*Lejla Turčilo**

Hoće li nas internet osloboditi: novi mediji i stare politike u Bosni i Hercegovini

Sažetak

Internet je postao značajan alat i veoma važan kanal političke komunikacije u suvremenom svijetu. Prvi zagovornici umrežene političke komunikacije su promovirali ideju da internet uklanja prepreke protoka slobodne informacije između donosioca političkih odluka i onih za koje se odluke donose (javnost) i ta inkorporacija interneta i područja političke komunikacije prouzrokuje promjene prijašnjih dominantnih modela političke komunikacije koji su se zasnivali na tajnosti i netransparentnosti. Tako bi nas internet „mogao osloboditi" i otvoriti nove načine sudjelovanja građana u političkoj komunikaciji.

Ovaj rad pokušava naći odgovor na pitanje: je li se to dogodilo u Bosni i Hercegovini? Je li nas internet počeo „oslobađati"? Analizira upotrebu interneta u političkoj komunikaciji u Bosni i Hercegovini u predizborno vrijeme. Početna hipoteza u ovom radu tvrdi da internet nije u potpunosti uključen u političku komunikaciju u Bosni i Hercegovini (ili, preciznije, nije uključen na pravilan način) tako, da bi se opisala situacija u BiH politici kad se govori o novim medijima, točan termin je „politička komunikacija koja koristi internet", a ne „umrežena politička komunikacija".

Ključne riječi: internet, politička komunikacija, političke stranke, nevladine organizacije, Bosna i Hercegovina

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Will the Internet set us free: New media and old politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Summary

The Internet has become a significant tool and very important channel of political communication in contemporary world. The first advocates of on-line political communication promoted the idea that the Internet is removing barriers to free information flow between political decision-makers and those in whose favor these decisions are made (public) and that incorporation of the Internet in political communication sphere causes changes of former dominant models of political communication, based on secrecy and non-transparency. Thus, the Internet "could set us free", and open new ways of citizens' participation in political communication.

This paper tries to find an answer to a question: has that happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina? Has the Internet started to "set us free"? It analyzes the usage of the Internet in political communication in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the pre-election time. The hypothesis from which we start in this paper says that the Internet is not fully incorporated in political communication in Bosnia-Herzegovina (or, to be precise, is not incorporated in the proper manner), so the accurate term to describe situation in B&H politics when it comes to new media usage is "political communication using the Internet" rather than "on-line political communication".

Key words: Internet, political communication, political parties, NGOs, Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Introduction

Political communication is an inseparate part of contemporary political processes. Having in mind that the Internet in a short period of time has become an important communication media, it is clear that it should be used in political communication as one of the important tools as well.   Question related to the role of the Internet in political communication in B&H is: does the Internet have exclusively instrumental role in presentation of political ideas or is there a transformation of rules of "political game" in the on-line sphere, when it comes to Bosnia-Herzegovina? In other words, is there an on-line political communication in B&H or do should we use the term "usage of the Internet in political communication in B&H"? The first term implies full implementation of the Internet in political communication between political actors and public and the second implies sporadic usage of the Internet by political actors, usually in the pre-election period. If we accept the theory that the network by its nature overcomes position of the instrument in political communication and it becomes almost equally important as its subjects and actors, then it is even more important to examine the ways in which the Internet is used in political communication in B&H .

The fact is that the Internet is not only a technology, but also communication media in a full meaning of that term. It is also new public sphere and that is its specific position in comparison to all traditional media. The Internet is media that enables (for the very first time ever) communication one-to-one, one-to-many and all-to-all (or at least many-to-many) in a real time and on global level. Democracy and anarchy are its key attributes, which make it good and bad at the same time. The Internet is interactive media and the power of ideas and readiness of users to share those ideas are condition of its existence. Network offers many useful things to its users and to people involved in political communication, since it posses extreme flexibility and adjustability, which are the key two things necessary to survive and act in contemporary environment, which is changing so fast. These useful things offered by the network have not been completely explored or discussed yet in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Web 1.0 and web 2.0. are still relatively new phenomenon to significant part of B&H population.

