

# Introduction

Scholarly research on the role of new communication technology in social and political life has a dual character. On the one hand, the Internet is of interest to us as a communication tool used in political campaigns by candidates, electoral advisers etc. On the other hand, researchers endeavor to understand and explain the influence of new media on the behavior of individuals and social groups. While it is indeed important to understand how the Internet, in a general sense, influences the functioning of the political sphere, from the authors' point of view the way in which the online environment can be used as a tool and factor of social change is particularly interesting.

This work is divided into three parts, which the authors hope will enable the reader to more easily find topics of interest. The first part consists of two chapters concerning new information and communication technologies. The main aim of the authors is to present the most recent information regarding the internet as a means of communication and the diverse uses and applications of the Web. Here the reader will also find a chapter with a more detailed presentation of certain new communication tools and technologies used in political and social activity.

The second part focuses on issues of political communication, and the changes resulting from the increasingly common use of new communication technologies by both the authors of political discourse and their audiences. There is no doubt that new means of communication have permanently changed the nature of the relations between politicians, citizens and journalists. Here the reader will encounter an extensive theoretical analysis of political communication, complemented by a presentation of the use of new technologies in American electoral campaigns. In the chapter entitled “Contemporary political drama”, on the other hand, the authors consider particularly disturbing trends observed on the cotemporary political scene, namely the issues of tabloidization, memeticization and YouTubization of politics.

The social aspect of new technologies is discussed in the third part of the book. In numerous researches dealing with the issue of the relation between the use of new information and communication technologies and the level of involvement in social and political life, two main opinions may be discerned. Firstly, there are those who do not attach great importance to new technologies and deny that there is a link between these technologies and social and political involvement. Their opponents argue that the use of technological innovations has, more or less directly, increased the level of involvement of individuals and groups. The reader will find a great deal of information regarding the activities of the participants of civic society – in particular, social movements, but also non-governmental organizations – in the environment of new information and communication technologies. The authors will analyze some of the tools and techniques used by cyberactivists aimed at eliciting the reaction of political actors, such as the activities of Anonymous and the ‘Indignant’. This part of the book concludes with a chapter, entitled ‘We are all hackers’, dealing with daily use of the Internet by ordinary citizens – all of us.

The basic method used by the authors in writing this work was the analysis of secondary sources (using desk research), which involved

seeking and analyzing existing, accessible academic publications dealing with the topic of the title. Of particular interest to the authors were publications concerning political communication, online social participation and works on the issue of new communication technologies and the Internet as sources of the information revolution, with particular consideration given to productive and receptive practices characteristic of new media. An important element for analyzing the data was the study of certain examples which in the authors' opinion presented the practical dimension of the use of new communication technologies in the political and social spheres. The selection of these examples was determined by both relevant criteria and the authors' own research interests. An analysis was also carried out of the content of messages accessible online and of the available statistical data from the authors' fields of interest.