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A DIALOGUE OF THE DEAF, OR COMMUNITIES OF DEBATE? THE USE OF FACEBOOK IN THE 2013 CZECH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN**

Abstract. *This article presents an analysis of the citizens' engagement with the 2013 Czech Parliamentary Elections campaign on Facebook. While many studies primarily focus on the intensity and forms of adoption of social networks by political actors in campaign communication, we attempt to explore both political parties' use of Facebook as well as the extent and ways of citizen participation on the online election campaign. The empirical base for this study consists of all communication archived over the course of three weeks (before and after the elections) on the Facebook profiles of ten most important Czech political parties. Using quantitative content analysis, we first present an overview of the dynamics and intensity of users' engagement with the campaign, illustrating that some of the small as well as populist parties have managed to mobilize significantly larger part of Facebook population than more established parties. Following that descriptive part, we first turn to the analysis of the actual content of communication, examining primarily the tone of users' comments, and than we move on to a more in-depth, qualitative examination of communication on the profiles of two selected political parties which were very successful in their online mobilization. The results indicate that most party profiles have displayed a rather surprising level of heterogeneity, allowing for dissenting voices to be displayed in what is generally seen as a heavily managed communication environment.*

Keywords: *election campaign; online mobilization; user participation; citizen engagement; social networking sites; Facebook; Czech Republic*

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Introduction

It is broadly accepted that the arrival of social network sites (SNS) and other Web 2.0 technologies (see Allen, 2013; John, 2013) during the last several years has changed the nature of political communication and the character of symbolic interactions between citizens and political actors, especially in context of election campaigns. In the wake of the 2008 Barack Obama campaign, commonly described as the first one to haves systematically utilized social media (Lilleker and Jackson, 2010; Johnson and Perlmutter, 2010), political parties and individual politicians across the Western world have been increasingly exploring the potential of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other SNSs to mobilize voters and engage with the electorate. From the perspective of political marketing, these new communication tools have a multiple appeal, whether it concerns their ability to amplify the messages spread through other channels, to provide an instant access to a network of supporters, to help raise funding (a feature which proved particularly valuable in the Obama campaign), but also to reduce the campaign expenses or to have a better grip over the campaign communication which bypasses journalistic newsrooms and the mediating role of mainstream media. With the rising penetration of the Internet and social networking sites in most parts of the world, election campaign managers have been adjusting their strategies in line with the "Web 2.0 campaigning" (Lilleker and Jackson, 2010; Gibson, 2013) and incorporating online tools and platforms into their communication mix, as recently observed in Sweden (Larsson and Moe, 2012), Finland (Strandberg, 2013), Italy (Vaccari et al., 2013), Norway (Enli et al., 2013) and many other countries.

At the same time, social media have provided new opportunities for citizens to participate on the democratic political process and to engage more actively and more directly with the electoral campaigns. This has been often portrayed by proponents of the cyber-optimistic perspectives on the role of the Internet in politics as a sign of the move towards "digital democracy" (see e.g. Dahlgren, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010, for discussion), particularly with respect to the assumed potential of the Web 2.0 platforms to challenge power relations between political actors and citizens (Shirky, 2008; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). As Lilleker and Jackson have pointed out, virtually anybody with an internet access "can create a weblog, comment on the election contest via social networking or microblogging sites, /.../ demonstrate their support through profile pictures, avatars or status updates and share or contribute to a variety of spoof campaign images that mock or promote, often in equal measure, parties or leaders." (Lilleker and Jackson, 2010). The possibility of co-creation of the campaign content, which is one of the intrinsic characteristics of the Web 2.0 campaign, is therefore potentially a double-edged sword

for political parties who normally "seek to control their messages and brand image across their campaign communication" (Lilleker and Jackson, 2010).

While research on the role of social media in election campaigns has been growing exponentially, the question of the particular ways SNS users are responding to campaign mobilization and interacting with the content on various social networking sites has arguably still been understudied. Detailed empirical investigations of this topic are arguably important not just in order to know whether and how has the e-campaign been "effective" from the party's point of view. In-depth analyses of users' participation are equally vital also when it comes to the continuing debates whether these new platforms facilitate and enhance democratic deliberation, exchange of opinions and involvement of a broader, heterogeneous spectrum of participants (Brundidge and Rice, 2008; Gil De Zuniga et al., 2009; Yardi and boyd, 2010), or if they rather produce self-enclosed, homogeneous, fan-type communities, or "cyberghettoes" (Hindman, 2009; Davis, 2010; Fenton and Barassi, 2011; Kushin and Kitchener, 2009; Ruiz et al., 2011).

