them that exceed beyond hundreds, this is rarely achievable.

Therefore, the higher the percentage of answered comments the bigger the exposure for the party or its leader. For the sake of this research I have exported these data for each of the parties, that succeeded in 2016 parliamentary elections, Facebook Pages in order to set a national benchmark for answered comments and thus evaluate the first part of relational and interactive political marketing communication '**Facebook (on-line marketing) and interactive and responsive leadership communication on Facebook**'.

The second part of the research consists of evaluation of surveys conducted over the internet, to be more specific the surveys were distributed among voters and sympathizers of SaS and its party leader Richard Sulík. The distribution took place on Facebook - Groups where SaS supporters discuss current issues, Pages that inform on activities of SaS, and finally voters who reacted to my status update.

In the closing part of my research I interview the spokeswoman of SaS Katarína Svrčeková about Facebook Events and how/if they helped the party achieve attendance and turn out at their campaign rallies, the use of Facebook in volunteer organization, and generic questions on Facebook/social media management were asked as well.

However, before analysing the data it is important to carry out an assessment of national Facebook utilization in political marketing. For this purpose, I am using two different set of criteria that will help determine the activity of Slovak political parties on Facebook.

I have conducted reviews of each party voted into parliament in the latest parliamentary elections according to the " Jackson's principles for effective e-marketing in politics" and "Small's relationship marketing criteria for Facebook" (Lees-Marshment, 2012, p. 207-208).

### 3.2 Jackson's principles for effective e-marketing in politics

Nigel Jackson extracts the idea of political marketing from a political science concept constituency service. This is a feedback line, or loop, which re-assures voters from an MP's region their candidate is up-to-date with their issues and consequently the MP uses it to get back to his constituency, answer and listen to their concerns. Moreover, this is an example of relational-, or as Jackson put it relationship-marketing.

The fact that marketing products is a mean business use to drive sales is an outdated general knowledge and the times of one-way approach toward sales, marketing to masses, has been slowly diminishing with the advancement of technology.

Businesses, and for that matter any organisation, has the ability to create databases, thus target customers and possible customers, the publics, more accurately (Jackson, 2008).

Jackson goes on further to acknowledge McKenna for recognizing the shift from "customer acquisition" to "customer retention" in 1990 which was the turning point in the way businesses perceived and evaluated customer relations. For example, a duo of academics Jackson relies on, Reicheld and Sasser, found out that "by retaining only 5% more customers, profits could increase by up to 100%". In the introductory paragraph to this chapter I am mentioning the importance of providing customer service to 100% cases. Jackson too stresses such attention can be valuable to MPs as well, even more so when re-election, party name and image are at stake - which are (Jackson, 2008).

Jackson's principles for effective e-marketing in politics appeared in a research of e-mailing, which too are an important part of relationship marketing<sup>10</sup>, however, the principles, since they concern relationship marketing, are applicable to social media as well.

---

<sup>10</sup> This study does not take e-mail into consideration, because e-mailing does not belong to the social media segment

1. E-political marketing is regularly used outside an election campaign	YES	NO
2. Communication is tailored to the requirements of the receiver	YES	NO
3. Communication is two-way and not just one way	YES	NO
4. It builds 'networks between an MP and the constituents	YES	NO

There is one obstacle I have identified with the Jackson's principles. The second principle asks about content tailored to the requirements of the receiver. In this paper, however, I am not researching the content, rather I am looking at the effectiveness and usage of the two-way communication. Examining content would require research into the type of the party based on Lees-Marshment model (2012) and then scrutinizing each of the posts according to the agenda as well as finding out whether it is set based on the party's mind (Product or Sales oriented) or on the minds of the publics (Market oriented) (Lees-Marshment, 2012). Therefore, I will be working with Jackson's principles numbered 1, 3, and 4.

1. E-political marketing is regularly used outside an election campaign	YES	NO
2. Communication is two-way and not just one way	YES	NO
3. It builds 'networks between an MP and the constituents	YES	NO

Each party has been put through these principles and the outcomes are the following:

Principles	SaS	Sme Rodina	#Siet'	SNS	Smer-SD	OLANO	NOVA	MOST-HÍD	LSNS
E-political marketing is regularly used outside an election campaign	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Communication is two-way and not just one way	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
It builds networks between an MP and the constituents	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N

Table 1

Criteria:

1. Principle: the party posts and update at least once a week
2. Principle: the party answered more than 2% of comments posted by users on its updates (during the researched period - election campaign)
3. Principle: the party posts MPs' blogs, or MPs answer comments on party's updates with their profiles (during the researched period - election campaign).

The results show there are only 2 parties that comply with Jackson's principles. SaS, the party of my interest, answered 2,8% of comments (more detailed data on this can be found in the next part of this chapter) - therefore communication is two-way. In the period after the election campaign the party did not cease to update its Facebook, and finally building networks between MPs and constituents is achieved by publishing regular blogs of MPs and during the research I found out MPs themselves answered

comments on the party's Facebook page - not regularly, but compared to other party's where such activity was minimal or non-existent it is a reason for checking the third principle.

The only party that did not check any of the boxes is Smer-SD. Interestingly, Smer-SD has been the leading party for 4 consecutive parliamentary elections - 2006, 2010, 2012, 2016 (The Bureau of Statistics of Slovak republic, 2016).

In the next part, I am submitting the party Facebook Pages to Tamara Small's relationship marketing criteria for Facebook. This will narrow down the view of relationship marketing in Slovakia and help us focus on more detailed components that make up relational and interactive political marketing communication.

### [3.3 Relationship marketing criteria for Facebook by Tamara Small](#)

Small's venture into relationship marketing in politics is based in Canada. While one would assume and expect a country with one of the highest-ranking democracies in the world where political participation scored 7.78 out of 10 and political culture 8.75 out of 10 on the annual report from The Economist Intelligence Unit to be advanced in terms of interactive and relational political marketing communication the one's expectations would be wrong (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016). Small writes that parties and politicians use data in their own favour and do not reflect on what they mean for the publics - instead of utilizing two-way communication Small found the current state of political marketing in Canada to be one-way. However, she does not forget to, more so even, stress the importance of relationship marketing which is more straightforward and a lot more "mediated and unmediated interactions" between MPs and constituents happens (Tamara A. Small, 2014, p. 3).

