Chapter 13
A Winding Road from "Likes" to Votes

The Role of Social Media in the 2013 Czech Presidential Elections

Václav Štětka, Alena Macková, and Marta Fialová

Abstract   This case study analyzes the use of social media in the campaign for the historically first direct presidential elections in the Czech Republic in January 2013. Following a brief outline of the political context and outcomes of the elections, this study explores and compares the strategies of campaign communication of the nine presidential candidates on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. Apart from mapping the dynamics of the campaign and the responsiveness of Facebook and Twitter users, we have used content analysis to examine basic formal characteristics of over 1,000 messages posted on Facebook in the course of the campaign by the candidates and their teams. Additionally, this chapter also examines more closely the place of social media in the campaign of Karel Schwarzenberg, the eventual runner-up of the presidential race, whose team distanced all other candidates in both the extent as the level of sophistication of communication carried via the social networking sites. Overall, the presidential elections have revealed both the potential as well as limits of electoral mobilization through social networks, while at the same time it has demonstrated the continuing importance of more traditional means of campaign communication in the Czech Republic.

Keywords   Social media • Election campaign • Czech Republic • Online mobilization • Political marketing

V. Štětka (✉)
Charles University in Prague, Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Prague, Czech Republic
e-mail: stetka@fsv.cuni.cz

A. Macková • M. Fialová
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

13.1   Introduction

The first direct presidential elections in the history of the Czech Republic were held in January 2013. 61 % of the electorate took part in the first round, which was nearly the same number as in the 2010 parliamentary elections (62.6 %). The direct elections not only broadened the range of acts by which the Czech citizens can influence politics and participate in public life, but they also brought a new challenge for the election campaign communication. The rise in the use of political marketing and the general shift in professionalization of political communication arrived in the Czech Republic a little later than in most Western European countries or in the U.S. A clear landmark in the development of election campaigns was the 2006 parliamentary elections, during which some Czech political parties resorted to PR agencies and began to develop a more long-term strategy in their communication (Matušková 2009). However, the direct presidential elections differed in many respects from parliamentary elections, and these differences were also reflected in the character of the campaign. First and foremost, these elections were focused on individual candidates instead of political parties. The second difference concerned the way of financing the campaign, with the candidates being obliged to transparent accounting and having the maximum size of the budget for their campaign determined by law. Last but not least, it was a political opportunity for a number of independent candidates, who were able to run for the presidential office without the support of a political party and often with limited resources for the campaign.

These novelties in the format of the elections, opening up new opportunities for campaign management, had naturally a significant impact on the transformation of campaign communication. As in the parliamentary elections, the presidential candidates tried to make use of the broad range of traditional media channels in order to address potential voters. The classical mass communication strategies were however also supplemented by online communication instruments and platforms, since a considerable part of the election campaign also took place on online social networking sites, very much for the first time in the Czech political history. In a sense, the 2013 presidential elections thus became a testing ground for the exploitation of this new type of communication media in political communication in the Czech Republic.

13.2   Theoretical Background

The rapid spread of the new media and communication technologies over the course of the last decade and their gradual adoption by political actors has significantly affected the character of public sphere in which democratic politics is played out, and has presented new opportunities and challenges for political communication. Especially with regards to election campaigns, the arrival of the social networking sites (SNS) and other Web 2.0 applications (see O'Reilly 2005) has enabled

political actors to directly approach, interact with, get feedback from and mobilize voters, bypassing thereby editorial control of the traditional news media organizations (Zittel 2004) and significantly cutting down on campaign costs (Gueorguieva 2008). Ever since the remarkable success of the 2008 Barack Obama campaign, one of the first ones to ever utilize social media (Lilleker and Jackson 2010; Fernandes et al. 2010; Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011), social networking sites have been increasingly used by the political parties as well as individual politicians and integrated into election campaigns across the Western world (Jungherr 2012; Strandberg 2013; Gibson 2013;). In Europe, several countries have recently experienced the phenomenon of "cyberparties" (Gibson 2013), the rise of new political parties or movements which have generated electoral support mainly or almost entirely from new media, including the Polish party Ruch Palikota (currently the most followed Polish party on Facebook), Slovak party Freedom and Solidarity (whose success in the 2010 elections was largely driven by its new media campaign) or the Pirate Party of Germany ("Piraten"), succeeding between 2009 and 2012 in several regional elections.

Apart from the already mentioned advantages, one of the main benefits of the use of SNSs in campaign communication is arguably their suitability for targeting specific voting groups (Strandberg 2013; Baumgartner and Morris 2010), and also the ability to start a viral campaign which can spread out to reach even those voters who are not SNS users (Greyes 2011). Summarizing the "direct" and "indirect" effects of social media on campaign communication, Kim Strandberg notes that:

> "On the one hand, it [the social media] serves as an affordable and versatile direct link to various types of voter segments, as well as an efficient fundraising and organizing tool.
>
> On the other hand, it could provide campaigns with added leverage through the traditional media and 'word-of-mouth' effects" (Strandberg 2013: 4).

