# MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

**Olena Tkachenko, Yaroslav Yanenko, Olga Sydorenko, Inna Sypchenko, Lyudmila Dudchenko, Natalya Rudenko**

Department of Journalism and Philology, Sumy State University, Sumy, Ukraine

## ABSTRACT

*The article discusses the peculiarities of building political communications based on the material of official Twitter accounts of Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelensky as candidates for the President of Ukraine from 31.03 to 21.04.2019. Today's politicians are actively leveraging the positive experience of using Internet technologies to influence target audiences and building political communication with potential voters.*

*Therefore, political communications including posts on candidates' official pages between the first and second rounds of presidential elections were chosen for the analysis. Based on the content analysis of text messages in the following aspects: frequency of posting, thematic integrity and completeness of the content, use of keywords, the participation in debates, vision of Ukraine's geopolitical strategy, and V. Zelensky's inaugural speech, the authors concluded that V. Zelensky's account was inferior to P. Poroshenko's account by the number of subscribers (readers) – 34 thousand vs 1.21 million; messages (43 vs 270); meaningful keywords.*

*Significant differences were observed in the thematic content filling. V. Zelensky used completely different instruments considering the mood of the citizens of Ukraine, their attitude to the previous government. He played on the heartstrings of Ukrainians. His phenomenon is similar to the phenomenon in the interpretation of I. Kant, it is based primarily on feelings.*

**Key words:** marketing communications social networks, Twitter, political communications, presidential elections, Ukraine

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

On March 31, 2019, the first round of the Presidential elections was held in Ukraine, with 39 candidates. Volodymyr Zelensky, who received 30.24% of the vote, and Petro Poroshenko, 15.95%, entered the second round of the elections.

Modern political communications influence the target audience by visualizing political ideas and demonstrating the image of a desirable future, identifying an individual with a politician or a political party, which can result in an individual's active actions, including voting in elections, campaigning with relatives, friends, and acquaintances, and participating in political actions, etc. An important role in this process is played by modern Internet communications, in particular, social networks.

We see the value of social networks in the ability of each individual to be in the center of the communication process: to set communication and maintain it; to participate in the development of a particular online platform, to post content, to share information, to post photos, videos, and audio; to support or refute other users' views through reposts, ratings, and more.

Social networks allow becoming an active participant in the election campaign, joining the debate, raising a current social and political issue, feeling involved in important events, thus exercising the right to vote and be elected, intentions to influence the course of events in a certain way, showing the attitude to promotion or discrediting of political parties or individual politicians, etc.

In 2018 and 2019, Mediacompas Company conducted a survey of Sumy State University students regarding their level of media literacy. There were several options to choose to answer the question "Where do you mostly get news about everything that is going on in the city, region, or country?" The overwhelming majority of respondents chose the option "From social networks". If in 2018 it was 69.3% – 167 people out of 241 surveyed, in 2019, it was already 95%, 133 people out of 140 polled (by comparison, the option "From TV" was chosen by 32,8% in 2018, and 25,7% in 2019, and the option "From print media (newspapers, magazines)" was chosen only by 8,3% and 7,9% respectively) [1] (Figure 1).
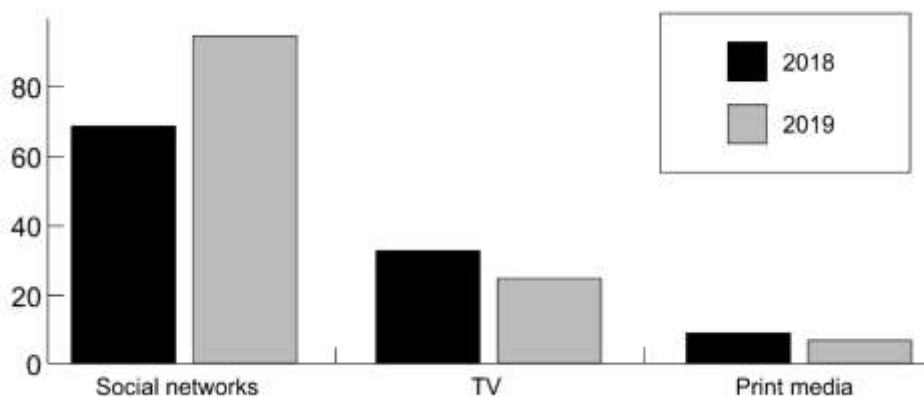