The Internet in B&H – Growth is Slow, but Significant

There is a significant growth when it comes to the usage of the Internet in the past five years, but the percentage of the Internet usage is still lower in B&H in comparison to world (and even regional) trends. In 2004, there were 585,000 Internet users in Bosnia nad Herzegovina (12%), and that number almost tripled by 2009. Based on the records of Communication Regulatory Agency[1], one in three citizens of BH uses the Internet – 1.42 million by the end of 2009 (37 %). In the following period, Communication Regulatory Agency projects continued upward trend; Internet usage has been growing steadily by around 6% a year (31.2% in 2008, 37% in 2009).

The Internet in Bosnia-Herzegovina is still a media of younger, urban elite. Data show that the majority of Internet users in B&H are at the age of 15-45, mainly situated in cities and with at least high school education[2]. Digital divide/gap is decreasing, but it is still present, especially between people living in urban and rural areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina, between younger and older people and between people living in certain regions in the country (more developed: Sarajevo, Tuzla, Banja Luka, Bihać, Mostar– less developed: Goražde, Prijedor, Zenica).

General Elections in 2010. in B&H – Way Too Many Actors, Way Too Little Information

For the 2010. elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina 48 political parties and 15 independent candidates applied with more than 8000 candidates for either state, entity and/or cantonal parliaments. 13 parties applied for the first time for these elections. 19 political parties and 4 independent candidates run for the members of the Presidency of B&H. Seven political parties (Socijaldemokratska partija BiH, Stranka demokratske akcije, Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu, Hrvatska demokratska zajednica BiH, Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata, Savez za demokratsku Srpsku, Hrvatska demokratska zajednica 1990-HDZ 1990) had candidates for all

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[1] http://www.rak.ba

[2] http://www.gfk.ba

levels of governance (state, entity, cantons, Presidency). According to information from Central Election Commission[3] this is a decrease in number of political parties that run for elections, since in 2002. there were 63 parties and in 2006. 61 parties. But, this is still a very big number of political parties in comparison to total population of Bosnia-Herzegovina (approximately 4 million).

Political parties invested huge amounts of money (approximately 6 million KM – 3 million Euros[4]) in promotion in media in the pre-election campaign, which is mostly spent on billboards and promo-materials (42%), adds on TV (26%) and in print media (23%). 5% was spent on the Internet activities. We could say that citizens got political propaganda rather than proper political information from political parties in the pre-election campaign, since majority of information were either PR materials created in political parties' headquarters or materials aimed at discreditation of opponents. Media analysts in B&H used the term "media wars" to describe the political discourse in September 2010. in which political actors promoted almost a hate speech rather than providing information on their programs. The Internet, as a new platform for direct communication with voters, media which could make the pre-election campaign more open and more transparent, channel for free information flow between political decision-makers and those in whose favor these decisions are made (public), did not find much of its place in such political discourse.

New Media and Old Politics: Web 1.0. Versus Web 2.0 in B&H Political Communication 2010.

The fact is that people, political organizations and society in general, by adopting technology and the Internet itself modify the network, but there is also opposite process: the Internet has significant impact on (political) communication in general. One can see that in the field of political communication the Internet has made one significant change: the essence of on-line political communication is communication of values and mobilization on meaning, and political subjects need to make technological, as well as organizational and structural changes in the

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[3] http://www.izbori.ba
[4] http://www.ti-bih.org

Internet environment. The Internet is much more than technologically more perfect message board and it should become the instrument of democracy, by providing such communication model in the politics in which one can easily get political information and in which citizens have the same information and capability to discuss political issues as their political leaders. Our analysis has shown that such model has not been established in Bosnia-Herzegovina yet.

Political parties and candidates still consider the Internet as a "place for a better promotion", rather than an additional communication tool. Their on-line discourse is based on a paradigm of web 1.0, which means that they prefer web sites in which they control the information flow, and that they are not ready to open more, letting voices of citizens to be heard in their on-line presentation. That is why the interactivity of the Internet, as its key comparative advantage, has not been used properly in B&H. Much better and more efficient engagement in the on-line sphere had NGOs from Bosnia-Herzegovina, which worked mainly on raising awareness of B&H citizens on the importance of elections and motivating them to vote on October 3rd 2010.

