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PR TECHNOLOGIES IN ELECTION PROCESSES AND ITS LEGAL BASIS

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Abstract: This article examines PR (public relations) in elections in detail. The study of international experience is especially important, since it is based on the opinions and scientific works of foreign scholars. The use of PR technologies in elections is becoming increasingly popular: both governments and political parties use various strategies to influence public opinion. Social media platforms play an important role in campaigning, allowing candidates to reach a wider audience and spread their message. However, there are concerns about government control over the online space and the possibility of disinformation campaigns to manipulate voters. It can be said that the fact that this article presents specific examples and that each of the opinions has a scientific basis enhances the scientific nature of the article.

Keywords: Elections, Democracy, PR, Congress, political parties

Elections are the cornerstone of a democratic society and serve as the primary mechanism for expressing the will of citizens and distributing political power. Over the years, technological advances have had a significant impact on electoral processes. This has changed the way elections are conducted and managed in society.

In electoral processes, public relations (PR) refers to the strategic communication practices used by political actors to influence public opinion and voter behavior. This includes a range of activities such as campaign messaging, media relations, and voter communication initiatives. Theorists Lilleker and Negrine define electoral PR as “the use of communication strategies and techniques to influence the perception of a political actor within the political process”¹. The scope of PR in the electoral context has expanded significantly with the development of communication technologies and has become an important component of modern political campaigns.

The historical evolution of public relations in politics and elections can be traced back to the early twentieth century. The use of propaganda techniques during World War I laid the foundation for modern PR practice, as Edward Bernays described in detail². In general, the use of PR techniques in election campaigns “In the 1930s, a significant change occurred in the way politicians communicated with voters through the Roosevelt administration’s radio broadcasts,” wrote M. Kern³.

It can be said that the mood of voters as a mass can determine the basis of democratic processes. With the advent of television, attempts to use it in the political arena have become more frequent. In particular, as an example, we can cite the influence of television debates on the presidential elections in the USA in 1960. Back in 2003, N. Druckman, who

carefully studied the elections in the USA, noted the great influence of the "television image" in the political arena⁴.

The transition to the digital age has brought about the most revolutionary changes in election PR. The integration of digital tools and social media platforms has not only expanded the reach of political campaigns, but also created new challenges and complexities. The changing landscape of electoral PR requires a comprehensive understanding of its historical context and contemporary practice. By exploring the shift from traditional media to digital platforms, this chapter aims to provide insights into the strategic use of PR to influence election outcomes and the changing dynamics of political communication.

The landscape of campaign public relations has changed dramatically with the advent of new technologies. These technologies, including social media platforms, data analytics, and targeted advertising, have become indispensable tools in the modern political campaign.

Social media has become a powerful channel for political communication, providing unprecedented opportunities for political candidates and parties to directly engage with voters. According to research by Sarah Enli and Ellie Skogerbo, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have not only increased the reach of political messages, but have also created a more interactive and personalized form of political communication.⁵

Social media played a major role in the 2018 Brazilian presidential election. Right-wing candidate Jair Bolsonaro effectively used social media platforms to communicate with voters and promote his campaign. Bolsonaro's team used platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to share campaign messages, disseminate information, and communicate directly with voters. WhatsApp in particular played an important role as a communication tool in Brazil, where it is widely used. The use of social media allowed Bolsonaro to bypass traditional media channels, deliver his message directly to the public, and mobilize all information into the political arena. This digital campaign strategy played a key role in his victory. Bolsonaro's success in the 2018 Brazilian presidential election demonstrated the growing influence of social media in shaping political outcomes around the world.

Data analytics plays a critical role in modern election PR strategies. The ability to collect, analyze, and use large amounts of data allows political campaigns to more effectively tailor their messages and identify potential supporters. A prime example of this is the Obama re-election campaign in 2012, which used sophisticated data analytics to target voters and optimize the campaign. This data-driven approach to campaign management has since become standard practice in political campaigns.⁶

"Targeted advertising" is another aspect of PR technologies that has changed the electoral process. It involves delivering personalized political advertising to specific segments of the electorate based on their demographic, psychographic, and behavioral data. As scholars such as M. Magin, N. Podschuweit, J. Habler, and W. Russman have noted, targeted advertising allows political campaigns to communicate more effectively with their target audiences⁷. The use of these technologies in electoral processes is not without its

challenges. Concerns about privacy, data security, and the potential for disinformation have sparked debates about the need for regulation and the ethical principles of using digital tools in political campaigns. However, the effectiveness of these PR technologies in engaging and influencing voters still makes them an indispensable tool in modern electoral strategies.

