ELECTORAL MANIPULATION VIA MEDIA:
THEORY AND EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT:
The mediatization of political communication makes it possible to increase the number of electoral manipulations via media, whose aim is to change the competitive positions of subjects running in the election. Manipulation activities give the opportunity to affect voters' decisions in a way that would be impossible without the media. Manipulations are performed by politicians, political parties or other subjects acting on their behalf. They can also be initiated by the governments of countries interested in influencing the directions of political changes in other countries. The presented study shows the possible use of media potential to manipulate election results. Such manipulations are possible in the situation of instrumental influence on the functioning of free and pluralistic media that allow political communication, or in the situation of instrumental influence on information, involving the creation and transmission of information in a non-objective way. The text focuses on the following types of electoral manipulations: (1) political influence of the government on the media; (2) political 'agencification' of the media; (3) limitations on carrying out election campaigns in the media; (4) the use of big data in political communication.

KEY WORDS:
Cambridge Analytica, election campaign, electoral manipulations, Internet Research Agency, political communication, public media

Introduction

Taking any democratic decision about the delegation of authoritative powers may involve the temptation to decide in a way that will intentionally cause differences in the subjectivity level and authority perspectives of political decision makers. This may increase the influence of some decision-making centres at the expense of others, and decisions may have instrumental effects, reflecting the intentions of the manipulators. The most common type of delegation of authoritative powers in liberal democracies is elections. Their social attractiveness results from the possibility of obtaining political representation using means approved in contemporary democratic regimes. The democratic character of decision making ensures the elected authorities and the effects

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of their rule have a measure of social legitimacy.[1] Apart from the influence on the form of elected authorities and their decisions, it is the legitimisation aspect of elections that gives the main temptation to instrumentalise their course so as to differentiate between the perspectives of subjects of electoral competition and consequently affect the ultimate result of the election. In this context, Andreas Schedler observes that the legitimisation cost of electoral manipulations (incurred by their initiators) is the function of their effectiveness and the degree to which the manipulative intentions are obvious to the public.[2] In the presented assumptions, electoral manipulations are procedural forms of influencing election results through intentional diversification of chances of the subjects of electoral competition for the benefit of their initiators. Contrary to electoral frauds and falsifications, these are legal activities falling within the wide range of democratic principles and thus they are not penalised. Therefore, in the presented context, the possibility of electoral manipulations is the object of competition between subjects that intend to instrumentally affect the final results of the election by influencing voters' decisions.

Dynamic changes in the sphere of social communication have an impact on the method of carrying out election campaigns. Apart from reducing social distance between politicians and voters, they make it possible to influence the course of elections in a way that will result in manipulated election results.[3] The essence of this process is the difference between the potential of an individual voter and the resources of candidates, political parties, or even whole states. In the face of efficient activities as part of an election campaign, a citizen is subject to pressure that may change not only their decision, but also their political attitude. If this process takes place within acceptable competition between election subjects, it should be treated as an expression of democratic order. However, the desire to win the election often moves the subjects of electoral competition to use their resources in a way that violates the rules of electoral fair play.[4]

The presented text shows the possible use of media potential to manipulate election results. It is based on an original research model referring to the theoretical background of communication related to electoral manipulations. There may be two dimensions of such manipulations: (1) instrumental influence on the functioning of free and pluralistic media that ensure political communication;[5] (2) instrumental influence on information, i.e. creating and transmitting information in an inaccurate way.[6] In both cases, the recipient may form their opinions or make decisions based on untrue information. This may lead to manipulating their electoral decision and consequently the taking over of rule by subjects that would not win the election in neutral conditions. The research process will involve looking for answers to the following questions: (1) What instruments are used in communication related to electoral manipulations? (2) Which subjects of electoral competition possess manipulation potential? (3) Which media are sensitive to electoral manipulations?