When it comes to political parties, several important elements were taken into consideration in our analysis of their on-line communication:

- (Non)existence of web sites, Facebook profiles, blogs or other forms of on-line presentation;

- Variety of content on-line (not only in terms of multimedia variety, but also various content in terms of topics, sources, function etc.);

- Quality of information on official web sites (are there information which fulfill the function of informing, orientation and education of citizens, not only information which are result of PR activities of political parties);

- Proactive and on-time information available on-line;

- Communication rather than informing by political parties on-line.

Out of 48 political parties which had candidates for 2010. elections, 31 had their web sites, but 9 out of 31 have not been updated for three

months or more before the elections. All seven political parties, which had candidates for all levels of government (SDP - Socijaldemokratska partija BiH, SDA - Stranka demokratske akcije, SbiH - Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu, HDZ BiH - Hrvatska demokratska zajednica BiH, SNSD - Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata, SzDS - Savez za demokratsku Srpsku, HDZ 1990 - Hrvatska demokratska zajednica 1990), had their web sites, as well as Facebook profiles, so we may say that they used the Internet the best. Several parties opened new web sites specifically for the 2010. elections, usually named after the slogan of the party[5].

Most of web sites were aimed at promotion, not communication (filled with video clips, speeches, timetable of election tours etc.). Their target audience was consisted of members of political parties or regular voters for those parties (who were able to, for example, download ring tones for mobile phones on SDA or SDP web sites). Majority of web sites were not inventive at all; they mainly respected "technical rules": design, colors, logo, easy download, while, in terms of content, already existing press materials were used to "fill in" the site. Web sites also did not use communication aspect well – SDP was one of rare parties which had web site that allowed comments and was fully interactive, but with very careful administrator, who cleared all "dissonant" voices. NS Radom za boljitak (http://www.zaboljitak.ba), had well designed and very informative web site (one of the best), but totally non-interactive: the only contact available was a phone number of party's headquarter. Model of dissemination of information on web sites was very similar to one in traditional media: titles with "big words" ("Vote for us is vote for better future" etc.), professional photos (made by hired professional photographs), a lot of news (aimed mainly at informing members of parties on the future activities).

When it comes to web 2.0 as a tool for pre-election campaign, we may say that social networks became in 2010. what in 2002. were web sites: new tool in clumsy hands. Dominant social network was Facebook (which is understandable, since majority of population prefers Facebook). Twitter and Flickr were used much less, and even absurd examples were present: that on a web site of political party[6] Twitter was linked and the party did not use Twitter at all. Twitter and Facebook were used the best by NS Radom za boljitak and Flickr was used the best by SDP. Also, presidential candidates used Facebook more than web sites, although in some cases

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[5] http://www.narodzna.ba – SDA or http://www.drzavazacovjeka.ba – SDP
[6] http://www.sdp.ba

official Facebook profiles of presidential candidates were not linked to official web sites of their parties (HDZ – Borjana Krišto). Some Facebook profiles were almost identical to web site of political party (SDU profile and web site for example, or profile of Martin Raguž and web site of HDZ 1990). It is interesting that many parties' activists used Facebook for posting their photos from different parties' events, which was not part of campaigning, but it could be called "promotion by accident" – these activists actually promoted themselves and their role in these events, but parties benefited as well. Blog was used in very few cases, and even some blogs that were quite popular and followed earlier were not used during the pre-election campaign (Željko Komšić, member of Presidency of B&H and member of SDP had very popular blog[7], but last post on that blog was in February 2010.).

In general, it was to some point understandable that political parties did not pay a lot of attention to the Internet four years ago during pre-election campaign, since the number of Internet users was lower. But, nowadays, when half of B&H population uses the Internet (especially since majority of these users belongs to younger population, who, predominantly, does not vote), this media could have been used better for political communication. There was no on-line campaigning in 2010, but rather political informing through the on-line media. The Internet still is new media for many political actors, and this new media was in many cases neglected since these actors preferred old politics (which implies one-way dissemination of messages and two poles of communication: active (political leaders and parties) and passive (citizens, whose only activity is expected on the day of elections)).