The idea that social media platforms sell personal data directly to politicians is not entirely true. However, social media platforms use targeted advertising algorithms that allow advertisers, including political campaigns, to reach specific demographics based on user interests, behavior, and other data. Social media platforms generally do not sell information about individual users in a direct, transactional way. Instead, advertisers, including political campaigns, will be able to create targeted ads and specify the characteristics of the audience they want to reach. The social media platform's algorithm will then display those ads to users who meet the specified criteria. This process is usually automated and does not involve directly selling the user's personal information. But in either case, politicians will be able to buy the exposed information for a large sum of money and then promote their campaigns to voters as if they were advertising them.

The question of whether public relations (PR) technologies are influencing the voting process is certainly relevant. The integration of technology communications with public relations and the selection process is profoundly changing the dynamics of strategic selection campaigns and election processes. And the transformation is primarily due to the development of the digital platform, which is revolutionizing both the possibility of political communication and the ability to "target" the election to specific preferences. The shift in election campaign strategies is evident in the move to data-driven approaches. Political campaigns now rely significantly on analytics to assess public opinion, track voter behavior, and optimize communication strategies. These PR methods are creating a new era of precision and personalization of political communication, while reinforcing the move away from traditional, broadly strategic election campaigns.

The effectiveness of public relations technologies in influencing voting behavior and public opinion has been the subject of extensive research. Research has shown that targeted digital PR technologies can significantly influence voter opinion and election outcomes. For example, a 2012 study by scholars Robert Bond, Christopher Fariss, Jason Jones, Adam Kramer, Cameron Marlow, Jamie Settle, and James Fowler found that social media messages influence the political expression of millions of people, having a direct impact on information search and actual voting behavior⁸. Similarly, Joshua Kalla and David Broockman found that personalized text messages can effectively mobilize voters, demonstrating the power of direct and personalized communication in modern election strategies⁹. They based their findings on their experience in 49 areas.

The impact of PR technologies on electoral processes is not entirely positive. The ethical implications of such technologies also pose risks, including the potential for privacy invasion and the spread of disinformation. This may exaggerate the role of algorithms and automated social media accounts in manipulating public opinion, highlighting the

challenges of ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes in the digital age. Modern PR technologies, in turn, can empower candidates in elections and harm voters.

While public relations technologies have provided political campaigns with new tools to gain voter trust and influence, they have also created complex ethical and regulatory challenges. The continued evolution of these technologies and their impact on electoral processes require ongoing analysis and adaptation of political strategies and legal frameworks.

The legal and ethical framework for the use of public relations technologies in electoral processes should be regulated. The main reason for this is that the introduction of advanced public relations technologies into electoral processes raises a number of legal and ethical issues that need to be carefully considered. The legal frameworks governing the use of these technologies often do not keep pace with the rapid development of digital tools, creating a complex regulatory environment.

One of the main legal issues is the regulation of privacy and data security. The extensive collection and analysis of voter data during political campaigns raises serious privacy concerns. For example, Article 31 of the new version of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan states that “everyone has the right to maintain the confidentiality of their correspondence, telephone conversations, postal, electronic and other messages that they do not have the right to disclose.”¹⁰ The European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), introduced in 2018, serves as an important legal basis in this regard, setting strict data protection standards and imposing severe penalties for violations.¹¹

Ethical issues are also important, especially in the context of disinformation and manipulation of public opinion. The use of micro targeting techniques in political advertising can lead to the creation of “echo chambers” or “filter bubbles,” where voters are only presented with information that reinforces their existing beliefs. So what are echo chambers and filter bubbles? These are terms used to describe phenomena related to how people consume information, especially on social media and online platforms, with the context in which thoughts are expressed; and “filter bubble” refers to personalized information ecosystems created by algorithms on online platforms that tailor content to people based on their past behavior, preferences, and online activities.