The interactive nature of social media, while offering the politicians new ways of reaching and mobilizing the electorate, has at the same time opened space for more direct participation of citizens on the electoral process, and for their more active engagement in democratic politics in general (Kirk and Schill 2011; Effing et al. 2011). Even though the claims about the democratic potential of online technologies have frequently been made from the onset of the internet (Poster 1995; Norris 2001), which has been seen as a space for political participation that twenty-first century liberal democracies were sorely lacking, the explosion of social media in the recent years has rejuvenated these hopes, particularly with respect to the potential of mobilization of young people who are the most extensive users of social media (Junco 2013).

13.3   Aim and Methodology of the Study

While the role of social media in both political communication and participation of voters has been examined by an increasing number of nation-based case studies as well as cross-national comparative analyses across Europe (e.g. Elmer 2012; Larsson and Hallvard 2012, 2013; Gustafsson 2012; Jungherr 2012; Graham et al. 2013; Strandberg 2013), this research area has so far been rather neglected by an academic enquiry in the Czech Republic, arguably owing to the fact that new media of all sorts have been used in the previous Czech election campaigns only as a marginal tool (Macková et al. 2013). This chapter attempts to expand the rather sparse scholarship on the adoption of social networking sites in political communication and political marketing in the Czech Republic, and add to the ever growing body of international research on the use of social media in electoral marketing by means of a case study of the 2013 Czech presidential election campaign. The principal aim of this study, therefore, was to examine the extent of adoption of social networking sites by the nine presidential candidates, and compare their formal characteristics as well as their success in mobilizing social networks users. Given the novelty of the topic in the political context of the Czech Republic, the research was designed as descriptive, focusing on mapping of the main similarities and differences between individual candidates in their ways of use of the two particular social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter, during the campaign.

With around 3.8 million registered Czech user accounts, Facebook is by far the most popular social networking site in the Czech Republic, as indeed in many other countries around the world.[1] Twitter, which is widely popular network abroad, and increasingly more used for political communication, is much less widespread in the Czech Republic—in spring 2013 it had only about 150,000 users,[2] which resulted in the fact that its exploitation in the presidential campaign turned out to have been rather marginal when compared to Facebook. Therefore, we decided to monitor Twitter only for the basic features (dynamics of the number of tweets and followers), while for the exploration of communication on Facebook we also used content analysis, identifying selected formal characteristics of the posts (types of messages and candidates' statements).[3]

The data were gathered during the 51 days preceding the first round of the elections, resulting in a total of 1,197 unique contributions on Facebook[4] and

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[1] According to http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/czech-republic, retrieved 20 August 2013.

[2] According to Klaboseni.cz (http://www.klaboseni.cz), retrieved 12 March 2013.

[3] The formal characteristics of the posts on Facebook were coded by two coders; the intercoder reliability, calculated on a pilot sample of 100 posts, was between 0.89 and 0.97 (Cohen's kappa).

[4] The Facebook data for the first round of the elections come from the period between 23 November 2012 (official announcement of the candidates) and 12 January 2013 (the second day of the first round). For the second round, the data cover the period between 13 January 2013 and 26 January 2013. In both cases, the data were collected after midnight of the second election day.

607 on Twitter.[5] The second round followed after 2 weeks, during which the accounts of the two remaining candidates were monitored. The quantitative part of the analysis was supplemented by qualitative observations focusing on the establishment of other online groups and events related to the campaign, particularly in relation to the campaign of the eventual runner-up Karel Schwarzenberg, and also on the mutual resonance of the online and offline campaign communication.

13.4 The Course and Results of the Elections

Until 2013, the head of the state used to be elected indirectly, by the vote of the Parliament. Candidates for the elections used to be nominated by deputies (groups of representatives from the Upper or Lower Chamber of the Parliament). In direct elections, candidates could be proposed not only by members of Parliament, but also by citizens, once their application was endorsed by at least 10 senators (in the Upper House), 20 deputies (in the Lower House) or 50,000 citizens of the Czech Republic.[6] For these first direct presidential elections, 20 candidates applied in early November 2012 but more than half of them were excluded by the Ministry of Interior for not having met the requirement of collecting the necessary number of signatures.

In the end, the election contest included nine legally registered candidates. The MPs of the ruling Civic Democratic Party (ODS) endorsed the Vice Chairman of the Senate, Přemysl Sobotka. The coalition partner of ODS, the second strongest right-wing party in the country, TOP 09 (Tradition, Responsibility and Prosperity) nominated the Minister of Foreign Affairs and chairman of TOP 09, Karel Schwarzenberg. The Senator and Prague Council deputy Jiří Dienstbier (Czech Social Democratic Party) did gather a sufficient number of signatures from his fellow citizens but in the end entered the election on the basis of his nomination by 27 senators. The other candidates for the Czech presidency included the former Prime Minister and chairman of the Social Democrats, Miloš Zeman; the former Prime Minister and Vice-President of the European Bank for Development and Recovery Jan Fischer; the European Parliament member and ex-Minister of Health Zuzana Roithová (Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party); the ex-European Parliament member and chairperson of the Sovereignty Party Jana

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[5] The beginning of the data collection on Twitter was delayed by 3 days due to the ambiguity in the official accounts of the candidates (from 27 November 2012 to 12 January 2013, the second round from 13 to 26 January 2013).