Small's criteria foundation lays in Jackson's principles, writes Jennifer Lees-Marshment, thus it bridges Jackson's constituency service with Small's political marketing research. Among Small's findings is that Canadian parties did not take advantage of Facebook Page features and did not respond to comments. Even though Facebook itself supports the culture of conversation between politicians and citizens

(in Facebook terms: audience, in marketing terms: the publics) as mean to receive instant feedback (Lees-Marshment, 2012).

The criteria for Facebook marketing according to Small are the following:

<b>Continuous</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated at regular intervals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YES/NO</li> </ul>
<b>Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information not easily available elsewhere</li> <li>• Information of relevance to non-members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YES/NO</li> <li>• YES/NO</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership</li> <li>• Donators</li> <li>• Volunteer</li> <li>• E-newsletter sign-up</li> <li>• Events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YES/NO</li> <li>• YES/NO</li> <li>• YES/NO</li> <li>• YES/NO</li> <li>• YES/NO</li> </ul>
<b>Interactivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback (Like or Comment)</li> <li>• Wall Post</li> <li>• Discussion board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YES/NO</li> <li>• YES/NO</li> <li>• YES/NO</li> </ul>

In the Small's criteria I have identified two obstacles. They are the Value and Recruitment parts from which I have to exclude items "Information not easily available elsewhere" and "Membership", "Donators", "E-newsletter sign-up", as in the Jackson's case for the sake of consistency of the research, because they do not belong to our focus and their research would require a detour. Omitting them will result into this final and revised stage of Small's principles that will look at the Continuity and Interactivity.



<b>Continuous</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated at regular intervals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>YES/NO</li> </ul>
<b>Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information of relevance to non-members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>YES/NO</li> <li>YES/NO</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer</li> <li>Events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>YES/NO</li> <li>YES/NO</li> </ul>
<b>Interactivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback (Like or Comment)</li> <li>Wall Post</li> <li>Discussion board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>YES/NO</li> <li>YES/NO</li> <li>YES/NO</li> </ul>

Each party has been put through these principles and the outcomes are the following:

Principles		SaS	Sme Rodina	#Siet'	SNS	Smer-SD	OLANO	NOVA	MOST-HÍD	LSNS
<b>Continuous</b>	Updated at regular intervals	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
<b>Value</b>	Information of relevance to non-members	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Recruitment</b>	Volunteer	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Events	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Interactivity</b>	Feedback (Like or Comment)	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
	Wall Post	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
	Discussion board	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Table 2

Criteria:

- Updated at regular intervals - was the Facebook Page updated regularly during the election campaign (at least once a week)?
- Information of relevance to non-members - was the information posted relevant to both members and non-members of the party?
- Volunteer - did the party use Facebook Page to recruit volunteers?
- Events - did the party use Facebook Page to promote events/rallies?
- Feedback (Like or Comment) - did the party engage with the public by liking or replying to their comment? The threshold for 'Y' was 2% of all comments answered.
- Wall Post/Timeline - did the party allow the publics post on its timeline? This means posts from audiences show up among party posts.
- Discussion Board - did the party allow the publics post do discussion board?

As you can see, only one party did not update its Facebook Page regularly, yet gained enough votes to enter the parliament.

Every party posted information of broad public interest which means they were current affairs and developments.

However, only one party used its Facebook Page to recruit volunteers, but all of them utilized Facebook Events in order to promote their meetings and rallies.

When it comes to two-way communication and engaging with audience (the publics) there were four parties that answered more than 2% of comments posted by their audiences.

Finally, none of the pages allowed discussion boards and only one allowed the publics to post on its timeline.

In the next part, we are looking at the two-way communication - number of comments each party received and how they went about answering them. The upcoming part is

also where we look at data from SaS leader's Facebook Page and build on current findings.

### 3.4 Relational and interactive party and leadership communication

In the aforementioned examples of relationship political marketing and communication I had to reach beyond Slovak borders to provide and supply cases distinct enough in the features that such communication employs. Those have been countries such as USA, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Canada, all of which on the latest Democracy Index (2015) rank higher than Slovakia. Moreover, in categories 'political participation' and 'political culture':

Country	Political participation (out of 10)	Political culture (out of 10)
USA	7.22	8.13
New Zealand	8.99	8.13
United Kingdom	6.67	8.75
Canada	7.78	8.75
Slovakia	5.56	5.00

Table 3 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016)

Sidney Verba defines political participation as an opportunity for citizens to voice their concern with government action and practice their right to influence government action, thus influence the outcomes (Sidney Verba, 1995).

Political culture is an imperative component of every democracy, that is of course if it is a culture of participation and civic engagement. The term was coined by Gabriel Almond and reflects the citizens' perception of not only current government, but the regime and politics in general: "A culture of passivity, leading to an obedient and docile citizenry, is not consistent with the healthy functioning of democracy" (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016). Therefore, it is very important to boost participation and engagement of citizens in politics by any means and social media has proven abroad to be a meaningful tool in sparking conversation and discussion

that possesses the power to ignite political participation.

One of the ways to measure political participation and political culture is to look at the voter turnout over the course of history. When it comes to Slovakia we can see a declining pattern until 2006 when social media began to penetrate the world.

