Facebook Profile of the Macedonian Voter

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Abstract

The world's upward trend of increasingly intense involvement and use of modern Web 2.0-based services, aimed at addressing politics and political campaigns, has been definitely manifested in the Republic of Macedonia recently. The Internet and social media have exhibited a gradually greater impact on Macedonian politics and political marketing than ever before. During the last presidential and parliamentary elections held in April 2014, Facebook, being a social network with a leading role in the country, has promoted itself as an extremely important arena for intensive political activism. The majority of Macedonian voters have shared both politicians' and political parties' posts through this social medium. This phenomenon can be considered a definite confirmation of the great role Facebook has in the country, not only regarding the dissemination of political ideas among the electorate, but also in the process of mobilizing potential voters, including the act of making a voting decision, especially regarding the politically undecided citizens. To the best of our knowledge, the paper presents a first attempt to describe the typical Facebook profile of a Macedonian voter, the level of his/her political engagement or indifference, as well as the most important features of his/her online behaviour during election campaigns, in correlation with his/her demographic and socio-economic characteristics. This profile is built up based on the results of an online survey being carried out during a time

period of one month among Macedonian Facebook users, in the dawn of the 2014 political elections. The research has undoubtedly affirmed the fact that the virtual support Macedonian Facebook users give to individual politicians and political options during political campaigns can not only be strongly felt, but can also significantly affect the election outcomes, regardless of Macedonian Facebook users' 'alleged' indifference towards political Facebook posts and numerous contradictions held within the survey answers.

Keywords: *Facebook profile, voter, political campaigns, political marketing, Republic of Macedonia*

Introduction

As individuals and as a society in a whole, we have been deeply immersed into a huge multidimensional space, saturated with information coming to us through Internet, television, radio, newspapers, books, and magazines, more than ever before. However, there are many significant differences between Internet and traditional mass media. It has already been said that the Internet has created a sense of a "new era in communication" regarding the flow of information, making the Internet evolution "revolutionary" and "ground-breaking" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 2). The Internet, being perceived as an unlimited source of information, has brought no restrictions in terms of "delivery of information beyond time and space", making the distribution of information faster through the "digitalisation and electrification" of the messages (Poster, 1995, p. 3).

Moreover, the Web 2.0 paradigm, which is a synonym of a more responsive, more interactive, more dynamic and more collaborative Web, has prevailed in the world lately through its popular forms: blogs, online discussion forums, and social networks. This sophistication has also allowed Internet users to access new information and new knowledge in a rather new fashion. According to Holmes (2005, p. 2), people who use the Internet "not only encounter and 'use' information and communication technologies", but increasingly, "their modes of action are enframed by these technologies". Still, the term 'Web 2.0' is controversial. For Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the founder of

the Web, it is jargon. As the term has come to be accepted, it has been defined not as a pure concept, but rather as a series of characteristics and design patterns that underlie contemporary Web applications. In a broader context, some authors argue that Web 2.0 is a force, calling it a 'social e-revolution' (Fraser & Dutta, 2009).

Besides the existence of a plethora of advantages Web 2.0-based media exhibits over the traditional ones, including the possibility to reach out to maximum number of people, client-specific targeting, versatile ways of advertising, the ability of instantaneous communication, increased user-generated content and participation, as well as scalable and multi-way communications, one major difference between the Web 2.0 and other media is the possibility of getting direct feedback. The direct and prompt two-way connection or communication between the creator of the information (the source) and its consumer (the destination) via intensive message exchange can reveal substantial information about particular user's interests in using any of the Web 2.0-based media. In this context, the existence of social networks such as Facebook gives the citizens an opportunity to participate in online discussions and to interact with other people. Right through social networking, the process of "narrowcasting" has been formulated, in which people can "choose and respond" to particular information within their interests without getting any interferences from others (Yoon & Kim, 2001, p. 53; Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 12).

This kind of interaction has recently become a very convenient way of developing dialogue between citizens and political parties, especially during election campaigns. Facebook has definitely grown into the most important and the most frequently used social medium. Nevertheless, the number of political parties' fans in the world shows that Facebook is not an easily adopted communication environment for them. In large countries, if one compares big political parties' Facebook profiles to Facebook profiles of musicians, sport clubs, or even any of the commercial product brands, one could conclude that the political parties, being supported by millions of voters, have no more than hundreds of thousands of Facebook fans. On the other hand, the commercial product brands, sport clubs or musicians boast dozens of millions fans on the same platform. One reason for such difference might well be the fact that people, in general, would not like to be identified with politicians.

