The Role Of New Media In The 2009 Election Campaign In Romania

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Abstract
The paper analyzes the Romanian presidential campaign of 2009, focusing on the online interactivity of the presidential candidates, the trend of online communication to multifunctional dialogue and each politician’s digital ammunition. Thus, the first direction of the case study is based on three analytic tools - site mapping, content and speech analysis and comparative interpretation of the results of each analysis, assessing any online presence of the five presidential candidates: Traian Basescu, Mircea Geoana, Crin Antonescu, Remus Cernea and Kelemen Hunor. The common elements of reference and comparative analysis are represented by social networks, blogs and video tools, flows of interactive information, etc. We begin with the home page of the campaign website, the candidate’s biography, the debate section, text elements of the web page, images and video clips, links to other organizations and visitors’ implication, comparing each candidate’s online interaction, according to J. McMillan and P. Ferber’s revised pattern. The result of the study will prove that the most online active candidate is not the same with the winner of the Romanian presidential elections.

Keywords: political communication, interactivity, online communication
Introduction

The new technologies, the Internet in particular, have unexpectedly changed the life of the modern individual, have transformed the public domain and the communication among its actors, witnessing a development in a much faster rhythm than in any other previous media. The Internet is the latest great challenge of the technological innovations in mass communications (Davies, 1999: 27).

Each innovation has modified the public information and the political participation, but historians think that, through history, each new media has been tempted to undermine the old monopoly (Davies, 1999: 27). There has rarely existed a media with such a vast and efficient potential to significantly change the form of communications like the Internet. The Internet with its cyberspace, highway of information and Web characteristics, has bound the world by a common denominator, the virtual space, which has given it what McLuhan called the content of a “global village”.

The Internet has rapidly transformed the way persons, organizations, political institutions, and governments communicate and negotiate political messages and roles, dividing political observers in optimists and skeptics. Generally, the optimists hope that the Internet will transform and stimulate the democratic participation, while skeptics do not credit the Internet to be more than a tool to consolidate the current mechanism of the political communication at the moment (Tedesco, 2005: 508) or, with respect to the importance of using the Internet for an election campaign, the optimists trust the Internet's capacity to change the political communication, while the pessimists think that the Internet has no chances to bring a consistent change to the future election and political scene, assessing it as a second hand communication instrument (Davies, 1999: 18).

New media is a concept that has modified the perspectives of mass communication by adding to it new characteristics and contents, and at the same time influencing, by its applicability, communication in general, and political communication and political marketing, in particular. In Romania, as in other Central and East-European countries for that matter, political marketing is frequently reduced to election marketing. In this sense, the new media implications in political communication have determined a shift of the communication mode, the strategies and the deployment of the election campaigns, introducing a new combative space, the online media.

The wide development of the phenomenon called Internet has conditioned the political parties and the politicians, the mass-media in equal measure, to identity target groups among the web surfers, as members of the potentially electing public. The most
pursued election campaigns with respect to their results, internationally and internally, have cultivated the Internet platforms and domains by official campaign sites, blogs, social networks, attracting sympathizers and volunteers, mobilizing voters. On the election campaigns radiography, the online media represents an objective with a visible weight and, consequently, the new political marketing techniques contribute to promoting the image of parties or politicians in election campaigns.

The political communication has rapidly seized the advantage of using the new media (Maarek, 2007: 269), especially that the traditional mass-media has been considered the “maillon faible de la communication politique” (Wolton, 1989: 165). The beginning of the online communication has been rather slow as it requires, in order to engage a mass communication, firstly, the connection of users to the Internet and, then, the creation of a database by online pages, and, in order to benefit from the “agenda effect” in the online media, the political communication has resorted to other media of mass communication.

In Romania, the Internet spread rapidly in all the society media. But, from a certain point of view, the political class has first adopted with enthusiasm the new communication media, shortly ending up in a situation where they didn't exploit its full capacity, as they weren't sufficiently apt for it. Most of the Romanian parliamentarians connected to the online media especially post press releases and possibly make public their parliamentary interpellations. About 20% (Ciocotișan, 2011) post articles referring to the political reality. Politicians have been among the first who created blogs, but not all blogs have periodical posts, connected to the political agenda of the moment. Among the 470 Romanian parliamentarians, 100 have blogs, 85 have Facebook accounts, and 20 have Twitter accounts (Ciocotișan, 2011), and some of them have accounts on all three social networks.

The political sites analysis and the parliamentarians performances in the virtual media communication has revealed the fact that the Romanian politicians are afraid of the online visitors reaction and their comments, sometimes critical, other times in a licentious, even trivial language. At the same time, they resort to blogging in order to create a trending image in line with the new tendencies, but they don't consider it necessary to apply a systematic effort, by no means negligible, to convince their own sympathizers, future constituents, as they are convinced that blogging rather consolidates the already existing election options, than change them (Guțu, 2006).

