

## **Political communication in Romania and its feedback nationwide**

Anamaria STAN (ROZSI)<sup>1</sup>, Adrian Ciprian GHINEA<sup>2</sup>, Elena Adriana BIEA<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:** *This paper presents the results of a quantitative marketing research conducted on Romanian voting regarding national political communication. The aim of this research is to establish the intensity and the extent to which voters participate and reply to communication activities initiated by Romania's political parties. Thus, the present study identifies the main sources of political information, opinions about political communication, and Romanians' voting attitude towards political changes. The article summarizes the result of the research.*

**Key-words:** *political communication, quantitative research, sources of political information, attitude towards political decisions*

### **1. Introduction**

Political communication in Romania has integrated technological trends, especially starting with the presidential nomination in the year 2014. The success of the President-elect is largely due to online communication strategies, respectively through a social media mix.

The research conducted was also a result of the important changes brought by the electoral legislation which has changed the election process and, by default, the political communication process (new rules for the financing of election campaigns, political messages submitted by controlled public rules etc.). The main aim of the research was to determine the degree of involvement and the response of the population at the level of communication initiated by political parties or candidates.

### **2. Literature review**

The importance of marketing research for the political field derives from the specificity of the fourth age of political communication, characterized by the

---

<sup>1</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, [anamaria.stan@unitbv.ro](mailto:anamaria.stan@unitbv.ro)

<sup>2</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, [ciprian.ghinea@unitbv.ro](mailto:ciprian.ghinea@unitbv.ro)

<sup>3</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, [adriana.biea@unitbv.ro](mailto:adriana.biea@unitbv.ro)

proliferation of political information and information tools. In this context, marketing research is indispensable and is made at short intervals. This permanent consultation of political opinions is caused by the pace of change on the political scene, which implicitly leads to important, sometimes radical, changes in voters' attitudes, opinions and behaviours.

Communication can be used without marketing, but "research ensures the correct orientation of communication and its efficiency, as it responds to the market opinion, respectively to the target audience or target groups" (Mihalache, 2012). Hence, the fundamental contribution of marketing research to the political market. It implies how politicians design their communication, choose their subjects and present them. An example of this is Donald Trump's electoral success. Any communication decision was taken following opinion polls. To track the shifting perceptions and voting intention after every political event, 1500 people per week were interviewed (online and by phone) in each state. This information allowed them to speak to voters in a way that they would understand and respond (Cambridge Analytica, 2017).

The communication act is possible through a communication channel, directly or indirectly, and communication success depends to a large extent on the reliability of voters in the media. The European Union is constantly concerned with the image of the media and democracy in each component country. The reliability of the sources of information used is very important, especially in political activity where these are the main means of transmitting the political message. At the European level, citizens' trust in public institutions and media is evaluated regularly. In the study "Media pluralism and democracy" conducted by the European Union in 2016, 58% of Romanians consider that media provide trustworthy information compared to 53%, the average at the European level.

According to this survey conducted in September - October 2016, on a sample of 1006 respondents surveyed face to face, 67% believe that television is "Reliable", 64% consider that the radio is a reliable source, 53% think that newspapers are reliable (printed and online) and only 46% indicated social media (online social networks, blogs, video hosting websites, etc.) as "Reliable".

### **3. Material and methods**

The data collection tool-questionnaire-included 15 questions relating to communication and policy questions for the characterization of 7 respondents. The method of questioning was an online interview. The questionnaire was hosted on Google Docs, with open access for all those interested in participating in the survey.

The research took into account the people with voting rights in Romania and with internet access. Because it could not accurately determine the size of the population studied, the sampling method was not random. Respondents were selected by chain method, which requires the respondents to recommend individuals

in the population investigated, interested in participating in marketing research. In the three weeks of data collection (February 15-March 9, 2017), the sample size was fixed at 436 respondents.

Because there was no control over the respondents, the sample is not representative nationwide, but the great number of respondents offers relevant data about the people voting in Romania. The sample comprised 53% females and 47% males, 78% coming from urban areas and 22% from rural areas, mainly in the Central region (31% only in Brasov). The best represented in the sample were respondents with higher education (36% have completed law school and 36.5% with postgraduate studies).

Centralized automatic responses in a Microsoft Excel file were adapted and transferred to the SPSS Statistics 23, for analysis.