The main aim of this paper is to contribute to this still-emerging research territory and to explore, by means of a case study of the 2013 Czech Parliamentary Elections, the extent and character of citizen participation on the election campaign, as led on Facebook profiles of selected political parties, with a specific focus on the degrees of homogeneity (versus heterogeneity) of users' contributions. Apart from this primary goal, the study also wants to add to the so-far very scarce empirical research on the use of social media in election campaigns in the Czech Republic, where social network sites have until only very recently played a marginal role in election communication (Macková et al., 2013). This has nevertheless changed following the campaign of the presidential candidate Karel Schwarzenberg in January 2013, which was particularly memorable for mobilizing masses of supporters via Facebook (Štětka et al., 2014a). The opportunity to analyse the first-ever systematic utilization of Facebook in Parliamentary Election campaign in the country was therefore an additional motivation for our study, which hopes to put the Czech Republic "on the map" of international research investigating the use of social media in political communication.

Exploring campaign communication and participation on social network sites

As mentioned above, the emergence of social network sites has risen hopes that citizens would have a chance to participate in politics[1] easier and

[1] *For the purpose of this article and our analyses we work with the definition of political participation as the potential of people to influence public sphere more intensely than just by voting their representatives. (Carpentier, 2011)*

more intensely than ever before in modern history. However, the question remains, how relevant their expression via these communication tools is and how can it enrich public political discussion. Does the Internet, in accordance with "the Internet enthusiasts", lead to "increased political engagement and to direct democracy" (Brundidge and Rice, 2008: 144) by enabling the involvement of new, minority voices in the public sphere, or does it rather support the formation of "homogeneous communities"[2] narrowing the spectrum of opinions Internet users are exposed to and thus leading to a widely discussed fragmentation? (Davis, 2010; Fenton and Barassi, 2011; Kushin and Kitchener, 2009; Ruiz et al., 2011)

These questions are predominantly framed by a habermasian ideal of public deliberation which represents a very frequent research perspective in this field, but the existing body of research does not offer clear answers to the questions. According to Brundidge and Rice (2008), the online discussions may contribute to citizens' exposure to dissenting voices which may lead to a more heterogeneous political discussion. However, taking into account the widening of knowledge gaps in the Internet environment and the colonization thereof by political marketing, the authors suggest that the heterogeneity of contesting ideas together with the unclear political motives of their proponents opens space for "elite demagoguery" rather than bringing anything positive for democracy (Brundidge and Rice, 2008).

Both Kushin and Kitchener (2009) as well as Yardi and boyd (2010) agree that political discussion on social networking sites cannot be described as entirely homogeneous, however their reseach results can also be interpreted as supporting the hypothesis about selectivity and homogeneity of online political discussion. According to Yardi and boyd, Twitter users are exposed to a wider specter of opinions than in their "offline lives" and also take part in discussions with people they disagree with, but the majority of their respondents interact much more with those who share their opinions (Yardi and boyd, 2010). Kushin and Kitchener challenge the hypothesis about homogeneous communities by stressing the presence of dissenting voices in the discussions in Facebook groups, although they are still marginal compared to the supporting voices (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009).

Ruiz et al. (2011) focused specifically on the habermasian question of "democratic qualities of citizen debates" in the online versions of national newspapers in different countries and concluded that two models of audience participation emerge: *communities of debate* and *homogenous communities*. In most cases the authors identified the presence of the latter, which can also be described as "a dialogue of the deaf", characterised by

[2] *Hindman (2009) and Sunstein (2007) use the term "cyberghettoes" to refer to a similar phenomenon where like-minded individuals group around quite narrow political ideas.*

collective reproduction of the same opinion, expressing mainly feelings and lacking argumentative debate. Although in two dailies, communities of debate were a typical form of discussion respecting alternative and minority perspectives and thus supporting a fruitful and collegiate discussion, the authors conclude that the majority of participants in the forums adhere to the ideological stance of the newsroom (Ruiz et al., 2011).

In relation to the question of the importance of social network sites in political communication some scholars focus on the very *affordances* of social network sites and study their impact on the nature (or form) of political discussions in this environment (Black, 2011; Halpern and Gibbs, 2013). Halpern and Gibbs (2013) argue that "political discussions in Facebook present a more egalitarian distribution of comments between discussants and higher level of politeness in their messages" which is caused by the specific affordances of identifiability and networked information access (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013: 1159). Black (2011) stresses the role of the filtering processes or algorithms supporting the existence of "echo chambers" or "information islands" where "people interact with similar others and seek confirmation of their own views" (Black, 2011: 7), of external sources published in the discussion flow influencing how people think about the topic discussed or of the "electronic multitasking" distracting people who take part in the online discussions (Black, 2011: 9).

