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Criteria of the efficiency of symbolic attributes of power in the World Wide Web

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Abstract

The work is devoted to the thesis that modern communication channels can be used for the increase of political influence due to the fact that the Internet has obviously been gaining power and is widely used and adopted. It supports the idea that no politician or public figure can hope to exist efficiently without using available Internet resources and maintaining personal sites or blogs for the sake of popularity and awareness. The criteria for the efficiency of symbolic attributes of power in the Internet are considered and selected for the analysis of different kinds of Internet resources used by politicians and political organizations in Tomsk and Tomsk region to. The work reveals how efficiently the personal or public blogs are used and whether they serve the real tool for the communication between the power and the public or they are basically formal and simply exist as a fashionable trend. It is shown that Internet channels are important and can increase efficiency of the communication between the authorities and citizens.

1. Introduction

The volume of information flow, growing at an exponential rate, is recognized as a condition determining new configurations of political processes in the Internet. Modern communication channels significantly increase the possibility of the influence of power. Let's pay attention to the following quotation: "As the Internet becomes ubiquitous and broadly adopted, it promotes change at the heart of the social structure: in politics and in the distribution of power across society" (Bertola, 2010). This quotation underlines the importance of the Internet resources in the political sphere.

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However, political elites often use the Internet-resource as a channel of political communication with the main aim to increase the image component, rather than the initiation and development of interactive forms of communication. Simultaneously, attributes of this kind are formed. In fact, it becomes an illusion of guarantees of the government itself. In this sense these attributes can be described as symbolic. P. Bourdieu wrote that in order to change the world, it is necessary to change the ways in which it is formed (Shmatko, 1993). Symbolic attributes of power is an integral part of symbolic capital, mechanisms of which are directly related to the new Internet technologies. For example, a popular edition "THE NEW YORK TIMES" gives the following facts: "Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president. Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee," said Arianna Huffington, editor in chief of "The Huffington Post".…, and further: "One of the many ways that the election of Barack Obama as president has echoed that of John F. Kennedy is his use of a new medium that will forever change politics. For Mr. Kennedy, it was television. For Mr. Obama, it is the Internet".

The analysis of the Internet resources, used in politics, showed that the following can be considered as the symbolic attributes of power: Internet blog, Web-forum, personal blog and site - all these "organizational toys" often substitute real power and authority of the managers from the power. Traditional communication practices of "broadcasting information", "notification", etc.., which implies passive creation of awareness of individuals, despite the loud statements about the pursuit of dialogue with the people.

The analysis of the Internet resources of Tomsk network (Tonet) showed symbolic attributes of such kind can be divided into three groups:

- Official sites of authorities or officials. They use specific language and a peculiar, often even formally regulated procedure of communication with citizens.
- News sites with the ability to discuss news and forums. They are grouped together because they allow discussing an event in a particular context, i.e. they have similar functions. They have no restrictions on the vocabulary and grammar (or they are easily bypassed) by virtue of the breadth of the audience.
- Personal websites and blogs (possibly collective) of active politicians and public figures. Communication style here is freer than the official sites have. Sometimes it is quite informal.

Such a division is rather arbitrary, because, for example, Tomsk governor, though having a website that shows signs of being "personal", does not really take part in its maintenance and updating.

On the other hand, the Legislative Duma of Tomsk region has not only the official site, but also more "informal" representations on Twitter and Facebook.

In 2013, the analysis of Internet resources of the authorities of the Tomsk region was conducted as a part of students' practical training (students of the direction "Public Relations"). The main problem which the authors faced was the selection of performance criteria for the comparison of different online resources of power. In the study, we focused on the following theses, reflected in a number of papers: "Best Political websites are selected by judges who review the entered websites using the seven criteria below: Design, Ease of use, Copywriting, Interactivity, Use of technology, Innovation" (Hellweg, 2011). The analysis of the data of the resources showed that these criteria do not adequately reflect the dynamics of Internet resources used by the authorities. Therefore, we select our own performance criteria, based on the works listed above:

- Informality. The official site and the author not limiting themselves to the description of their own initiatives and ideas, showing themselves from a "human" side - family, hobbies, and recreation receive 1 point and 10 points respectively.
- Operational efficiency. Speed of actual reaction to external events and news event. Point 1 is given to the resource, which is more than full of the information in the spirit of "news from the fields" and practically does not contain the content really demanded by citizens.