Two things have attracted attention about the role of social media during the Macedonian parliamentary and presidential elections' political

campaigns held in April 2014. The first one is the increased online presence and advertisement of political parties through their own Facebook profiles, and the other one is the relatively big number of people who have clicked 'LIKE' on presidential or parliamentary candidates' Facebook pages, pictures, or statements.

This paper presents the preliminary results of a politically independent research project, which was launched in order to estimate the level of involvement and importance of social networks, i.e. Facebook, in shaping political attitudes of the Macedonian voter. As far as we know, this is the first attempt to address some of the issues related to the Web 2.0-based political marketing carried out through social media in the Republic of Macedonia. As such, this research strives to initiate further explorations and studies on this subject, which aims to have a larger impact on the parliamentary and presidential elections' outcomes in the future.

1. Social media and political campaigns

Having drastically redefined communication, today's online social media have leapt across social and cultural boundaries and now are influencing even the politics. The great effects of social media on the electorate during election campaigns were first proved during US presidential elections in 2008, when Obama won. US presidential elections have undoubtedly shown that online platforms like Facebook and Twitter have an ability to reach out to voters in a much better, more cost-effective, and more efficient way than traditional media. Since then, politicians, candidates and political parties countrywide use social network sites for political purposes by communicating directly with their voters and supporters, making their campaign information, political ideas, or political messages easily accessible to everyone, especially young people (Smith, 2011). The political entities have been signing on to social media accounts to increase their following, and, consequently, to increase their reputation, rankings and scope of influence among citizens by intensifying both the political communication and political marketing. According to Vesnić-Alujević (2009), all of these affects regarding politicians' advertising and promotion of their own politics can be accomplished in three ordinary situations: (1) when a citizen becomes a 'friend' to a certain political actor or party; (2) when someone puts 'LIKE' on a political actor's comment; and (3) when someone comments on other people's postings. In such a way, the political parties can mobilize supporters,

gain more votes, get some attention in the traditional media like television and newspaper, and get the attention of other politicians and political journalists (Karlsen, 2012), as well as facilitate fund raising (Carpini, 2000; Vergeer, 2012). In addition, they have integrated Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google Plus into their promotion strategies and have continued to connect with their potential voters and supporters via social media, regardless of the previous elections' outcomes. This global phenomenon has been recently recognized as 'open-source politics' or 'Politics 2.0', based on the idea that social networking and e-participation technologies will revolutionize our ability to follow, support, and influence political campaigns (Echazarreta & Lloveras, 2009; Peña-López, 2011).

Most of the researchers agree that the key of the success lies in targeting the right voter, by sending him/her the right messages at the right time via friends who are already political parties' members or supporters of political candidates. Obama's win in both the 2008 and 2012 US presidential elections, is significantly credited to the extensive use of social network sites before and during the elections, as well as the specific ways he employed - the so called 'Obama's Web 2.0 strategies' (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011), that have led to the notion of the so called 'Obama effect' (Harris *et al.*, 2010).
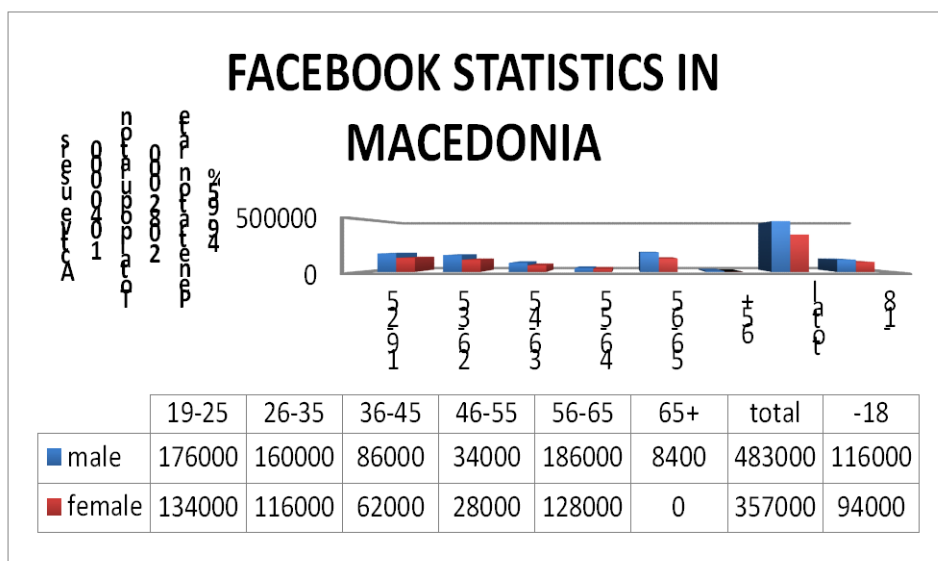
Since 2008, which can be considered a true milestone regarding the involvement of social media in political campaigns, a plethora of studies have been conducted throughout the world in order to investigate and assess the benefits of involving Web 2.0 technologies as tools for shaping potential voters' mindsets during political campaigns. To mention a few, Williams & Gulati (2009; 2013) have written a series of papers on social networks and political campaigns, as well as Smith (2011), Zhang *et al.* (2010), Bermudez (2012), Auvinen (2012), Gulati & Williams (2013), and Dimitrova *et al.* (2011).

