

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: CASE STUDY OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS, 2009

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This research focuses on the role of the Internet in the electoral campaign for the EP elections of 2009. It includes the following topics: the use of the Internet for marketing purposes; the communication between citizens and political actors; the interdependency of the Internet and other mass media; and advertising modes used through Internet. The theoretical framework is based on the connection of 5 nodal points: democracy, citizenship, public sphere, ICTs and political communication. The concept of citizenship has been changing over time, especially in the context of transnational 'state' or globalised media. Cammaerts and Van Audenhove (2005) suggest questioning the link between a nation state and citizenship and give a new perspective of citizenship as a notion that goes beyond the nation state. Pateman refers to it as a 'more flexible form of citizenship' (Pateman, 1998, p. 56). In the context of globalisation and new ICTs, Castells (1997, 2008) redefined the notion of a public sphere, which is now constructed around global communication networks. Foot (2005) proposes the new concept of 'electoral websphere' that gives more opportunities to run a political campaign than a classic one. Lusoli points out a reconnection of citizens by this new media and the re-establishment of a 'voter-candidate link' (Lusoli, 2005). Under the influence of Web 2.0, many politicians have created their blogs and social network sites' profiles. This PhD project is based on the case study of the European parliament elections in 2009 and has 2 parts: 1. The analysis of the European Parliament online political campaign for widening participation on its official website, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube 2. The analysis of Facebook and YouTube material and blogs, posted by parties/candidates taken into consideration (four countries, three political groups from the EP and one pan-European party). The methods of qualitative and quantitative content analysis have been used, incorporated in Critical Discourse Analysis and Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis. Included are the analyses and critical valorisation of texts and audio-visual material published online, concerning political marketing, electoral documents and marketing products of electoral competitors in Europe. For a broader perspective, the comparative method is used, in order to compare campaigns of different political actors and different countries inside the EU.