**Figure 1** News sources for modern Ukrainian students

The active use of social networks by modern politicians is based on the already positive experience of influencing the target audience and building political communication with potential voters through Internet technology. It is worth mentioning President Barack Obama, who has been actively using social networks and multimedia technologies in his political communication since 2008, other politicians started to follow this example. Currently,

prominent political leaders (B. Johnson, R. Erdogan, E. Macron, D. Trump, etc.) play a significant role in the media communications using the social network of Twitter, therefore, official (verified by the network) accounts of political leaders are now perceived by the mass media as official sources of information and are actively cited by electronic and paper mass media. Therefore, political communications on Twitter including posts on official pages of P. Poroshenko and V. Zelensky, candidates for the President of Ukraine between the first and second rounds of elections were chosen for the analysis.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Social networks have become the object of research for many scholars who considered them a scientific issue. In particular, J. Walter, D. Westerman, S. Tong, and L. Langwell studied the formation and principles of functioning of social networks. A. Bard, J. Soderqvist, Z. Bauman, M. Castells, J. Cohen, Chr. May, E. Schmidt, and others investigated the essence and nature of social networks, their power and extraordinary influence on political communication.

An intensive study of political communications on social networks in Ukraine began in the early 21st century. T. Avksentyev, A. Bashuk, M. Madzhira, V. Nedbay, I. Parfenyuk, V. Fehler, N. Chorna, V. Shevchenko and others studied the problematics of information security, cross-media content and innovative media technologies. Researchers consider social networks an important and promising channel of political communication with mobilizing potential.

Social networks are one of the factors of the presidential media strategy. They convey their messages to the public, form public opinion, and have the opportunity to gain the attention of an inactive, non-election audience. In addition to all the opportunities and benefits of social networks, there are also some challenges to society; a threat to information security is above all. V. Fehler distinguishes the notions of "information security" and "information threat" [2, p. 81], and among the threats to the information security from an economic and social perspective, he points to the "depersonalization of interpersonal ties related to expanding communication using technical means" [2, p. 82-83]. M. Magiera notes that in the modern world, "special attention should be paid to the way of informing" [3, p. 161-162], because "the majority of the population assess reality based on random information from the media, and not on a detailed analysis of state administration activities" [3, p. 163].

## 3. FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, THE MAIN MATERIAL, AND THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

*Purpose of the research*: to determine the peculiarities of constructing political communication on the Twitter social network by candidates in the second round of the 2019 presidential elections in Ukraine, to describe the phenomenon of Volodymyr Zelensky.

*Objects of the analysis*: the official Twitter account of Petro Poroshenko (by June 2019 – 1.21 million readers) and the official Twitter account of Volodymyr Zelensky (listed on the official site of V. Zelensky and his team – https://ze2019.com; by June 2019 – 33 thousand readers).

*Analysis period*: 03/31/19 – 04/21/19 (the second round of the presidential elections in Ukraine).

The main method of the research was the content analysis of text messages posted on the official Twitter accounts of P. Poroshenko and V. Zelensky (except for those where the images duplicate text or which are a translation of the previous message into English).

We considered the construction of Internet content by the candidates according to the following aspects: frequency of posting, thematic integrity, and completeness of the content, use of keywords, participation in debates, vision of Ukraine's geopolitical strategy, and V. Zelensky's inaugural speech (Table 1).