Methodology of the study

In order to examine the above outlined topics, we have designed an empirical study investigating, primarily by means of content analysis, the character of communication on the political parties' Facebook profiles during the campaign for the 2013 Parliamentary Elections in the Czech Republic. The study was driven by three research questions, with the first two being followed by an empirical hypothesis (see below):

RQ1: What are the differences between parties in the level of adoption of Facebook and the intensity of engagement of its users?

RQ2: How homogeneous is the communication on political parties' profiles in terms of the tone of contributions, and to what extent are dissenting voices present there?

RQ3: What differences or similarities can we observe in communication discourses present on profiles of the two parties which were the most successful in online mobilization, YES 2011 and Czech Pirate Party?

Even though the research on the adoption of new media by political parties is still far from conclusive (Strandberg, 2013), there are indications that fringe and alternative parties are relatively more keen on utilizing these new campaign tools than large parties representing the establishment (Carlson

and Strandberg, 2008; Gibson and McAllister, 2009), especially (but not solely) given the fact that the former type of parties usually lack resources to employ more costly, mass-oriented campaign tools. Also, a recent comparative survey of campaign managers (Stetka et al., 2014b) has revealed that newer parties perceive the importance of new media channels as higher than the older ones. Therefore, we expected that:

H1: Alternative and new parties will be more active in their effort to mobilize supporters on Facebook than traditional/mainstream parties, and their followers will display higher level of engagement.

Studies conducted in context of the U. S. congressional or Presidential elections (Fernandes et al., 2010; Woolley et al., 2010; Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008; Bronstein, 2013) found out that user-generated content on candidates' Facebook pages is predominantly positive in tone and mainly (although not exclusively) supportive to the candidate. Even though there is certainly a difference in the way communities of fans are created around an individual candidate and around a party, for the lack of comparable data we based our second hypothesis upon an assumption that

H2: Contributions supporting "home" parties/candidates will prevail over those criticising them.

The data for the analysis were collected from official Facebook fan pages of thirteen most relevant Czech political parties which entered the election contest, in the period of three weeks (14. 10. – 3. 11. 2013),[3] that is, two weeks before the elections and one week following them. The pages were systematically monitored and archived every day using the plug-in ScrapBook for Mozilla Firefox browser. To analyse the level of adoption of Facebook by parties during the campaign and the intensity of citizen engagement, we have measured the number of statuses posted by parties on their Facebook profile, as well as the number of comments and replies posted by Facebook users in response to these (via the "posts by page" interface). Number of page likes, "talking about", and the number of likes and shares for individual statuses was also tracked down during the same period. The full sample was composed of altogether 278 party statuses, 3436 comments and 3392 replies.

For reasons of manageability, the analysis of the actual content of communication and its authors, as outlined in the hypothesis H2, was conducted on a more limited sample, encompassing just the last week before the elections

[3] *The parties were selected based on their political relevance, i.e. either they were the most already represented in the Parliament or they had the potential to enter the Parliament based on the opinion polls.*

(21. 10. – 26. 10. 2013), and involving only the first 30 responses (comments and replies) to each party status posted within that period.[4] Also in order to reduce the scope of the analysis to a reasonable level, the number of parties included into this stage of analysis was restricted to seven, the selection of which was motivated by the aim to represent three distinguished party types, namely traditional/mainstream parties (represented in the sample by the Czech Social Democratic Party, the Communist Party and the Civic Democratic Party), the alternative/non-parliamentary parties (the Pirate Party and the Green Party) and the populist/protest parties which were established only very recently (YES 2011 and the Dawn of Direct Democracy)[5].

Concerning the tone of comments and replies, we measured the valence of the users' statements separately towards "own party" (that is, the party on whose FB profile the contribution was posted), towards another party and towards other Facebook users, on a three-point scale (positive, negative and ambivalent/neutral). Coding was performed by two coders, who, after having undergone several rounds of coder training, achieved an intercoder reliability of at least 0.7 (Krippendorff Alpha) for each of the above mentioned content variables, which is considered an acceptable level (Lombard et al., 2002).

The next chapters of the article will present the results of our analysis in accordance with the order of the above stated research questions; first, we will overview the basic data on party mobilization and users interactions on Facebook during the campaign, then we turn to the tone of the communication posted by FB users on the parties' profile. The final part is devoted to the qualitative comparative analysis of communication discourses present on the profiles of two selected parties, YES 2011 and the Czech Pirate Party.