The notable performance of the politicians on the social network websites have brought them a sympathy capital, converted in political capital during the election campaigns.

In the context of a society under the influence of the digital era and the information era, as M.
Castells calls it, not having a web page or a blog, a Twitter or a Facebook account is a major political error for a politician, as an indecision at a certain point may become permanent, destroying the politician in the online media.

**Elections and online communication in 2009 political context**

For the time being, in Romania, we may notice the online attempts of the candidates during the presidential election campaign in 2009 that have transmitted to the potential electorate and even the supporters the locations where they could be seen, the events they participated in, the election messages they asserted during that time, and also offered he sympathizers the possibility to express themselves on their forums. Despite the fact that USA set the fashion of election campaigns in the online media where Barack Obama used all the resources pertaining to this environment, Romania, and implicitly, the candidates for the 2009 presidential elections tried to adapt to the new model that had already become a trend.

In 2009 either, there has not been an official supervision of the online activity of the candidates' websites with respect to the number of visitors, the independent sites preoccupied with the election themes, the options of the online electorate. It is desirable that for the next elections there are projects like “Politics and the Internet” (Boogers, 2003: 18), that monitor the campaign sites until the day of the elections, offering at the end different statistics concerning the online evolution, the new media impact on certain age or professional categories, the profile of the electorate in the virtual environment, the level of online interactivity of the constituent with the parties and the candidates, respectively. Such a monitoring would allow for pertinent analyses to assess in what measure the e-democracy and the cyberspace campaign are winning votes.

The 2009 presidential election campaign officially started on October 22, with 12 candidates entered in the race for Cotroceni: Traian Băsescu, Dan Mircea Geoană, George Crin Laurenţiu Antonescu, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Kelemen Hunor, Sorin Mircea Oprescu, George Becali, Remus Cernea, Constantin Rotaru, Eduard Gheorghe Manole, Ovidiu Cristian Iane, Constantin Ninel Potârcă. The first three favourite ranks in the 2009 presidential elections have been occupied by Traian Băsescu, Mircea Geoană, and Crin Antonescu. There were two election ballots, November 22 and December 6, 2009. After the first ballot, the final confrontation took place between the former president, Traian Băsescu, and Mircea Geoană, the president of the Democrat Social Party.
The election campaign of the first ballot was characterized by an absence of confrontations between candidates, and generally, a chaotic debate, sometimes on themes that were irrelevant for the evolution of the Romanian society and between candidates with unequal chances. The debate avant-garde was occupied by the Băsescu - Geoană - Antonescu triplet. Some of the candidates were totally invisible in mass-media or new media.

The 2009 campaign for the presidential elections is the first campaign to have used the new media in a larger context and an integrated structure. However, it must be underlined that Traian Băsescu was the first candidate to use the Internet starting with 2004, but much less than in 2009. In the 2004 campaign, Traian Băsescu has used the viral character of the Internet in a smart manner, by giving the users games, messages by way of Yahoo Messenger, and on his website he allowed the posting of comments by surfers thanks to the blogging platform he used (Ulmanu, 2011: 202).

After five years since the last presidential elections, we noticed significant changes in the 2009 Romanian e-campaign. The candidates have consulted specialists in the communication domain, as well as in the IT domain, so that the considerable modernization was pretty visible, whether the politicians have or have not trusted this type of communication. Each candidate was present in the online media, with official campaign pages, blogs, as well as with accounts open on social networks.

The campaign staffs, besides the traditional advertising campaigns (banners, brochures, folds, video clips broadcasted by televisions), have included the promotion of candidates by the new media (official campaign sites, blogs, video-sharing, photo-sharing, messenger, social networks). Another characteristic of the 2009 election campaign consists in the fact that it's the first election campaign associated with a national referendum concerning the introduction of the unicameral Parliament.

**Online interactivity**

The classical definition of interactivity suggests that a message, in order to be interactive, needs to be transformed by communication exchange: in other words, a conversation. S. Kiousis (2002) offers a more complete definition of interactivity: " the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many, both symmetrically and asymmetrically, and participate in reciprocal message exchanges (third order dependency). As for the human users, it also refers to their capacity to perceive the
existence as a simulation of interpersonal communication and to augment the degree of acknowledging their telepresence (Kiousis, 2002: 372). However, Jennifer McMillan surprised the essence of the definition proposed by Kiousis and composed the interactivity model formed of four parts, but which depends on two variables: the communication direction and the receiver's level of control, as the interactivity is not presented as a binary concept, but as a progressive continuum, where the roles of source and receiver are switchable (Lilleker, Malagon, 2010: 28).

