

The Effectiveness of the On-line Lobbying as of the Innovative Strategies of the American Interest Groups

Lasha KURDASHVILI*

Abstract

Online-lobbying is the most recent development of lobbying strategies of the Interest groups. It started in the beginning of the 2000s, has gained the increasing popularity as it showed as one of the most effective and time-saving, resource-saving strategy. With the help of online lobbying, a political interest group and its member can quickly work together to solve any issue, to articulate the interests of the wider community, consult with competent people. Computer communication can thus stimulate the development of civil society institutions, to assist in the formation of civic consciousness. In the following article are discussed the effects of the new methods of online-lobbying and the online strategies that are used by the American interest groups to influence the public opinion. Will be analyzed the rising influence of social networking and brought the main points of its use among the interest groups.

Keywords: Interest groups, internet, lobbying, media, political strategies, politics, public opinion, public relations, social networks, United States

Introduction

Online-lobbying is the most recent development of lobbying strategies of the Interest groups. It started in the beginning of the 2000s, has gained the increasing popularity as it showed as one of the most effective and time-saving, resource-saving strategy. Among other advantages of the Internet - technologies offer new possibilities for the transformation of the institute of lobbying in the direction of democracy and protection of the public interest. In the classic lobbying system can also be highlight the absence of civil lobbying or ignoring public opinion. Internet networks as the global accessible information resources can and should be used to disclose the "secrets" of lobbying mechanism for active pressure on the power structures (Perea & James, 2012). With their help, an interest group and its member can quickly work together to solve any issue, to articulate the interests of the wider community, consult with competent people. Computer communication can thus stimulate the development of civil society institutions, to assist in the formation of civic consciousness. The future lobbying is information expansion. Lobbying often refers to a highly skilled activity, which has a political meaning and legal basis and is an integral part of a democratic political system. The Institute is intended to implement the lobbying interests of different groups (unions, associations) organized by citizens on the impact of legislative and administrative activity of the state bodies. Based on this definition, lobbyists may be, in most cases, professionals such activities lawyers, for-

mer officials, journalists, with ties and experience in the political decision-making. The success of the lobbying activity is largely determined by the breadth of relations lobbyist in a certain organ of power, his gift of persuasion (Dekieffer, 1981).

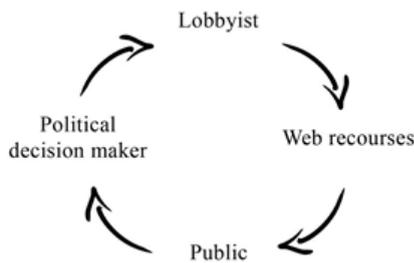
When using computer networks as a lobbying tool, the emphasis changed: professionalism of the lobbyist does not play the most important role, competition of ties and incentives gives the way to competition of information quality and the ability to work with it. Probably, it is appropriate to include the new technological definition of lobbying. Lobbying through computer networks - is an information expansion of one or more persons with the use of computer communication technologies, focused on a specific audience and designed to realize the interests of various groups, organized by citizens to provide the needed legislative and administrative activity of the state bodies. Defining the role of computer networks as a lobbying tool and the use of them in this new capacity can already be observed. Achievements in such disciplines as: network technology, social psychology and political science make it possible to predict the prospects of some phenomenon. At the moment, there are three main areas such prospects: the use of computer networks as an information resource for lobbying, direct pressure information via computer network, personal computer-mediated communication with people taking political decisions.

* Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Education and Humanities, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.
E-mail: lasha.kurdashvili@gmail.com

Supervisor: Irina BAKHTADZE, Prof. Dr., Faculty of Education and Humanities, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.
E-mail: ibakhtadze@ibsu.edu.ge

The distinguishing feature of a professional lobbyist is the awareness of the power system (Eisler, 2016). The lobbyist knows the decision-making scheme, coordinates the duties and competence of each of the current system agents, the terms of coordination at every stage of decision-making, personal characteristics of decision-makers. It is necessary to know in advance about upcoming decisions of the authorities, to prepare arguments and public opinion to influence them. In case of a closed channel of influencing the power the absolute majority of the population is left out of the political process. So the new approach of the internet lobbying expands the possibility of quick two-way communication in which the information flows not Interest Group to the decision makers but also from the officials back to the interest groups. The publication of information required for lobbying could significantly improve government interaction with citizens. As the advantages of network information are relative cheapness, efficiency, accessibility and interactivity of the provision of information.

