

Szymon MAŃKOWSKI

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6092-2292>

Political Communication on Social Media During Poland's 2020 Presidential Campaign

Abstract: Proper political communication is one of the most crucial areas of activity for political actors and organizations. The processes of political communication have been constantly evolving for years, however, the greatest dynamics is associated with the emergence of the Internet and, in particular, some of the most important channels of communication belonging to the *Web 2.0*, i.e. social media, which enable the performance of all strategic functions of political communication. The article is an attempt to present political communication in social networks on the basis of the recent 2020 presidential campaign in Poland.

Key words: social media, political communication, elections, Internet, presidential campaign

Introduction

The main purpose of the analysis presented in the article is to provide an insight into the political communication on social media of the 2020 presidential candidates. The subjects of the research analyzed in this article are the candidates who were promoted to the second round of elections, namely Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski. Due to the limited volume of the article, it was decided to narrow the research period to the last ten days of the first round of the 2020 presidential campaign in Poland. The study analyzed the activity of the above candidates on social networks used for a long time in political communication such as: Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, as well as on a portal used relatively recently, namely Instagram. The social media activity of Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski is defined as the subject of the study, taking into account the total number of posts, reactions, comments and shares under the posts, which approximate the extent with which the candidates reached their audiences and their involvement in the published content. The potential purpose of the content published by the candidates was also analyzed, dividing it into coverage of election meetings, promotion of their person, presentations of the election program, press conferences and media activities, publications aimed at counter-candidates, distinguishing between positive and negative ones, and other content not strictly related to the election campaign, i.e. sharing their private lives or providing information on other current responsibilities, etc.

The type of publication is an element that the study aims to give an idea of the tools that the above politicians use in the processes of political communication on social media. The study took into account content including text, text and photo, text and video, text and graphics, broadcasting and publishing online events. It also examined whether the aforementioned candidates interacted directly with voters, understood in this case

as replying in comments or responding to emerging content. The research method used in the analysis is a comparative content analysis of the candidates' profiles. The main research question for this article was: What were the main goals of Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski in the process of political communication on social media during the 2020 presidential campaign in Poland? The following were taken as additional research questions: which social media was dominant during the 2020 presidential campaign in Poland for Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski, and do Rafał Trzaskowski and Andrzej Duda interact directly with their social media audiences and how does social media translate into the effectiveness of their activities in the electoral process? Preliminary analysis of the empirical material allowed us to formulate the main hypothesis: The most important goal of Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski in the process of political communication on social media during the 2020 presidential campaign in Poland was to promote their person. The statements were taken as specific hypotheses: Facebook was the dominant social media during the 2020 presidential campaign in Poland. Rafał Trzaskowski and Andrzej Duda do not interact directly with their audiences, and the activity of politicians in social media still plays a minor role in terms of the effectiveness of activities within the electoral process.

Political communication in social media

Political communication has been one of the most relevant areas of political science research for many years. The classic concepts of Harold Lasswell and Paul Lazarsfeld are used to characterize the above phenomenon. Of particular importance is the assumption made by both authors about the persuasive nature of political communication (Kolczyński, 2005, p. 225). In the context of contemporary activities of politicians, including those conducted in the Internet space, it is worth noting the two main types of persuasive communication, namely propaganda and political marketing. Today's political communication processes are combined with processes of mediatization, marketization and professionalization, which affect such issues as the choice of strategies and tactics of political communicators (Lilleker, 2014, p. 19).

According to *Digital's* latest January 2023 report, 90% of Poles have regular access to the Internet. Which, relative to the previous year alone, represents a 3% increase (Sroka, 2023). One of the most important channels of communication belonging to *WEB 2.0*, social media, is also playing an increasingly important role, being used by all age groups and demographics of web users regardless of their level of Internet usage. The *digital* report cited above states that social media users accounted for 67% of the country's population in 2023 (Sroka, 2023). Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison define social networking as follows "a service on the Internet that consists of giving users the opportunity to create their profiles, which are public, and to show on these profiles their connections with other users" (Boyd, Ellison, 2007, p. 11). The role of social media in the process of political communication, on the other hand, is related to Jurgen Habermas' concept of the structural transformation of the public sphere. The researcher argued that the public sphere is that part of social life in which members of the community, as a result of public debates, meetings or deliberations held on issues of public importance, together create a strategy