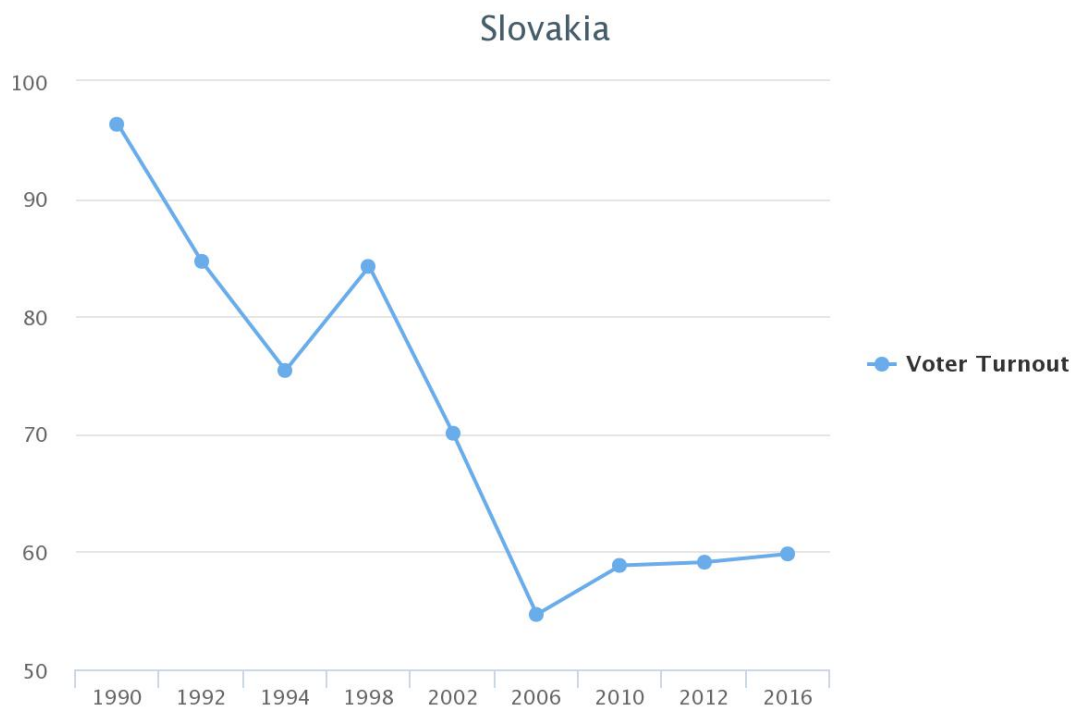


Figure 1 (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), 2017)

In this part I am looking at the overall number of comments people posted to parties' Facebook Pages and how many of those comments each party answered, Aggregation of such will allow me to determine an average percentage of answered comments for Slovakia. This number I will compare to the number I get from SaS and then I am comparing it to the number I get from the SaS leader Richard Sulik's Facebook Page. I am expecting to receive one of the highest numbers for SaS from among the party list and low numbers for other parties, which would mean relationship marketing is not on the rise and participation does not equal election.

Party	Comments received	Comments replied	Comments replied %
SaS	4596	129	2,807%
Sme Rodina	16515	204	1,235%
#Siet'	6463	163	2,522%
SNS	3077	3	0,097%
Smer-SD	10750	3	0,028%
OL'ANO	12836	258	2,010%
NOVA	2618	110	4,202%
MOST-HÍD	507	7	1,381%
LSNS	992	7	0,706%
<b>National Average</b>	<b>6 483,778</b>	<b>98,222</b>	<b>1,665%</b>

Table 4

Criteria:

- Only parties who gained more than 5% of votes, therefore made into the parliament, were included in the research
- OL'ANO and NOVA ran together, but kept their Facebook communication separate

### 3.4.1 Methodology of the research

As suggested above and earlier in the text, I used tools provided by Facebook to extract data from each Facebook Page.

Each Facebook Page consist of a Wall (also known as Timeline) and a Discussion Board. Each Facebook Page has administrative control of these components and can regulate - allow or disallow - the audience or the publics to use them to post their own posts (Visitors' Posts).

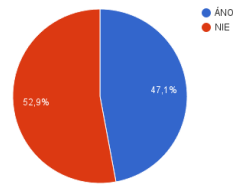
When a Facebook Page makes a post, it goes to the Timeline. A member of the audience or the publics can make a post either on the Wall/Timeline or on the Discussion Board only if the Page allows it. Earlier in the research (Table 2) I determined only one of the Pages allow visitors' Wall posts and none of the Pages allowed Discussion Boards. This decision is understandable from the point of the view of engagement and having control of the content. Therefore, every discussion was confined to Page's posts, thus driving engagement and comments on the Page's posts. This made the research easier as I did not have to search both the Wall and the Discussion Board for posts, but only the former.

I used Facebook's tool Graph API which allows users to browse particular dates, types of posts, comments, likes, shares of Facebook Pages with simple line of codes. In my case, I wrote a line of code that returned these specific data for each of the Facebook Page:

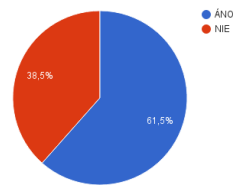
- Wall posts
- Comments on the wall posts
- Date frame from 12th of November (when the official election campaign begun) until the midnight 3rd of March (when the moratorium started - meaning no party could advertise/promote itself in any way)
- The line of code used to extract posts:  
*71030757230/feed?limit=100&\_\_paging\_token=enc\_AdBZA36M9wPb1rWOi  
aPR5x7U2ZClaujZCzCvee4SBaMIanBwsdLVAL4Nn7TGeToCt8zinzKxAoB4n  
wtlHsGWYwBWfCTy&until=1447857189*
- The line of code used to extract comments and replies:  
*71030757230\_10153323901022231/comments?fields=comments{from,id}&fil  
ter=toplevel&limit=100*

I chose to follow only updates posted by Pages during the election campaign cycle which officially ran from 12th of November (when the official election campaign begun) until the midnight 3rd of March (when the moratorium started - meaning no party could advertise/promote itself in any way). These dates were announced by then Speaker of Národná Rada Slovenskej Republiky Peter Pellegrini (noviny.sk, 2015).

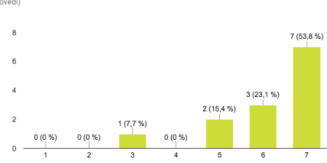
Napísali ste niekedy komentár strane SaS v komentároch na Facebook-u?



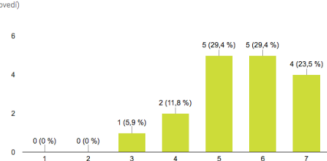
Dostali ste od strany SaS odpoveď na Vaš komentár?