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**Model of electronic interactivity, Ferber and collaborators**

According to the model of electronic interactivity, proposed by Ferber and collaborators (Ferber et al., 207: 391 – 400), one can measure the level and control of the receptivity of the political message receiver by the websites interactive technical characteristics. The level of control of the receiver compared to the emitter candidate is high when the response (feedback) works between the two concepts, when the speech is mutual between the two participants in the dialog (double entendre), multiplied (for the participants in the dialog) in the political speech (three directions). It is determined a low level of control of the receiver when the source acts in one way (monologue), when between the source and the receiver the dialog is responsive in both ways, and a controlled response when the participants determine the message from the source to the receiver.

The language used by the candidates on their official sites influences the relation they establish with the user by building the public perception of their own identity. Their identity is circumscribed to the political and ideological platforms, but also to the characteristics of
their personality and personal life. The statements of the politicians (McMillan, 2002: 271 – 292), produce different effects, like, for example, the case of texts whom main informing function is replaced by the promoting one, and the forecasts and assessments are replaced with the press statements or communicates. The link between the language and the interactivity hasn't been fully explored in the context of using websites in politics.

**Methodology**

To determine the use of Internet and the online interactivity, with application on social networks, in the 2009 Romanian election campaign, we have analyzed the websites of the main candidates to the presidency, mapping each site and inventorying the web page elements as text, images, and video clips with special analysis on the start page and the candidate biography, the presence or absence of the technical characteristics that allowed the interactivity - links to e-mail, materials posted for download, user registration, textual hyperlinks, visually convincing characteristics. This analysis contributed to identifying the purpose of sites. Therefore, according to Gibson Rachel and Ward Stephen (2000: 300 – 14), we will see in which of the four models fall the sites of Romanian politicians.

- for INFORMATION – characteristic to presentations and for the dissemination of information about parties, politicians and political events (for example, newsletters, press releases, official documents);
- for MOBILIZATION – that supports the party (for example, for volunteering, online members, online fund raising, and so on);
- for INTEGRATION – the capacity to coordinate and incorporate the internal communication of the party on the Web (for example, the presence at Intranet and the number of hyperlinks offered on pages by satellite and other non-party sites);
- for PARTICIPATION – elements generating a general political interest and offers the Internet users, without the support of the political supporters (for example, chat rooms, news groups, online petitions).

Therefore, the number of characteristics found on the site in a category (for example, information, mobilization, and so on) was divided to the total number of available elements on the site from this class, thus it resulted an index factor for each category between 0 (all absent elements) and 1 (all present elements). Moreover, common elements like archiving
articles, photos, graphics, have contributed to integrating the interactivity-related elements at the moment of the election campaign, as well as after it.

Unlike the previous analyses of the candidates' sites, which have used the speech analysis or the content analysis, we proposed a miscellaneous research methodology, that combines the speech analysis, a qualitative technique presenting a high degree of subjectivity, but focuses on the analysis of specific site messages with a quantitative content analysis, that allows for the development on categories and the ulterior numbering of the presence or absence of characteristics on a certain website; this is a transparent and efficient analysis instrument, but focuses exclusively on the technological characteristics.

To determine in what measure have the 2009 Romanian presidential elections included an interactive dimension, our research has rested upon any online presence: the official campaign sites of the first five candidates: Traian Băsescu (http://www.basescu.ro), Mircea Geoană (http://www.mirceageoana.ro/), Crin Antonescu (http://www.crinantonescu.ro/), Remus Cernău (www.remuscernea.ro), Kelemen Hunor (http://www.kelemenhunor.ro/candidatlapresedintie). The sites and blogs have archived for analysis during the election campaign, and we subsequently analyzed each sample.

Three analytical instruments have been successively used: sites mapping, content and speech analysis, and comparative interpretation of each analysis results.

First, we analyzed the social networks, the blogs and the video instruments, the asymmetrical interactive information flows, like the RSS subscriptions, and the symmetrical interactive information flows (chat rooms or online debates).

For the next phase, we performed a critical analysis of the speech (monologue, feedback, responsive dialog, mutual speech) on the web pages through the start page, the candidate biography and a sample page from the debates section. The analysis was based on elements of the web page as text, including images and video clips, links towards other organizations and the involvement of the site's visitors (donations).

The final step of the analysis involved measuring the level of interactivity, using the revised model of interactivity. To measure the level of interactivity, the web pages of the sites taken as samples have been considered as a whole and assessed from the point of view for the user's control (from 0 to 10), the direction of communication one-way, two-way or three-way, and whether the communication has been isochronous. In the case of the model from user-to document, the process has been repeated using the nature of the category to which the public belongs (active or passive public).
Two of the first elements to have been distinguished, after the termination of the first two phases of research, were the architecture and the purpose of the analyzed sites. The differences between these elements are obvious in the analyzed samples and are essential for the understanding of the perceived interactivity, as well as of the effective interactivity of the sites.