Methods

The basic mechanism allowing for electoral manipulations is the possibility to influence the level of political uncertainty of the whole electoral process. Political uncertainty understood this way is the object of competition between political actors interested in influencing the effect it has on electoral processes and contributing to the choices made as part of the elections. Hence, in electoral competition processes it can be regarded both as a strong independent variable and as a key dependent variable.[7] The concept of impact of political uncertainty on electoral manipulations is based on the unknown result of the election, and especially on the management of its dynamics in the electoral process. The uncertainty of election result may have an impact on, for example, the very outcome of the election, on participation in elections, or on the ultimate decisions taken by voters. Scholars identify two basic sources of uncertainty of the result of electoral competition.[8] The first of them is the uncertainty of voters' behaviour and motivations determining their decision of participating in the election and choosing a particular party or candidate. The number of factors affecting the electoral decision, their character and subjective gradation of motivations of an individual voter allow us to identify individualised uncertainty related to a single voter's decision and uncertainty related to whole segments of the electoral market. The other type of source of uncertainty originates from the assumption that voters do not have effective instruments to assess candidates' or political parties' positions in the electoral competition and/or that the perception of these positions may not be accurate. This results from activities carried out by electoral competition subjects that 'blur' the electoral message in order to increase the probability of obtaining electoral support or dissuade potential voters of their political opponents. In this case, decisions can be taken on the basis of ideas and beliefs, not rational analysis and can be formed on the basis of instruments of electoral manipulations as well.[9]

The level of political uncertainty is the basic instrument moderating electoral processes and the object of particular competition between political forces. By changing its level, they can improve their competitive positions on the electoral market. The basic components of political uncertainty are communication and institutional regulation.[10] Usually they are closely interrelated, having a synergistic effect on the subjects interested in changing the level of uncertainty. The primary assumption of communication uncertainty is the statement of a positive correlation between the pluralism of available information and the rationality of the choice made with the use of this information. Hence, the temporal area of influence of changes in the level of communication uncertainty is the present time, as the image of reality on the basis of which voters are to take their decisions is shaped in the presence. Political forces operating in the conditions of limiting communication uncertainty focus on shaping the information environment, which enables intentional selection of messages to create the expected attitudes and make choices in the conditions of incomplete access to information. If, however, information uncertainty is the goal, the subjects of electoral competition may generate two kinds of strategy. The first one involves affecting the increase in recipients' perception and media competition in seeking and reaching voters, and it grants the voters free access to information. The second strategy involves providing recipients information aimed at arousing information chaos, disorienting or misleading voters.

Information pluralism is of fundamental importance in the process of formation of voting preferences, which determines the need to ensure all political subjects equal conditions of presenting their offer and the existence of 'alternative' (non-official) channels of information.[11] Competition is limited in electoral communication through licensing the political message of the opposition by media dependent on the government, limiting access to media by cancelling the opportunities for low-cost presentation of political programmes (e.g. free election broadcasts in electronic media) and introducing low limits of financing political activity, which makes effective creation of electoral messages difficult or impossible. The manipulation potential of the communication aspect of influencing voters' attitudes gained importance with the popularisation of political communication, especially in the age of mass communication and social media.[12] The use of communication instruments of electoral manipulations may have twofold effects. The first is the inequality of political parties in terms of media access, so some of them will be stronger in this regard. As a result, by strengthening their media message, they will be able to shape voters' attitudes and decisions more effectively. The second effect

1   DYE, T. R., SCHUBERT, L., ZEIGLER, H.: *The Irony of Democracy: An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics.* Wadsworth : Cengage Learning, 2009, p. 132.
2   SCHEDLER, A.: *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism.* Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 274.
3   For more information about manipulated election results, see: STEWART, A. J. et al.: Information Gerrymandering and Undemocratic Decisions. In *Nature,* 2019, Vol. 573, No. 7772, p. 117-121.
4   FRANK, R. W., MARTÍNEZ I COMA, F.: How Election Dynamics Shape Perceptions of Electoral Integrity. In *Electoral Studies,* 2017, Vol. 48, p. 155.
5   LEDUC, L., NIEMI, R. G., NORRIS, P.: Introduction: Comparing Democratic Elections. In LEDUC, L., NIEMI, R. G., NORRIS, P. (eds.): *Comparing Democracies 2: New Challenges in the Study of Elections and Voting.* London : Sage Publications, 2002, p. 3.
6   GORTON, W. A.: Manipulating Citizens: How Political Campaigns' Use of Behavioral Social Science Harms Democracy. In *New Political Science,* 2016, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 64.
7   SCHEDLER, A.: *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism.* Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 22.