that allows, consequently, to develop a solution (Brol, Czetwertyński, 2015, p. 34). Social media are different from traditional media. Among the characteristics that can be distinguished in their context, Gladwell and Skirky mention reach – social media, like traditional media, have the ability to reach numerous audiences. However, traditional media use a typical organizational framework for the production and dissemination of information, while social media tend to be more decentralized and less hierarchical. Access – the means of production in the case of traditional media are most often owned by the government or private owners. Social media are widely available to numerous audiences free of charge or in some cases by charging a subscription fee. Usage – content creation in the case of traditional media most often requires specialized skills and appropriate education. In contrast, it is much simpler to publish messages on social media, for which the ability to use new technologies is sufficient. Immediacy – in the case of social media the message reaches the audience immediately, additionally providing a space for immediate response, in the case of traditional media the process of broadcasting the message can be much longer. Persistence – a message that appears in traditional media once shared cannot be changed.¹ Messages appearing on social media can be changed instantly both through editing as well as the ability to add comments to the text (Gladwell, Shirky, 2011). The use of social media makes it possible to perform all strategic functions of political communication, such as providing current information to the audience, interacting with the community, creating new events and also mobilizing supporters of a specific political option to promote content. Noting the above and the increasing role of social media in particular among young voters and those just entering the age of active participation in elections, it is worth noting whether and how the use of social media translates into the electoral outcome of a particular political option.

Comparative analysis of content (2020)

Table 1

Number of publications

Number of publications	Andrzej Duda	Rafal Trzaskowski
Facebook	116	105
Twitter	25	112
Instagram	28	23
Youtube	23	15

Source: Own elaboration based on the conducted study.

In terms of the number of published content for Andrzej Duda, Facebook is the dominant social network, while Rafal Trzaskowski, perhaps surprisingly, showed more activity on Twitter than on Facebook. Andrzej Duda’s activity on this platform was several times lower. There was little interest from the candidates on Instagram, but it should be remembered that this medium was only just being discovered at the time in terms of political communication, quite unexpectedly, the least publications of the candidates

¹ It is not possible to change the content of a live television broadcast or an article that appeared in print.

appeared on the social network Youtube, this may be due to the low diversity of content that this platform offers.²

Table 2

Average number of reactions/comments/shares (2020)

Number of reactions	Andrzej Duda	Rafal Trzaskowski
Facebook	10,600	17,300
Twitter	2,631	2,002
Instagram	7,200	26,100
Youtube	–	–
Number of comments	Andrzej Duda	Rafal Trzaskowski
Facebook	2,000	655
Twitter	539	186
Instagram	800	634
Youtube	–	–
Number of shares	Andrzej Duda	Rafal Trzaskowski
Facebook	5,800	855
Twitter	–	–
Instagram	–	–
Youtube	–	–

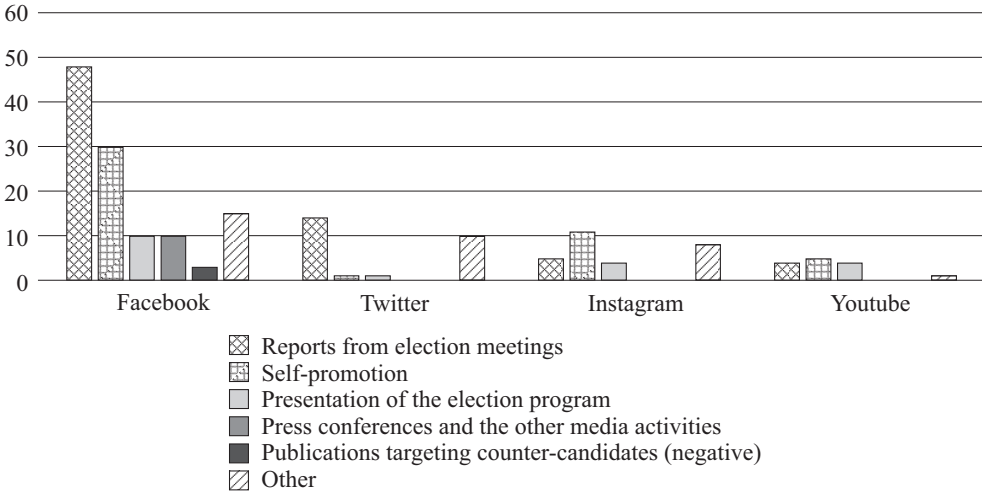
Source: Own elaboration based on the conducted study.