[6] The direct election of the President was officially legislated by the Constitution act no. 71/2012. Additionally the procedural regulation no. 275/2102 was adopted, about the election of the president of the republic, which among other things defined the details of the proposal of candidates. Both acts became effective in October 2012, when the date of first round of the election (January 2013) was proclaimed by the chairman of the Senate.

Bobošíková; the former Senator Taťana Fischerová, as well as the composer and painter Vladimír Franz. The last candidate, differing from the rest not only in his ostentatious distancing from party politics but also in his alternative appearance—Franz is a devotee of body art and his body is 90 % tattooed—told the media that he decided to accept the candidature in response to the initiative born on Facebook.[7]
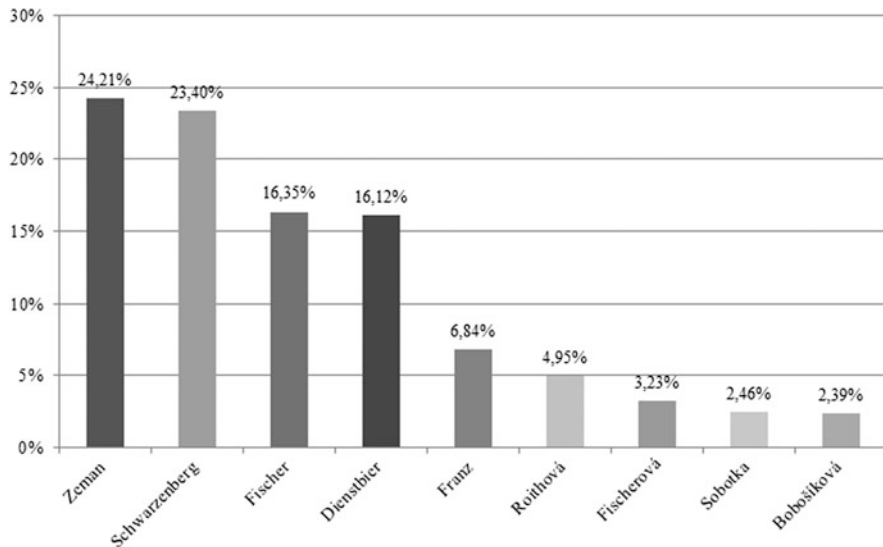
The interval between the official announcement of the confirmed candidates (23 November 2012) and the first round of elections (11 and 12 January 2013) did not leave much leeway for the efforts of the election teams and candidates' supporters. In the public service media, the Czech Television and the Czech Radio, the election campaign was officially opened as late as 26 December and terminated on 9 January 2013. In this period, each candidate was given space in these media for his or her presentation in the form of election spots. The nominees thus had little time left for the campaign. Moreover, this time included the Christmas holidays, which normally tend to considerably subdue political communication. This situation contributed to a sizable increase in the intensity of the campaign only in the last 2 weeks before the elections.

The biggest favorite in the pre-election polls had for a long time been Jan Fischer, who was overtaken only as late as by the end of December by Miloš Zeman, who in the end won the first round of the elections (see Graph 13.1). The second round was quite surprisingly not reached by the widely favored pair (Fischer and Dienstbier) but instead by the then-Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, a 73-year old aristocrat who spent most of his life in Austria and who, at the beginning of the campaign, was given minimal chance by the polling agencies.

Although the presidential campaign did not last very long, it greatly affected the Czech society and clearly split the public opinion. Especially around Schwarzenberg, a group of enthusiastic supporters became active, particularly (but not only) on social networking sites which played a major role in his campaign (as will be demonstrated further in this chapter). On the other hand, Zeman gathered supporters mainly through his appearances in pre-election television discussions and by exploitation of other, more traditional channels of communication, like outdoor billboards. In the end, not even the open support by the majority of social networks users and by the mostly right-wing press (with three main dailies explicitly endorsing the chairman of TOP 09) could help Karel Schwarzenberg to victory, and Miloš Zeman took the second round with a fairly decisive margin of nearly 10 %, having gained 2,717,405 votes (54.8 %).

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[7] See   http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jan/09/vladimir-franz-tattooed-czech-elections, retrieved 02 June 2013.

Graph 13.1 Results of the first round of the 2013 Czech presidential elections (% of votes). Source: Czech Statistical Office and authors

13.5   Presidential Elections on Social Networks: A Basic Overview

Aside from their own websites,[8] all candidates—with just one exception—used both Facebook and Twitter for online communication with the electorate. However, many of them established their online profiles only for the purposes of the presidential campaign, without having previously been users of social networking sites. Among the exceptions were Schwarzenberg (with already existing profiles on both Twitter and Facebook), Sobotka, Bobošíková, as well as Dienstbier, all of whom had managed their profiles or pages on Facebook in a more or less active way before the start of the presidential campaign. The remaining candidates were therefore slightly disadvantaged by the necessity of having to develop the base of their followers virtually "from scratch", a task arguably difficult to achieve within the limited period of the campaign, which was apparent especially on Twitter. As it is clear from the data (see Table 13.1), some of the candidates used Twitter in the campaign only marginally (often in the form of merely copying of their Facebook contributions)[9] or they gave up on using it completely.

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[8] Zuzana Roithová did not use Twitter in her election campaign.