8   FOWLER, J. H., SMIRNOV, O.: *Mandates, Parties, and Voters: How Elections Shape the Future.* Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 2007, p. 56.
9   WESTHOLM, A.: Distance versus Direction: The Illusory Defeat of the Proximity Theory of Electoral Choice. In *American Political Science Review,* 1997, Vol. 91, No. 4, p. 871.
10   SCHEDLER, A.: *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism.* Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 23.
11   TURSKA-KAWA, A., WOJTASIK, W.: Direct Democracy in Poland. Between Democratic Centralism and Civic Localism. In *Journal of Comparative Politics,* 2018, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 18-29.
12   POELL, T., VAN DIJCK, J.: Social Media and Journalistic Independence. In BENNETT, J., STRANGE, N. (eds.): *Media Independence: Working with Freedom or Working for Free.* New York : Routledge, 2014, p. 189.

directly assumes the diversification of the possibility to exert influence through the existence of media which seem to be independent, but covertly present the attitudes of one political option. In the 21st century, the processes of such political 'agencification' of the media have been additionally reinforced by the development of digital communication, which has definitely given the subjects of electoral competition more opportunities to create their own channels of communication (official and affiliated).

Results

The manipulative character of the communication dimension of elections is based on the capability of influencing voters and subjects of electoral competition in the area of information, with the axis of media influence and its consequences for actions connected with the communication function of elections.[13] Obviously, it does not mean that all activities connected with electoral communication have manipulation potential. The detailed list of principles that make elections honest is very long and includes conditions on three different planes: procedures, communication and control.[14] The requirements related to communication are, above all: (1) equal access of parties and candidates to mass media; (2) a ban on government influence on the official media message; (3) media being able to show the course of election campaigns and elections freely; (4) free communication between election participants and voters.[15] This list of communication conditions of fair elections allows seeking manipulation practices first of all in the actions of the government, which have an impact on the normative and material regulations of using media in election campaigns. Still, the candidates may also exert some influence in this regard.

The most important instruments of electoral manipulations in the communication dimension are: (1) political influence of the authorities on public media through performing supervisory and managerial functions. It can lead to the limitation of pluralism of public media in the election period; (2) political 'agencification' of the media. It results in informal attribution of some media to particular political parties based on the dominant views; (3) limitations in carrying out election campaigns – for example, as a result of a ban on broadcasting political advertisements in mass media or a ban on using particular carriers; (4) the use of big data in political communication.

Political Influence on the Public Media

The characteristic feature of many contemporary democratic countries is the existence of public media. These are institutions (usually radio and TV broadcasters) designed to perform the state's information functions as regards education, socialisation and formation of expected social attitudes. They have a mass character, which means the possibility of remote public communication to many recipients in a short time.[16] The public character of such media determines the engagement of state authorities in their organisation, management and control. The impact of authorities on public media varies between countries, but basically there are three models: (1) minimalist – in countries where the content of commercial media is not regulated and the financing of public media is relatively low; (2) task-oriented – commercial media are obliged to produce programmes serving the identity functions of the state, and public financing of the media is on a moderate level; (3) interferential – where interference in the content is justified by the public interest, and public financing is on a high level.[17] In practice, the perspectives of politicians' interference in and influence on the content of the message depend on the tasks of the public media and the level of financing obtained from public resources.

Political impact of the authorities on public media is mostly connected with the intensification of two phenomena. The first of them is the mediatization of politics. It is an element of a broader process of mediatization, in which the essence of contemporary social changes is the transformation of social communication (the broader context) and the increasing role of mass media (the narrower context). Mediatization processes affect nearly all areas of social life, making media the dominant subject influencing the character of social relationships. This also occurs in the sphere of politics, in which media – as an intermediary between politicians and voters – are quickly reducing the effectiveness of (and the need for) direct communication. Another phenomenon that strongly affects the authorities' need of influencing public media is framing, defined as a way of perceiving social reality and promoting it among the biggest group of recipients possible.[18] Framing leads to narrowing the cognitive perspective, stressing the characteristics that are expected to support the desired reception of the broadcast information. It is so because communication has three levels of influence: cognitive, discursive and interpretative.[19] On the first one, the information includes a memory scheme that allows its easy absorption by the recipient. On the discursive level, the ways of understanding events are created in which a significant role is played by communication groups of reference (in the case of politics, predominantly political parties, experts and journalists). The interpretation level includes the effect of the existence of an interpretative framework, which equips the message with the connotations and the way of understanding the sender's desires. In the sphere of election campaigns, as a result of framing public media no longer simply provide information. Instead, they present ready-made interpretations prepared so as to ensure electoral support for the authorities.