Andrzej Duda received the highest number of reactions on the social networking site Facebook, while Rafal Trzaskowski on Instagram. Even though Facebook was the reach-dominant medium for Andrzej Duda, Rafal Trzaskowski still received a higher number of responses on it. It should be noted, however, that Trzaskowski's posts not directly related to the election campaign but to his private life and publications about his activities as Mayor of the Capital City of Warsaw were very popular. In terms of Facebook comments and shares, Andrzej Duda received greater reach, which may suggest that his audience was more engaged with the content of the president seeking re-election. As mentioned above, Instagram was the reach-dominant medium for Rafal Trzaskowski, on which the candidate representing Civic Platform gained a significant advantage in terms of number of reactions over Andrzej Duda. On the other hand, more comments appeared under Andrzej Duda's content, which again may suggest that it was the electorate of the incumbent president who was more engaged in the 2020 election campaign on social media. On Instagram, it was not possible to measure the number of shared content. On Twitter, in terms of reach both in terms of reactions and the number of comments, Andrzej Duda fared better, which may be surprising if one considers the number of posts appearing previously analyzed. Finally, Rafał Trzaskowski recorded a significant advantage. Youtube turned out to be a social medium where it was not possible to conduct a comparative analysis due to the fact that Andrzej Duda had comments disabled on his profile, which also resulted in the inability to verify the comments appearing there. Rafał Trzaskowski, on the other hand, did not refer on his profile to the election campaign, only to his activities as Mayor of the Capital City of Warsaw. It is worth mentioning that Rafal Trzaskowski's Youtube profile was created precisely during the 2020 presidential campaign.

² Youtube allows only video content to be published.

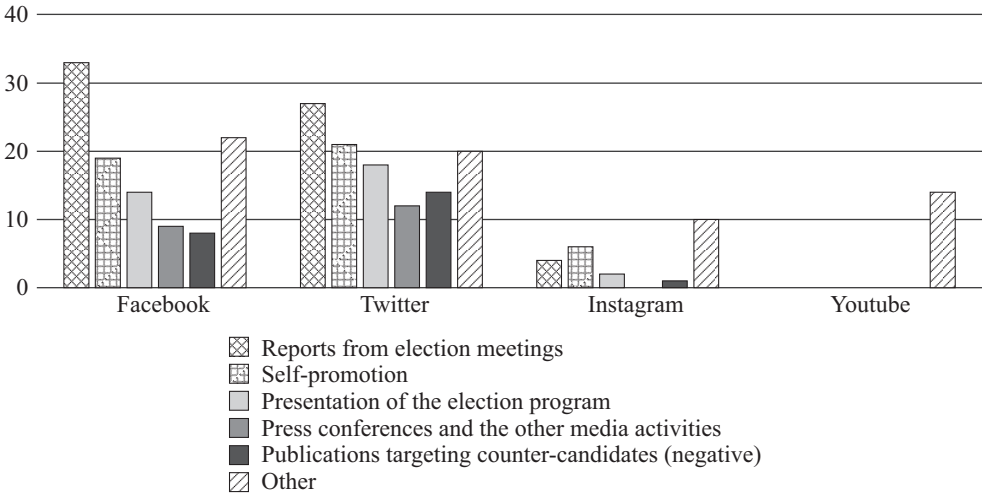
Purpose of content published by candidates

Graph 1. Purpose of content – Andrzej Duda



Source: Own elaboration based on the conducted study.

Graph 2. Purpose of content – Rafal Trzaskowski



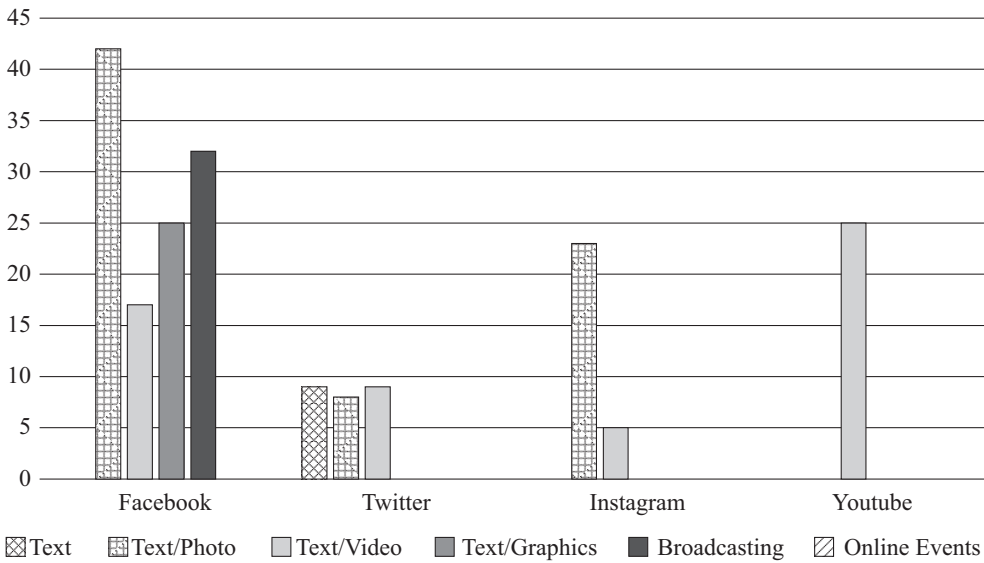
Source: Own elaboration based on the conducted study.