**Results of the analysis**

*Traian Băsescu* is the first politician to have ever "shown and exploited the potential of the Internet as a means of political communication. The concept of digital guerrilla, dramatically applied during the 2004 presidential campaign, went down in history and may be considered as the first initiative of real and efficient online political communication in the Romanian space" (Guțu, 2006). The site [www.basescu.ro](http://www.basescu.ro) has recommenced the online communication with the electorate in 2007, on the occasion of the referendum, relaunched on a blog structure and transformed in a forum. In the 2009 campaign, Traian Băsescu hasn't used a personal blog, but he used the forum where he posted pictures, election messages (political speeches from the towns where the election rallies took place), and video images.

Traian Băsescu's site was built on a dynamic platform presenting a general content of users, alternative posts and voices, a platform designed from the point of view of a two-component image strategy, one positive, drawn around the slogan "Băsescu for Romania", and the other negative, drawn around the slogan "Let's go to the referendum! They won't fly from fate!".

The campaign site has systematically presented a flow of information and statements, announcements on Twitter, where he posted video elements of the campaign, like, for example, the final debate between Traian Băsescu and Mircea Geoană in the second ballot, with the "definite triumph" of Traian Băsescu, or video images - live of the election rallies in the country, taking into account that the users rarely read the political manifestos or the ideological programmes.

The results of the content analysis and the speech analysis offers proof that the site design and function correspond to the description of a campaign where all the multimedia instruments are integrated in the strategy of the general campaign, which is highlighted by the coherence between the start page design of the message and the language used with the candidate platform. Băsescu's site had as functions the supply of information, during the election campaign, the handling of relations and the consolidation of the party that supported him, as well as the promotion of the participative involvement.
The analysis of Traian Băsescu's speech demonstrated that he presented his political platform without supplying personal information about himself, although his language was constantly personalized (for example: "My vision") using the reflexive voice, 1st person, singular, alternating with the 1st person, plural, for the idea of the association with the people (for example: "we will do", "we will see", "we have"), highlighting the assumed intention to increase the user's commitment by personalizing the speech and substituting the personal identity with the public person of candidate Băsescu. To realize this attribution, the story of the campaign drifts from the 1st person, singular, "I", to the 1st person, plural "we", thus creating the slogan that counteracted the attack of the counter-candidates in the form: "Them with them, and us with you". This strategy creates an interaction of the type user to user, defined as parasocial interaction, where "the greatest people are considered as part of the circle of someone's colleagues, establishing and consolidating the link between user and candidate" (McMillan, 2002: 214). Traian Băsescu's charisma was magnified by a powerful personalization of the campaign, as one of the Romanian politicians who admirably alternated the trenchant attitude with the emotional vector.

Certainly, the site focuses on its purpose of offering information to the visitors and connecting with other supporters, by posting video clips of the campaign moments, as well as television. Băsescu, on managing his campaign site, offered the supporters images and materials to post on their own blogs, but without sending to sites that they couldn't control or without offering link to other sites and blogs. Despite the high risk of causing himself image prejudices by generating contents to the visitors, Băsescu's staff has maintained the permissiveness of comments made by the participants on the forum discussions.

Despite the risks of allowing the users to generate content, the participation has been realized by including interactive characteristics on the websites. Through language and speech, the candidate has demonstrated a campaign style with an ascending participative form. The type of participation has shown direct links with the interactivity levels, suggesting that the interactivity is just as linked to politics as personality.

The absence of the registration compulsiveness on the site has offered the possibility of the uncontrolled symmetrical communication, lacking asymmetrical communication, lacking links, hyperlinks, and addresses of the web pages posted by the visitors.

Even for the elements for which was perceived the highest interactivity, there was a delay between the users' posts and the display of the messages. Despite the technical permissiveness, the dialog was sometimes minimal and circumstantial, and the communication alternated between dialog and monologue.
The section with the highest level of interactivity was the forum, where the receiver posted the feedback so that the direction of communication was qualified as \textit{three-way}, as the users weren't able to post comments, answering to questions posted by the organizers, candidate or other users, thus allowing for a development of a multiple-way communication of the dialog type.

The speech analysis demonstrated that the discussions were fragmented, and the interventions were incoherent. There were no interactivity expectations for certain sections of the site, although several interactive characteristics could have been included in a biographical section, for example. However, this study offers but a summary image of a user's experience on a certain site and mainly focuses on the most populated sections.