Both the processes of mediatization of politics and the possibilities offered by framing as a tool of carrying out election campaigns increase politicians' interest in manipulative use of public media.[20] These factors can relatively easily give them advantages with regard to reaching voters and politically socialising them using instrumentally selected content and ways of interpretation. This can be illustrated with Spanish regulations, which grant political parties different amounts of free broadcasting time for election campaigns on public media.[21] The first limitation factor is the preference for parties that have registered election committees in at least 75% of constituencies. Another limitation is making broadcasting time dependent on the result of the previous election. Big parties which obtained support of over 20% in the previous election receive 45 minutes of broadcasting time a day, while new initiatives or those that did not receive any seats in the latest election only get 10 minutes.

Political parties which do not have access to public media must focus on other communication channels, which makes their campaign difficult and more expensive in comparison to the subjects that use public media. Manipulation activities do not have to involve brutal interference in the content and way of its presentation. They can be much more subtle and suit the mission of the public media, carrying out tasks concerning the formation of social awareness or promoting political attitudes following the axiological system of one side of the political competition. In this case, the manipulation mechanism may refer to promoting attitudes reflecting the basic socio-political divisions, e.g. the centre – the peripheries (for instance, European values vs. national values) or the State – the Church.

Electoral manipulations carried out by the public media may also be much less subtle. It is so mostly when the level of political culture of society allows their use with impunity or when some political forces express a high level of determination to achieve their electoral goals. Examples of such activities in Poland are so frequent that they can be referred to as typical. This occurs both at the level of appointing politicians to executive positions in public media and to institutions established to control them. In the first case, the Directors of public television have been Robert Kwiatkowski (SLD), Ryszard Miazek (PSL), Juliusz Braun (UW) or Jacek Kurski (PiS). They all have political bonds or even are members of particular political parties. The problem is similar in the case of political personalisation of institutions supervising public media. The members of the *National Broadcasting Council* (and more recently, the *National Media Council*), have been, for example, Marek Jurek (ZChN), Danuta Waniek (SLD), Elżbieta Kruk, Joanna Lichocka and Krzysztof Czabański (all from PiS).

13   TURSKA-KAWA, A., WOJTASIK, W.: Communication Function of Elections. In *Communication Today*, 2013, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 37.
14   *Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections*. Paris : Inter-Parliamentary Council, 1994, p. 14.
15   GOODWIN-GILL, G. S.: *Free and Fair Elections*. Geneva : Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006, p. 147.
16   McQUAIL, D.: *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. London : Sage, 1987, p. 32.
17   CLARK, J., AUFDERHEIDE, P.: *Public Media 2.0: Dynamic, Engaged Publics*. Washington : Center for Social Media, 2009, p. 2.

18   FISHER, K.: Locating Frames in the Discursive Universe. In *Sociological Research Online*, 1997, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 1-25. [online]. [2019-01-16]. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.5153/sro.78>.
19   SCHEUFELE, D. A.: Framing as a Theory of Media Effects. In *Journal of Communication*, 1999, Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 106.
20   BUSBY, E., FLYNN, D. J., DRUCKMAN, J. N.: Studying Framing Effects on Political Preferences: Existing Research and Lingering Questions. In D'ANGELO, P. (ed.): *Doing News Framing Analysis II*. New York : Routledge, 2018, p. 31.
21   GONZÁLEZ, M. H.: Publicidad e información sobre elecciones en los medios de comunicación durante la campaña electoral. In *Teoría y Realidad Constitucional*, 2018, Vol. 40, p. 461.