2. Facebook in the Republic of Macedonia

Facebook was launched in 2004 as a social networking Website, being exclusively dedicated to Harvard students. According to the official statistics, Facebook had, on average, 829 million daily active users worldwide in June 2014 (Facebook, 2014). Facebook, as well as other social networking sites (Twitter, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn etc.) allows users to register and

create profiles, as well as to contribute to message threads, thus keeping in touch with friends, family members, and colleagues. Each Facebook profile has a 'wall', where other Facebook users can add their posts. Since the wall is viewable by all the user's friends, wall postings are, basically, a form of a virtual public conversation. Facebook users interact with other users/Facebook 'friends' by updating their status, writing on other Facebook members' walls or simply, by sending messages to them as direct e-mails. Users can create their own groups or join someone else's groups, upload media (video, audio, and photos), and 'LIKE' pages and posts.

In the Republic of Macedonia, there are more than one million active Facebook users, which yield a high penetration rate of almost 50% on the total population of just over two million. According to the 2011 survey data, "this tiny country with a population of 2.1 million has 708,960 active users, from which 408,220 (58.3%) are male and 291,660 (41.7%) are female" (Emruli *et al*., 2011). Their number is growing every minute. Two years before, Facebook was used mainly for fun by teenagers; nowadays, Facebook is being used primarily as a tool by the population aged under 45. As per Socialbakers (2014), the largest age group of users in the Republic of Macedonia is currently 18-24, followed by the users aged 25-34. There are 57% male users and 43% female users. The last official statistics update information is represented on Fig. 1.

FACEBOOK STATISTICS IN MACEDONIA

	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	65+	total	-18
■ male	176000	160000	86000	34000	186000	8400	483000	116000
■ female	134000	116000	62000	28000	128000	0	357000	94000

(Source: www.socialtimes.me/stat/mk)

**Figure 1: The structure of Facebook users in the Republic of Macedonia,
by gender and age (September 10th 2013)**

The statistics provided by Fig. 1 show that, in general, there are more male Facebook users. Most of the users are 19-35 years old. In addition, Macedonian agencies "Rejting" (http://www.rating.mk/) and "New Media MK" (http://newmedia.mk/) have recently carried out a research called "Facebook Nation". As per them, the average Macedonian Facebook user is a female aged 28 years, despite the fact that 49% of the Macedonian Facebook users are males. She is highly educated, spending over 3 hours per day on the Net, following from 25 to 50 companies, and having 200 to 300 Facebook friends. She possesses a smartphone she uses to login to the net almost every day. Again, this picture is not something that deviates from the global average. Only 2 out of 10 Macedonian Facebook users follow brands for fun, and only 1 out of 10 has had a direct communication with brands and companies through Facebook (Dano, 2013).

With the relatively high penetration rate in the Republic of Macedonia, Facebook, as a nationwide leading social networking platform has great potential to become an extremely appropriate medium for political advertising. It gives unprecedented opportunities to political candidates to approach the citizens more closely. That is why Macedonian politicians are increasingly using it as a tool for political marketing, along with other social networks, especially during election periods. Since the parliamentary elections in 2011, when Macedonian political actors started to use social networks, through the elections held in April 2014, things have changed significantly: the number of politicians and political parties active on Web 2.0 during the election period was considerably larger, primarily on Facebook. They have used it primarily for self-promotion, as well as for commenting on others' profiles on different topics.