For information of a negative character anonymity is important (Birnbaum, 1992). The network may well provide this condition. The easiest way of working with networks of lobbyists - replicating the necessary information in the network. Thus, the public and politicians attention may be brought to the urgent problem, argued the adoption of a political decision or prepared the ground for any lobbying action. Replication mechanism is simple: on any server is placed the information to which reference is posted on the most visited sites of the right audience, the web-links to it are also posted in popular mailing lists and newsgroups. It should be noted that the anonymous organization of information in the propaganda campaign is particularly widely used by all sorts of interest groups



This activities has two fold benefit. On the one hand the lobbyist is establishing the necessary social environment for pushing the required legal act in the congress and receives the required public support. At the same time the media receives the required news material and establishes itself as the power tool that is influencing the public opinion.

Another more effective and much more laborious kind of work on conducting awareness campaigns in networks is cooperation with the network audience. There are several types of organization of interactive communication.

- Organization of discussion on the specific topics on websites or in newsgroups, the discussion of the bill or an important political resolution.

- Organization of voting polls, collecting signatures via e-mail to appeal the authority.

According to Pew Research Center in 2013 39% of American adults contacted a government official or spoke out in a public forum via offline methods while 34% did those via online methods. Within this group 17% signed the online petition, 18% have commented on an online news story or blog post on the political issue, while only 7% had the opportunity to express their opinion in mass media, on the TV shows or live radio (Smith, 2013). Virtual sphere gives the lobbyist the opportunity directly to engage with the voters and active political groups to build up the foundation for his future pressure on the decision-makers.

It should be noted that the organization of interactive communication as a method of propaganda campaign is particularly widely used all sorts of social organizations and interest groups. Despite its low cost, this method is effective for the category of citizens who are the most socially and politically active, having common interests. Representatives of public organizations have high mobility and capacity for rapid self-organization and for the solution of urgent problems. Especially using the social networking sites such a Facebook or Twitter for those reasons.

(Pew Research Center, 2013)

Political engagement on social networking sites

60% of American adults use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter; these are some of the civic behaviors they have taken part in on these sites:

	% of SNS users who have done this	% of all adults who have done this
"Like" or promote material related to political/social issues that others have posted	38%	23%
Encourage other people to vote	35	21
Post your own thoughts/comments on political or social issues	34	20
Repost content related to political/social issues	33	19
Encourage others to take action on political/social issues that are important to you	31	19
Post links to political stories or articles for others to read	28	17
Belong to a group that is involved in political/social issues, or working to advance a cause	21	12
Follow elected officials, candidates for office or other public figures	20	12
Total who said yes to any of the activities listed above	66%	39%

Pew Research Center 2013 studies have shown that social networks engaged 39% of the American adults into the political activity which included such activities as: promoting the material related to political issue (38% of the adult involved), encouraging people to vote (35%), posting thought and comments on the political issue (34%), posting links to political stories (28%). The authors of the study concluded that "social networks have enormous potential, they provide a new generation of PR stunning interactivity" (Smith, 2013, p. 18). About ten years ago, researchers have realized extraordinary impact of the Internet on the lobbying. However, according to statistics, most lobbyist use the Internet only as a supplementary rather than the main communication channel. Although experience shows that lobbyist are paying more attention to websites and social networks (Hopkins, 2003).

The web-site of National Education Association points out the great help of the online lobbyist that worked with this interest groups in 2013. In total of 669,199 of our cyber-lobbyists – activists who have emailed their elected officials through their Legislative Action Center, with the list of top 50 lobbyists (National Education Association, n.d.). This highlights the importance of the new technological methods in development of the lobbying for the interest groups. The media and political environment has changed, so the traditional lobbying-technology no longer bring the desired results, so the new media techniques are successfully both to attract the public attention and to influence more effectively on the decision-makers and officials.