Facebook mobilization and user participation during the 2013 elections campaign

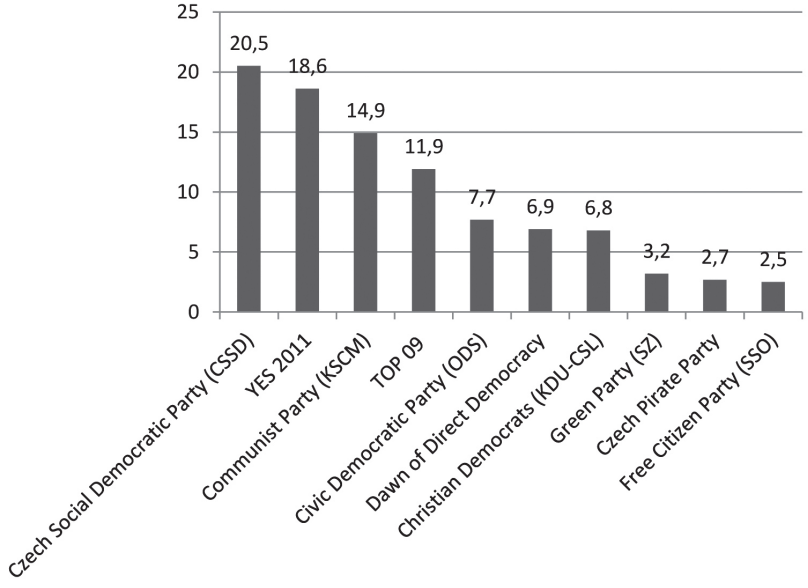
The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy with a proportional electoral system, which has for the most part of the transformation period produced coalition-type governments; despite of that, most of these

[4] *The decision to include the first 30 reactions was based around the median number of users' contributions per party status, which ranged between 21–56 for the seven parties in the sample.*

[5] *In this article we use either English versions of the full names of the Czech political parties, or their official Czech abbreviatons. Their official full names in Czech and their English names used in this article are as follows: Czech Social Democratic Party – "Česká strana sociálně demokratická" (ČSSD); YES 2011 – "ANO 2011"; Communist Party – "Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy" (KSČM); TOP 09 – "TOP 09"; Civic Democratic Party – "Občanská demokratická strana (ODS)"; Dawn of Direct Democracy (of Tomio Okamura; Dawn) – "Úsvit přímé demokracie Tomia Okamury"; Christian Democrats – "Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová" (KDU-ČSL); Free Citizens Party – "Strana svobodných občanů" (SSO); Green Party (Greens) – "Strana zelených" (SZ); Czech Pirate Party (Pirates, Pirate Party) – "Česká pirátská strana".*

coalitions have been relatively stable, with only three pre-term elections taking place in over 20 years of the country's existence since the break-up of Czechoslovakia (1992). However, in recent several years, the political system has experienced a significant shake-up and fragmentation due to the appearance and proliferation of various new parties, capitalizing on the increasing dissatisfaction of the population with the state of democracy and the political establishment. This tendency was further underlined by the course and outcomes of the 2013 Parliamentary Elections. The elections, which took place half a year before the regular term following the demise of the centre-right government of Petr Nečas in June 2013, had a second-lowest election turnout in the history of the Czech Republic (only 59.5 per cent of eligible voters). In line with general expectations, the first place was taken by the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), which was in opposition for the previous seven years; however, the margin of victory was much smaller than predicted, as ČSSD received only 20.5 % of votes, just under two per cent more than the runner-up, a newly formed party YES 2011.

Graph 1: RESULTS OF THE 2013 CZECH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS (% OF VOTES) – TOP 10 PARTIES

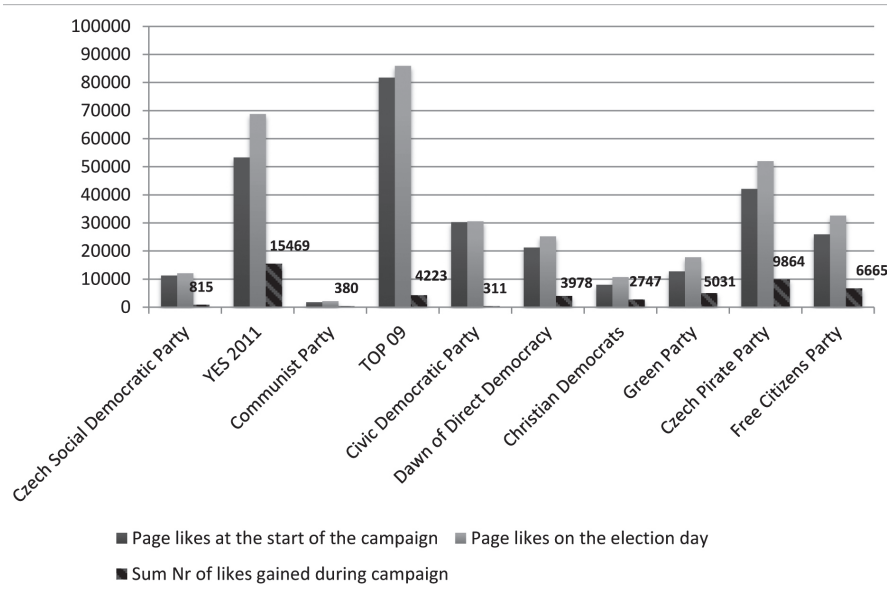


Established and headed by one of the richest Czech businessmen Andrej Babiš, the YES 2011 party centred their campaign strategy around a strong anti-corruption rhetoric and attacks on the previous governments. Rise of populism was also apparent in the electoral success of another newly