- Regularity**.** Indicator is linked to operational efficiency, but shows how often the resource is updated and the changes which are not related to the urgency.
- Feedback**.** The quality of feedback from readers or visitors. This includes technical convenience of forms for appeals, and the opportunity to get a real solution to your problem instead of the standard formal reply (efficiency of address). Expert evaluation.
- Competence. The presence (or absence) of specialists on the discussed issues in the group of authors or visitors of the resource. Expert evaluation. So, discussion among amateurs receives one point, and discussion among experts on the subject receives 10 points.
- Significance**.** It indicates how the news event given in the resource affects the formation of information picture of the day. One point is given in case of absolute indifference by the media, independent journalists and the public to the appeared message (post, discussion, posted information). 10 points are given in case, when news gets into news feeds in the nearest future, journalists begin to work with this information and the resource is included in the regular "view blog" of radio and television stations.
- Efficiency**.** The ability of the resource not only to set the problem, but also to find a solution and to resolve a problem. Point 1 is given if the whole debate comes down to a kind of "kitchen discussion" with no actual result; the problem is discussed and given up. 10 points are given when precedents were repeatedly set, people received help.
- Website traffic**.** Popularity of the resource. The average number of visits and comments to records.

For the assessment of each resource a number of indicators were selected to assess each informational site on a scale from 1 to 10. These indicators will be specific for each of the resource groups. Namely:

- For official sites – 1) regularity, 2) operational efficiency and 3) feedback.
- For news sites and blogs – 1) competence, 2) significance, 3) efficiency.
- For personal sites and blogs – 1) informality, 2) website traffic, 3) efficiency.

We will select Internet sites, best-known in Tomsk (according to the rating systems) and look at them from the point of view of the proposed indicators.

2. Official sites of authorities

1. Tomsk administration: http://tomsk.gov.ru/ru/organy-vlasti/mestnoe-samoupravlenie/administratsiya-goroda-tomska. The website is updated regularly. News and press-releases of the separate events are published daily. It is interesting for journalists for the frequent invitations to the events. Design has not been updated for many years. Responds to the actual questions in the town by posting comments of the first persons of the city quickly enough. Quality of feedback is average, there is a high proportion of purely formal responses to the complaints of the citizens.

2. Duma of Tomsk: http://duma.admin.tomsk.ru. The site is updated daily. The quality of news is high, but the relevance is significantly lower in comparison with the colleagues from the town administration. Fresh attractive design. Feedback is technically implemented, but in fact is almost no demanded. This can be judged from the fact that there are no published answers to the questions from the public (it is assumed that the latter are answered personally). Judging by the section "Overview of addresses", about 30 requests are received through the site in a quarter.

3. Legislative Duma of Tomsk region: http://duma.tomsk.ru/, and also Duma in Twitter: http://twitter.com/duma_tomsk_ru; Duma in Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/duma.tomsk.ru. Duma is conducts qualitative work with citizens in the information space. Besides the usual site, communication is done through the forums and social networks. Press service of the Duma publishes their own monthly review of the internet-forums, which improves the quality of the communication process. Duma's own forum (which is

discussed below) increases the rate of relevance. Feedback is provided by the presence of contacts of every delegate. The project "43rd delegate is the public opinion", implemented here, allows every resident of the region to express an opinion on a topical issue. The results of the surveys conducted here will necessarily be heard by the delegates.

4. Administration of Tomsk region: http://tomsk.gov.ru/. The site is updated regularly, but infrequently. The urgency of the news is quite low. Most often, the resource is used as a telephone or a resource guide. Feedback is implemented only in the presence of telephones and e-mails of officials. The design has not been updated for a long time, the site structure is irrational, and the information placed is often outdated.

5. Administration of Seversk: http://seversknet.ru/. The site is not bad, but is realized on a "free engine", which limits its possibilities. The news appears every working day: it includes news of Seversk as well as the review of legislation and announcements of town events, reports of traffic police and so on. Hence, the relevance of the content is relatively high. However, the lack of convenient communication tools for the officials (other than phone and sometimes e-mail) significantly reduces the quality of the feedback from the public.

6. Duma of Seversk: http://duma-seversk.ru/. Website of Seversk Duma is a lot like the site of administration - the same design, the use of free engine. It does not add users to the resource and reduces its relevance and usefulness for solving town problems. The site is updated, news is mainly formal, though there are topical ones (problems of shareholders). Each published news implies its discussion by visitors, but in most cases the come-back counter shows zero.

Table 1. Analysis of Internet sites according to the rating systems

Resource	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Total
1	8	6	5	19
2	6	4	3	13
3	7	7	7	21
4	5	5	5	15
5	8	7	3	18
6	5	5	3	13

3. News sites and forums

1. Tomsk forums: http://forum.tomsk.ru, section "Politics". Resource is the most visited and the highest rated forum of Tomsk. Visitors of the forum react to news events within a few minutes, the most important of which cause heated discussion. Several thousand visits and dozens of new topics in a day suggest the involvement of the most active Internet audience in the region in participation in the discussions. This is the reason of the relatively low average level of professional competence of the participants. On the other hand, the forum is constantly monitored by journalists and officials of local governments, which increases the level of significance in the news picture of the day and in the effectiveness of the solution of many problems of citizens.