#### **4. Results and discussions**

Research objectives have formed the basis of the development of the questionnaire. The research theme was formulated as follows: "Attitudes, opinions and behaviours of the population voting in Romania regarding central and local political communication". Therefore, the results of the research were rendered depending on the theme and objectives of the research established a priori.

##### *The retrospective of the turnout for the last elections*

Sample turnout at the last 4 polling (euro-parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014, local and parliamentary elections in 2016) was higher compared to the national turnout. 67% of respondents have participated in the European Parliament elections compared to 32.44% at the national turnout (Permanent Electoral Authority, 2017).

It is known that national elections are considered more important towards European Parliamentary elections (Openpolitics.ro, 2014), therefore, the turnout at the presidential election in 2014 was 86% (and 53.18% nationwide). At the 2016 local elections, the sample turnout was 75.5% (48.17% nationwide) and at the parliamentary elections it was 74.5% (at the national level the turnout was 39,5%).

##### *Political communication from the perspective of the voting population in Romania*

Political communication is not only used to win the election, it also used for other important goals such as: improving the image of a candidate, persuading voters, counteracting opposition attacks etc., which can increase the likelihood of electoral success. In view of these considerations, the research focused on identifying respondents' opinions on the main purpose of political communication (Table 1).

The purpose of political communication	Responses		Percent of Cases	vs.	N	Mean
	N	Percent				
Increasing the notoriety of the candidate / political party	50	6,8%	11,5%		172	2,45
Promoting the proposed project	241	32,7%	55,3%		172	2,74
Persuade / convince	58	7,9%	13,3%		172	2,79
Identifying voter issues	181	24,5%	41,5%		172	3,42
Information on political activity	208	28,2%	47,7%		172	4,16
Total	738	100%	169,3%		172	-

Table 1. *Share of the main purpose of political communication vs. its manifestation in current political activities*

From their own perspective, respondents were asked to specify what should be the main goal of political communication and more than half (55,3%) considered „Promoting the proposed project” followed by „Information on political activity” (47,7%). In the next section of Table 1 there are the results of the ordering of the same purposes of political communication, according to the criterion of its predominance on the political market, from 1-most frequently to 5-the least frequently. A lower mean translates into a higher frequency of occurrence of the variable. Most respondents believe that today political communication activities are used to „Increase the notoriety of the candidate / political party” (the lowest mean is 2.45 points).

#### *The political information media used by the voting population*

The 2014 elections have made changes in the political information source. This phenomenon can also be seen in the results of marketing research. According to the research conducted by Vieraşu Timotei in February 2013, television is the main media for the political field, followed by the Internet. Today, as shown by the present research, the main source of information for 72.5% of those surveyed people is the Internet, subtracting Radio and Television.

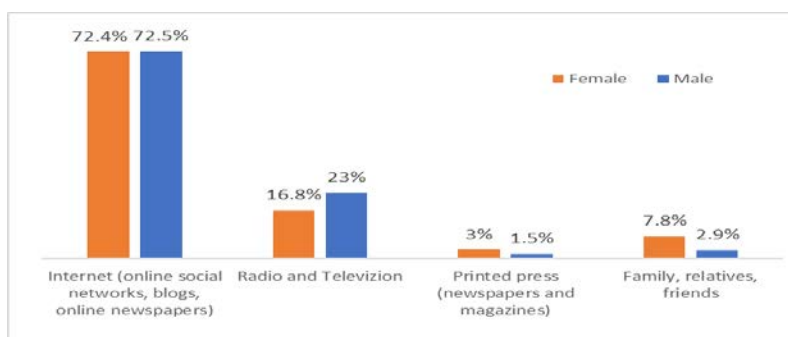


Fig. 1. *The source of political information accessed crossed with gender*

Within the two groups according to gender (Fig. 1) there were differences regarding the use of offline information sources, especially in the case of extracting political information from family, friends or relatives. In this case, women are the ones who choose this source of information more often than men. The Chi-Square test was used to statistically test the observed differences. The result was that they were not statistically significant, therefore there was a link between the source of the political information and the respondent's genre.

Research has revealed that online media is the most reliable source of political information (Fig. 2).

Considering online made up of: online newspapers, blogs, online social networks and offline including: radio and television, printed media, family, relatives and friends, we found that the average of offline reliability (2.98 points) is lower than online (3.21 points). So for this sample, online is the most reliable source of political information.