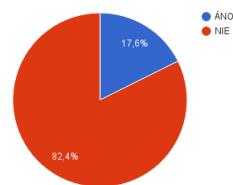
Aké je pre Vás dôležité, aby Vám strana odpovedala na komentáre a správy? (13 odpovedí)



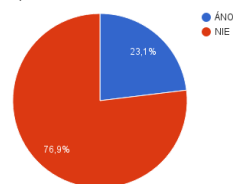
Ohodnoťte komunikáciu strany SaS na Facebook-u na základe Vašej skúsenosti. (17 odpovedí)



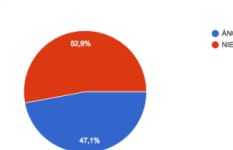
Položili ste niekedy otázku strane SaS prostredníctvom správy na Facebook-u?



Dostali ste od strany SaS odpoveď na Vašu správu?



Nahrádza podľa Vás komunikácia na Facebook-u osobnú, tvárou v tvár, komunikáciu? (17 odpovedí)



In the next part, I am looking and surveys which will tell us more about how SaS audience perceives relationship communication and in the final step of the research I should present the interview with SaS spokeswoman and compare the party's attitude to relationship communication to the results I will have presented by then.

### 3.5 Survey evaluation

Surveys were divided into three separate categories, each consisted of several questions.

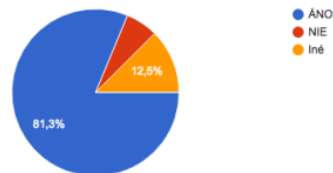
The first survey labelled 'Relationship communication of SaS on Facebook' asked the following questions:

- Have you ever posted a question to SaS in comments on Facebook? yes/no
- If yes, did you get an answer from SaS? yes/no
- Have you ever posted a question to SaS in Facebook Messages? yes/no
- If yes, did you get an answer from SaS? yes/no
- How important is to you when on SaS reply to your comments/messages on Facebook? (1 – not important, 7 – very important) 1-7
- Based on your experience and observation of SaS Facebook Page evaluate

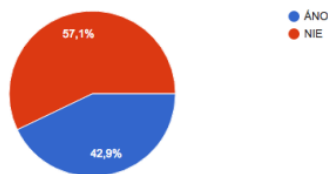
their communication in replying to comments and messages. 1-7

- Would you or would you not say that communication on Facebook substitutes face-to-face communication?

Dozvedeli ste sa o predvolebných diskusiách/akciách strany SaS prostredníctvom Facebook-u?  
(16 odpovedí)

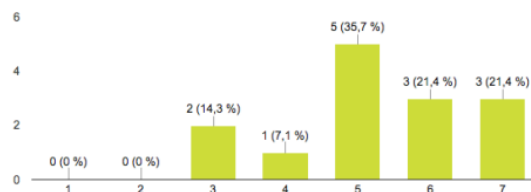


Zaujali vás použitý text a obrázok natolko, že ste sa rozhodli zúčastniť, alebo zväziť účasť na propagovanej Udalosti?  
(14 odpovedí)



Figure

Ako sa vám páčila takáto forma propagácie? (14 odpovedí)



question whether Facebook relationship communication substitutes face-to-face communication.

Figure 2 holds the results. Out of 17 answers it is apparent that if people did write a comment on SaS post they mostly got an answer and even their messages were answered. More than 50% said it is very important (7) to them to have their comments and messages answered, but only 23,5% say they are very satisfied with SaS communication on Facebook. People are also divided on the

Figure 3



The second survey labelled 'Event promotion on Facebook' asked the following questions about how people perceived promotion of rallies and campaign Events of SaS on Facebook:

- Did you find out about the campaign events of SaS via Facebook? yes/no
- Did the event visualization of images, graphics and slogans and writing caught your attention to the point where you confirmed your attendance or at least showed an interest? yes/no
- How did you like this form of communication (via Facebook Events). 1 – 7