[9] For example, Táňa Fischerová had these two channels interlinked, which explains the fact that she was nominally the most "active" candidate on Twitter, generating 304 tweets during the campaign period (more than 50 % of all of the candidates' tweets). The second highest number of tweets (which was however the highest number of *original* tweets) was posted by Karel

Table 13.1 The dynamics of the number of fans on Facebook and audience on Twitter in the campaign

Candidate	Number of Facebook fans			Number of followers on Twitter		
	23/11 2012	12/1 2013	Increase	27/11 2012	12/1 2013	Increase
Bobošíková	1,300	**1,955**	655	13	**59**	46
Dienstbier	1,560	**3,862**	2,302	172	**364**	192
Fischer	7,125	**10,226**	3,101	105	**130**	25
Fischerová	3,069	**7,749**	4,680	137	**214**	77
Franz	42,089	**65,723**	23,634	697	**780**	83
Roithová	1,186	**3,005**	1,819	–	–	–
Sobotka	5,526	**12,970**	7,444	555	**692**	137
Schwarzenberg	35,021	**95,726**	60,705	2,497	**5,550**	3,053
Zeman	4,915	**15,654**	10,739	26	**59**	33

Source: Authors

Another fact which made the use of Twitter in the campaign more challenging was the number of fake accounts which emerged during the campaign. While some of them were rather satirical (the most successful was the fake account of Karel Schwarzenberg, @schwarzenbergk),[10] others were more easily interchangeable with the official accounts launched by the candidates' teams. Communication on these accounts was usually less formal and therefore very popular. Of all the candidates, only Schwarzenberg succeeded in attracting a significant number of users on Twitter, as he managed to gather more than 8,000 followers by the second round of elections, a historically unique achievement on the Czech Twitter (and in particular among political profiles). At the same time, Schwarzenberg's team made a great effort adjusting the communication on this network to this specific communication environment.[11]

As already mentioned, the penetration of Twitter is rather underdeveloped in the Czech Republic, so it comes as little surprise that Facebook became the dominant social networking site for campaign communication in the 2013 presidential election. Despite its promising potential (based on the number of users), the intensity of Facebook use by the candidates differed greatly, with some of them clearly not paying too much attention to this new communication platform. Facebook became an important tool particularly for the so-called civic candidates, particularly Franz and Fischerová, who did not enter the elections based on the support of large political parties but who were nominated directly by the citizens and presented

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Schwarzenberg (165), with the third place belonging to Jana Bobošíková (88). The fourth-highest number was 22 (Dienstbier), indicating the remaining six candidates did not really take Twitter seriously as a platform for mobilization of voters.

[10] This fake account was followed by more than 20,000 users (http://www.socialbakers.com/twitter/schwarzenbergk, retrieved 15 June 2013).

[11] In one case, when commenting upon a television discussion of the candidates, Schwarzenberg's team went so far in the assessment of the political opponents that after many aggravated responses by other users, the contributions were erased and the team was forced to apologise for them.

Table 13.2 The number and success of contributions by presidential candidates on Facebook

	Number of posts	Average number of daily posts	Likes (average per post)	Comments (average per post)	Share (average per post)
Bobošíková	97	**1.9**	29.4	13.8	5.7
Dienstbier	100	**2.0**	44.7	9.4	11.9
Fischer	77	**1.5**	187.6	141.8	18.03
Fischerová	285	**5.6**	74.8	11.7	41.5
Franz	182	**3.6**	637.1	84.3	113.3
Roithová	40	**0.8**	85.6	11.3	32.4
Sobotka	63	**1.2**	90.1	39.8	10
Schwarzenberg	141	**2.8**	1280.1	165.1	298.5
Zeman	64	**1.3**	424.8	168.2	72.8
Schwarzenberg—second round	96	**6.9**	3964.2	723.2	1056.5
Zeman—second round	53	**3.8**	1978.0	760.8	727.7
Total	1,197				

Source: Authors

themselves as non-political candidates. Most of these candidates also had low-budget campaigns, largely based on the work of volunteers, within which Facebook often served as a tool for mobilization of citizens and for coordination of their commitment.

> "A wonderful wave of creativity is rising. People themselves produce printed matter, visuals, texts and various materials in support of Táňa Fischerová. A proof of this may be another nice version of a pin, which has reached us today." (Facebook of Fischerová, 19 Dec 2012)

> "Billboards are not needed, active people will do!" (Facebook of Fischerová, 30 Dec 2012)

In case of two civic candidates, Fischerová and Franz, the intensity of communication was visibly higher than in case of most others—with the notable exception of Karel Schwarzenberg, who succeeded in winning by far the most "likes". Because of such a wide base of followers, their contributions were also the most shared ones of all the candidates (Table 13.2).