3. Facebook profile of the Macedonian voter

The main objective of this research was to explore the current usage of Facebook as a tool for political marketing before and during the period of presidential and parliamentary elections in the Republic of Macedonia, which held in April 2014. To the best of our knowledge, this paper represents a first attempt to describe the typical Facebook profile of a Macedonian voter, the level of his/her political engagement, as well as the most important features of his/her online behaviour during election campaigns, in correlation with his/her demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

3.1 Method and sample

To accomplish the objectives of the study, data were collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire, prepared in Google Docs, sent over Facebook, and completed by Facebook users. A Web-based survey was conducted to investigate the effects of political campaigns on Facebook users in the Republic of Macedonia during pre-election periods. Regarding the structure, the online questionnaire contained a 3-point Likert scale (twice), ranging from (1) 'Don't believe/affect', (2) 'Neither do believe/affect, nor don't believe/affect' to (3) 'Do believe/affect', intended to measure the intensity of answers provided for some questions, as well as numerous

'yes/no' type of questions. Besides these, two of the questions were designed as 'multiple choice'.

The online questionnaire consisted of three sections, containing logically connected questions.

The first section was designed to gather demographic characteristics of the Facebook user, including his/her gender, age, the highest level of education achieved, monthly family income, nationality, and employment status.

In the second section, respondents were asked to pick out one of the options related to their Facebook-using behaviour. This group of questions include: information about the time spent on Facebook, the number of Facebook friends, information about whose Facebook posts the respondent is following (friends, celebrities, politicians, family members, colleagues, other), information about whose Facebook statuses the respondent mostly reads and comments on (friends, celebrities, politicians, family members, colleagues, other), information regarding their beliefs concerning the trustworthiness in the Facebook-generated contents vis-à-vis the contents generated by the traditional mass media (press, radio, television), as well as information about the preferred device for accessing Facebook (PC, laptop, smartphone, tablet).

The questions in the third section were aimed at addressing respondent's thinking about Facebook and political campaigns by choosing one of the options provided. These include: the membership to any political party, the membership to any Facebook group being formed especially for the needs of any political campaign, information about following or liking politicians' Facebook pages, information about the frequency of sharing or commenting on politicians' postings, information about the level of the impact politicians' Facebook postings have on the voting decision, the participation to any political event based on information disseminated via Facebook, beliefs as to whether Facebook is a good tool for expressing respondent's political attitudes, belief as to whether Facebook contributes to better informed voting population, the respondent's thoughts on how much the politicians' or political parties' Facebook posts bother them, as well as which type of Facebook information is most helpful to evaluate the political candidates.

3.2 Data collection

As the survey was conducted in the Republic of Macedonia, a Macedonian version of the questionnaire was administrated. The questionnaire, originally written in English, was translated into Macedonian, and sent by email and Facebook solely to Facebook respondents older than 18 years and entitled to vote at the forthcoming elections. The online survey ran from March 15th to April 25th 2014, just before parliamentary and presidential elections were held. After the initial reliability and validity screening, a total of 407 responses were found to be complete and usable for statistical analysis. This is a very important fact, since there were 1,040,000 active Facebook users in the Republic of Macedonia, as in September 2013 (Facebook Statistics, 2014). Out of them, 840,000 Facebook users are aged 18+, which comprise the total population size. Given a margin of error of 5%, a confidence level of 95%, and a response distribution of 50%, the minimal recommended sample size has been estimated to 384 Facebook survey respondents (Raosoft, 2004). This number is less than the total number of survey responses obtained, assuring that all conclusions will be drawn with a high statistical significance.

3.3 Results

The data analysis was accomplished by using IBM® SPSS Statistics® v20 statistical software. Two types of analyses have been primarily conducted: the first one includes descriptive data analysis, whilst the second one involves exploratory data analysis revealing the relationships among some of the variables included.