The most interactive elements of the site were the forum and the Video and Live sections, creating a perceived interactivity, influencing the level of involvement, the trust, the users' satisfaction and the general attitude towards the site \url{www.basescu.ro}. It is a higher level of perceived interactivity by comparison with "the brochure type of sites", nevertheless most of the elements were monologue-specific, \textit{one to many} type of communication. In any case, the visitor public was generating content by way of the forum, thus raising the degree of interactivity.

In the document-user evaluation, although the technological characteristics of the site are visibly improved, the campaign site was mostly used to offer information and to mobilize the supporters.

In conclusion, the site \url{www.basescu.ro} has used the interactive functions of the Internet, although it only used a campaign site and a few messages posted on the Twitter microblogging platform. The visually convincing characteristics of the site haven't influenced the voting turn out and the decisional process. Băsescu's site demonstrates the amalgam of styles, which describes the speech as a promotional type of discourse. The higher interaction between the candidate and the large spectrum of citizens was probably considered difficult to manage in the context of an election campaign with an unforeseeable ending. The users were scarcely encouraged to develop a dialog, frequent, coherent, and direct, but they were attracted by the interview with Zoso on the eve of the elections and by the live transmissions that he realized on the site. The interactivity requires a shift of the campaigns' perspective with respect to the use of the Internet to create a dialog, as well as the participation or the mobilization of the electorate.

Mircea Geoană's election site had a more elaborated structure than Traian Băsescu's, on a much more complex and dynamic platform, that, besides the voice of the candidate,
allowed to generate content from users, posts and comments of the visitors with a political orientation pro or con. Mircea Geoană's slogan was “Together we will win!”, declaring: “I'm candidate for presidency of Romania because I want us to find together the way of this country towards a better life. To once again become a society united around our national values - Christian family, honest work, and solidarity among people” (www.mirceageoana.ro).

Although using a simple graphic, Mircea Geoană's campaign site, influenced by his American advisers, had an integrated structure of the other online media: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube – “Mircea Geoană in the social networks – which made direct references to the social networks he was connected to.

The start page of the site offers coherence and unity, structuring its elements in this manner: news flow, debates of the subjects of the momentum, promotion of Mircea Geoană, the man, and his book.

Mircea Geoană recommends himself as a presidency candidate with an assumed responsibility to use the advantages of the Internet and the social sites in the election campaign. In the campaign there were used the multimedia instruments, thus providing coherence to the start page design, the candidate's message, the used language, and the election platform. His campaign site was used to supply information on the candidate's participation in radio-televised broadcasts, political and cultural events, the political agenda established for Mircea Geoană. Moreover, the site also made references to his blog, where he periodically posted personal notes regarding the campaign, as well as the ideas he supported with respect to the party, education, or even annotations presenting him as a simple person going to a jazz festival and other cultural events.

Unlike Traian Băsescu, Mircea Geoană has provided information on himself, as a politician, as well as human, presenting the basic elements of his cursus honorum with biographical data that also included family life.

The integrated platform of the campaign site has allowed for a permanent dialog of the candidate with the potential voters, allowing the users to post comments, but the interactivity wasn't always symmetrical and prompt. Although he was considered an innovator, in the American style, of his 2009 election campaign, for adopting elements of modernity like the new media platform, the preference of the visiting public was for the respect of the traditional principles.

In the approach of the two way communication, the control of the messages worked, as it appears from the content analysis of the comments on the campaign subjects. Periodically, the candidate Mircea Geoană intervenes in the online dialog, but he lacks the
consistency and rapidity of the response. His interventions are scattered once in a while to create the impression of interactivity. Furthermore, he directly asked the visitors to turn out for the vote, in order to avoid the absenteeism and the lack of commitments manifested at the Euro-parliamentary elections in June 2008.

The site included interactive characteristics through the personality of his speech and the invitation towards the user to keep an eye on the events and the efforts organized by the candidate and his campaign team, the focus in his speeches fell on the "we", giving a collective meaning to the entire campaign. He lacked the spontaneity of language, although his efforts to prepare were considerable. The interactivity of the site and his accounts on the social sites is characterized by the presence of the encouragement technical characteristics, formal or declarative, of the reciprocal dialog. He offered e-mail links, materials that could be downloaded and open access to view the site and the posting of messages, allowing for an uncontrolled communication. The communication from user to user, with elements of interactivity wasn't used consequently, although there are answers to the visitors' posts.

The site [http://www.mirceageoana.ro/dezbateri](http://www.mirceageoana.ro/dezbateri) offered a statistical management of all the architectural elements by presenting the news, the article, the subject, the date, the number of comments, the number of views, and a thematic indexing on the blog.

The start page displayed snippets of the news section, the title of the article posted on the blog, submitting the election agenda to the users' attention and allowing them to generate content by comments, thus resulting in a three-way communication.