A notable mobilization of followers, as measured by the dynamics of their growth (and other activities connected with the increasing number of fans) was observable during the campaign on the profiles of Schwarzenberg, Franz, and finally (between the first and second round) of Miloš Zeman as well. Franz succeeded in mobilizing his followers considerably in the autumn months, during the period of collection of signatures (necessary for his nomination), but later his activity declined and during Christmas holidays his profile became silent for 2 weeks. Just like many other candidates, he was not very successful in restarting the mobilization wave at the beginning of January.[12] On the other hand, an

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[12] Although the team of Fischerová was most active on this network, the mobilisation was lower than in case of the second civic candidate, Vladimír Franz (Table 13.1).
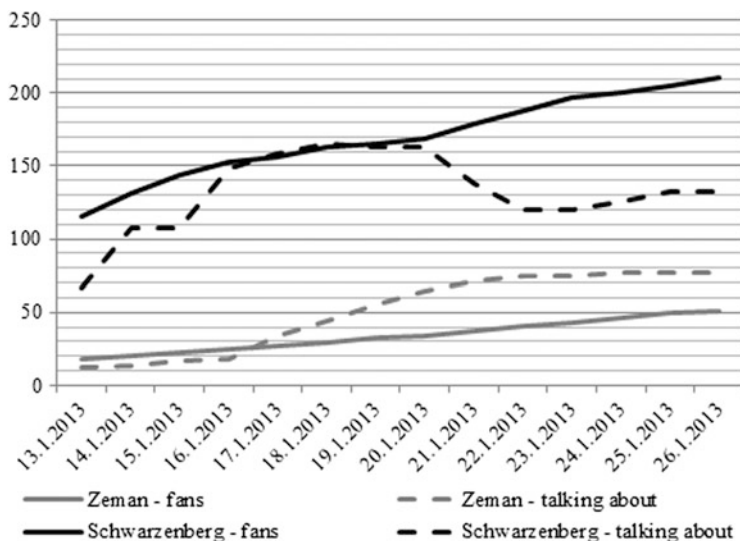
Graph 13.2 Development of the number of fans and "talking about" on Facebook before the second round of elections (in thousands). Source: Authors

enormous wave of support arose after the New Year's Day in favor of Karel Schwarzenberg. While before the first round, there was an increase of more than 60,000 followers on Facebook, in the 2 weeks between the first and second rounds another 166,000 was added (see Graph 13.2), which was naturally reflected in the increased activities on his Facebook page. A surprisingly low activity on Facebook was displayed by the long-time favoured candidate Fischer, who launched his campaign a little earlier than the rest of the candidates and soon exhausted his potential for mobilization. This candidate was also harmed by becoming the target of several negative campaigns and of more or less open attacks by his political opponents. Criticism was turned especially to Fischer's previous membership in the Communist Party, and this information was also heavily disseminated via social networks.

Before the second round, the two remaining candidates made a greater effort at mobilizing online support. After his victory in the first round—albeit a very tight one—Zeman's team increased the targeting of the Facebook users, although the majority of his voters in the first round (mainly elderly people and citizens living in small towns and villages) hardly represented typical users of social networks. Given this situation, the challenge for Zeman's team was clearly how to win the support of voters for other candidates from the first round, and particularly the younger ranks. In an attempt to address this part of the electorate, Miloš Zeman's team set up a special Facebook page "We are also young but we vote for Miloš", directly aimed against the wave of support for Schwarzenberg by the young people before the first round. As shown in Graph 13.2, this strategy was probably successful, at least partially, given the increased number of his fans on Facebook as well as the number

of the so-called "talking about",[13] measuring activities of Facebook users connected in some way to particular profile.

What can these statistics tell us about the campaign before the second round? Of interest may be the fact that while the number of Schwarzenberg followers continued to grow, the statistics "talking about" began to drop sharply around the middle of the campaign before the second round, following a rising wave of criticism of Schwarzenberg by Zeman's supporters.[14]

Zeman's partial success on Facebook is also documented by the poll conducted by the polling agency Median during the second round of elections, showing that the differences in composition of voters for the two candidates slightly dropped when compared to the first round. Thus, Zeman managed to address 16 % of the voters in the youngest age category, as compared to 27 % who voted for Schwarzenberg. No less interesting may be the data on the voters' Internet use, which was part of the same survey. 23 % of Zeman's voters used the Internet daily (and 18 % were daily users of Facebook and other social networks), while among Schwarzenberg's voters, 33 % were daily Internet users and 30 % daily Facebook users. These figures show that the wave of support of Schwarzenberg before the first round may not have been so easily transferable and its impact could possibly be smaller than initially predicted. While the course of the election campaign and the results of the first round created a widely shared idea about the mass support of Schwarzenberg by the young voters, the survey revealed that 58 % of the voters aged 18–29 declared, on Election Day, they would abstain from voting, which was arguably a blow to Schwarzenberg's changes in the run.[15]

13.6 The Content of Facebook Campaign: Supremacy of Meta-Communication

Since the use of social media for political communication is not yet widespread in the Czech Republic, the social networks channels of each candidate were mostly set up directly for the presidential campaign, as demonstrated by the names of the Facebook pages and profiles (e.g. "Zeman for the Prague Castle" or "President Táňa

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[13] "Talking about" is the number of people on Facebook who have engaged with certain FB page during the last 7 days. It measures all activities connected to the particular profile (sharing, mentions, comments, etc.), not just the number of "fans".

[14] A wave of criticism, displaying features of a negative campaign, focused on the issue of Schwarzenberg's wife being allegedly "unsuitable" for the post of the First Lady because of her poor Czech and the Nazi past of her father, as well as on Schwarzenberg's opinions regarding the violent expulsion of the Sudeten Germans in 1945, which he was heavily critical of, alluding it to war crimes. Zeman, on the other hand, endorsed this act, much in line with the still-dominant, nationalistic interpretation of the Czech post-war history.