Much better on-line campaigning we saw from various NGOs (CCI - Centar civilnih inicijativa[8], Transparency International[9]), which used the Internet as one of the most important communication channels for reaching wider target groups. These NGOs worked mainly on raising awareness of people on the importance of voting, so the main content they provided on the Internet was related to this as well. They published reports on work of politicians in the previous four years, informed citizens

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[7] http://www.zeljkokomsic.blogger.ba

[8] http://www.cci.ba

[9] http://www.ti-bih.org

on how to vote and thus increased the turnout (which was biggest in history of elections in B&H – 54.21%[10]).

When we compare the usage of the Internet in pre-election time in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2010. by political parties and by NGOs, we can conclude that political parties still relied on traditional media, in which they invested enormous amounts of money (as we already said, almost 3 million Euros), while NGOs (which do not have that money) used the Internet as a "communication shortcut". As a consequence, the Internet had bigger impact on elections turnout (that is, number of people who voted for the very first time this year) then on the results of 2010. elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Conclusion

If a democracy is a governance of people and if the Internet enables people to overlook their politicians, then the Internet could truly "set us free" and become the base for the democracy. But, what should be done in order to create such situation in B&H?

Variety of sources, transparency, speed and free flow of information, as well as interactivity, are the basic attributes that make the information shortcut, offered by the Internet, so popular. But, these attributes do not develop and enhance on their own. Political subjects need to play significant role in this process of network enhancing, by accepting the Internet as potentially powerful tool in the sphere of political communication and by accepting the on-line sphere as a new sphere for their activities. The Internet can contribute to create situation of on-line politics in which communication is fully implemented, but it cannot create such situation itself – political actors are still in charge for that (as well as the public), not the media that they use. B&H political subjects, as seen from our analysis, do not create such situation, since their web sites mainly contain the same (or very similar) information as off-line media, such as press releases, interviews with political leaders etc. Most of them do not offer any special on-line content, which could increase transparency of political process on-line and they do not use web 2.0 potentials.

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[10] http://www.izbori.ba

The Internet opens new sphere for political activity – the on-line political scene. But, this new political sphere is not isolated from the "real world" in which most of political activities are still held. Coordination of these two spheres – on-line and off-line political sphere – is a key task for political subjects, so that these two spheres are not separated or opposed to each other.

In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina unification of the Internet and politics has not happened yet, except in the case of NGOs. The Internet has not been fully implemented in the field of political communication in Bosnia-Herzegovina, or at least it has not been implemented properly.

Political parties do not pay attention to communication through the Internet, although some of them try to activate their websites, e-mail accounts, Facebook profiles etc. in the time of pre-election campaign. Generally speaking, in B&H political context, in which one can see the crisis of political legitimacy and relatively bad relations between citizens and their political leaders, the Internet as interactive, multi-way communication media, can find small number of active supporters in both of these groups. Politicians and their institutions publicize their information on the network and answer to questions in a bureaucracy manner. On-line communication and off-line politics are still two separate spheres in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Two key areas which Bosnia-Herzegovina should improve in order to connect these two spheres are infrastructure and knowledge. Infrastructure should be developed to enable even bigger number of population to participate in on-line sphere (overcoming digital divide and digital gap), while knowledge is something that is missing on the side of political parties, as well.

The fact is that the Internet can help in overcoming the crisis of political legitimacy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but that requires the full implementation of technology and, even more importantly, change of attitudes of political subjects and their adaptation to new (new-media) politics. Bosnia-Herzegovina, as a transition country and as part of global(ized) world, must make step forward in increasing transparency of political processes and the Internet seems to be one of means to make this step. Future of politics lays in communication and the future of communication belongs to the Internet. B&H political decision-makers do not have an excuse for ignoring this fact.

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