Political 'Agencification' of the Media

Contemporary democracy as a model of exercising political power is characterised by progressing dispersion of authoritarian functions. This takes place both in the case of departure from the classic (tripartite) separation of powers and of specific outsourcing of some functions previously performed by political system institutions. In political science literature, this process is called "agencification". The term originally referred to the transition of regulation competence from the structures of executive power to quasi-independent governmental agencies.[22] Currently, its definition has been extended to cover other spheres of authoritarian activity, including the media. Political 'agencification' of the media is a process similar to the above-mentioned influence of politicians on public media, but it is associated with commercial media instead. Either voluntarily or if forced to do so, they support one particular side of political conflicts, presenting views and attitudes that are the effect of political feedback. As a result, they no longer produce and provide objective information. They begin to present processed content in the form of messages showing a specific political vision of socio-political relations.

Political 'agencification' of the media may originate from several sources.[23] The first is the material dimension of media functioning, in which they need to generate income to cover the costs of their operation. Political affiliation (especially with the ruling party) may facilitate this process by obtaining a source of financing that would otherwise be inaccessible or hardly accessible. This material motivation makes the media an easy tool to be used by politicians. Another aspect of the material dimension is the creation power of the authorities, which can be used against disobedient media. This may happen, for example, through the tax system, imposing special levies on particular entities from the media sphere. Another factor of political subjection of commercial media may be de-concentration of control regulations. The second important source of the 'agencification' process is the binary schematisation of the sphere of politics, with the pressure to belong to one of the sides of the political conflict. It is easier to find the recipients of your messages in the case of emphasising (or even enhancing) the presented ideological views, also because of their easier reception. Nuancing the message, requiring recipients to display greater motivation (and very often, also higher cognitive competence), may discourage less experienced consumers of information. And finally, the third source of 'agencification' of media may be ideological motivations: the goals of the media and political entities may be coincident in terms of the executed politics. In this case, there may be a symbiotic relationship, in which politicians treat the medium as an instrument of their activities, and the medium carries out the strategy of contributing to the expected direction of political processes through its communication channels.

Political 'agencification' of the media is a phenomenon with a great degradation potential for electoral processes. It results from the fact that contemporary media have a huge advantage over the recipient in terms of the capacity to verify the truthfulness of the provided content. The amount of information available in the media is many times greater than several decades ago, which makes a potential voter more susceptible to making decisions on the basis of information that is not verified and may prove to be false. As Frank Luntz observes, the enormous amount of information that an average person faces means that with well chosen language, words, phrases or argumentation, politicians can safely achieve their goals.[24] Those who have an impact on communication can facilitate the change of opinions on any topic. It is especially evident in the case of big media, which are oriented at satisfying the needs of their advertisers and not at providing information for society (thus representing so-called big media effect). This offers the media great creation possibilities by referring to the recipients the advertisers want to reach.[25] Political subjects are also advertisers which can affect the content of the message, its interpretation and provision to the expected target group. The United States is a special example of media 'agencification', as the key media outlets there are clearly associated with particular sides of the political conflict and their attitudes.[26] Limiting the possibility to advertise in commercial media can also be a factor of manipulation, as they can choose the subjects that will advertise through them. Examples of such regulations can be found in countries of Central and South America (e.g. Costa Rica, Paraguay, Nicaragua), where the press must observe limitations on electoral advertisements, usually restricted to one page or even less.[27]

Limitations in Carrying Out Electoral Campaigns

Another factor limiting the competitiveness of elections may be various bans on broadcasting political advertisements. The very phenomenon of facilitating communication between politicians and voters is consistent with the postulate of political pluralism; its essence is to ensure the proper structure of competing parties and candidates so as to enable voters to choose between the available visions and political programmes.[28] Candidates and political parties should be able to have equal conditions in promoting their programmes, ideas or financing their activity. When different parties are granted dramatically different licenses, this mechanism may contribute to limiting competitiveness and cartelisation of political parties or the whole party system. Then, the dominant parties owe their position to the functioning system of institutionalised discrimination and prevent or block the possibility of any democratic changes.[29]

The basic manipulation dimension in this case is the possibility to preserve in social awareness the level of recognisability of political entities. The beneficiaries of this process are parties and politicians with an established brand and social recognisability, i.e. most often subjects from the government or from the opposition (if it has a high level of electoral institutionalisation). Some scholars point to the relationship between politicians' presence in information programmes and generating support in elections. This mechanism has become more forceful since the development of local TV stations.[30] Through a ban on political advertising, they can limit the perspectives of generating electoral support by new parties and unknown politicians, robbing them of one of the basic instruments of campaign fight. On the other hand, particularly expensive forms of political advertising (e.g. TV electoral commercials) may be inaccessible for new entities without huge financial resources, reducing their perspectives for reaching wide groups of voters. The best solution in this situation may be to ensure free broadcasting time in electoral programmes for the subjects competing in the elections.