founded party, Dawn of Direct Democracy of Tomio Okamura, a party with just a handful of members but a charismatic leader. The previously ruling conservative parties (TOP 09 and ODS) suffered a defeat, while none of the small parties portraying themselves as an alternative to the establishment and focusing mainly on young, urban electorate (the Pirate Party, the Green Party or the Free Citizens Party) managed to exceed the 5 % election threshold.

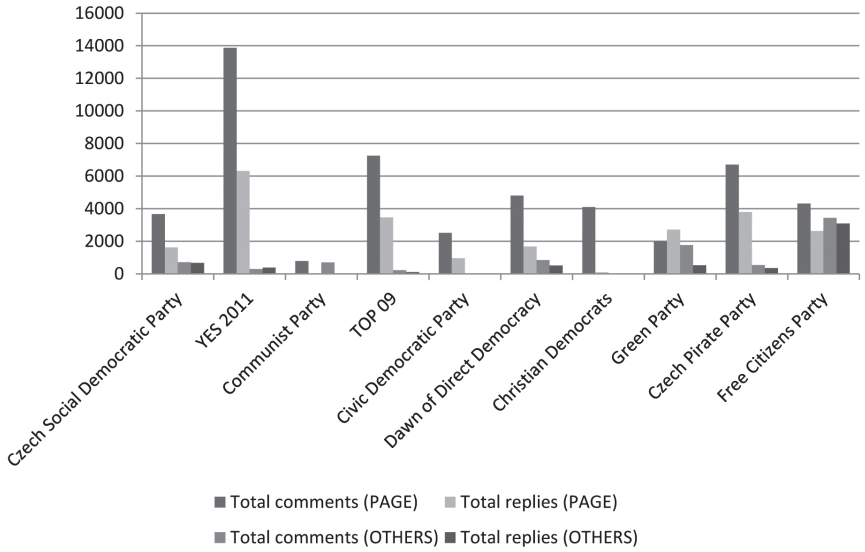
In the first part of the analysis we mapped the adoption of Facebook as a campaign tool by Czech political parties, and the intensity of interactions of users with their profiles. Comparing the number of "page likes" two weeks before the elections (the beginning of the sample interval) and the second election day, it is clear that it was the new and "alternative" parties who took the biggest advantage of this social networking site for election mobilization purposes. Although in absolute numbers, it was TOP09 which had the highest number of "likes" at the end of the campaign (over 85 thousand), the rise of its followers during the actual campaign was relatively marginal (4 thousand), pointing to the fact that the popularity of the party among Facebook users reached its peak during the presidential campaign of its leader Karel Schwarzenberg in January 2013 (see Štětka et al., 2014a). Looking at the number of followers gained during the two weeks, YES 2011 was the clear "winner", with over 15 thousand of likes, with the Czech Pirate Party taking the second place (nearly 10 thousand).

Graph 2: THE NUMBER OF "LIKES" ON POLITICAL PARTIES' FB PROFILES DURING THE CAMPAIGN (TOP 10 PARTIES)



As for the users' engagement with the content generated by the parties, the profile of YES 2011 displayed by far the highest amount of interactions, as measured by the number of comments and replies. While the Pirate Party profile was again very lively, FB users were similarly active on the profile of TOP09. The profile of the Dawn of Direct Democracy generated a relatively high number of interactions as well, as did the Free Citizens Party.

Graph 3: THE NUMBER OF USERS' COMMENTS AND REPLIES ON PARTIES' FB PROFILES DURING THE CAMPAIGN



These results confirm the first hypothesis (H1) which predicted alternative and new parties to be more interested and successful in mobilizing supporters and engaging the users on Facebook than the mainstream, long-established parties. This was particularly true for YES 2011 which not only gathered the most fans during the campaign, but also became an epicentre of election communication of Facebook users, having generated over a quarter of the total of 75 thousand user reactions during the observed period.

Fans or opponents? Examining the tone of users' comments

Nevertheless, if we want to investigate the character of citizen engagement in online election campaign more thoroughly, we need to go beyond the sheer intensity of interactions, as they may turn out to be a misleading indicator of popularity and hiding an internal complexity of communication

which take place on the political parties' profiles. This prompts a question: what kind of messages were the users posting on these profiles?