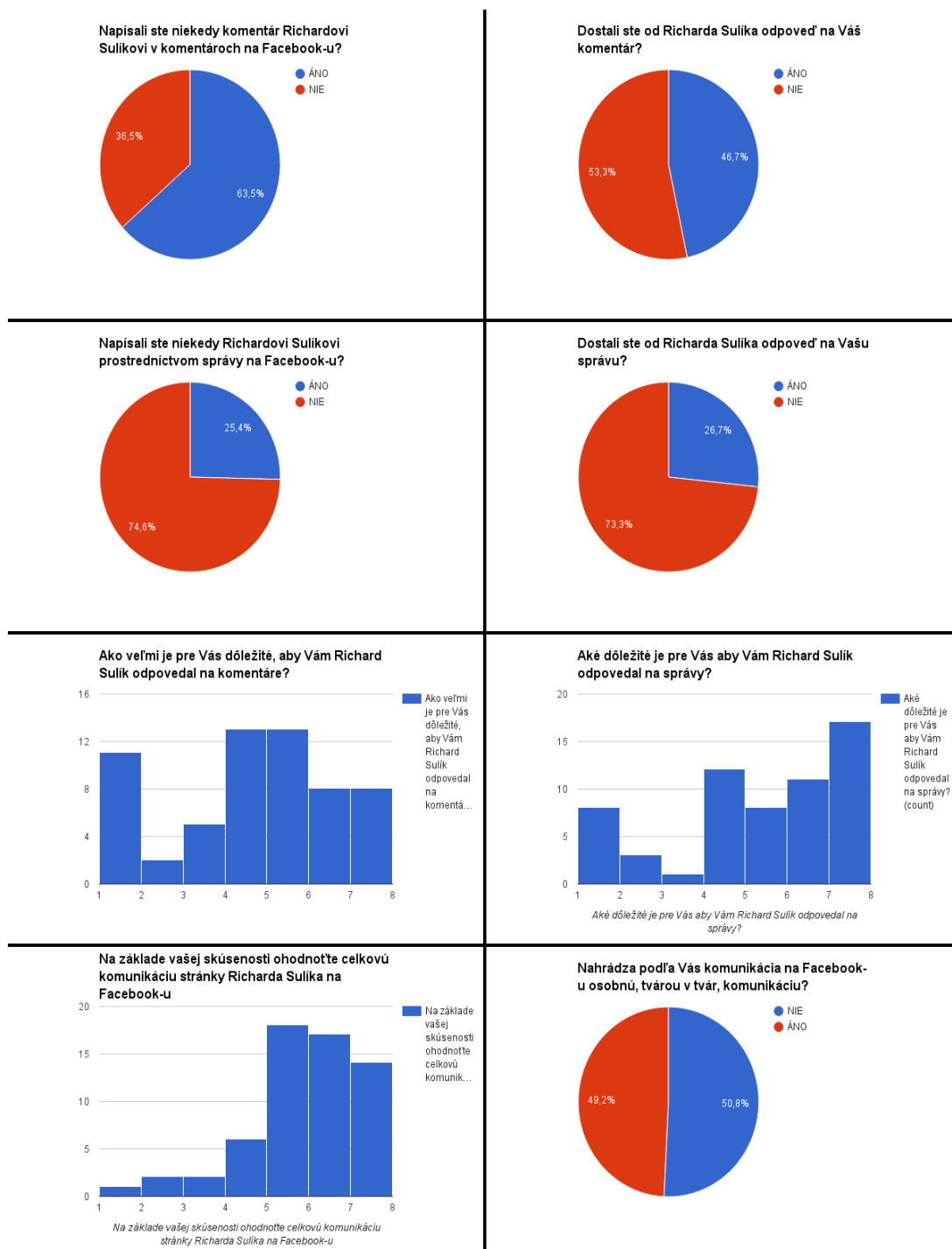


Figure 4

What we found out in Figure 3 is that most of the people (81,3%) found out about rallies and campaign Events on Facebook, but the way they were promoted (the copywriting, visuals) did not persuade them to attend (57,1%) and 35,7% say they liked the form of Event promotion, but only 21,4% say they liked the promotion very much. However, when we compare this with the interview with SaS

spokeswoman where she claims the all of the events were full in terms of attendance we stumble upon differences between claims on Facebook and actions. In other words, on Facebook in Events you can choose three options to let the host know whether you will 'Attend', 'Maybe Attend', or 'Not Attend' and the trend among social media marketers in my field is that these numbers do not correspond with real attendance and the real attendance is always higher - which the SaS spokeswoman confirmed, as you will see in the next and the last part of research. In the last survey labelled 'Relationship communication of Richard Sulík on Facebook' I asked the following questions:

- Have you ever posted a question to Sulík in comments on Facebook? yes/no
- If yes, did you get an answer from Sulík? yes/no
- Have you ever posted a question to Sulík in Facebook Messages? yes/no
- If yes, did you get an answer from Sulík? yes/no
- How important is to you when on Sulík reply to your comments/messages on Facebook? (1 – not important, 7 – very important) 1-7
- Based on your experience and observation of Sulík Facebook Pages evaluate their communication in replying to comments and messages. 1-7
- Would you or would you not say that communication on Facebook substitutes face-to-face communication?

This survey received 63 answers and the results show people took advantage of the ability to discuss Mr. Sulík's agenda in comments to his posts, but did not write as many messages to him. Interestingly, Mr. Sulík and the party spokeswoman claim he responds to all messages, but the results obtained from the survey suggest the opposite. Nevertheless, it is important to point out 11 out of 63 don't think it is very important to have their comments answered by Mr. Sulík and 26 people combined out of 63 think it is important, but not very important. However, 17 people out of 63 think it is very important that Mr. Sulík answers his messages. Overall, 49 out of 63 give Mr. Sulík mark 5 or higher thus like his Facebook communication or like it very much. But still, it does not mean to more than half of asked people that relationship communication on Facebook is a substitute of face-to-face communication.

### 3.6 Interview with the spokeswoman of SaS Katarína Svrčková

In interview with Ms. Svrčková I was interested in finding out what role did Facebook play in volunteer organization<sup>11</sup>.

Surprisingly, there was no volunteer recruiting via Facebook. Instead, SaS uses their website to collect e-mail addresses for an initiative called 'Priatel'ia Slobody' - 'Friends of Freedom'. When it came to the election campaign the database of collected e-mails consisted of "around 5000 e-mails" which were used to recruit volunteers for each rally.

Although, I did find out more about the overall strategy SaS employs on social media. The relationship marketing plays an important role in the party's strategy, Ms. Svrčková, as the head of communication, said the Facebook page is updated on regular basis and content ranges from political satire aimed at its opponents to discussion of serious issues and promotion of its agenda and candidates. When it comes to candidates they are obliged to post blog posts which the party then shares and promotes on social media. Subsequently, candidates are encouraged to keep up their own Facebook pages and engage with the publics via their own channels of communication - Facebook being the most popular, some do Twitter. Relationship communication via Facebook engagement (replies and likes) is done by the party's communication team, but candidates are welcome to answer questions on SaS' Facebook page with their own Facebook page. This is interesting and I would go as far as calling it cunning and innovative. Not only the candidates present themselves to larger audience, they make it seem like they look for issues to solve and questions to answer.

---

<sup>11</sup> Rather than analyzing the role of SaS spokesperson I was interested in data she could provide, therefore the form of the interview transcript focuses more on the contents of her answers than wording and style.

Moreover, Svrčeková, although it cannot be proven the strategy on social media has direct impact on voter turnout and SaS successful election campaign<sup>12</sup>, did voice confidence in the relationship marketing approach and after the interview ended asked for my professional input, advice and evaluation of the party's digital marketing communication.

I concluded the evaluation of interview and received answers as satisfactory and despite the fact that volunteers were not in fact recruited via Facebook I cannot state it has hurt SaS in any way. When you look at #Siet', the last party to get into parliament, you will see it has posted several times about volunteer recruitment and afterwards witness them in the streets. Yet, it gained the least seats<sup>13</sup>. To sum up, volunteer organization in relationship marketing did not play a fruitful role nor to the party (SaS) nor to the publics as SaS omitted it and succeed and #Siet' employed and did not succeed.

---

<sup>12</sup> SaS came in the second place after the winner SMER-SD which was to many surprising given the fact SaS was involved in the 2012 infamous government crash which ignited premature election and re-established SMER-SD as the ruling party - the only ruling party.