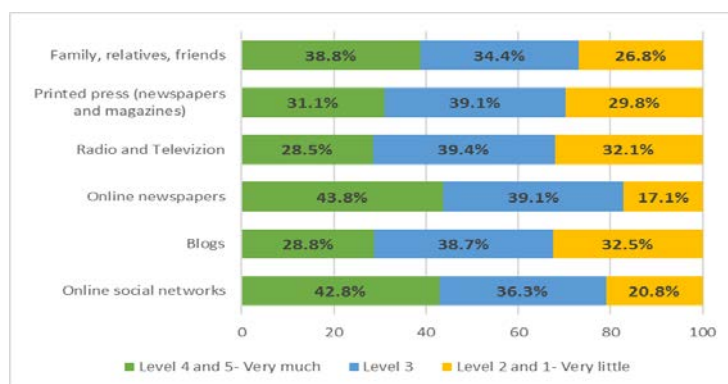


Fig. 2. *The level of reliability of sources of political information*

It is important that the political message is transmitted through those channels of communication accessed and preferred by the voters. Invited to distribute 100 points according to the preference of transmitting the political message, most respondents have expressed their preference for online political message (38,87 points of 100). Then there was preference for the personal transmission of the political message (24,2 points of 100), the transmission of the political message via radio and television (22,61 points of 100) and finally, through newspapers and magazines.

The preference for online political messages is 3 (2,75) times higher than the preference for political messages sent through newspapers and magazines and 1,7 times more preferred than transmitting through radio and television.

*The attitude of the voting population in Romania towards political decisions*

Political communication is not only about transmitting information and about choosing communication channels but also about the attitude of voters towards political decisions. To a certain extent, the last one influences the intention to vote. Assessing attitudes towards political decisions during an election campaign was possible using a scale of 1 to 5 (where 5-Very High), considering equal distances between scale levels.

The two main aspects which mostly influence the decision to support a candidate / political party (Fig. 3) is discussing topics of general interest (88,07%) and detailing in specific, tangible terms of the proposed electoral program (69,27%).

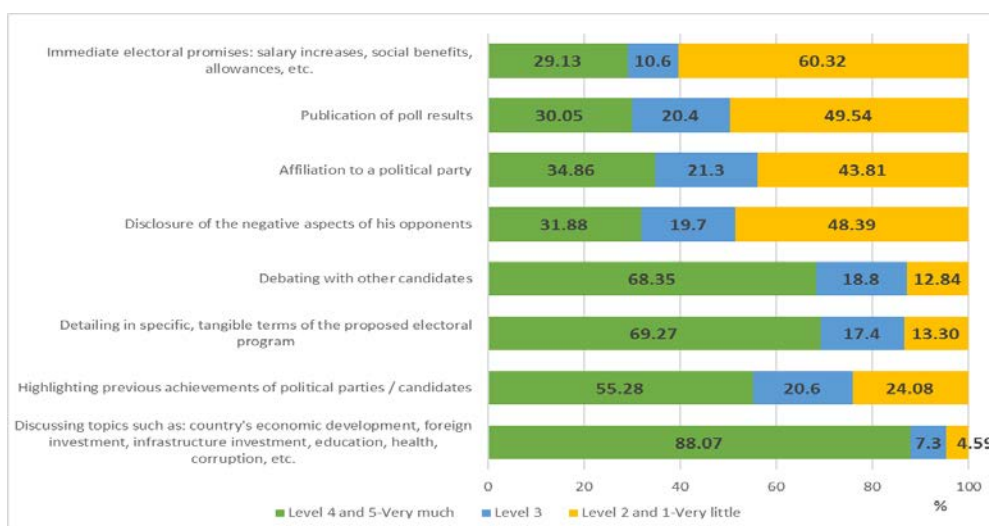


Fig. 3. *The share of the main aspects that contribute to influencing the decision to support the candidature*

Immediate electoral promises have the least influence on the intention to vote, but for people with a low level of understanding (general, vocational, high school, post-secondary school) they have a greater influence compared to people with higher education. This was the result of testing the differences between the two groups mean (2.92 points for low-level voters and 2.21 points for upper-educated voters), applying the Student test.

According to specialists interviewed in a previous qualitative research on political communication in Romania, electoral campaigns, in particular, should be predominantly positive. Therefore, the attitude of the population surveyed was measured against the statement "The political communication in Romania is predominantly positive" and we found that 67.43% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement.