**Table 1** Frequency of posting

| Date | Zelensky | Poroshenko |
|---|---|---|
| 31.03.2019 | 2 | 13 |
| 01.04.2019 | 5 | 4 |
| 02.04.2019 | 2 | 4 |
| 03.04.2019 | 0 | 0 |
| 04.04.2019 | 3 | 7 |
| 05.04.2019 | 0 | 20 |
| 06.04.2019 | 1 | 2 |
| 07.04.2019 | 2 | 15 |
| 08.04.2019 | 1 | 13 |
| 09.04.2019 | 1 | 3 |
| 10.04.2019 | 2 | 22 |
| 11.04.2019 | 0 | 17 |
| 12.04.2019 | 3 | 24 |
| 13.04.2019 | 1 | 2 |
| 14.04.2019 | 0 | 18 |
| 15.04.2019 | 2 | 20 |
| 16.04.2019 | 3 | 9 |
| 17.04.2019 | 2 | 7 |
| 18.04.2019 | 5 | 12 |
| 19.04.2019 | 2 | 30 |
| 20.04.2019 | 0 | 5 |
| 21.04.2019 | 6 | 23 |
| **Total** | 43 | 270 |
| **Average number of tweets per day** | 1,95 | 12,27 |

Between March 31 and April 21, 270 posts were posted on P. Poroshenko's official Twitter account (12.27 per day on average), and 43 on Zelensky's official Twitter account (1,95 per day on average), which is more than six times less. During the period under consideration, the largest number of tweets (30) was posted on P. Poroshenko's Tweeter on April 19, which is the day of the debate. Instead, V. Zelensky posted only two tweets that day. The highest number of V. Zelensky's tweets is six, on April 21 (the day of the second round of elections). The number of days when no tweets were posted in the accounts: V. Zelensky's tweets - five, and P. Poroshenko's tweets – only one (Figure 2).

*Thematic integrity and completeness of the content*. It is noteworthy that all V. Zelensky's tweets are separate (independent) in terms of content creation, almost every one of them touches on a separate topic, therefore each of the following does not develop on the previous one. P. Poroshenko's Tweeter is dominated by a different way of constructing content: one by one, there are several messages united by a certain topic, event, personality, etc.
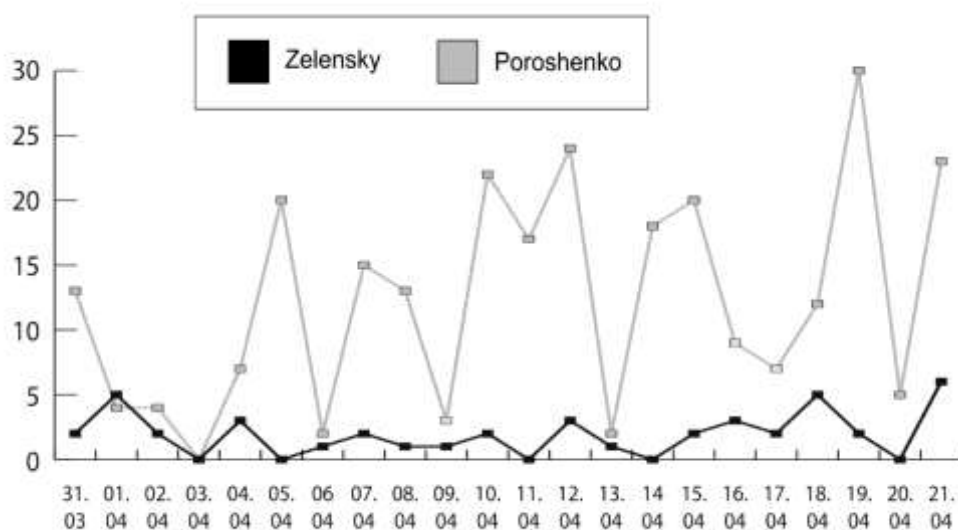
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and Natalya Rudenko

**Figure 2** The distribution of messages by day

In our view, this is caused by the need to divide long messages - too long for the technical requirements of the social network "Twitter" (maximum of 280 characters) – into several messages when one follows another.

We highlighted the keywords in the posts of the official Twitter accounts of V. Zelensky and P. Poroshenko of the researched period that mark their attitude to certain events, phenomena, personalities, etc. (Table 2).