<sup>13</sup> Again, I nor anyone can imply this was the reason the party did not gain more seats, but in terms of social media strategy employing volunteers was aligned with Lees-Marshment relational and interactive political marketing communication. Therefore it is important to note.

## 4 Results and Evaluation

We are now looking at the core results of the research which handles raw data obtained from Facebook pages of Slovak political parties that made it to the parliament in 2016.

The important elements to pay attention to are totalled numbers, averaged numbers and % of replied comments. They show to what extent each party engaged in communication with its publics - the lower the % the worse. The best parties engaged over 2%.

Comments received can be interpreted not only as a number of received comments, but also understood as a number of opportunities each party had to engage publicly with its publics. This is important, because if we decide to treat the comments as a brand would treat customer inquiry then none of the parties fulfil the notion that 100% of customer inquiries have to be addressed. The reason why this would be wrong approach is that not every comment deals with a different issue and, for example, out of 10 comments on a post 5 can ask the same question and the other 5 a different question - than 2 replies (one to each set of questions) from the party's profile is enough. This is to justify the 2% rule of evaluating parties' successfulness in answering comments; i.e. take opportunities to engage with the publics in public<sup>14</sup>.

Party	Comments received	Comments replied	Comments replied %
SaS	4596	129	2,807%
Sme Rodina	16515	204	1,235%
#Siet'	6463	163	2,522%
SNS	3077	3	0,097%

---

<sup>14</sup> This is due to a fact that the examined Facebook pages are public hence anyone can see what is happening.

Smer-SD	10750	3	0,028%
OLANO	12836	258	2,010%
NOVA	2618	110	4,202%
MOST-HÍD	507	7	1,381%
ĽSNS	992	7	0,706%
National Average	6 483,778	98,222	1,665%
Total	58354	884	1,515%

Table 5

Party	Number of posts	Post per day
SaS	238	2,106
Sme Rodina	365	3,23
#Siet'	159	1,407
SNS	158	1,398
Smer-SD	100	0,885
OLANO	289	2,558
NOVA	82	0,726
MOST-HÍD	149	1,319
ĽSNS	56	0,496
Total	1596	
Average		1,569

Table 6

Table 6 shows the total number of posts parties posted on their Facebook Pages was 1596 and on average parties posted, if rounded, 2 posts a day.

Table 5 shows parties received 58354 comments and replied 884 times - they replied to 1,515% of comments, if rounded to 2%.

This means the number of posts SaS posted on their Facebook Page is more or less the same as national average, if rounded. Moreover, the percentage of replies exceeds the national average by 1,142%. This is a sign of regularity in its relationship

communication. What is more, as we will find out later on SaS and its leader reply to every single message they receive on Facebook. Of course, this data is not trackable, but it was revealed during the interview with the SaS spokeswoman.

As for the party leader and his communication, Table 7 shows his Facebook communication lack behind national average, but it is also important to note this research does not cover every party's leader on Facebook due to timeframe and content restraints - it would not be possible to fit it into this paper. Therefore, as Mr. Richard Sulík is one of the founders and current leader of SaS I take him as the brand's/party's ambassador and an equivalent of his party.

Party Leader	Comments received	Comments replied	Comments replied %	Number of posts	Post per day
Sulík	16101	143	0,888%	163	1,442

Table 7

What is interesting is that Mr. Sulík's audience commented more on more or less the same amount of posts as SaS made. This shows that the liberal's party ideology is compliant with civic engagement. From the interview with SaS spokeswoman I also found out that *Mr. Sulík replies to all of the message he receives via his Facebook Page*, again this is not trackable, but it supports the overall relationship communication.

#### 4.1 Implications and future reference

In this concluding part of the research part I would like to outline implications and position the findings for future and practical use.

The rising trend in voter turnout suggests political culture in Slovakia has an ascending tendency and along with the results of research it ascends towards a society more engaged in discussion with political elites. The move from mere receiving information to discussing them with political elites is deemed positive and the example of SaS shows how important it can be not only for the party itself, but also for the publics.

The thing about is that giving the publics voice and including them in dialogue provides more space for new ideas rather than recycling old ones.



The implication that relationship communication has the ability to transform political spectrum is perhaps best visible in the example of Obama who successfully defeated Republicans two times in a row thanks to utilizing social media communication aimed toward getting a response and creating space where dialogue and civic engagement is strongly supported. It was a large-scale project which influenced Slovakia as well.

The results show each party engaged to some extent with its publics and to be able to measure it means we know have the tools to enhance it. I believe this work has the ability and data researchers can work with in the future in order to provide better insight and understanding of Slovakia's political marketing and how it influences our political culture.

The underlying of the research is to show the communication is relationship based and although it may not be as extensive as in other countries there is ground for it to remain and continue on this path.

## 5 Conclusion

This work is the first of its kind to be carried out in the real of Slovak politics. There are two reasons.

The first reason is that Slovakia lacks experts in political marketing. The first of such kind Mr. Flašík ran SMER-SD campaigns since 2000 until 2006, but his one-way acquisition model of promotion would be unsatisfactory today.

One of the most successful campaigns was run by political communication consultant Mr. Baťo who helped the then little known entrepreneur and philanthropist Andrej Kiska launch and successfully finish his presidential bid in the span of 2 years, from 2012 to 2014, with the help of advertising agency Komplot ran by Mr. Znášik. The latter has worked for Most-Híd in the 2016 parliamentary campaign. The last instance would be the company Vrtieť Psom - Wag The Dog (named after a movie depicting political PR in Washington D.C.). The company specialized solely on political marketing and in the 2016 election worked for #Siet' until its owners and the only consultants got into conflict with the leader of #Siet'.

It's safe to say although these men and companies are professionals in political marketing there are still parties that do not employ such practices and rely on in-house employers who usually have more responsibilities and only focus on political marketing partially.

It would help if parties invested in professional expertise and moved from applying one set of strategy on the whole electorate to diversifying their set of advertising and PR activities which would in the author's opinion deprive the country of billboards (one-way communication) and add to the support of rallies where people meet physically and discussions in the media and on social media where candidates have more opportunities to speak than from a billboard.