Andrzej Duda’s publications on Facebook most often concerned coverage of meetings with voters, promotion of his person and other activities not directly related to the electoral campaign, while in the case of posts aimed at counter-candidates they were exclusively negative. The purposes of Rafal Trzaskowski’s publications on Facebook were distributed very similarly numerically. Reports of election meetings and, to a greater extent than for Andrzej Duda, other activities not directly related to the elec-

tion campaign dominated. This, in Trzaskowski’s case, can be justified by reporting on current local government activities. The President of the Capital City of Warsaw kept his Twitter account in almost the same way, in Andrzej Duda’s case this social media was mainly used to report on election meetings and other activities not directly related to the presidential campaign. In the case of the incumbent President of Poland, the results look slightly different on Instagram, where publications promoting the person of Andrzej Duda dominated. The situation is different in the case of Rafal Trzaskowski’s profile in this social media, where publications unrelated to the election campaign prevailed. Trzaskowski often used Instagram to show his private life, posting photos of his family. On the social network Youtube, Andrzej Duda most often published content promoting himself, while Rafał Trzaskowski published content unrelated to the election campaign, primarily showing the candidate’s local government activities at the time.

Type of publication

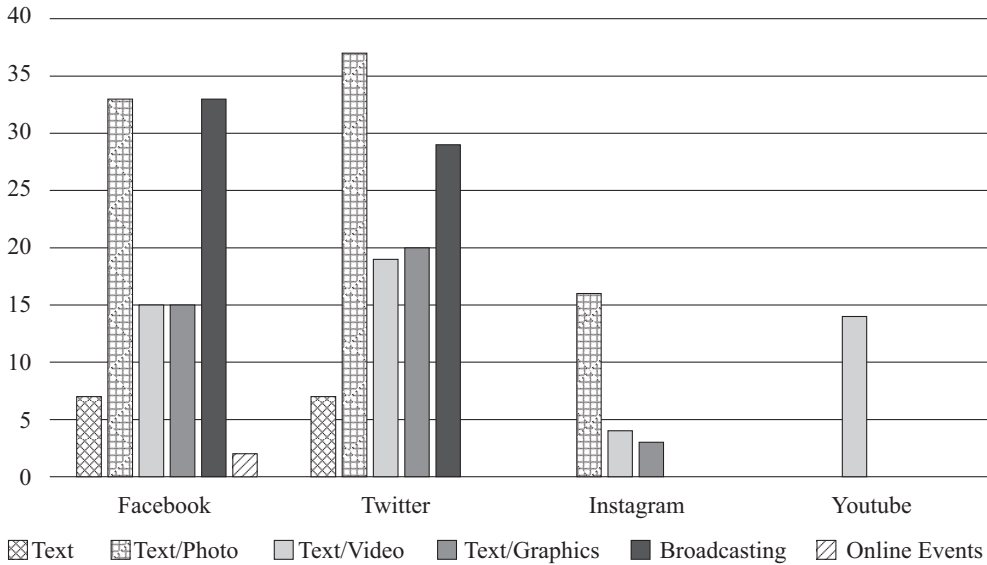
Graph 3. Type of publication – Andrzej Duda



Source: Own elaboration based on the conducted study.