**Table 2** Use of keywords (number of times over the entire period)

|  | Zelensky | Poroshenko |
|---|---|---|
| Poroshenko | 7 | --- |
| Zelensky | --- | 33 |
| Ukraine, Ukrainians | 8 | 202 |
| Country of dreams | 2 | 0 |
| Hope | 1 | 0 |
| Opponent | 0 | 14 |
| Debates | 8 | 30 |
| Stadium | 1 | 17 |
| Olimpiysky | 0 | 11 |
| Tests | 0 | 5 |
| EU, European Union | 0 | 28 |
| NATO | 0 | 32 |
| European integration | 0 | 2 |
| Putin | 0 | 19 |
| Russia, the Russian Federation | 0 | 13 |
| Kremlin | 0 | 10 |
| Revenge | 0 | 7 |
| Aggressor, aggression | 0 | 14 |
| Threat | 0 | 7 |

V. Zelensky mentions his opponent's name 7 times, while P. Poroshenko did it 33 times. By the way, the word "opponent" was never used in V. Zelensky's messages, unlike P. Poroshenko's messages (the word "opponent" was used 14 times).

*Candidates' views at geopolitical values of Ukraine*. P. Poroshenko used the words "Ukraine" and "Ukrainians" 202 times in his messages, while V. Zelensky – 8 times. In the account of P. Poroshenko, the words "European Union" ("EU") were used 28 times, "European integration" – two times, "NATO" – 32 times.

V. Zelensky's twitter messages of the studied period never contained these words, instead, the words "country of dreams" (2 times) and "hope" (1 time), which were not found in P. Poroshenko's twitter messages, were used here.

In the account of P. Poroshenko the words "Russia" and "Russian Federation" are used 13 times, the name of V. Putin – 19 times, the word "Kremlin" – 10 times, "revenge" and "threat" – 7 times each word, "aggressor" and "aggression" – 14 times. During the studied period, V. Zelensky's twitter messages did not contain any of these words.

As for Poroshenko, during his presidency, he defended the European integration processes in Ukraine and its accession to NATO membership, and he did much for that. V. Zelensky did not address geopolitical problems.

*Candidates' messages that received the most audience support*. The main messages that received the most likes in V. Zelensky's tweet were: unification, equality, the future; the most talked-about posts in P. Poroshenko's Twitter are the issues of debates and criticism of the opponent. On the day of the second round of elections of the President of Ukraine, April 21, 2019, Twitter accounts of the candidates were marked with three messages, which received the most "likes". In total, on 21.04.2019 6 posts were posted in V. Zelensky's twitter, and 23 posts in P. Poroshenko's tweet.

The topic of V. Zelensky's messages, which received the most "likes" on 21.04.2019, was the motivation of the Ukrainians to vote, the results of the first exit polls and the greetings from the President of France E. Macron; the subject of P. Poroshenko's messages was his concession and reflections on his future and future Ukraine.

D. Trilling points out that "while watching television, more and more citizens comment on the program live on social media. This is especially interesting in the case of political debates, as viewers' comments may not only allow us to understand public opinion, but they can also be an influential factor" [4, p. 259], however, J. Gottfried, B. Hardy, R. Holbert, K. Winnegh, and K. Jamison state that "the effect of the debates is dimmed by the simultaneous involvement of social media" [5, p. 172].

According to A. Bashuk, "social networks have a significant impact on the political situation in the country; have considerable mobilization potential, which was demonstrated by the Ukrainian protests of 2013-2014, which led to a change of power in the country. At that time, Internet information provided greater responsiveness than traditional media and a high degree of trust" [6, p. 13].

Considering the perspectives of political communications on social networks, I. Parfenyuk concludes that "social networks of the Internet have the prospects of becoming one of the most powerful tools in the communication between political leaders and potential voters" [7, p. 64].

*Debates of the candidates for the Presidency of Ukraine*. In their Twitter messages, the candidates for the President of Ukraine, who entered the second round, paid special attention to the organization and holding of the debates, in particular, the word "debates" was used 30 times by P. Poroshenko, and 8 times by V. Zelensky.