Regarding respondents' gender, out of 407 respondents, 263 (65%) were females and 144 (35%) were males, as shown on Fig. 2. Regarding the education attainment, most of the respondents (211; 52%) have a bachelor degree, followed by 94 respondents (23%), who have got some high school completed, 61 (15%) have got a Master of Science/Art degree, 24 (6%) have got a Doctor of Science/PhD degree, 16 (4%) were with higher education, whilst only 1 person (≈0%) has only an elementary education, as shown on Fig. 3.
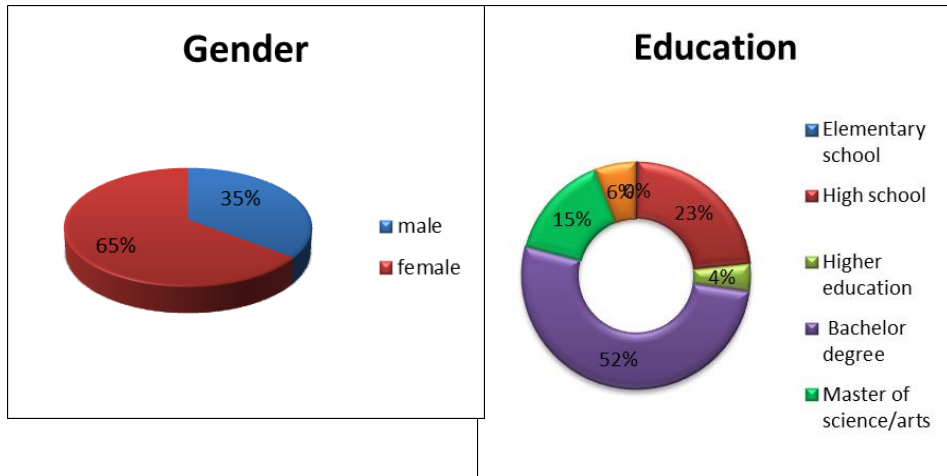
Figure 2: Respondents' gender
(Source: Original research)

**Figure 3: Respondents' highest
education** (Source: Original research)

The highest percentage of the respondents being encompassed by the research were at the age between 25 and 34 (45.5%), followed by the Facebook users between 18 and 24 (29.2%), and those between 35 and 44 (61 persons; 15%). The lowest number of Facebook users belongs to the age group over 65 years (4 persons; 1%), as depicted by Table 1.

The employment status has shown that most of the respondents (185 persons; 45.5%), were employed, 99 (24.3%) were unemployed students, 91 (22.4%) were unemployed, 26 (6.4%) were employed students, and only 6 (1.5%) were retired (Table 2).

The total family monthly income was ranging between 20,000 and 30,000 MKD[1] for 121 (29.7%) of the respondents. As shown on Fig. 4, the total family monthly income of less than 10,000 MKD has been detected with 42 respondents (10.3%).

The most frequent are Macedonian Internet users aged over 18, who spend from 1 to 3 hours daily (176 respondents; 43.2%) on Facebook. In addition, 108 respondents (26.5%) spend less than 1 hour per day on

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[1] MKD = Macedonian denar is the official Macedonian currency

Facebook, 78 respondents (19.2%) spend from 3 to 5 hours on Facebook, 27 respondents (6.6%) use from 5 to 7 hours per day on Facebook and only 18 respondents (4.4%) answered that they spend more than 7 hours per day (Fig. 5) on Facebook.

Table 1: Respondents' age [years]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 18 - 24	119	29.2	29.2	29.2
	2 25 - 34	185	45.5	45.5	74.7
	3 35 - 44	61	15.0	15.0	89.7
	4 45 - 54	26	6.4	6.4	96.1
	5 55 - 64	12	2.9	2.9	99.0
	6 Over 65	4	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	407	100.0	100.0	

(Source: Original research)

Table 2: Employment status of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Unemployed + student	99	24.3	24.3	24.3
	2 Employed + student	26	6.4	6.4	30.7
	3 Unemployed	91	22.4	22.4	53.1
	4 Employed	185	45.5	45.5	98.5
	5 Retired	6	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	407	100.0	100.0	

(Source: Original research)
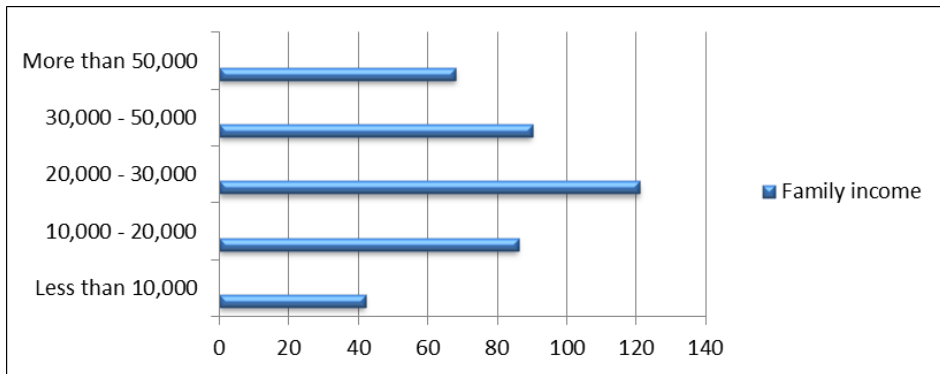
(Source: Original research)