The multimedia elements, through photo, video and audio materials, gave the illusion of an even greater interactivity, contrasting with many elements of the one to many communication style.

Mircea Geoană adopted the Internet and its interactive functions in his election campaign strategy, function that are visible by the RSS and share buttons in disseminating information, attracting new visitors and new sympathizers.

Mircea Geoană's campaign strategy consisting in using the online communication means, after the Barack Obama model, according to his American congeniality, was to attract young people by involvement and participation to the ballot, as this target public was unwilling and politically detached.

**Crin Antonescu** has preceded his election campaign with another site [www.spunesitu.ro](http://www.spunesitu.ro), different from the official one, [http://www.crinantonescu.ro](http://www.crinantonescu.ro), with a simple, yet successful, design. Crin Antonescu exploited the site's aptness to raise funds, an
implicit function of official sites in election campaign in most of the Western European and North American states.

The campaign team has capitalized ideas from the deployment of Barack Obama's online campaign, designing a website with the new integrated communication means, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr. The purpose of the site used in the election campaign has promoted the image of the candidate to the presidency, using an active platform to encourage the communication of online messages. Each section of the site offers not only the possibility to post a comment, but also a reply, and even send messages on one of the social sites, marked in a pretty obvious way, even several times on a page, which made it generate considerable content from the users.

An innovative element of the site is the use of widgets (blog widget; creating a badge and choosing the right colour - blue, white, yellow; animated banners). The campaign site was functional, visited by the constituents, an aspect quantifiable by comments and registered displays.

Crin Antonescu promoted the basic ideas of his election offer by all the electronic elements of the site, provided information on his political agenda, on himself by means of the CRIN button (Who is Crin, Crin's Story), offered multimedia documents, but lacked the type of communication user to user by the fact that he didn't answer constituent's questions. At the same time, Antonescu's site used the voices of his sympathizers to engage the users, thus creating a sense of community and impact on the interactivity.

The site www.crinantonescu.ro was equally used for dialog and exchange of information, but also for the promotion of video recordings during the campaign. His online presence covers all the standard rules in the matter, but he doesn't stand out in any of them. He's the first one to have obtained an official LinkedIn account, a site for socialization and communication for people with different professions. His message to create a union based on "good sense" does not correspond to the digital media, an elitist, individualistic and polarized media in this election period.

Although he has blogroll, we don't find on the candidate's blog links to online organizations and supporting persons. The two-way communication worked, creating the appearance of a great interactivity. The presence highly represented by the social sites integrated in his official campaign site has generated a flow of interactive information, messages from user to user, downloads of multimedia materials by the surfers, the moderator role of the candidate on his own site, although the absence of his answers is a negative characteristic, they may define the direction of communication as a three way one, even if at
the lowest levels. The interventions by comments of the site's visitors are included in the autonomous content category. Symmetrical, conversational communication was for most of the time in the form of dialogs.

He was the candidate who the best understood the role of using the Internet in the election campaign by the participation and mobilization of the constituents, even if he didn't fully used its function to create a dialog.

The best online election campaign, according to the assessment of the specialists in the local and the international media, was the campaign of Remus Cernea, the candidate of the Green Party, for which he also received an award (Toreanik, 2009). His political programme consisted in ten commitments assumed in the "Green Platform", and his slogan was “Think bold”.

His site's design is based on an inspired combination of tones of green in the spirit of the political body he represents. The same palette is associated on the other social sites he's present on, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Hi5. His campaign site's architecture is extremely comprehensible, easily accessible and attractive. It's the site of a person who offers an alternative to the lack of commitments and the political inertia in Romania of 2009, and who proposes to attract an electorate that is politically detached. Remus Cernea' website has the technical characteristics necessary for the public interactivity, facilitating a three way communication.

The language used by the candidate is totally uninhibited, with a clear message and convincing with respect to the content and form. It's a language addressed to young people, incensing to dialog, conversation and involvement in the candidate's project. It's an online voice representing the ones absent from the political arena, trained, connected to the realities of contemporary Romania, but without drive in the political life.

The site was built in September 2009 and also contains a forum of the supporters, press releases and a photo gallery. It was considered the most visited political site in Romania, according to Trafic.Ro, in November 2009, it counted 56,702 unique visitors (www.remuscernea.ro).

The start page mentions and at the same time offers links to he supporting sites and references to the accounts of the socializing sites. It is notable that he has 3000 members on Facebook, and his blog counts 9000 unique visitors per day (Toreanik, 2009). He is the candidate that stated that “The Internet is one of the most transparent channels by which a candidate may promote itself” (Toreanik, 2009).
It was a campaign site that encouraged the interactivity between the candidate and the users, the potential voters, by posting comments and video materials that they themselves could upload on the site. It was a structured site, used for the supply of information, for the phases of the election campaigns, for the generation of resources, for maintaining relations and consolidating the green party, and for the promotion of participation of the civil society.