[15] See http://www.median.cz/docs/Median_PREZIDENT_II_KOLO_determinanty_vysledku.pdf, retrieved 14 June 2013.

Fischerová") as well as by the content of the communication, the vast majority of which was oriented towards the presidential campaign only. The narrowing down of the content to the matters of the campaign was probably also related to the relatively weak position of the president within the Czech political system. According to the Constitution, the Czech president has no significant powers (even though both previous Czech presidents, Václav Havel and Václav Klaus, often managed to extend their powers beyond the scope of the Constitution) and so the candidates themselves faced the problem of a relative shortage of issues to be communicated to the citizens. The themes of the campaign were often produced artificially and the candidates were obliged to publish their opinions and comments even on topics that do not belong within the scope of competences of the presidential office. To a large degree, the live television discussions became the main "producers" of themes for the campaign, especially between the first and second rounds of elections.

What were the main features of the communication facilitated by candidates' teams on Facebook? As already hinted, the vast majority of candidates were focused in their Facebook communication on the actual course of the campaign (see Table 13.3). A surprisingly small amount of communication was devoted to emphasizing the personality of the candidate him/herself; relatively more attention to the presentations of the candidates' political opinions and statements was paid by the teams of Schwarzenberg, Zeman, Fischer and Sobotka. In the case of the civic candidates, Fischerová and Franz, expressions of political opinions were almost entirely absent, a fact which was indeed much criticized by their opponents, especially in Franz's case who largely based his communication strategy on his controversial image (the tattooed face and body).[16] This certainly helped him in attracting the attention of international media that treated him as a sort of curiosity:

> "Vladimir Franz, an opera composer and painter, is tattooed from head to toe, his face a warrior-like mix of blue, green and red. He's also running in a surprising third place ahead of this week's Czech presidential elections." (*The Guardian*,9 Jan 2013)[17]

> "This is the most interesting presidential candidate ever." (*Huffington Post*)[18]

Looking at the content of candidates' statements in greater detail (Table 13.4), we can see that on average, only 19 % of them were devoted to political causes, problems or topical events (value "Issue"); a much greater portion (68 %) was taken by comments regarding the course of their own campaign.

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[16] More often than other candidates, Franz shared pictures on Facebook. They made up a quarter of all his contributions (as opposed to the average of 17 % in case of the rest of other candidates), and the vast majority of them depicted his face and body.

[17] See http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/09/vladimir-franz-tattooed-czech-elections , retrieved 12 January 2013.

[18] See http://videos.huffingtonpost.com/world/this-is-the-most-interesting-presidential-candidate-ever-517478350, retrieved 14 January 2013.

Table 13.3 Content of contributions by presidential candidates on Facebook (%)

Candidate	Candidate's statements	Promotion and campaign	Information	Others
Bobošíková	32.0	34.0	34.0	–
Dienstbier	21.2	42.4	35.4	1.0
Fischer	40.3	42.9	11.7	5.2
Fischerová	12.6	66.3	18.6	2.5
Franz	15.9	47.3	31.9	4.9
Roithová	22.5	62.5	15.0	–
Sobotka	44.4	41.3	12.7	1.6
Schwarzenberg	38.3	48.9	9.2	3.5
Zeman	25.0	59.4	14.1	1.6
Schwarzenberg—second round	18.9	71.7	7.5	1.9
Zeman—second round	42.7	52.1	3.1	2.1
Total	22.6	52.6	19.3	2.6
N	306	629	231	31

Source: Authors

Table 13.4 Types of statements by presidential candidates on Facebook (%)

Candidate	Issue	Campaign	Others
Bobošíková	6.5	77.4	16.1
Dienstbier	33.3	61.9	4.8
Fischer	25.8	61.3	12.9
Fischerová	13.9	83.3	2.8
Franz	10.3	82.8	6.9
Roithová	44.4	44.4	11.1
Sobotka	7.4	63.0	29.6
Schwarzenberg	7.1	78.6	14.3
Zeman	18.8	62.5	18.8
Total	18.6	68.4	13.0
N	57	209	40

Source: Authors

Thus, in general, this online social network primarily served as a platform for informing about the campaign; in other words, it was mainly filled with "meta-communication". The candidates' opinions or information about their personality as themes of communication were kept rather in the background, while contributions of a more private character were entirely absent. Arguably, Facebook was not even used as a tool for developing a long-term relationship with the followers, which was perhaps due to the relatively short duration of the pre-election campaigns. Online communication was based more on efforts at fast mobilization and at informing citizens about the ongoing campaign (by pointing out topical events, activities, interviews in the media, etc.) For the civic candidates, Facebook was clearly a very important tool of communication as well as of coordination of their campaign volunteers, which was of major importance especially in the initial phase of the campaign, when the volunteers collected signatures in support of their candidature and tried to engage the citizens.