The stadium as a place of debates is also an object of interest; the word "stadium" was used 17 times by P. Poroshenko and 1 time by V. Zelensky. Besides, in Poroshenko's Twitter posts, the word "Olimpiysky" (as the name of the stadium where the debates were held) is

mentioned 11 times and the word "tests" (medical procedure undergone by both candidates) 5 times; in V. Zelensky's messages, these words are not found (Figure 3).
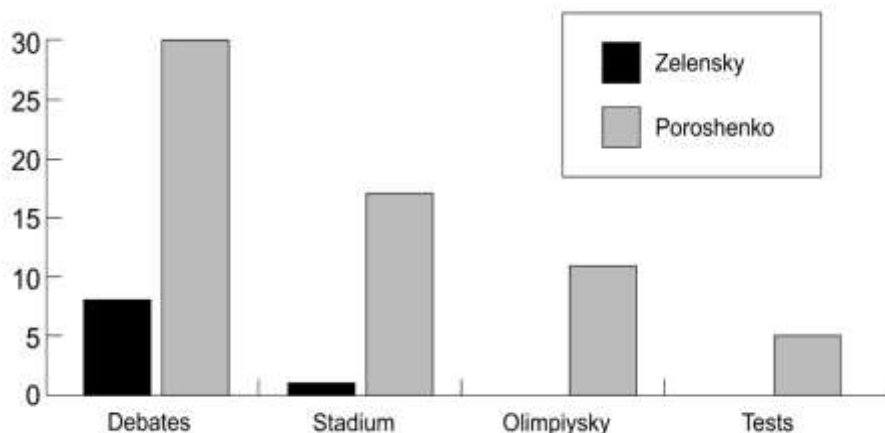


**Figure 3** Candidate Debate: Keywords

In debates, the candidates tried to create a negative image of the opponent addressing him personally. In particular, in his speech, V. Zelensky makes personified mentioning of his opponent 8 times (Poroshenko, Petro Poroshenko, Petro, Petro Oleksiyovych) and 6 times – indirectly (your, his, he, a person); in addition, the words "first" or "second" are used 12 times in the speech regarding P. Poroshenko (in terms of "there are two Poroshenkos"). In total – 26 times. In his speech, P. Poroshenko also makes personified mentioning of his opponent 8 times (Volodymyr) and 13 times indirectly (he, you, his, my opponent, presidential candidate). In total – 21 times.

As we can see, there is a slight difference in the number of mentioning a candidate in his opponent's speech. It is worth noting that V. Zelensky appealed more to his opponent during the debates, while P. Poroshenko addressed his opponent much more in the official Twitter account – almost 7 times (47 references to the opponent's name and use of the word "opponent" vs 7 times of mentioning in V. Zelensky's account) (Figure 4).
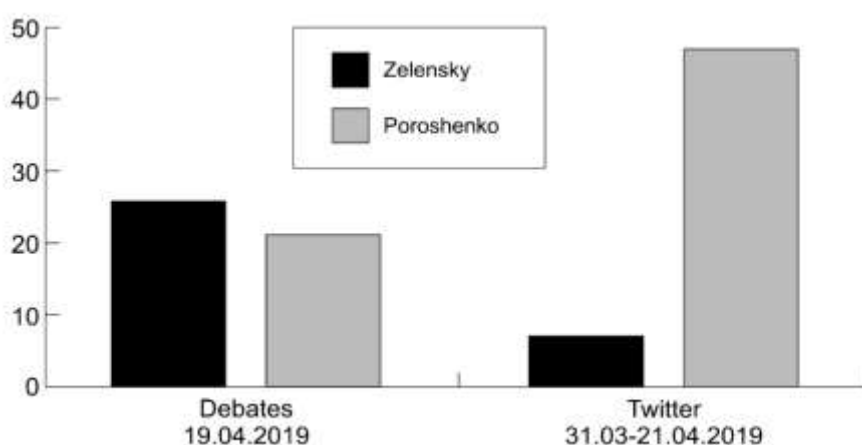


**Figure 4** Mentioning Opponent Candidates in their Messages

In their speeches, candidates mentioned the name of V. Putin: P. Poroshenko – twice, V. Zelensky – once. However, in the official Twitter account, P. Poroshenko mentioned the name of V. Putin 19 times, and V. Zelensky – never. The words and phrases of "Russia", "Russian

Empire", "Russian fakes" appear 4 times in the speech of P. Poroshenko in general, instead, in the speech of V. Zelensky, there is one word "Moscow". Moreover, in official Twitter posts (in the studied period 31.03-21.04.2019), P. Poroshenko used similar words and phrases 23 times, V. Zelensky – never.