Looking at the valence of users' statements towards the "home" party (Tab.1), it is quite apparent that not every comment equals an expression of support, and that there is a relatively high amount of "dissent" present in the communication on parties' profiles.

Tab.1: VALENCE OF STATEMENTS OF FACEBOOK USERS ON PARTIES' PROFILES IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

	Reference towards "home" party (%)				Reference towards another party (%)				Reference towards another FB user (%)			
	Pos	Neg	A/N	total	Pos	Neg	A/N	total	Pos	Neg	A/N	total
ČSSD	51.2	37.7	11.1	**324**	26.9	55.6	17.6	**108**	10.9	77.4	11.7	**137**
YES 2011	53.9	34.8	11.3	**1158**	15.9	53.2	30.9	**220**	11	63	26	**292**
KSČM	57	34.2	8.9	**79**	–	–	–	**7**	2.9	82.4	14.7	**34**
ODS	24.4	62.5	13.1	**648**	27.4	42.3	30.3	**208**	11.7	66.9	21.5	**163**
DAWN	78.6	10.2	11.2	**644**	6.7	71.1	22.2	**194**	23.6	58.3	18.1	**127**
Pirates	75.8	4.5	19.7	**1001**	15.4	55.9	28.7	**188**	22.6	39.5	38	**266**
Greens	52.9	9.8	37.3	**643**	23.7	35.5	40.9	**93**	28.4	21.3	50.3	**183**
TOTAL	57.8	25.2	17.1	**100%**	18.5	53.4	28.1	**100%**	17.4	53.7	29	**100%**

As the Table 1 reveals, the amount of negative statements on the "home" party profile is not negligible, representing one quarter of all comments/replies which involved an identifiable statement with a reference (either explicit or implicit) towards the party, its candidates or politicians (this involved 63.3% of the total number of users' contributions in the entire sample; in other words, in 36.7% of cases a reference to the "home" party was missing). Furthermore, over 17% of references were coded as ambivalent or neutral, which results in the fact that positive references – statements which could be interpreted as supportive for the party – amounted to just over 57 percent. While support prevails, and the hypothesis H2 is thereby confirmed, the fact that only a slight majority of Facebook users' contributions referring to the party (that is, only one third of the total number of comments or replies) can be regarded as positive certainly calls for a more cautious interpretation of the sheer volumes of interactions on parties' profiles, and suggests that mobilization on Facebook does not produce only self-enclosed communities of party fans but often can become a space of contestation with a heavy presence of dissenting and critical voices.

This is, however, more true for some parties than others. Looking at the Table 1 in a more detail, we can observe that by far the highest percentage of criticism (62.5% of statements) was present on the profile of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which was leading the government for the previous seven years and was linked to numerous corruption scandals. The

public criticism of ODS, which resulted in the lowest-ever elections result in the party's history, apparently found its way on its Facebook profile, where the core supporters and fans found themselves in a notable minority. In a stark contrast to this, the profiles of the populist Dawn of Direct Democracy and the Czech Pirate Party contained predominantly positive messages (over 75 % in both cases), with only a marginal number of critical voices entering the debate. We can obviously only speculate to what extent is this affected by the moderation of the debate by the profile's administrators (which, according to anecdotal evidence, was rather heavy on the Dawn's profile, with negative comments being allegedly deleted), but in any case it demonstrates that Facebook as a platform was not being used in a homogeneous way during the elections but treated differently by parties as well as users. This is further illustrated by looking at the ratio of positive versus negative statements referring to another party – the profile of the populist Dawn was apparently flooded with negative references to the party's political opponents and election competitors (71 % of statements), while the profile of ODS attracted relatively highest amount of supporters of other parties (27.4 %). A notable outlier from these patterns is the profile of the Green Party, which displayed by far the highest share of ambivalent or neutral statements, both towards "home" party as well as towards another party, suggesting that the contributions were more balanced and more factual. The fact that the Facebook profile of the Green Party was relatively the most favourable place for a civilised debate can be further demonstrated by the lowest percentage of negative comments towards another FB user (only 21.3 %). As the numbers for the other parties show, "flame wars" among the contributors were apparently much more common than peaceful deliberation, with the users on profiles of the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Civic Democratic Party displaying relatively the highest level of negativity towards other contributors (over two thirds of statements coded as negative).

Discourses of dissent: comparing users' participation on the profiles of Czech Pirate Party and YES 2011

In order to answer the third research question and to explore to what extent does the communication on political parties profiles correspond to the normative assumptions related to concept of "Public Sphere 2.0" (Ruiz et al., 2011), we have compared communication discourses present in the users' comments and replies on profiles of the two parties which proved most successful in mobilizing fans and supporters during the campaign – the runner-up party YES 2011 and the Czech Pirate Party.