Figure 4: Total family income per month
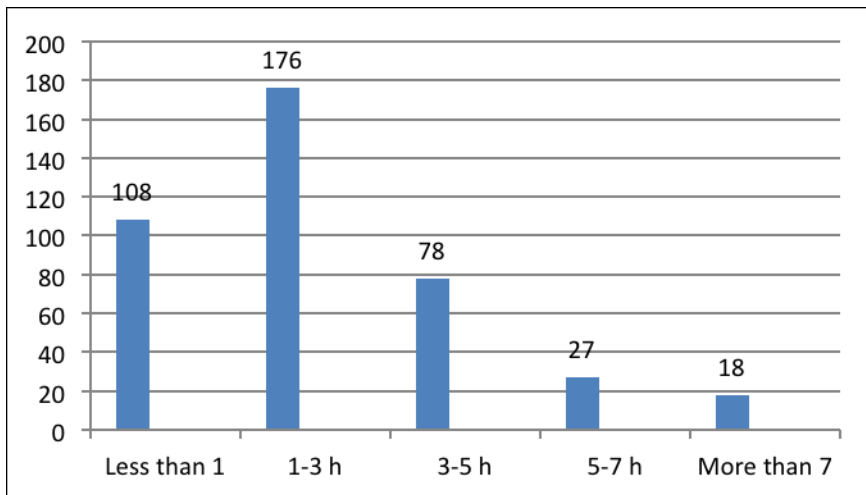
(Source: Original research)

Figure 5: Average time per day spent on Facebook

Most of the 407 respondents, or 178 of them (43.7%), have 100 - 500 Facebook friends, 118 (29.0%) have 500 - 1,000 Facebook friends, 75 (18.4%) have more than 1,000, and 36 respondents (8.8%) have less than 100 Facebook friends (Table 3).

Table 3: Number of Facebook friends

|		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1 Less than 100	36	8.8	8.8	8.8
	2 100 – 500	178	43.7	43.7	52.6
Valid	3 500 – 1,000	118	29.0	29.0	81.6
	4 More than 1,000	75	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	407	100.0	100.0	

(Source: Original research)

As per our research results, 283 respondents (69.5%) neither do, nor don't believe in Facebook posts, compared to traditional media, as newspapers, radio and TV. In addition, 18.2% (74 respondents) don't believe at all, and 12.3% (50 respondents) answered that they believe in Facebook posts (Fig. 6).

The results of the research have also pointed out the fact that the great majority of the sample uses their laptop to access Facebook (175 respondents; 43%), followed by 136 respondents (33.4%), who are using a personal computer. Besides, 81 respondents (19.9%) use smartphone, whilst 15 respondents (3.7%) are using tablet to access Facebook (Fig. 7).
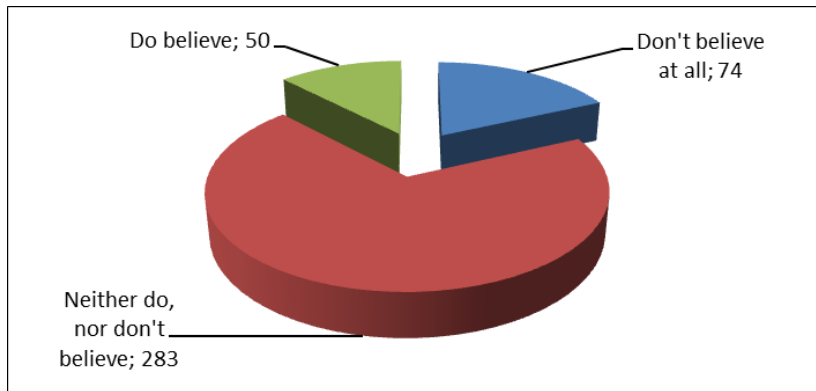
(Source: Original research)