While candidates often used the word "debates" in official Twitter accounts (P. Poroshenko – 30 times, V. Zelensky – 8 times), in the debate speech of P. Poroshenko, this word is found twice, in V. Zelensky's speech – never.

To summarize the keywords related to the debates, in the period under review, there were 9 in V. Zelensky's twitter messages, while P. Poroshenko's twitter messages contained 7 times more keywords – 63. This indicates that attention (perhaps somewhere excessive) that the candidates paid to the organization of the debates, to the venue, medical tests, etc. Thus, both P. Poroshenko and V. Zelensky understood the importance of debates in the election process: P. Poroshenko being an experienced international politician was eager for the debates, while V. Zelensky, a person with no political experience, tried to offset the traditional format of the debates by moving them from an official television plane into an emotionally open one.

Each of the parties evaluated the results of the debates by their criteria. Accordingly, P. Poroshenko's team believed that the incumbent president had won in the debates, and V. Zelensky's team was sure it was their candidate.

*Inaugural speech by the President of Ukraine V. Zelensky.*

*About European integration*. In his inaugural address, V. Zelensky used the words and phrases "Europe", "European country" 6 times, while in his official Twitter account, he never did it.

*The keywords* in V. Zelensky's speech are "shared chance", "shared dream", and "opportunity". It is noteworthy that the message in the official Twitter account of V. Zelensky 2 times contains the phrase "country of dreams", which is absent in the messages for the same period in the official Twitter account of P. Poroshenko.

The main messages characterizing *images of the desirable future* in V. Zelensky's inaugural speech were: joint responsibility for the country; making Ukraine a European country; the return of Ukrainians home, back to their native land; unification of the country as a national idea; solving the most important tasks and problems that exist in Ukraine; changes in government structures (proposal to members of the Government to resign, announcement of dissolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and early parliamentary elections).

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

V. Zelensky's Twitter account was inferior to P. Poroshenko's account by the number of subscribers (readers) – 34 thousand vs 1.21 million; messages (43 vs 270). Significant different were the thematic content filling, the meaningfulness of the keywords, as well as the views on the geopolitical strategy of the state.

B. Obama's experience in using the latest digital communications has attracted the attention of excellent politicians, including P. Poroshenko. However, V. Zelensky, understanding the mood of Ukrainian citizens, their attitude to the previous government, used completely different instruments. He played on the heartstrings of Ukrainians. Thus, his phenomenon is based on the philosophy of I. Kant, where the phenomenon is based primarily on feelings.

In Kant's theory of cognition, there are two opposing concepts: nomen and phenomenon. The phenomenon is what the mind deals with in the empirical cognition, the phenomena that we perceive gaining the experience. In other words, phenomena are emotionally perceived

objects, etc. For us, the phenomenon is the world, where our consciousness is the place of living. Thus, according to Kant, this is the thing we are dealing with.

Traditionally, in Ukraine, five minutes before the New Year, the President addresses the Ukrainian people with his welcome speech. Almost all Ukrainian TV channels broadcast this appeal. However, on December 31, 2018, at 11:55 pm, Volodymyr Zelensky announced (about his wish): "I am going to become a President". It was emotional, bold, and rough. This news spread social networks immediately. It was commented and discussed on radio, television, in transport, at work, and home; however, many considered the statement a joke typical for "Kvartal 95".

On April 21, 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky defeated his opponent with a result of 73.22% (Petro Poroshenko trailing behind with 24.45%). Thus, he received the support unlike any of the presidents before him and became the sixth President of Ukraine.

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