Both of them can be described as new political actors, even if their actual

political impact has been quite different – while the Pirates, having received 2.7% of votes, have only gained broader visibility through these elections, YES 2011 has challenged the so-far dominance of the two strongest parties (Civic Democratic Party and Social Democratic Party) and became a major political force following the 2013 elections outcome.

Politically, YES 2011 can be described as an example of a populist-protest party without traditionally designed programme but rather focusing on a single issue – in this case, corruption and state capture. Because of the party's founder and leader, the multi-billionaire Andrej Babiš, the party was able to invest considerable amount of money into the campaign which was designed and led by professional PR agency. The second party selected for this comparative case study, the Czech Pirate Party, is an openly anti-populist and anti-establishment actor without almost any financial resources, and run by a group of enthusiasts.

Based on the textual analysis of users' individual interactions, it can be argued that the communication on the respective parties' profiles represents two very different political discourses. Although both can be described as conflictual or critical, the criticism on the Czech Pirate Party is of a very different nature than the conflict on the YES 2011 profile. Whereas the first one is typical for a critical dialogue between those who support the Pirates or at least share most of their political values, the YES 2011 page content is formed mainly by either supportive comments of uncritical supporters of the party, or by disapproving reactions of the party's opponents. Hence the Czech Pirate Party's Facebook discourse is a self-cultivating one, aimed at discussing problematic issues, with a relative lack of verbal attacks against the party as such, whereas the YES 2011 page is full of one-sided reactions of either fans or critics of the party with almost no dialogue between the two sides or even inside the opposing camps.

The overal critical-minded atmosphere of the Pirates' Facebook page and its deliberative aspects are manifested mainly in the general criticism of mainstream (political) habits and the promotion of a deserved system change. The party fans have clearly appreciated that the Pirates *"don't flow with the stream"* or *"don't compromise on their principles"* (as mentioned in the comments) and that they don't employ the usual political marketing strategies. The refusal of certain campaign methods identified as "mainstream" or even populist is typical for the self-cultivating aspect of the discourse on the Czech Pirate Party, as the comment below illustrates, pointing out the triviality of a campaign event aimed at catching attention of families with small children by offering them a jumping castle – see Pic. 1:

> *"A jumping castle for kids?! Really?! Why do you use the same trivial tools [...] as all the other parties?"* (user: Marek Šimoník, 16. 10. 2013)

Pic. 1 – THE PICTURE POSTED ON THE CZECH PIRATE PARTY'S FACEBOOK PAGE AND CRITICIZED BY ITS FANS



Comments asking for a higher quality of the discussion and arguments, discussing specific problems, even with opponents, and offering alternative political, communication or technological solutions are not unusual for the discourse of the Czech Pirate Party Facebook profile. The communication often resembles the habermasian ideal of public deliberation and challenges the very nature of Pirates' participation in "official" politics. The paradox of an anti-establishment party making efforts to become a parliamentary party and complaining about the unjust attitude of mainstream media and the minority status is introduced in the discourse by some of the voters who stress the importance of the oppositional character of the party and that "Pirates don't cry":

> *"I will give you my vote but I think you're just pushing too hard. [...] Would you really consider it a victory to make it into the Parliament with the kind of representation we can expect to be there?"* (user: Pavel Molčík, 19. 10. 2013)

In comparison with the Czech Pirate Party, the YES 2011 party supporters are almost uncritical towards the party, despite the fact that in terms of sheer numbers, there are significantly more dissenting voices present on their page (see Table 1). By contrast, the fans express their trust put in the YES 2011 movement and their comments are stressing the negatives of the established political parties in a very general sense ("mafia", corruption, disappointment). The comments are typical for their emotinal appeal and fatalist character, being rather general statements than invitations for

a discussion. We identified a very frequent characteristic that we call the "don't-disappoint-us-discourse" suggesting (and sometimes clearly stressing) that althoug the party is usually associated with the inevitable change it offers, it is not considered the ideal solution, but rather the last hope and the best among the bad options which emphasizes the fatalist character of the discourse:

> *"I believe in YES, if they betray us, it does not matter, there is no one else to trust anyway – so, please, don't disappoint us!"* (user: Lada Hejzlarová, 23. 10. 2013)

The difference in the communicative environment on the YES 2011 Facebook page compared to the Czech Pirate Party can also be demonstrated by the very positive reception of the particular campaign outlets by the fans. Whereas the opponents do not hesitate to criticize the mainstream political marketing strategies, supporters of the party praise them for the smart ideas and a sense of humour. The picture (banner) below (see Pic. 3) gained many positive comments for being a clever reaction to an incident in which the YES 2011 opponents allegedly burnt down straw bales arranged as "country bumpkins", a party's label for their political opponents, with a slogan "Let us not be ruled by country bumpkins anymore!". The YES 2011 used the opportunity and published this banner with a wordplay basically saying that their opponents will lose the elections ("burn down" in Czech).

