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PERSONAL BRANDING IN POPULIST COMMUNICATION: CASE STUDY OF CAMPAIGN ON ANTI-COVID REGULATIONS IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic increased communication activities by populist political actors as it provided opportunities to gain attention of some groups of the society and forming communities with the help of communication strategies based on the political populist communication style: stressing the anti-elite (or anti-political establishment) approach, raising the importance of the representation of interests of the people and the expression of a common interest. The role of the social media as a platform where communities (information bubbles) could be created to spread misinformation increased during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Populist political actors were among those who were actively using communication on social media platforms with the objective to promote their position on the government's risk management decisions. The advent of COVID-19 pandemic elevated several 'new' actors in the Lithuanian political arena who constructed their communication strategies by using the topic of anti-COVID regulations as the basis for their civic position in the interest of the people and the common good, while opposing the existing political establishment and their proposed measures to manage COVID-19 pandemic and the involved risks. The case study investigates the branding of new actors by their use of populist communication. It is presented by highlighting the key elements of the populist communication strategies used to create a personal brand by raising awareness and showing a populist political actor as the responsible person/influencer taking an active position in the communication on anti-COVID-19 regulation in Lithuania during the years 2020–2023.

Biography of the presenter

Dr. RENATA MATKEVIČIENĖ has been researching communication for more than 15 years. She has recently worked on organizational communication, social responsibility, political communication, trust, and societal and community resilience in both business and political communication contexts.

Renata Matkevičienė has been a member of the Lithuanian Communication Association for more than 10 years; in 2018, she prepared the first Lithuanian glossary of communication and PR terms with her colleagues.

Since 2016, she has been actively cooperating with NGOs, consulting on communication, storytelling, and manipulation in public spaces.