Nowadays, the problem of limiting the possibility of canvassing must be discussed in the context of the emergence of new communication channels, whose main characteristics are the personalisation of message and individualisation of contact between the communicating subjects. These characteristics lead to the reduced importance of mass communication, typical of the old type of media, and the growing importance of individualised forms of communication. The difference between financial resources needed to use non-traditional media and resources necessary to present content on TV, radio or in the press also plays a part. The new type of political communication may to some extent be unrelated to financial resources. Communication can also be executed through organisational competence and the activity of party members, candidates or volunteers. They may succeed in receiving support without using traditional media, especially in local campaigns. The role of television, radio or central press is greater in campaigns, in which the social distance between the candidates and the voters is relatively larger. Still, the importance of the individual message is growing in them, too.[31]

22   BOON, J., SALOMONSEN, H. H., VERHOEST, K.: The Effects of Organisational Features on Media Attention for Public Organisations. In *Policy & Politics*, 2018, Vol. 46, No. 3, p. 14.
23   MOYNIHAN, D. P.: Ambiguity in Policy Lessons: The Agencification Experience. In *Public Administration*, 2006, Vol. 84, No. 4, p. 1036.
24   LUNTZ, F.: *Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear*. London : Hachette, 2007, p. 26.
25   McCHESNEY, R. W.: *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. Champaign : University of Illinois Press, 1999, p. 38.

26   GROELING, T.: Who's the Fairest of Them All? An Empirical Test for Partisan Bias on ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox News. In *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 2008, Vol. 38, No. 4, p. 631-657.
27   ACEVES-GONZÁLEZ, F. D. J.: Elecciones, medios y publicidad política en América Latina: Los claroscuros de su regulación. In *Comunicación y sociedad*, 2009, Vol. 12, p. 38.
28   WEINER, M., ÖZBUDUN, E.: *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries*. Durkham : Duke University Press, 1987, p. 393.
29   MOSER, R. G., SCHEINER, E., STOLL, H.: Social Diversity, Electoral Systems, and the Party System. In HERRON, E. S., PEKKANEN, R., SHUGART, M. S. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems*. New York, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 139.
30   PRIOR, M.: The Incumbent in the Living Room: The Rise of Television and the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections. In *The Journal of Politics*, 2006, Vol. 68, No. 3, p. 662.
31   YANG, M., BARINGHORST, S.: Studying Media within Political Consumerism. In BOSTRÖM, M., MICHELETTI, M., OOSTERVEER, P. (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Political Consumerism*. New York, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 188.

The potential of broadcasting political advertisements may be limited in two basic ways: (1) subjective; (2) material. In the first one, the legislator limits the use of political advertising by specifying media in which the adverts are prohibited. It may involve a total ban on TV, radio or the press or specification of some advertising carriers. One example can be the proposals of election code regulations in Poland, prohibiting the broadcasting of paid electoral advertisements on radio and TV and placing graphic election materials on carriers with a surface area exceeding $2x2$ m². These regulations were complained about to the Constitutional Tribunal, which finally decided that they violated the freedom of expressing views and spreading information. Similar regulations function in France and Belgium, completely prohibiting the use of large format advertisements in election campaigns. The material dimension assumes financial restrictions on using paid political advertisements. It may involve limiting the general campaign expenses for this purpose, specifying the upper limit of aggregated resources allocated by candidates and parties. It may also deconcentrate the limit on the basis of the number of candidates competing in the election or the maximum price for one spot or large format advertisement.