13.7   Endorsements by Celebrities

Although the support of politicians by celebrities has already occurred in the Czech Republic, it was the 2013 presidential elections that have really brought forward the trend of celebritization of politics. In the Czech presidential elections, both types of celebritization mentioned by John Street (2004) could be identified. The first is the type classified by Street as "celebrity politicians", i.e. well-known people trying to assert their own political interest through the elections. An example of such celebrity in the Czech elections was one of the civic candidates, the composer Vladimír Franz, or a Czech of Japanese origin, Tomio Okamura, who after the check of the petition sheets was found just below the 50,000 signatures needed for nomination. The second type of celebritization according to Street, that is, the exploitation of the qualities of the celebrities for the campaign, was much more frequent. The statements of many celebrities became a significant feature of the presidential campaign. While in the Parliamentary elections the phenomenon of personal endorsement has so far not been very common in the Czech Republic, the presidential campaign brought onto the web pages and Facebook accounts a large number of well-known persons expressing their support for this or that candidate.

Many famous people from the domains of culture, politics or science made known their preferences for the candidates, who then used this support in their official campaigns—either directly in TV advertisements (election spots) or indirectly, in communications on online social networks. The latter strategy was particularly strongly adopted by Schwarzenberg and Dienstbier. Nearly one third of the Facebook contributions categorized as promotion in our analysis (see Table 13.3) was actually a statement of support by well- (or sometimes less-) known public personalities.

Of all the candidates, Schwarzenberg enjoyed the widest endorsement by celebrities coming from politics, culture, and science, very much from the moment when he first announced the launch of his campaign in September 2012. On his official communication channels, short quotes by the celebrities giving reasons for preferring him were frequently posted:

> "Why do I want to vote for Karel Schwarzenberg? Because he is an aristocrat. Not because he has a coat of arms but because he has an aristocratic spirit." Jiří Menzel, film director (Facebook of Karel Schwarzenberg, 13 Dec 2012)

> "I cannot see anyone else among the candidates who is able to develop the legacy of Václav Havel in his presidential office but Karel Schwarzenberg." Michal Prokop, musician (Facebook of Karel Schwarzenberg, 16 Dec 2012)

The endorsement by individual musicians and popular music bands was widely promoted by Schwarzenberg's election team on social networks even in the early phases of the campaign, especially with regard to the so-called "Nights with Karel", public events which took the form of concerts by the supporting bands and musicians, and which were aimed primarily at the youngest voters. An important role in the first but especially in the second round of the campaign was also played

by the stylization of Schwarzenberg as a successor of the particular style of presidency attributed to the first Czech president, Václav Havel. In the final phase of his campaign, his team often referred to their long-term friendship, as well as to Schwarzenberg's contacts with the dissidents. Miloš Zeman, on the contrary, was often presented as the successor of the (infamous) political style of the 1990s, directly linked to the outgoing president Václav Klaus.

13.8   Karel Schwarzenberg: An Aristocrat Ruling the Facebook

As already mentioned, the unexpected success of Karel Schwarzenberg in the first round of the presidential elections became almost a sensation, especially given the polls showing the voters' support for him in single digits until late December. However, in 2 weeks his team succeeded in stepping up the campaign, which started later than in the case of the other candidates (a mere 4 months before the elections). Although Schwarzenberg was the only one to already have some base of followers on Twitter and Facebook before the elections, in these 4 months he managed to multiply this base several times (Table 13.2 and Graph 13.2).

In spite of being the oldest candidate (73 years of age) and deliberately pursuing a very conservative image (perhaps most notably symbolized by his bowtie or his somewhat archaic Czech), Schwarzenberg managed to win the hearts of the largest part of the young electorate. This was certainly helped by the fact that apart from the more conservative line of his campaign, emphasizing his overall amicable, humorous but very level-headed personality which clearly distanced him from the other candidates, his election team led a "punk-tinged" campaign targeting young voters and voters from big cities.[19] The visuals disseminated mainly through the outdoor campaign—posters, leaflets, stickers or badges (Fig. 13.1)—with Schwarzenberg with a pink hair typical of the punk subculture and with the slogan "Karel for PreSIDent" bore a clear reference to Sid Vicious from the Sex Pistols (Eibl, Gregor and Macková 2013).[20] These visuals mainly served for promotion of many events linked to the campaign. Apart from the events called "Let's have a beer with Karel", which were launched already in the 2010 parliamentary elections, his election team organized a series of concerts "A Night with Karel", held in regional towns and widely promoted on Facebook. It can be therefore claimed that he succeeded in interlinking the online and offline campaigns, which could be seen

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[19] For more information about the style of his campaign which caught an eye of international media see an article in *The New York Times* of 24 Jan. 2013: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/25/world/europe/czech-prince-schwarzenberg-runs-a-punk-campaign.html?_r=2& last accessed 26 August 2013.

[20] The consistent use of Karel Schwarzenberg's first name only was yet another strategy in the campaign that aimed at bringing him closer to the young people, sending a message that despite of his aristocratic family origin he is a very informal and youth-spirited man.

Fig. 13.1 An example of a
visual used in the campaign
of Karel Schwarzenberg.
Source: VolimKarla.cz

for example in the rapid spreading of the badges both throughout Facebook profiles
as well as in their physical form.

A strong potential for viral dissemination on online social nets was also
exhibited in many video programmes produced by his election team or his pro-
moters from the ranks of well-known public personalities, as discussed above.
These videos, usually emphasizing humor, which was an essentially part of
Schwarzenberg's campaign, became widely popular already before the official
election spots were made public.

