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# Strategic communication and manipulation of information by political parties during election campaigns on Facebook

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# Strategic communication concept

- Strategic political communication during election campaigns
  - Strategic communication is the purposeful use of organizational communication to fulfill its mission (Hallahan, et al. 2007).
  - In practice, the most common level of strategic communication analysis is campaigns (Botan, 2018)



# Election campaigning

- New or newly formed parties in their campaigns pay more attention to social media than big and "old" parties (Lilleker, 2015).
  - Why? Smaller hierarchical structure of parties, involvement of young people and their greater openness to new communication opportunities.
- In general, traditional media among parties are still seen as important campaign tools, but the impact of social media on political campaigns in the world is increasing.
  - the information environment is expanding, which creates time constraints for users. In this way, the richness of information brings poverty of attention.

# Different realities (*Janice Schuetz, 2009*)

- Objective political reality (includes political events as they actually take place)
- **Subjective political reality (as perceived by political actors and citizens)**
- Reality of events (covered by media)



# Positive vs negative emotions

- Negativity is an actor's statements that involve an attack, criticism, or confrontation with a competing actor. (Song, Nyhuis & Boomgaarden, 2017)
- Some political advisers and candidates believe that negative campaigning can help activate their supporters, persuade non-elected voters and influence their opponents.
  - Coalition or «old» parties vs. opposition and «new» parties
- Success and feeling good.

# Political knowledge determinants and processes (Perloff, 2018)



# Social media platforms



- Blumler, J. (2013): People are able to follow on social media messages, respond to them and share them, but remain open several important questions about:
  - Reliability of communication
  - News sources
  - Truthfulness
- Citizens are flooded with highly polarizing messages and troll-rhetoric-coordinated attempts to manipulate public opinion.
- The result: different predictions about political reality; populism, audience and media fragmentation, human selective obedience to messages according to its own confidence and the tendency to strengthen them.

# Classification of false information

## *(Kapantai, E., et al., 2020)*

| [1] Zannettou et al. (2019) | [2] Tambini (2017)                      | [3] Kumar and Shah (2018) | [4] Wardle and Derekshan (2017) | [5] Parikh and Atrey (2018) | [6] Tandoc et al. (2017) | [7] Molina et al. (2019) | [8] Lemieux and Smith (2018) | [9] Pamment et al. (2018) | [10] House of Commons (2018) |
|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Fabricated content          | Falsehood to affect election results    | Misinformation            | Satire                          | Visual based                | News satire              | False News               | Disinformation               | Fabrication               | Fabrication                  |
| Propaganda                  | Falsehood for profit gain               | Disinformation            | False connection                | User based                  | News parody              | Polarized Content        | Hoax                         | Manipulation              | Manipulated content          |
| Imposter                    | Bad journalism                          | Opinion based             | Misleading content              | Post based                  | Fabrication              | Satire                   | Bias in Fact selection       | Misappropriation          | Imposter content             |
| Conspiracy theories         | Parody                                  | Fact based                | False context                   | Network based               | Manipulation             | Misreporting             | Rumors                       | Propaganda                | Misleading content           |
| Hoaxes                      | Ideologically opposed news              |                           | Imposter content                | Knowledge based             | Advertising              | Commentary               | Hyperbole                    | Satire                    | False context                |
| Biased or one-sided         | News that challenges orthodox authority |                           | Manipulated content             | Stance based                |                          | Persuasive Information   | Misinformation               | Parody                    | Satire                       |
| Fallacy                     |   |                           | Fabricated content              |                             |                          |                          |                              | Advertising               | Deep fakes                   |
| Rumors                      |   |                           | Leaks                           |                             |                          |                          |                              |                           |                              |
| Clickbait                   |   |                           | Harassment                      |                             |                          |                          |                              |                           |                              |
| Satire                      |   |                           | Hate speech                     |                             |                          |                          |                              |                           |                              |



# Categorization of false information (Meel, P., Vishwakarma, D.K., 2020)

- Manipulation: circulating information that becomes false inadvertently as a consequence of an honest mistake, carelessness or cognitive bias
- Impact: less harmful but wrong interpretation of facts can lead to big damage



# Briefly about Latvia (I)

- Parliamentary republic
- Founded in 1918
- Occupied several times during World War II
- 1990: regained its independence
- 2004: Part of European Union and NATO



# Briefly about Latvia (II)

- Election intensity during last years
- Very low ratings of parliament, politicians and trust level to them
- Unpredictability of new and small parties
- Development of digital area.
- Media environment in Latvia.
- Media fragmentation.

# Methodology

- Content analysis of political parties' Facebook pages by Facebook analysis tool CrowdTangle
- Research object: manipulation with information

Few examples of political manipulation

# Technical manipulation (photo)



# Technical manipulation (video)

LATVIA

The video distributed by a ZZS board member has been slowed down, making Bordan look intoxicated

April 6, 2021 No Comments



A modified video in which the Minister of Justice Jānis Bordoņš (New Conservative Party) talks about air ventilation in schools has become popular on the social media "Facebook", through the member of the board of the Greens and Farmers Union (ZZS). The video has been significantly slowed down, "stretching" the original 30-second fragment to 40 seconds, giving many the impression that the Minister is intoxicated.



# Manipulation with facts

- Jānis Bordāns (Minister of Justice, New Conservative party): *«JKP is an absolute voluntary organization. We pull our funds out of our pockets and do two things every day, also working in the campaign»*  
/ August 20, 2020
  - NCP as a party and officials receive ~4 million euros from the state budget.
- Aleksejs Rošļikovs («Alternative» party) during debates on 2020: «Alternative is the new political force»
  - Founded in 2007
- Many parties in the debate claim to have kept their promises.



# Manipulation with opinions

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# Expressive polemic as political theatre



# Summary

- Quantitative data can be easily processed with appropriate software, but is still important for content and context analysis.
- Manipulation of information and disputes over it in a context of low trust can negatively affect voter turnout.

# Thank you!

For questions and cooperation:  
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