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Digital campaigning of Ferdinand Marcos Jr.: impact of social networks on the Philippines 2022 elections and political communication

Научный руководитель – Аркатов Дмитрий Александрович

Семичев Д.М.[1]*, Торгуд А.И.*[2]

1 - Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики» - Санкт-Петербург, Санкт-Петербургская школа социальных и гуманитарных наук, Департамент прикладной политологии, Санкт-Петербург, Россия, *E-mail: dmsemichev@edu.hse.ru*; 2 - Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики» - Санкт-Петербург, Санкт-Петербургская школа социальных и гуманитарных наук, Департамент прикладной политологии, Санкт-Петербург, Россия, *E-mail: atorgoood@gmail.com*

This study examines the influence of the media to the electoral outcomes in the Philippines. The aim of the paper is to identify what role did social media and campaign coverage play in the election results in the Philippines in 2022. The relevance of this study is to examine social media as a new application of electoral PR in Asia. The research question is: What role does media coverage of an electoral campaign perform as a factor in winning elections in the Philippines based on the example of the 2022 presidential election?

This issue is considered in the existing academic literature through the interaction between the authorities and the media through electoral processes [5]. The main argument concerning this issue is the theoretical assumption that media influence people's political beliefs [6] and are a driving and mobilizing force in political processes [4]. Bond and coauthors [2] note that media coverage has a positive impact on increasing voter turnout. At the same time, it remains unclear whether the media can persuade voters and influence election results, as it is difficult to determine the effect [5]. One well-known result is that voters are more likely to believe favorable stories about candidates [1]. Academic literature also emphasizes the role of Facebook* and Twitter* posts in altering the information environment and decision-making process of individuals [7].

The Philippines is a presidential republic where the president is elected for one 6 year term, and political change has been influenced by rapid digitalization. Spread of the Internet in general and Facebook* in particular made social media the main field of political contestation and replaced traditional media. Ex-president Rodrigo Duterte actively used political trolls and fake news, creating bots and hiring people to imitate support [8]. If social information of the campaign and its visibility increase, the level of political participation also increases [7]. It helped Duterte to win elections and to justify a war on drugs that led to thousands of deaths due to extra-judicial killing incentivised by the government. And in the 2022 elections team of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (son of former dictator), improving Duterte's strategy, created a dense network of supporters spreading hatred against his opponent Leni Robredo and changing the perception of Marcos family heritage [9][10].

Marcos succeeded as a candidate and a leader in elections gaining 58% of votes across the country. Based on Statista's data [11], there is no statistically significant variance between different regions of the country and different ages of voters in terms of candidate support. But the factor of the investment into presidential campaign advertisements has a strong positive influence on electoral success. Consequently, the electoral campaign instruments are one of the most crucial elements of analysis of recent elections.

The research methodology is based on the analysis of Facebook* posts about the electoral campaign of Ferdinand Marcos 2022 applying qualitative content analysis. From the posts analyzed, the prevailing majority refers to Macros with a clear positive connotation. Posts can

be characterised by high degree of emotional approval, with only 3 out of 290 posts describing Macros negatively. The main topic for dissemination of materials is the events attended by the candidate. The posts are regularly published from the same accounts, consequently, the publications are intentional. Categories of campaign posts include events, quotes, meetings with people, support rallies, Macros victory speeches. Characteristics of the posts are: extreme emotionality, use of upper case, lots of emoji. Tropes such as nation, supermajority, loyalty, unity, family, protection, support, truth, justice, continuity (reference to his father), true Filipino, recovering from the trauma of dictatorship are used. The campaign of the next most voted candidate, Robredo, is hardly covered on Facebook.

Thus, presidential elections in the Philippines are based on emotions and performance of candidates rather than ideology or policy decisions. Media coverage makes elections in the Philippines much more personalistic and does not play a role of 'liberation technology' [3]. Trends started by Duterte in 2016 were only strengthened by Bongbong in 2022 by creating well-prepared populist campaigns that implied more historical and national narratives rising the role of Filipino identity. Radicalized partisanship of the population increased leading to political polarization and increasing conflictual manner of political communication on the Internet.

*Facebook, Twitter and Meta are banned in Russia and considered extremist

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