Figure 6: How much do you believe in Facebook posts, compared to traditional mass media?
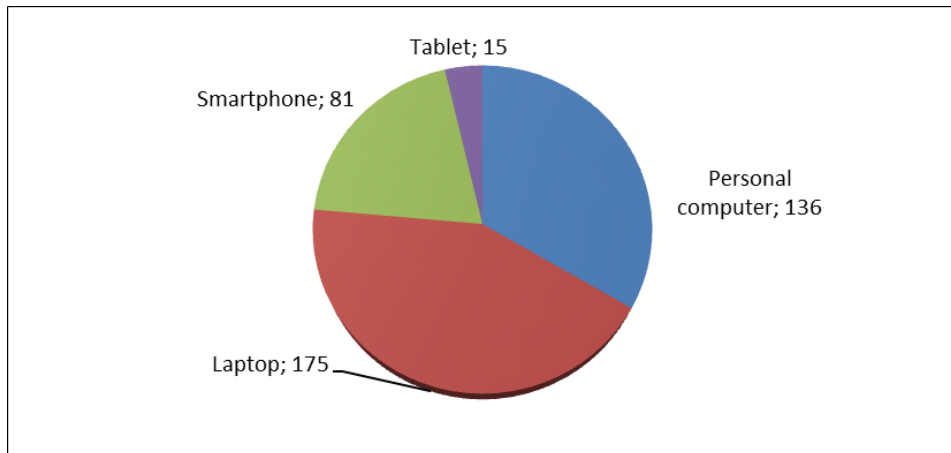
(Source: Original research)

Figure 7: Which type of device do you use most frequently to access Facebook?

Less than half of the total number of respondents (168; 41.3%) have answered that they are not members of any political party and do not prefer any of them, 125 respondents out from 407 (30.7%) are already members of a political party, whilst 114 respondents (28.0%) have answered that they are not members, but they favour a certain political party. More than half of the respondents or 316 (77.6%) are not members of a Facebook group that was created especially for the causes of a political campaign. Most respondents (290; 71.2%) have never shared or commented on politicians' posts on Facebook, 82 of them (20.1%) do this rarely, 29 (7.2%) often and only 6 (1.5%) have answered that they always share such posts.

The second type of data analysis involved an investigation of the relationship between some of the variables.

First, a cross-tabulation was made between respondent's gender and the answers of the question "Do you think that Facebook is a suitable way to express your political attitude?" as being two variables coming from different logical sets. As a result, one can conclude that most of the women do not agree that Facebook is a good way to express personal political attitudes, as shown on Table 4. However, male respondents who do not agree outnumber females who agree.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation: Respondents' gender × Facebook as a suitable way for expressing personal political attitude

Count

		Do you think that FB is a suitable way to express your political attitude?		Total
		1 Yes	2 No	
Respondent's gender	1 Male	47	97	144
	2 Female	66	197	263
Total		113	294	407

(Source: Original research)

Second, the cross-tabulation that examines the relationship between the highest education the respondent's has obtained and the answers of the question "How much do you believe in Facebook posts, compared to traditional media (newspapers, radio, and TV)?" yields the conclusion that Facebook users with a bachelor degree who neither do, nor do not believe, prevail absolutely (Table 5). In addition, among Facebook users with the same level of education, the number of those who neither do, nor do not believe in Facebook posts are always dominant if compared to those who either do not believe at all or those who do believe.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation: Highest education completed × Belief in Facebook posts

Count

		How much do you believe in Facebook posts, compared to traditional media (newspapers, radio, and TV)?			Total
		1 Don't believe at all	2 Neither do, nor don't believe	3 Do believe	
Highest education completed	1 Elementary school	0	1	0	1
	2 High school	24	59	11	94
	3 Higher education	6	8	2	16
	4 Bachelor degree	34	156	21	211
	5 Master of science/arts	6	41	14	61
	6 Doctor of science	4	18	2	24
Total		74	283	50	407

(Source: Original research)

In order to discover if there is a relationship between these two variables, a Chi-Square test for independence has been carried out (Table 6).

Table 6: Chi-Square test for independence: Highest education completed × Belief in Facebook posts

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18,528[a]	10	,047
Likelihood Ratio	17,263	10	,069
Linear-by-Linear Association	4,936	1	,026
N of Valid Cases	407		

a. 7 cells (38,9%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.

(Source: Original research)

Since $\chi(10) = 18{,}528$; p = .047 < 0.05, it can be concluded, with 5% uncertainty, that there is a statistically significant association between the highest education completed and the belief in Facebook post. In other words, these two variables are dependent on each other, since the belief in Facebook posts is affected by the respondents' level of education.

Third, we examined the relationship between the respondents' gender and the information provided regarding following politicians on Facebook. Fifty-five out of 144 males (38.2%) follow politicians on Facebook, vis-à-vis 92 out of 263 females (35.0%), which are both considerably high percentages (Table 7).