Pic. 3 PUBLISHED ON OCTOBER 23, 2013 IN REACTION TO AN INCIDENT IN WHICH THE YES 2011 OPPONENTS ALLEGEDLY BURNT DOWN STRAW BALES WITH THE PARTY'S ADVERTISEMENT.



The frequent critical comments on the YES 2011 Facebook page seem to be produced exclusively by the party's opponents. They focus on both the alleged communist past of the party leader and his present business strategies (*"He is showing you how he's gonna buy you all step by step... and you can't see it" – user: Tomas Brejla, 20. 10. 2013*), criticize the political marketing strategies of the party (purchase of supporters and likes), its populism and the lack of a realistic political programme. Typical for the criticism are also complaints about the party's pasivity in the discussion – according to the critics, YES 2011 representatives either don't communicate at all or reply to positive comments of their supporters only. Our analysis corresponds with this conclusion as the party and its supporters seem to try to avoid any discussion or confrontation as much as possible. Unlike the Czech Pirate Party, deliberation is not supported on the YES 2011 Facebook page, and criticism is usually rejected as some kind of inappropriate behaviour:

> *"I think it would be better if you started not to respond to the negative contributions at all!!! Those who post them are probably low achievers who feel important just because you reply. Please, don't react to them and they'll go and repair their self-esteem somewhere else!!!"* (user: Zdeněk Majzlík, 22. 10. 2013)

The above presented comparison of users' communication on the Czech Pirate Party and YES 2011 Facebook profiles indicates an existence of two rather distinct modes of discussion, which both correspond to and, at the same time, complicate the dichotomy of online public discussion models presented by Ruiz et al. (2011), that is, the "communities of debate" versus "homogeneous communities". Based on our qualitative insights into the way people have engaged with the campaign on these two profiles, we can consider the Pirate's page a "community of debate", despite the fact that in terms of opinions expressed towards the party the profile seems to be rather homogenous. On the contrary, the profile of the YES 2011 movement can probably be described as a space where, in the words of Ruiz et al., "people are having a dialogue of the deaf" (ibid.: 482), although their contributions certainly don't correspond to the notion of "a coherent collective reproduction of the same positions" (ibid.).

Conclusions

The 2013 Parliamentary elections certainly highlighted the role of social network sites as a new tool for campaign communication in the Czech Republic. All relevant political parties adopted Facebook as one of their communication platforms; however, it was predominantly the new and "alternative" parties which put a significant effort into mobilization through Facebook. Conversely, these profiles attracted the highest amount of Facebook users who also displayed the highest level of engagement, as measured by the number of interactions, comments and replies (H1 confirmed). With the exception of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the tone of users' reactions on FB profiles of the selected political parties was predominantly positive and supportive towards the party (H2 confirmed). However, the relatively high amount of criticism aimed at the "home" parties on their own Facebook profiles, coupled with the notable presence of "cheerleaders" for other, competing parties, indicates an existence of dissent in an environment which, arguably, was created in order to boost parties' and candidates' popularity and disseminate their positive self-images, and which the parties have formally a control over. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in the volume of support and opposition among the commentaries on parties' profiles; while for Dawn of Direct Democracy or the Pirate Party, Facebook clearly functions as mostly a fan-gathering platform, the more established, traditional parties display the biggest volume of critical voices.

Overall, our study suggests that there is neither a uniform pattern of the use of Facebook for campaign communication by parties, nor a single, universal mode of users' participation. The character of engagement shows significant differences between the surveyed profiles, and seems to be rather tightly related to parties' political aims and campaign strategies, as we tried to demonstrate in our case study, juxtaposing the two parties which heavily relied upon Facebook mobilization during the 2013 election campaign, YES 2011 and the Czech Pirate Party. Going back to our initial theoretical assumptions, we can argue that both "communities of debate" as well as "dialogue of the deaf" are simultaneously present on Facebook during the election campaign, which also challenges the attempts to attribute this particular social network site a clear-cut, unitary role in the democratic political process: our findings rather stress that it can be used in different ways, support elite demagoguery, contribute to formation of "information islands", but also promote rational deliberation – even if the latter might be perhaps hardest to find. Further research is certainly needed to shed more light on the patterns of communication on social network sites in the context of election campaign, and we hope this study has, for all its limitation, pointed to a direction which promises to bring more empirical data in the future, especially by comparative research.

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