2. News agency TV-2: http://www.tv2.tomsk.ru/. Discussion of separate pieces of news. Website of television company TV-2 is popular because of the importance of the media in the region. A wide range of visitors reduces the overall level of competence, but the status of the media provides high significance of the information reason and efficiency in resolving of many situations. This is partly due to the fact that officials are obliged to respond to press reports.

3. News. Town portal "In Tomsk": http://news.vtomske.ru/. Discussion of separate pieces of news. Quite popular independent news site registered as electronic media. Scientists, officials, experts often appear in discussions of resonance news. The site publishes Delegates and cultural figures are often published on the site. All this increases the level of competence and affects other indicators.

Table 2. Analysis of news Internet-sites

Resource	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Total
1	4	7	6	17
2	6	4	3	13
3	4	8	8	20

4. Personal sites and blogs of acting politicians and public figures

1. Personal site of the Governor Sergey Zhvachkin (http://gubernator.tomsk.ru/). It is fully serviced by the press service of the Tomsk region administration, and presents a collection of press releases. There is no mechanism for a feedback. The element of informality is provided by section about hobbies and interests, and photos "without a tie". We can emphasize that in the Western tradition, which is now followed by Russian politicians, it is necessary for the candidate to be registered in at least a few top-networks: «While the first rule is to not overextend yourself into too many networks, that doesn't excuse any candidate from not having a presence on at least a few of the top networks. We believe it's absolutely necessary to have presences on at least: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr» (Schossow, 2013).

2. Blog of G. Nemtseva, head of the Tomsk Region Department of the Political Party "Just Russia": http://nemceva.livejournal.com/. It is not conducted regularly, exists due to "fashion". New entries appear mainly on holidays or in connection with high-profile political events. Low attendance and comment rate. Latest updates appeared in August 2012.

3. Blog of V. Kress, a member of the Federation Council of the Tomsk region: http://kress.tomsk.ru/. It is fully maintained by the assistant. Consists of reprints of party press releases and holiday greetings. It does not collect comments and is not very popular. (Latest updates appear in November 2011).

4. Blog of Ch. Akataev: https://www.facebook.com/chingis.akataev?fref=ts. Blog of deputy governor for social policy is conducted regularly and thoroughly. It is updated from time to time.

5. Useless bites: http://thebytes.ru/. In fact it is a collective blog maintained by several authors. It states that anyone can place a post here, in case it is something worthwhile. This idea is clearly demonstrated in following link: "Every citizen, regardless of their economic circumstances, should be able to share the benefits of the Information Age - including better communications, greater participation, electronic life-long learning, and e-commerce" (http://www.partnerships.org.uk/cyber/manifest.htm). The main author and creator by the nickname tLS - Vadim Andrianov, a programmer, is often characterized as "Tomsk Navalny" Most blog posts quickly give coverage to town problems, are competently discussed, but do not always provide the opportunity to resolve the problem. The blog constantly gets in surveys and digests.

6. Gorod.Tomsk.Ru: http://gorod.tomsk.ru/ Collective blog, dozens of authors. Social and political issues are uncommon. Therefore the site does not fall into the thematic monitoring of authorities and the media.

Table 3. Analysis of the Internet-sites of Tomsk politicians

Resource	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Total
1	2	2	3	7
2	8	6	8	22
3	5	3	5	13
4	2	1	2	5
5	8	5	7	20
6	3	3	3	9

5. Conclusions

Summarizing, we can draw the following conclusions. New attributes of power are associated with the possibilities of World Wide Web. Active participation of the Information Society in the communication process depends largely on the site, which organized the discussion. "Every conceivable group of like-minded people on the planet is theoretically able to connect and communicate with their fellow-travellers. Furthermore, the global nature of the Internet means that for minimal outlay political activists now have the whole world as a potential audience for their propaganda via web sites, e-mail and discussion groups". However, the form of the resource (the official website, forum or blog), the regularity of its updates, and the quality of materials (including their competence) have the important influence. This in turn affects the attendance and comment rate which allow the site to get into the office and journalistic reviews, and thus expand the audience of discussion due to the fact that "With information systems and technology both operationally and strategically critical for organizations today, the governance of information technology has become a key issue and concern" (Joe Peppard, 2005). The blog author's personality, opportunity for informal communication with them and existing results of such communication has a significant impact on the activity of citizens. The above is a confirmation of the following thesis "All communication media, not just the Internet-enabled kind, are inherently political. Printing presses, radio, television, each altered the processes of governance and power, for better and worse, by shifting control over the power to inform and argue" (Rheingold, 1999). In this context, we can talk about the symbolic conversion of the attributes of power. Traditional peculiarity of special symbols of individual status (crown, scepter, suite and so on) is transformed into a symbolic attributes directly related to the communicative practices through which the potential of symbolic power is realized.

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