As described in the introduction, the tools used by the candidates were divided into those containing text, text and photo, text and video, text and graphics, broadcast and online events. On Andrzej Duda’s Facebook profile, posts containing text and a photo can be seen most often. A large percentage are also broadcasts, primarily of election meetings. In Rafal Trzaskowski’s case, broadcasts make up an even larger percentage of the total number of publications, as they equal text/photo posts. On the Twitter account of the President of the Capital City of Warsaw, text/photo publications can be observed most often, while with Andrzej Duda it is difficult to clearly indicate the

Graph 4. Type of publication – Rafal Trzaskowski



Source: Own elaboration based on the conducted study.

dominant type of posts. On Instagram, due to the nature of the portal, photo and video content dominates, which the surveyed politicians supplement with short text. The analysis of this social medium may look extremely interesting during the upcoming elections, due to the increasing popularity of Instagram in political communication and the new forms of video communication that occur on it, namely *reels*. On Youtube, due to the nature of this medium, there was only video content, complemented by a short description.

Conclusion

Each successive election campaign shows the growing importance of social media in political communication processes. During Poland’s 2020 presidential campaign, Rafal Trzaskowski and Andrzej Duda were most likely to use Facebook and Twitter, which have long been used in political communication, but Rafal Trzaskowski’s very high reach on Instagram shows that the diversity of social media used by politicians is likely to increase. The upcoming election campaigns promise to be interesting in terms of the direction in which Poland’s major politicians and election committees will go. On the one hand, will the candidates try to keep older voters, who are more likely to use Facebook and Twitter, or will they target younger voters, more likely to use Instagram and Tik-Tok, which is increasingly popular among the youngest voters in particular.

The research conducted largely confirmed the hypotheses. Self-promotion indeed turned out to be extremely important in the political communication of the analyzed

candidates, but publications reporting on election meetings were equally popular. In the case of Rafał Trzaskowski, there were additionally numerous contents on Instagram and Youtube on topics not directly related to the election campaign, only showing the candidate's family life and his reporting on his duties as Mayor of the Capital City of Warsaw. It is difficult to say whether R. Trzaskowski in this way lost to A. Duda or not, as it was this content that was most popular with his audience. One may wonder if this was a deliberate move to bring the candidate's more private face to potential voters as well. Relatively little attention was paid by the candidates to their counter-candidates, but if there was content devoted to them, at least during the last 10 days of the first round of the election campaign studied, it was exclusively negative. According to the specific hypothesis, the analyzed candidates did not interact directly with their audiences. Such is meant by establishing a dialogue in comments, which is, in a way, the essence of social media. On the one hand, this is understandable given the risk of an unfortunate statement, but on the other hand, proper and effective interaction could bring in potential new voters. The study did not provide a clear answer in the context of another specific hypothesis defining Facebook as the dominant medium in the political communication of the analyzed candidates, while such a hypothesis in relation to Andrzej Duda is correct, in the case of Rafał Trzaskowski it is not, this candidate published the most posts in the analyzed period on Twitter, while he enjoyed the greatest engagement among his audience on Instagram. Nor can the statement be confirmed unequivocally: Social media translates into effective actions in the electoral process. The actions taken by politicians during the electoral process are so varied that it is difficult to say whether this one factor translated into the final result. The analyzed candidates did not record any activities in their social media activities during the period under study that could dramatically change their final electoral result. However, it is quite likely that in the following years social media will have an increasing impact on the final result, and politicians will be required to constantly follow trends. In the case of the analyzed cases, namely A. Duda and R. Trzaskowski in 2020, it must be admitted that political communication on social media was conducted in an extremely professional manner. In particular, on Facebook, and in the case of Rafał Trzaskowski also on Twitter. The analyzed politicians took advantage of all the opportunities that social media provided.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Koncepcja): Szymon Mańkowski

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Szymon Mańkowski

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Szymon Mańkowski

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Szymon Mańkowski

Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Szymon Mańkowski

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Komunikacja polityczna w mediach społecznościowych w trakcie kampanii prezydenckiej w Polsce w 2020 roku

Streszczenie

Właściwa komunikacja polityczna jest jednym z najistotniejszych obszarów działań dla podmiotów i organizacji politycznych. Procesy komunikacji politycznej od lat ulegają ciągłej ewolucji, jednak największa dynamika wiąże się z powstaniem Internetu, a w szczególności jednych z najważniejszych kanałów przekazu należących do sieci *Web 2.0*, czyli mediów społecznościowych, które umożliwiają wykonywanie wszelkich strategicznych funkcji komunikowania politycznego. Artykuł jest próbą przedstawienia komunikacji politycznej w serwisach społecznościowych. Na podstawie ostatniej kampanii prezydenckiej w Polsce w 2020 roku.

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe, komunikacja polityczna, wybory, Internet, kampania prezydencka