The second reason is the lack of academic interest in Slovak political marketing. When researching sources for the text to support the hypothesis as well as numerous claims I have made I stumbled upon lack of academic interest, or should I say I haven't had anything to stumble upon for that matter?

However, this unsatisfactory outcome has encouraged me to carry on with my intentions. The best place to start was naturally on-line and as I believe in democracy and that discussion strengthens it there was little to be discussed about the aim of the thesis.

The move from acquisition to retention in business has definitely helped how not only businesses view their customers, but also how customers view businesses and interact with each other. The deeper the relationship runs the more it becomes a standard and something citizens start to demand by default. It is popular for governments to advocate transparency in ruling as well as for political parties to unveil their finances during campaigns in transparent banking accounts, this is now supported by legislation. Naturally, communication became two-way and transparent as well and led to emergence of relationship marketing.

The case in Slovakia is that ever since social media, the easiest way for a company/brand/party to dwell in to relationship communication the voter turnout grew and discussion rose. Although, on one hand we cannot conclude with the fact that relationship communication works well for every Slovak party it did add to the successful result of SaS and its leader. On the other hand, we can conclude with the fact that relationship communication has the potential to strengthen democracy and in order to preserve it we should see rise in the number of comments posted and comments answered.

## Resumé

Roky pred uvedením Facebook-u a sociálnych sietí politické elity boli odkázané na jednosmernú komunikáciu cez televíziu, rádio a tlačenu reklamu. Chris Rudd sa v prípadovej štúdií New Zealand Labour party zaoberá prvou zmienkou dvoj-smernej komunikácie v politickej sfére na prelome tisícročí 1999-2002. Vtedajšia vládnuca strana spustila na svojej webovej stránke takzvaný 'ch@t' - spôsob komunikácie vďaka ktorému mohli návštevníci stránky strany nechať odkaz svojmu poslancovi, alebo členovi strany, ktorý musel následne odpovedať (Lilleker, Lees-Marshment, 2005).

Z pohľadu komunikácie bol tento krok prelomový a otvoril cestu k interaktívnej, alebo vzťahovej komunikácii, ktorá mala dve smery. V roku 2004 inovoval aj Howard Dean, vtedajší senátor štátu Vermont sa cez blogy a web stránky dostal komunikáciou upravenou a zamierenou na otázky bežných ľudí až do finálneho kola Demokratických primárok. Napriek neúspechu ho jeho úspešná kampaň vyniesla do pozície šéfa Demokratickej Národnej komisie a jeden z členov jeho komunikačného tímu sa neskôr v roku 2008 pričínal o ikonické víťazstvo Obamu v prezidentských voľbách 2008 už z pozície jedného zo šéfov jeho komunikačného tímu. Obamova kampaň využila sociálne siete Facebook a MySpace na mobilizáciu dobrovoľníkov, vďaka ktorým sa mu podarilo získať lokálne komunity a penetrovať kampaň aj v najmenších mestách (Carr, 2008).

Dôvodom, prečo boli sociálne siete tak dôležité je ich dostupnosť. Implementácie sociálnych sietí do komunikácie zabezpečí to, že svoju agendu politik dostane priamo k svojmu elektorátu bez toho aby si platil čas v televízií, alebo priestor v novinách (Carr, 2008).

Interaktívna komunikácia spočíva v zapájaní a angažovaní publika. Toto je jedna z vecí, ktorú Barack Obama pohopil a vďaka webu sa dostal bližšie k svojmu elektorátu, čím vytvoril pocit priameho spojenia (Carr, 2008).

Kvôli nedostatku výskumu v tejto oblasti navrhujem analógiu so zákazníckym servisom značiek, rovnako ako Nigel Jackson, ktorý prirovnáva vznik vzťahovej

komunikácie k tej firemnej z 90. rokov kedy sa spoločnosti začali sústrediť na udržanie existujúcich zákazníkov ako akvizíciu nových. Dosiahli to aktívnou komunikáciou a zapájajúcimi zákazníkmi do komunikácie. Podľa medzinárodnej konzultačnej firmy Brain and Company spoločnosti, ktoré angažujú svoje publikum na sociálnych sieťach zaznamenajú 20% až 40% nárast peňažných prostriedkov minutých na svoje produkty a služby (LiveWorld, 2016). Okrem pozitívnej konotácie, ktoré so sebou tieto číla nesú sú prenesiteľné aj na politické subjekty, ktoré by mohli pravidelnou komunikáciou so svojím publikom dosiahnuť podobné percentuálne množstvo hlasov vo svoj prospech, alebo nárast publika.

Sféra politického marketingu na Slovensku trpí nedostatkom výskumu. To čo vidíme je vec jedna, ale čo to naozaj znamená, je vec druhá. Toto je úlohou akadémie a koniec koncov aj motiváciou práce.

Dáta štatistického úradu ukazujú rast volebnej účasti od roku 2006, pričom stúpajúcu tendenciu si udržali aj v parlamentných voľbách 2016. Domnievam sa, že jedným z identifikátorov je práve využitie sociálnych sietí na angažovanie publika v politickej debate. Na to aby sme niečo také dokázali je potrebné skúmať tú časť Facebooku, ktorá umožňuje vzájomnú komunikáciu. Sú ňou komentáre, na ktoré môžu politické subjekty odpovedať.

Ako vzorku som zvolil všetky strany úspešné v parlamentných voľbách 2016. Z tejto skupiny som vypočítal a stanovil prah odpovedí na komentáre, ktorý ak je dosiahnutý ukazuje na zvládnutú vzťahovú komunikáciu. Pokiaľ nie je dosiahnutý, ukazuje na medzery v takejto komunikácii. Každý komentár bol hodnotený ako príležitosť zapojiť vzťahovú komunikáciu.

Prah úspešnosti strana dosiahla pokiaľ odpovedala na 2 alebo viac percent komentárov. Samozrejme, experti z marketingovej praxe sa zhodujú, že každá firma, či značka, by mala odpovedať na 100% komentárov a zaistiť aby boli všetky požiadavky spotrebiteľov uspokojené. Avšak, pri politických stranách treba počítať s tým, že otázky a názory v komentároch sa budú opakovať - preto stačí ak strana reaguje na každý dotaz/otázku/názor raz a tým pádom pokryje prívržencov onoho dotazu/otázky/názoru. Napríklad, ak z 10 komentárov obsahuje 5 rovnakú otázku a

zvyšných 5 inú otázku je v poriadku ak strana zareaguje na 2 komentáre - 1 z každej skupiny. Nanešťastie, 5 z 9 strán nedokázalo odpovedať ani na 2% komentárov.