However, they are not dependent on each other, a fact that has been confirmed by the Chi-Square test for independence (Table 8). Since $\chi(6) = 14.588$; p = .024 < 0.05, it can be concluded, with 5% uncertainty, that there is

a statistically significant association between those two variables, i.e. they are mutually dependent.

Table 7: Cross-tabulation: Respondents' gender × Follows politicians on Facebook

		Respondents' gender			
		Male		Female	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Follows on FB	Friends	132	91.7%	232	88.2%
	Celebrities	40	27.8%	82	31.2%
	Politicians	**55**	**38.2%**	**92**	**35.0%**
	Family members	28	19.4%	35	13.3%
	Colleagues	59	41.0%	77	29.3%
	Other	38	26.4%	47	17.9%

(Source: Original research)

Table 8: Chi-Square test for independence: Respondents' gender × Follows politicians on Facebook

		Respondents' gender
Follows on FB	Chi-square	14.588
	df	6
	Sig.	.024[*]

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the .05 level.

(Source: Original research)

Table 9 presents a summary findings and figures that build up the Facebook profile of the Macedonian voter.

Table 9: Facts and figures about the Macedonian Facebook voter

• 70% of Macedonian Facebook voters do not follow Facebook profiles and pages of Macedonian politicians;
• 71% of Macedonian Facebook voters have never shared their political attitudes;
• 79% of Macedonian Facebook users' voting choices have not been affected by political posts;
• 76% of Macedonian Facebook voters have never participated a political event based on an information disseminated via Facebook;
• 66% of Macedonian Facebook voters do not think that the information, disseminated by Facebook have made them a better informed person in a political context;
• 40% of Macedonian voters on Facebook are bothered some, and 37% are bothered very much by the Facebook posts about politicians and/or political parties during political campaigns;
• The evaluation of political candidates and their political ideas through Facebook has been done mostly based on texts (38%) and video (29%);
• 65% of Macedonian voters on Facebook are female;
• 52% of Macedonian voters on Facebook have a bachelor degree;
• 45% of Macedonian voters on Facebook are 25-34 years old;
• 45% of Macedonian voters on Facebook are employed;
• Family monthly income is 20,000-30,000 MKD;

- Most of Macedonian voters spend, on average, 1-3 hours per day on Facebook;

- 43.7% of Macedonian voters on Facebook have 100-500 Facebook friends;

(Source: Original research)

Conclusion

Social networking sites like Facebook play an increasingly significant role in political arenas nationwide. They are growing engagement tools that assist the improvement of political processes by helping political candidates in communicating their political agendas and ideas to the community, by consolidating and mobilizing their followers, as well as by attracting new potential members and voters, especially during the period of election campaigns. On the other hand, supporters, political parties' members and voters can also use online social media networks to communicate their political favourites or political candidates, by sharing their attitudes and viewpoints.

For any political party or candidate, it is extremely important to identify the profile of the users of a given social network, in order to adjust and fit their political preferences to achieve a successful user micro-targeting. The Know-Your-Customers'-Needs motto, which is the central principle of the contemporary way of doing successful business, can be equally effectively mapped in politics, too. That is, however good a product or service is, no one will buy it if they don't want it or believe they don't need it. In the same manner, politicians won't persuade the potential voters and supporters that they 'want' or need to 'buy' what political parties are offering, unless it is clearly understood what it is the 'customers' really want. In this particular case, the 'customers' are the Facebook users. Knowing their general profile, which includes a plethora of characteristics and specific behaviours, can significantly help political actors in achieving their strategic goals on a long run, especially regarding their efforts to attract more potential voters during election campaigns. Once such knowledge is gained, political actors can much easier persuade potential and existing voters that 'buying' from them is in their best interests.

In this context, the significance of the research, whose preliminary results are presented for the first time within the paper, is threefold: (1) it is the first attempt that portrays the profile of the Macedonian Facebook voter ever; (2) it is a solid basis for obtaining deeper insights into the Macedonian society, the online social networking in the country, and especially the Macedonian Facebook population, by employing more sophisticated statistical analyses, including the statistical inference methodology; (3) it is an excellent starting point that can hopefully foster further explorations of this subtle matter in the country.

As per results obtained by the research, one can conclude that, in general, Facebook do not affect Macedonian voters' decisions. Most of them follow both politicians' and political parties' Facebook profiles, but it seems that political announcements do not affect their election choices. Approximately all respondents, i.e. almost all Macedonian Facebook users aged 18+, are not subject to the influence of political announcements. However, election results have revealed quite an opposite behaviour, which is yet another topic to be analysed.

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