This phenomenon, according to E. Pariser, threatens the democratic process by limiting the impact of different points of view and facilitating the spread of false information¹². In addition, the ethical implications of using automated bots and algorithms in a political campaign can be an extremely dangerous decision if political manipulation occurs. The balance between the use of PR technologies in electoral processes and the protection of legal and ethical standards is a complex issue. Governments and regulators are tasked with developing policies aimed not only at protecting individual rights but also at maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. This requires a deep understanding of the capabilities of these technologies and their potential impact on society.

While public relations (PR) technologies offer powerful tools for political campaigns, their use must be carefully regulated to address legal and ethical concerns. Ongoing

dialogue between policymakers, technologists, and civil society is critical to shaping a regulatory environment that supports innovation and protects democratic values.

Jurisdictions have different legal and regulatory approaches to public relations technology. The legal and regulatory frameworks governing the use of public relations technology in electoral processes vary significantly across jurisdictions, and impact the ways in which these technologies are used. In the European Union, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) takes a comprehensive approach to privacy and data protection. The GDPR's strict rules on data processing and consent will have a profound impact on political campaigns that use personal data for targeting and communications purposes. For example, the regulation requires explicit consent for data processing, which significantly limits the scope of inappropriate political communication. In contrast, the United States takes a more decentralized approach, with the use of PR technology subject to state-specific laws and federal guidelines. The lack of a single data protection law in the United States "not only allows for greater flexibility in the use of data, it also creates a set of rules by which political campaigns must operate," writes McGeeveran¹³.

In jurisdictions with strict data protection laws, political campaigns will need to develop more transparent and consent-based communications strategies. This often results in a greater focus on organic engagement on social media and traditional forms of political campaigning, rather than targeted digital advertising. In contrast, in countries with less stringent rules, we may see campaigns more aggressively using data analytics and microtargeting to tailor messages and influence specific segments of the electorate.

Here are a few examples:

Example One: A prime example of aggressive data mining and microtargeting in political campaigns is Cambridge Analytica and its involvement in the 2016 US presidential election. It's worth noting that Cambridge Analytica, while mired in controversy and facing legal consequences, is often cited as an example of how data mining can be used to influence specific segments of the electorate. Cambridge Analytica, a UK-based political consultancy, investigated how Facebook collected and used users' personal data without their consent. The firm said it used data mining and psychological profiling to "target" voters with personalized political messages. They have been involved in campaigns including the 2016 US presidential election and the Brexit referendum in the UK.

Second example: Christopher Wylie, in his book *Mindf*ck: Cambridge Analytica and the Plot to Break America*, provides evidence of how the firm used data analysis and microtargeting to influence voters during the US Congressional elections.

Importantly, the ethical and legal issues surrounding Cambridge Analytica's actions have sparked broader debates about data privacy, digital manipulation, and the regulation of political campaigns in the digital age. The incident has drawn increased attention and calls for transparency in the use of data in a political context.

Furthermore, the regulatory approach to combating disinformation and transparency in online political advertising varies. Some countries, such as Sweden, emphasize self-regulation and accountability of platforms and campaigns, while others, such as Singapore,

are determined to combat fake news that could affect legitimate political discourse enabled by law. In short, a comparative analysis of different legal frameworks shows that there is no single approach to governing PR technologies in electoral processes. The diversity of legal measures reflects different cultural and political values, and each approach has unique implications for the conduct of political campaigns and the integrity of electoral processes.

It is appropriate to consider the challenges and future trends of integrating public relations technologies into electoral processes. The integration of public relations technologies into electoral processes, although transformative, presents a number of challenges that need to be addressed. In addition, forecasting future trends and potential changes in this area is crucial to adapting and preparing for the changing landscape of political communication. Currently, a number of challenges and obstacles remain in this area.