The above-mentioned solutions regarding the ban or restrictions on political advertising show that they may as well serve to limit electoral competition and equalise the chances of the competing entities. It depends on the goal of the adopted solutions: either social rationalisation of electoral competition or the reduction of competition by promoting regulations that favour particular parties or candidates. In the second case, the manipulation potential of such regulations results from the instrumental motivations of the subjects that introduced them. Usually, these are the ruling parties (having the influence on the course and effects of the legislation process), sometimes also supported by the opposition if it is strongly institutionalised in the election. In the latter case, the proposed solutions are used against new political movements and less known candidates involved in the elections. Especially in the case of a total ban on a certain form of political advertising, their ability of reaching voters with their message is restricted. The beneficiaries of such regulations use their position resulting from their recognisability in the awareness of potential voters. An example of such a solution, supporting the existing political parties, can be seen in Mexico. As part of that solution, voters registered abroad are sent information on the parties competing in the election.[32]

The Use of Big Data in Political Communication

Whereas internal determinants empower the voter in terms of making decisions at the ballot box, the external reasons for voting for political parties or specific candidates assume the existence of a moderating factor. This factor is the media and their growing role connected with changes in the forms of contemporary political communication. Processes of the mediatization of politics significantly affect the formulation of political offer for voters, understood as a product of political marketing and thus having a direct impact on particular decisions of individual voters. This is pointed out by Susan C. Stokes, who argues that political parties and candidates may refrain from revealing their real views and intentions during election campaigns, estimating potential profits and losses on the Election Day. So this is the beginning of electoral manipulation in the form of hiding real intentions from voters or even presenting future plans and purposes they do not really intend to achieve.[33] Such activity can be treated as a specific electoral fraud, but because of its character, it cannot be regarded as illegal or be penalised.

Currently, apart from the above-mentioned process of the mediatization of politics, there is also the phenomenon of the demassification of social (and also political) communication. It seems to be a potential factor of reducing the institutional advantage of big political parties, especially by dispersing the sources of messages and the possibility of reaching smaller and smaller segments of the electoral market (and sometimes even individual citizens) with the message. Surely, this works to a certain point, but relevant parties still possess

the dominant role in political communication, because they have institutional resources and direct impact on the media, which can ensure obvious advantages in the competition with the aspiring forces. Manipulation activity in this regard can occur on two main planes. The first of them is creating a negative image of the political opponents and their social perception. The image of parties and politicians can also be affected by the media, which can be pressured in various ways to treat the subjects of political competition unequally or even be biased in the way of reporting and commenting political events. In some countries, e.g. in Japan, there are regulations prohibiting negative campaigns.[34] The second plane of creating an unrealistic image of the sphere of politics by the media is its non-objective presentation related to framing.

A relatively new phenomenon in political communication is the use of big data mechanisms in election campaigns. Big data means large, variable and diverse sets of data. Their processing (analysis) is usually connected with the application of artificial intelligence (AI) or advanced IT tools. In the case of political communication, these relatively new data processing technologies permit reaching an individual voter with an individualised political message (micro-targeting). It is so when the used digital media and advanced algorithms effectively link the political message to the voter's psychological profile. Thanks to contextual communication, not only effective segmentation of the electoral market is possible but also addressing individual messages to particular recipients. The manipulation potential of big data lies in the possibility of influencing the voter so as to produce a false image of the surrounding reality or to stimulate attitudes and decisions which would probably not occur in neutral conditions.[35]

Since the use of big data in political communication is a relatively new phenomenon, it involves some interpretation problems. In addition, manipulation activities in this regard can be initiated by subjects that do not compete in the election directly although they are interested in affecting its result. Suitable examples are the actions of Russia, accused of influencing the presidential elections in the USA, France, or the referendum concerning Brexit.[36] In practice, regarding electoral manipulations, we can only point to examples in which the mechanism was revealed either by its authors or by the media. It results from the fact that the described manipulations are obviously unethical and their revelation is condemned by public opinion.

The best known example of using big data to manipulate elections is connected with the activity of the company *Cambridge Analytica*, which used illegal analytical tools to obtain the psychological profiles of approximately 50 million of American *Facebook* users. They were used by the electoral team of Donald Trump, competing in the presidential election against Hillary Clinton.[37] The situation was somewhat different in the presidential election in Poland in 2015. After the election campaign, on the basis of analysis of electoral documents of the team of Andrzej Duda, journalists revealed an agreement with the company *Elchupacabra* associated with politicians from the ruling party (PiS), in which it was obliged to create thousands of thematic threads a month and 5,000 automatic entries on social media. Media also had proof of the engagement of the Russian company *Internet Research Agency* in the debate before the British referendum on leaving the European Union. Its employees, using a system of false accounts on social media, created planes of political discourse, presenting attitudes to persuade people that the United Kingdom should leave the European structures.[38] The described action is a typical example of astroturfing, the goal of which is to evoke a specific impression by creating information and its viral distribution. In this case, the intentions behind manipulation can be the support or critique of a certain politician, obtaining social support for a certain initiative, or conversely, discrediting an idea.