Analyzing the population's attitude according to their residence (Fig. 4) it has been noticed that the rural population is more in agreement with this claim and the percentage of the urban respondents who strongly disagreed with this claim is higher compared to rural ones. This means that the attitude of the rural voters is more favorable to the political communication in Romania than the attitude of the urban voters. These differences of opinion between the two groups were tested and validated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

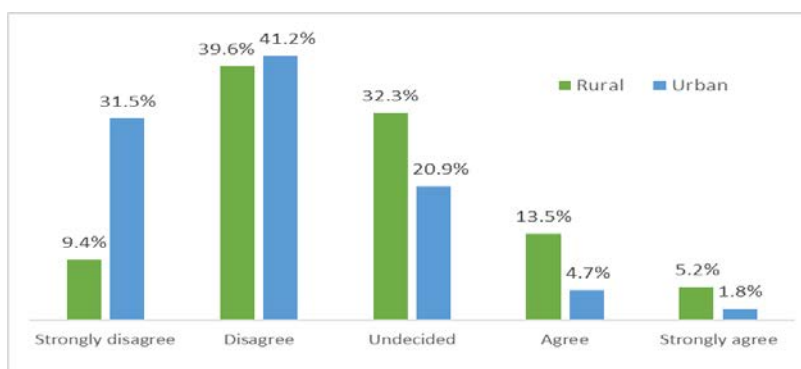


Fig. 4. *The attitude towards the statement “Political communication in Romania is mostly positive” crossed with residence*

## 5. Conclusions

After analysing the results, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the political communication in Romania and the attitudes, opinions and behaviours of the population with the right to vote.

Voters use the Internet as the primary political source of information. The reason is that they consider it the most trusted means of information. Most of them do not spend more than an hour informing themselves about the political activity, but first, they prefer to have their political message transmitted through the online environment and second, by personal transmission of political beliefs and ideas.

In the electoral campaign, most respondents are influenced by topics such as: the country's economic development, foreign investment, investment in infrastructure, education, health, etc. and less than immediate electoral promises: salary increases, social benefits, allowances, etc. Electoral promises particularly influence people with a low level of understanding.

The main purpose of political communication should be to promote the political agenda rather than to increase the notoriety of the candidate / political party, as in the case of current political communication.

The limitation of this quantitative research comes from the sampling method used which does not allow the extrapolation of the research results to the whole researched population. Also, the sample did not include the population from all the counties of the country, as it only covered 32 counties of Romania's 41, plus respondents from Bucharest. Further research is recommended on a representative sample at a national level. In particular, the survey was represented by voters with higher education, but at the level of Romania, the population with medium education is more numerous (Mihai, 2016), therefore, the majority of the electorate is assured by them.

## 6. References

- Cambridge Analytica, 2017. *Donald J. Trump for President*, [online] Available at: <<https://ca-political.com/casestudies>> [Accessed 14 June 2017]
- European Union, 2016. *Media pluralism and democracy*. [pdf] Bruxelles: European Commission. Available at: <<http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2119>> [Accessed 5 April 2017].
- Mihai, A., 2016. Pe ultimul loc în UE: Doar 19% din populația ocupată din România are studii superioare, față de media UE de 33%. *Ziarul Financiar*, [online] (22.07.2016) Available at: <<http://www.zf.ro/eveniment/pe-ultimul-loc-in-ue-doar-19-din-populatia-ocupata-din-romania-are-studii-superioare-fata-de-media-ue-de-33-15535932>> [Accessed 24 March 2017].
- Mihalache, D., 2012. *Curs de Marketing Politic*. Universitatea Creștină „Dimitrie Cantemir” [pdf] Available at: <<https://marketingpolitic.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/dan-mihalache-curs-de-marketing-politic.pdf>> [Accessed 25 May 2016].
- Openpolitics.ro, 2014. *De ce e participarea scazuta la alegerile PE?*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.openpolitics.ro/de-ce-e-participarea-scazuta-la-alegerile-pe/>> [Accessed 3 April 2017].
- Permanent Electoral Authority, 2017. *Rezultatele electorale din Romania* [online] Available at: <<http://alegeri.roaep.ro>> [Accessed 13 April 2017]
- Timotei, V., 2013. *Tehnici de manipulare a electoratului prin cercetări de marketing*. Ph. D. Available at: <<http://webbut.unitbv.ro/teze/rezumate/2013/rom/VierasuTimotei.pdf>> [Accessed 13 March 2017].