The candidate has offered information about himself and his political objectives, has announced, on the official site and on the other social sites, this political agenda during the campaign, and also had the largest number of posts on Twitter during the campaign, posted on Youtube his interventions in the audio-visual media and, very importantly, he gained sympathizers in the virtual environment by asking people to get involved. His message is neither diffuse, nor predominant, but it is the message generating dialog, without being blatant, which is visible on the discussion forum to which any user had access.

He promoted, through the articles on the site and the language of the discussion he encouraged, a clean election campaign without resorting to the attacks of the digital guerrilla, offering an online dialog platform, exchanges of information and election clips, from his team and the visitors.

Remus Cernea offers, as well as Crin Antonescu, the possibility to obtaining financing from supporters for the election campaign by way of the new media.

The official campaign site offered a space to the user to upload their comments and supporting materials thus promoting the participation and the interactivity. It represents a model of site for the type of communication from user to user, with a significant frequency of promptness of responses from the site's holder, and the three way direction of communication was permanently ascending (for example, the number of fans on Facebook and followers on Twitter, with the same increasing tendency, has reached the number of one million views in January 2011 (www.remuscernea.ro).

The site language, content analysis and architecture have influenced the level of trust and involvement, with proofs in this sense, on the one hand, the expressed satisfaction of the users, and on the other hand, the unanimous appraisals of the analysts toward the online performance of the candidate Remus Cernea. The site has constantly benefited from the webmasters' counselling by offering all the facilities characteristic to the domain, including the creation of statistics and newsletters.

For the 2009 presidential campaign, the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania (Uniunea Democrată a Maghiarilor din România - UDMR) representative was Kelemen Hunor. His slogan, “Kelemen Hunor calls things by name!”, well chosen, clear and with a
vast addressability to voters of all professions and ages, was posted on the start page of his official campaign site. [http://www.kelemenhunor.ro](http://www.kelemenhunor.ro), bilingual site, Romanian - Magyar.

Before his election campaign, Kelemen Hunor launched on his site the interactive contest with prizes for the best election poster and message, the winner being the one obtaining the vote from the site's users.

The form of Kelemen Hunor's site is limited with respect to the interactivity, with an obvious control exercised by the candidate. It's probable that the possibility to post nationalistic messages, contrary to the candidate's purpose to promote his image in the presidential race, determined this strategy to narrow the site's communicational platform. The comments to the candidate's post were very few, 8 respectively, to the only article published by the candidate on his blog during the campaign as a matter of fact.

The campaign site also integrates the blog and the social networks Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Yahoo Messenger, Flickr, on which Kelemen Hunor owns accounts. At the same time, the News section has RSS. It's the only site to have made available the voting procedure to his constituents. The interactive map shows the candidate's itinerary around the country with the caravan "Your voice matters!". His political agenda, under the title "Choose the future!", is accessible from the start page. The photo and multimedia gallery promote the candidate and the man Kelemen Hunor by means of election clips, photos and audio-video materials from moments of the campaign.

The blog was only an extension of the official site, not being exploited with respect to interactivity. The reason for the absence of posts from the candidate on the blog was presented as "exclusively my task, and because of my very busy schedule I effectively didn't have any physical time to sit down in front of the computer to write" ([www.kelemenhunor.ro](http://www.kelemenhunor.ro)), is in total contradiction with the implicit purpose of the site and the blog.

The language used by the candidate expressed the necessary data to form a perception on his identity, by biographical elements and the political and ideological platform. The mere accidental presence of the users' comments made that interactivity work only in one way, and the receiver's control, according to the figure, be extremely low. The site's characteristics determined the monologue type of communication, offering a flow of information from the candidate to the potential voters, a passive public respectively. Only the voice of the candidate predominates. Despite the well realized image of the site, it lacks the clear justification of the online campaign, without a feedback and content generated by the site's visitors.
The function of the site to provide information on himself and his political platform, as well as on the actions of the actual election campaign, was the main objective. The message was the assumption of commitments by the candidate towards the constituents.