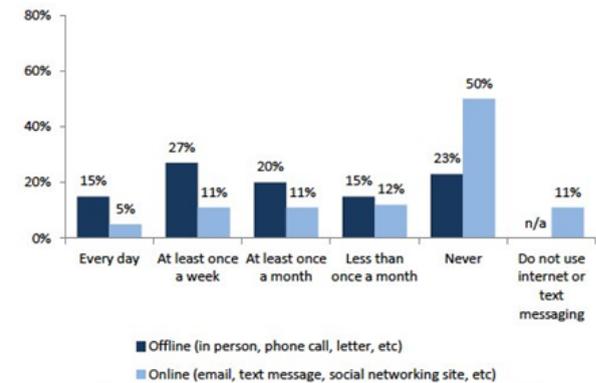
Social Networks Lobbying Techniques and its Analysis

The term “social network” was introduced long before the advent of the Internet and a modern internet networks, even in 1954, by a sociologist from the “Manchester School” James Barnes (Aamaas, Keenan, Zijden, & Sedmak, 1997). The modern concept in the simplest form is a circle of friends a person where there is the man himself in the center of a social network, his friends - the branches of the social network and the relations between these people - connection. The online social network is a software service platform for interaction between people in a group or groups. As applied to the Internet it is a virtual network, which is a means of providing services related to the establishment of relations between its users and between users and the interests of their respective information resources installed on the sites of the global network.

Unlike blogs, social networks do not provide such opportunities to publish any texts on the interest group page. The blogger can put on their behalf any text of any size and volume, thus obtaining the possibility to draw attention directly to him, to earn a certain reputation and increase the popularity of his name - in other words, to give the opportunity to “PR” himself through his texts and later to gain the mass media attention (Trottier & Fuchs, 2015). With the help of the social networks and individual is able to create a powerful and wide information resource and successfully use it enlarging his social cycle popularizing his personal ideas and approaches, attracting even mass media and government attention. This scheme applies for any public group that is successfully applied by interest groups. In social networks, there is practically no possibility of writing and putting the copyright text. This is not “independent journalism” of the blogosphere. Profile on a social network, being formalized and informative, is, in fact, some analogue of resume on a citizen, which a citizen constitutes himself. Profile is something greatly expanded executive summary that can informally and tell about important details such as person’s interest and political preferences. In social networks, a great number of fields in the profile are dedicated to personal information of a user. This allows the user to identify himself as a professional and moreover allows the interest groups to target their members easier. The group in a social network is an analogue of some Internet forum on specific topics. The difference is that any user of a social network has an

important opportunity to a simple, rapid and mass invitation to the group of all his friends. Nowadays a rising number of internet user in the U.S. prefer to discuss the political and social issues online rather than offline.

How Americans discuss politics and public affairs with others
How frequently Americans discuss politics or public affairs with others...(based on all adults)



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012
Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

(Smith, 2013)

In comparison on the daily basis 15% of the participants of the Pew Research Center preferred to discuss politics online using the social web-media. This is due to the much wider coverage of the internet media than of the traditional ways of communication (Smith, 2013). One of the priority of the online discussion of the problems a person avoids immediate negative criticism once getting it only there is time to analyze and think over the strong and persuasive reasons to support the opinion. Overall it increases the public engagement into the political discussion round the target problem. The opinion stated in the social-network lasts longer and it can be used as a reference, which is easily accessible.

Understanding the links between people, groups of states and non-state associations can help in the understanding of the impact they have on each other. Facebook and other such systems, contrary to popular, not only among ordinary people, but also among a large part of local researchers, are not social networks but systems (or instrumental platforms) support for interest group networking. Networks themselves may exist and successfully operate even outside of Facebook.

It seems that such a broad and general understanding of social networks is much more applicable to modern public practice than the simplistic reduction of the whole variety of social networking sites than including only those that operate as the social network support systems. Such an approach is much more effective when applied policy analysis. In particular, social networks analysis theory has been successfully applied and continues to be used for the analysis of political networks.

Thus, the respective social networks (and not necessarily operating within the social networks of support systems) should be one of the areas subject field of any investigation, associated with the political role of social media.