V záujme výskumu čo najviac zaostriť som následne zvolil stranu SaS a jej lídra ako subjekty, ktoré porovnávam s dosiahnutými výsledkami a snažím sa zistiť, či im vzťahová komunikácia prospela.

Vzhľadom na to, že samotná strana dosiahla a prekročila prah úspešnej vzťahovej komunikácie - odpovedala na 2,807% komentárov, ktoré dostala počas predvolebnej kampane - a vo voľbách skončila na 2. mieste hodnotím implementáciu vzťahovej komunikácie ako úspešnú. Avšak, nemôžem ju označiť za kľúčovú nakoľko vo vzorke sa objavil 5 strany, ktoré prah úspešnej vzťahovej komunikácie nedosiahli. Medzi nimi bola aj víťazná strana SMER-SD.

Avšak, je potrebné uvedomiť si aj fakt, že volebná účasť v skúmaných parlamentných voľbách dosiahla najvyššiu mieru od roku 2006, ako uvádza Štatistický úrad SR. Tento výsledok korešponduje s faktami prezentovanými v teoretickej časti. Bolo ro práve okolo roku 2006 kedy sociálne siete výrazne začali penetrovať nie len politické, ale aj prostredie bežného užívateľa internetu čím sa pochopiteľne zvýšila aj viditeľnosť politických subjektov.

Môžeme tvrdiť, že v roku 2016 situácia vyvrcholila a používanie sociálnych sietí a politickej participácie dosiahli svoje špičky. Ako odkaz pre budúci výskum by som zvolil výzvu porovnať volebnú účasť a skóre vzťahovej marketingovej politickej komunikácie aj po ďalších parlamentných voľbách. (Lees-Marshment J. , 2014) (Rudd, 2005) (LiveWorld, 2016) (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012) (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012) (Watson & Noble, 2014)

## References

- Carlyne L. Kujath, B. (2011). Facebook and MySpace: Complement or Substitute for Face-to-Face Interaction? *CYBERPSYCHOLOGY, BEHAVIOR, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING*, 75-78.
- Carr, D. (9. November 2008). How Obama Tapped Into Social Networks' Power. *The New York Times*.
- Cassidy, A. (2. April 2015). *Political brands: who gets your vote?* Dostupné na Internete: The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/>
- Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky. (30. March 2014). *Počet platných hlasov odovzdaných pre jednotlivých kandidátov na prezidenta Slovenskej republiky za Slovenskú republiku*. Dostupné na Internete: Voľba Prezidenta Slovenskej republiky 2014: <http://volby.statistics.sk/>
- Buffer. (14. November 2016). *The Future of Social Media (And How to Prepare For It): The State of Social Media 2016 Report*. Dostupné na Internete: Buffer Social: <https://blog.bufferapp.com/>
- Darren G. Lilleker, M. P. (2016). *Political Marketing and the 2015 UK General Election*. London: Palgrave Macmillan .
- Hootsuite. (14. October 2014). *Social Customer Care: The Future of Customer Satisfaction*. Dostupné na Internete: Hootsuite: <https://hootsuite.com>
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). (2017). *Voter Turnout*. Dostupné na Internete: IDEA: <http://www.idea.int/data-tools/question-view/521>
- Jackson, N. (2008). Vote Winner or a Nuisance: Email and Elected Politicians' Relationship with Their Constituents. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 91-108.
- Jackson, N. A. (2012). Underused campaigning tools: political public relations. In J. Lees-Marshment, *Routledge Handbook of Political Marketing* (s. 271-286). New York: Routledge.
- Lees-Marshment, J. (2014). *Political Marketing: Principles and Applications*. New York: Routledge.
- Lees-Marshment, J. (2014). The Political Product. In J. Lees-Marshment, *Political Marketing: Principles and applicaions* (s. 4-5). Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- LiveWorld. (9. May 2016). *The Importance of Social Customer Service for Business*. Dostupné na Internete: LiveWorld: <http://www.liveworld.com/importance-of-social-customer-service-for-business/>
- MarketingCharts. (5. October 2016). *The State of Traditional TV: Q2 2016 Update*. Dostupné na Internete: Marketing Charts: <http://www.marketingcharts.com/>
- noviny.sk. (12. November 2015). *MAC TV s.r.o.* Dostupné na Internete: noviny.sk: <https://www.noviny.sk/slovensko/154449-ofiicialne-potvrdene-pellegrini-vyhlasil-parlamentne-volby-na-5-marca>
- Plunkett, J. (11. July 2016). *Third of TV watching among younger viewers is via on-demand services*. Dostupné na Internete: The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com>
- Rudd, C. (2005). Marketing the message or the messenger? The New Zealand Labour Party, 1990-2003. In J. L.-M. David G. Lilleker, *Political marketing: A comparative perspective* (s. 79-96). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Sidney Verba, K. L. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan, L. (2012). Social media and political communication: A social media analytics framework. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 1277-1291.
- Tamara A. Small, A. M. (2014). *Political Communication in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- The Bureau of Statistics of Slovak republic. (13. January 2016). *Vol'by a referendá*. Dostupné na Internet: Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky: <http://volby.statistics.sk/>
- The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2016). *Democracy Index 2015: Democracy in an age of anxiety*. Dostupné na Internet: EUI: [http://www.eiu.com/public/topical\\_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2015](http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2015)
- Vesnic-Alujevic, L. (2012). Political participation and web 2.0 in Europe: A case study of Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 466–470.
- Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2014). *Evaluating public relations: A guide to planning, research and measurement*. London: Kogan.
- Zhang, W. (2010). The Revolution Will be Networked: The Influence of Social Networking Sites on Political Attitudes and Behaviour. *Social Science Computer Review*, 75-92.