Kelemen Hunor has joined his counter-candidates by his appeal to the visitors to vote. In the absence of a platform for the exchange of information and interactivity, the election campaign was the backbone of the site by means of election clips, directed messages, posts on the social sites, and so on. By the "Get involved" section, Kelemen Hunor invites the user to watch the events and the efforts organized by the candidate and his team, but without interrelating on the site. Therefore, with respect to the interactivity assessment, the site didn't reach its objective, and the direction of communication stayed only at the first level, excluding the symmetrical communication from user to user, although the speech was unitary and coherent. The level of involvement of the constituents, the target group of the candidate, respectively the Magyar community, was visible in the results of the candidate Kelemen Hunor at the elections, but invisible on the site. Because of the lack of comments from the users, the candidate's site was the type of multimedia brochure site. Surprisingly, after the success of the involvement of the site's users on posting 86 election posters and messages, as well as the designation of the best for the first participation, Kelemen Hunor resigned the idea of online interaction with the potential constituents in his election pool. Therefore, although the interactivity technological characteristics of the site were present numerous, visually convincing, the online communication remained a desideratum ignored in the campaign.

**Conclusions**

Thus, after the analysis of the five candidates to the presidency of Romania, the results are:

**Table no. 1 - the online interactivity of the official campaign site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Email contact</th>
<th>Social networks</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>RSS</th>
<th>Donations - volunteering</th>
<th>Answers to comments</th>
<th>Forum</th>
<th>Biography</th>
<th>Links</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traian Băsescu</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dan Mircea Geoană</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
According to Manuel Castells' theoretical observation (Castells, 2001), the Internet influences our daily life in equal measure with the profound implications on the society in general, and on the communication in particular. More precisely, with respect to the political communication and the election campaigns, the Internet changes the traditional structure. Therefore, the comparative analysis showed that the Internet takes on a more and more important role within the election campaigns, and it eventually demonstrates the transition to an interactive and multi-directional communication, taking place on the candidates' sites, as well as on the mass-media, during the elections, in order to adapt to the social evolutions in using the Internet.

B. Villalba's studies (Villalba, 2003) regarding the political mediation offered by the Web highlighted the fact that most of the candidates and the parties only used the Internet in order to transfer information towards the website visitors, in a unidirectional communication.

Politicians are making efforts and turn to modern techniques of communication for a more efficient communication with the electorate, according to Cavanagh's statement “Political campaign has always adopted and adapted to the latest tools of persuasion” (Kavanagh, 1995: 176).

The Romanian mentality is mostly tributary to the communication face to face, declarative political platforms and election promises, adopting an attitude of resignation towards a pre-established situation. In this sense, we notice that there are no profound analyses regarding the influence on the electorate of the online political message, nationally or locally. The existent considerations are circumstantial, without the support of a substantial sociological research.

Almost all the analyzed parties, and implicitly all the participants have watched, from the first line, the transmission of information on the World Wide Web to the detriment of the
participative character, care that could have augmented the political and operative interest among the Internet users.

Besides the already standardized elements, like feedback, contact e-mail or newsgroups, parties, have, rarely taken these measures to enhance direct interaction. Thus, only two of the candidates' websites offered discussions on the forums especially created for the constituents, while the other candidates preferred to intervene symptomatically to the comments of the posters without much involvement. The surfer were therefore too little encouraged to develop a dialog, coherent and direct, the interactivity wasn't always symmetrical and prompt, the control of the messages was in place, and the candidates lacked consistency and rapidity of response.

Instead, the Romanian parties and their candidates to the presidential elections were mainly focused on offering online information on their history, their biography, their organization and position regarding the current political issues, by means of the newsletters, campaign documents, press releases and news about the party, while the general requests, even in the case of the political system in Romania or an election procedure, were lacking. The only one to have posted the election procedure on his campaign site was Kelemen Hunor.

The interactive functions were used, but not in excess.

Besides the participation, the functions of mobilization and integration/creation of networks also, proved to be of accessory interest for the sites of the Romanian politicians. Only the candidate of the Liberal National Party and the one of the Green Party tried and succeeded, in a slight measure, to raise funds for their election campaign by using online requests to the public. The Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania, in the person of Kelemen Hunor, and the Democrat Social Party, in the person of Mircea Geoană, tried to attract volunteers only by means of a few words posted in the section specifically created.

In the campaign for the 2009 presidential elections, the most active with respect to online communication was the Green Party candidate, Remus Cernea. The online interactivity is in contradiction with the public visibility, where the candidate Remus Cernea is almost inexistent. All the candidates ranked in the election race before him were public figure very well known in Romania, but Cernea was the one to have maintained himself at the top of the political section with respect to the service of monitoring the Internet traffic Trafic.ro. It was a campaign site that encouraged the interactivity between the candidate and the users, the potential voters, by posting comments and video materials that they themselves could upload on the site. It is a model of site for the type of dialog from user to user and one
to many with a significant frequency of promptness of responses from the site's holder, and the three way direction of communication was permanently ascending.

The sites don't respect any characteristics of a certain typology, as they blend integrative characteristics from all the models, sites benefiting from la latest innovations of architecture, structure and design in the domain.
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