32   LAFLEUR, J. M.: *Transnational Politics and the State: The External Voting Rights of Diasporas*. New York, London : Routledge, 2013, p. 52
33   STOKES, S. C.: What Do Policy Switches Tell Us about Democracy? In MANIN, B., PRZEWORSKI, A., STOKES, S. C. (eds.): *Democracy, Accountability and Representation*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 106.

34   TAK, J.: Political Advertising in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. In KAID, L. L., HOLTZ-BACHA, C. (eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Political Advertising*. Thousand Oaks : Sage Publications, 2006, p. 291.
35   WOOLLEY, S. C., HOWARD, P. N.: Political Communication, Computational Propaganda, and Autonomous Agents. Introduction. In *International Journal of Communication*, 2016, Vol. 10, No. 9, p. 4883.
36   ANDREWS, L.: *Public Administration, Public Leadership and the Construction of Public Value in the Age of the Algorithm and 'Big Data'*. Released on 19th September 2017. [online]. [2019-02-03]. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/padm.12534>.
37   PERSILY, N.: The 2016 US Election: Can Democracy Survive the Internet? In *Journal of Democracy*, 2017, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 68.
38   BASTOS, M., MERCEA, D.: The Public Accountability of Social Platforms: Lessons from a Study on Bots and Trolls in the Brexit Campaign. In *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 2018, Vol. 376, p. 7.

Conclusions

The presented examples of media communication-related electoral manipulations show the high potential of activities aimed at affecting the electoral result by instrumental use of the media. They involve the creation of an image of reality that will lead to the expected form of voters' attitudes and decisions. Politicians' intentions in this regard are obvious: they want to maximise the result of the election using the available instruments of influencing media. Motivations of the media are, however, more complex. They may be driven only by the economic aspect of their operation, and then they will be oriented at the monetisation of their potential. They may consciously support the subjects of electoral competition, pursuing their ideological mission. They may also be unconsciously used in electoral competition as instruments of electoral manipulations. But in each case, there must be a relationship between the media and the politicians.

Taking efficiency into consideration, communication manipulations have a lower potential than those referring to changing institutional rules. This results from the lack of automatic effects and the impossibility to measure specifically the scale of their influence. But it does not mean that their use will be less effective: usually, they are easier to apply than those that require formal changes in the rules of executing elections. From the point of view of subjects that resort to communication manipulations, their advantage is definitely that they do not need to have the resources they would need in the case of institutional manipulations. In practice, neither great political influence nor economic potential is necessary to effectively impact voters' decisions. Taking all this into consideration, we should expect the growth of manipulation practices in the area of political communication. It will be promoted by the process of the demassification of social communication, carried out by more and more sophisticated tools allowing reaching an individual voter.

The latest research confirms the fact that as a result of properly positioned electoral communications citizens may be exposed to the instrumental influence of entities taking part in the electoral competition.[39] It is especially true if the information comes through social media and is created by fanatics or automated bots. Even a few entities of political communication present in crucial places on social networking sites may contribute to changing voters' decisions. Such evolution can be regarded as electoral manipulation influencing the outcome of the election. Its mechanism involves limitations in the flow of information resulting in the distortion of premises significant in the decision-making process. As a result, voters may vote against their own social and economic interests.

The essence of communication associated with electoral manipulation is the mechanism of change of natural preferences resulting from rational premises. They may be replaced with external factors affected by instrumental external stimuli. Political communication itself is an element necessary for the existence of a democratic electoral process. However, the deterministic character and course of elections may generate mechanisms leading to non-democratic decisions. An important role in electoral manipulations is played by entities working as the agents of political forces. Apart from the media, these may be social organisations, domestic or international. In their case, an important regulatory problem is the limitation of possibility of social and institutional control over the created and shared contents. Contemporary political communication, which is nowadays quickly and extensively going online, disregards formal state boundaries. This factor will surely be the most important challenge faced by political communication in the future.

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