A significant role in the rise of the enormous wave of support on online social
networks for Schwarzenberg was played by the followers themselves, who took an
active part in the mass spreading of campaign-related events (e.g. "I'm going to the
elections and voting for Karel") or information about the campaign and the elec-
tions (e.g. the video "World Politician", featuring an endorsement to
Schwarzenberg by one of the country's most popular young singers on 10 January
2013, became one of the most shared online contributions in the elections).

13.9   Social Networks as Catalysts of the Polarization
of Society

The candidates for the office of the Czech president used online social networks in a
limited way, and the number of their followers—with the exception of
Schwarzenberg and Franz—was measured in thousands, rather than tens of thou-
sands. Still, there was a notable activation of the social networks users in general,
beyond the group of fans and followers of the candidates themselves. People used
social media to express and spread support for their favorite candidate or expressed
their antipathy towards their rivals. Unsurprisingly, Facebook became the centre of

this communication buzz. There was some mobilization on Twitter as well but due to the lesser number of its users who formed a rather homogenous opinion group (displaying an overwhelming support for Schwarzenberg), there were fewer conflicts of opinion on Twitter than on Facebook.

A major part of those activities on social networks which were not managed by the candidates' election teams but rather fuelled by the enthusiasm of the citizens was the use of political satire. The citizens produced various memes and viral videos, founded a range of groups and Facebook pages filled with praise or calumny, or launched entire web pages. Much of this satire was turned against Miloš Zeman, especially after the first round of the elections, and this trend has continued even after him entering the presidential office, with the main theme of most of the jokes being Zeman's openly positive attitude to alcohol and smoking.

Schwarzenberg was not saved from becoming a target of jokes either, a large part of which was focusing on his frequent dosing off during the Parliament sessions, as well as on his often inaudible pronunciation. These two qualities became the focus of parody pictures and many jokes.[21] However, as Baumgartner (2007) has argued (based on his analysis of satirical clips of the JibJab group), the effects of political satire on citizens can differ based on the kind of humor used in the satirical materials. While the kind of satire which is very critical in its substance may radicalize already existing opinions about the candidate (which seems to fit the case of jokes on Miloš Zeman), the use of kind-hearted humor does not necessary lead to an increase in antipathies towards politicians but, according to Baumgartner, has often a reverse effect, which is exactly what might have happened with the rather amiable (and certainly not malicious) jokes about Schwarzenberg.

The public circulation of political satire, disseminated mainly (although not exclusively) through social media, undoubtedly contributed to the strong polarization of the Czech society especially before the second round of the elections. Interestingly, the candidates themselves waged no negative campaign on social networks; the polarization was probably caused and reinforced simply by the activity of the citizens and self-organized online groups.[22] As for the actual sources of polarization, we can first identify the activities connected with the production of videos and their diffusion through social media. A specific group of activists tried to persuade citizens to think carefully whether to give their vote to those candidates who they believed had little chance of reaching the second round. Another such group tried to prevent the two most-favoured candidates ahead of the elections, Zeman and Fischer, from reaching the second round (this was the aim of the initiative "How to get rid of Zeman and Fischer?"). These attempts were met with many reactions on social networks. Many citizens or groups even demanded

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[21] And yet Karel Schwarzenberg managed to turn this criticism in his favour. He entered the 2010 parliamentary elections with the slogan "When they talk rubbish, I sleep". He used the same strategy in the 2013 presidential elections, when his outdoor campaign used the slogan "From time to time you may not understand what I say but my opinions are clear.

[22] This phenomenon—the rise of homogeneous opinion groups that can easily become radicalized—is often seen as a possible weak spot of the new media (see e.g. Stromer-Galley 2003).

that the less favoured candidates should resign; there were new initiatives for the election of some candidates or rejecting the election of others, either launching special web pages (e.g. LepsiPrezident.cz [BetterPresident.cz]), or establishing Facebook groups, pages, (e.g. "We are also young but we vote for Miloš [Zeman]") or events ("I'm going to the elections and voting for Karel!").

13.10   Concluding Remarks

The 2013 presidential elections were the first serious "test" of the usability of online social networks in the Czech political campaign. Although the Czech politicians have occasionally used online media in election campaigns before, only these January elections fully revealed their potential for mobilization of voters. Based on the outcome of these elections and the reactions of the public as well as many experts it can be argued that social media have proved to be an efficient instrument for mobilization especially of the younger segment of the electorate, plus the voters from cities and larger towns. Without the support of these groups, Karel Schwarzenberg would most probably not have achieved such a great and surprising result in the first round. Without doubt, the presidential elections indicated that, in the future, social networks will play a much more significant role in election campaign communication in the Czech Republic than what we have witnessed so far. Having said that, the ultimate triumph of Miloš Zeman, who in the first round virtually ignored social networks, and even in the second round concentrated primarily on traditional media of political persuasion—especially live television debates and outdoor campaign—pointed out the limitations of campaigns conducted on social networks, in particular because of the relatively low election participation of the voters belonging to the so-called "Facebook generation", which finally cost Karel Schwarzenberg the president's post. In other words, the road from the "likes" on Facebook to the ballot boxes appears to be more complicated and a way less predictable than what online activists or marketing enthusiasts might assume.

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