It can be said, that they consist of:

- **Privacy and data security:** One of the most important issues is ensuring the privacy and security of data collected through PR technologies. The Cambridge Analytica scandal highlights the vulnerability and potential for misuse of voter data.
- **Disinformation and manipulation:** The rise of fake news and online disinformation campaigns pose serious challenges to fair and transparent electoral processes. The spread of disinformation can significantly influence voter opinion and undermine trust in democratic institutions.
- **Digital divide.** The digital divide, which refers to the gap between digital technologies and people with access to the Internet and those without access to the Internet, can lead to unequal access to political information and participation in digital electoral processes. This inequality raises concerns about the inclusiveness and representativeness of digital election campaigns.

Future trends should be considered separately. They consist of:

- ✚ **Increased regulation and oversight:** The response to these concerns could be to increase regulation and oversight of PR technologies in electoral processes. This could include more comprehensive data protection laws, stricter rules on online political advertising, and measures to combat disinformation.
- ✚ **Advances in personalization techniques:** The use of artificial intelligence and machine learning in political campaigns is expected to grow, leading to more sophisticated personalization techniques for targeting voters and optimizing messages.
- ✚ **Focus on ethical issues:** As political parties and candidates are required to adhere to higher standards of transparency and accountability when using PR techniques, more attention can be paid to ethical campaign practices.
- ✚ **Integration of new technologies:** The future may see the integration of new technologies such as block chain for secure voting processes, virtual reality

(VR) for interactive campaigns, and advanced analytics to analyze voter sentiment in real time.

While public relations (PR) technologies offer innovative ways to engage voters and campaign, they also pose significant challenges that need to be addressed. The future of these technologies in electoral processes may be determined by a combination of regulation, technological advances, and ethical considerations.

To understand the real-world implications of using PR technologies in electoral processes, it is useful to look at specific examples where these technologies have played a critical role in shaping election outcomes.

Case Study 1 focused on the 2008 US presidential election. The 2008 US presidential election is often cited as a watershed moment in the use of digital media for political campaigns. Barack Obama's campaign effectively leveraged the power of social media and data analytics to engage and mobilize supporters from a wider electorate, particularly young voters. McFarland analyzed how the Obama team used platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (now X) not only to spread propaganda but also to raise funds and coordinate volunteers, setting a new standard in digital campaigns¹⁴.

According to scholars such as A.Hendricks and E.Denton, this approach became the foundation not only for disseminating information from digital platforms but also for developing a sense of community and activism among supporters¹⁵. The campaign's ability to provide space for voters to communicate, interact, engage, and participate on these platforms was instrumental in building a strong base of grassroots support. Obama's team used sophisticated data collection techniques to segment the electorate and tailor messages to specific demographic groups. As another American scholar, D. Kreiss, noted, this is one of the first large-scale applications of such technology in a political campaign, allowing for unprecedented personalization and targeting in electoral politics¹⁶. This data-driven approach allowed the campaign to efficiently allocate resources, personalize communication with voters, and maximize the impact of messages.

Case Study 2 Another important case study I have chosen is the Brexit referendum. The 2016 Brexit referendum used public relations technology to influence public opinion. The political campaign behind Brexit effectively used targeted social media advertising and data analytics to reach and influence specific segments of the electorate. D. Cummings, one of the organizers of the referendum, described in detail the strategy of using targeted digital advertising to spread their message and the important role it played in the success of the campaign¹⁷.

Lessons learned and implications are the most important aspect of this question. These case studies provide several key lessons:

- 1) **The power of social media is mobilization:** Social media platforms can be a powerful tool for political mobilization and activism, especially among young people.

- 2) **Data Analytics for Targeted Campaigning:** Effective use of data analytics for targeted messaging can have a significant impact on voter behavior and decision making.
- 3) **The need for ethical and legal frameworks:** These examples also highlight the need for strong ethical and legal frameworks to regulate the use of digital technologies in electoral processes and ensure fairness and transparency.

In conclusion, the integration of public relations technologies into electoral processes has demonstrated great potential and serious challenges. While these technologies offer new opportunities for political engagement and voter mobilization, they also raise important questions about data privacy, disinformation, and ethical campaigning. A balance must be maintained between the use of technological advances and the provision of robust legal and ethical safeguards for political dialogue. This balance is essential not only for the integrity of electoral processes, but also for maintaining public trust in democratic institutions.

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