Speaking of the terminological apparatus, should be clarified in understanding of such phenomena as social media (or social media), "New Media", monitoring and measurement of the activity of social media, "created user-generated content", "citizen journalism", "Web 2.0.", "Personalized" communications, political mobilization through social media (Dahlgern, 2013). So far, both in political science and in communication still is unsettled generally accepted definition of data phenomena. There is no and awareness of what each of them includes: a software and hardware platform, or models of social interaction; to production or consumption content; a completely new model of political cooperation, and the new tools of "traditional" political process.

New media - electronic media, often more is dynamic than traditional media, usually allowing the audience to interact with the information producers. They are social. Social media (which include Facebook and Twitter) is designed to connect people with each other. In this capacity, they are used to deliver information to a large number of users in the short time period.

It is necessary to designate and key features of Facebook and Twitter:

- The content of Facebook not always is intended for public access.
- To access the most interesting content posted in social media it is usually necessary to be a member thereof.

• However, social networking support systems usually give access to a large number of personal information, particularly the nature of relations between the various members of the network.

• Twitter - micro blogging service that has characteristics similar to both blogs and services with the support of social networks. It allows you to establish links between people, groups and organizations, and users can quickly share content through a lot of contacts the user has (Trottier & Fuchs, 2015).

Actually analysis of specific networks is a logical implementation of the three steps that must be part of any interest group social media project aimed at the study of focus group:

- Step 1: Identify the network edge.
- Step 2: Determine the relationship between network nodes or its members.
- Key point: the members of the network have an impact on each other to influence the actions of each other. It is therefore important to understand how they relate to each other.
- Key point: the need to understand the power and the nature of relations in network, to understand how it functions.

- Compare different networks, identify those points where they overlap and analyze the comparative levels of network cohesion.

- Step 3: Monitoring and measuring of key indicators

Conclusion

The methods of online lobbying are the modern strategy of influencing the public opinion and still have to be investigated as the time passes. The popularity of social media and web-sites offer new scales of opportunities to the interest groups. By identifying the key features of the online networking and using the social media resources the interest group is capable of building up its main focus and pressure group which as the result will work in achieving the goals of the organization. The online lobbying methods works as both top to bottom and bottom to top flow of information within the political environment. Not only it creates the necessary informational basis among the public at the same time it also activates the work of the official lobbyist who can use internet to communicate with the interest groups and governmental decision makers.

References

- Aamaas, A., Keenan, W. J., Zijden, L. V., & Sedmak, C. (1997). *Resilience and Unemployment*. Salzburg: Salzburg University.
- Ashley, H. (2009). *Change at Hand: Web 2.0 for Development*. Iied: CTA.
- Birnbaum, J. (1992). *The Lobbyists: How Influence Peddlers Get Their Way in Washington*. New-York: Times Press.
- Carr, D. J., Barnidge, M., Lee, B. G., & Tsang, S. J. (2014). *Cynics and Skeptics: Evaluating the Credibility of Mainstream and Citizen Journalism*. Madison: SAGE.
- Dahlgern, P. (2013). *The Political Web: Media, Participation and Alternative Democracy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dekieffer, D. E. (1981). *How to Lobby Congress: A Guide for the Citizen Lobbyist*. New-York: Dodd.
- Eisler, K. (2016, May 10). *Hired Guns: The City's 50 Top Lobbyists*. Retrieved January 7, 2017 from Washingtonian: <http://www.washingtonian.com/articles/mediapolitics/4264.html>
- Hogg, C. (2016). Study: 86% of people use mobile devices while watching TV. *Future of Media*.
- Hopkins, B. R. (2003). *The Nonprofits' Guide to Internet Communications Law*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons.
- Miller, C. C. (2009). How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics. *The New York Times*.
- National Education Association. (n.d.). Retrieved January 5, 2017 from <http://www.nea.org/home/18526.htm>

Perea, E. A., & James, M. (2012). *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge university.

Smith, A. (2013). *Online and offline civic engagement in America*. Retrieved December 30, 2016 from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/04/25/part-1-online-and-offline-civic-engagement-in-america/>

Sterne, J. (2010). *Social Media Metrics: How to Measure and Optimize Your Marketing Investment*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons.

Trottier, D., & Fuchs, C. (2015). *Social Media, Politics and the State: Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and Youtube*. New York: Routledge.

Wang, H. (2012). *Interactivity in E-Learning: Case Studies and Frameworks*. Madison: Dakota State University.