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Online Political Communication as a Method of Fundraising

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SUMMARY

Relevance of the dissertation. An increasing role of funds in elections and easier access to fundraising online makes it highly relevant to research how political parties make use of this situation, what fundraising similarities and differences exist among political parties and identify other communication trends of online fundraising. One of such trends stems from the counterposition between the theoretical approaches of normalisation and equalisation – their proponents aim at finding out whether the competitive position of a political figure is related to the potential of communication undertaken by him or her online. The theoretical hypothesis of normalisation suggests that political figures in a better competitive position make more active use of online communication tools. This dissertation aims at finding out how the competitive position of political figures correlates with the level of their activity in fundraising communication online. In practical terms, that is important for communication professionals, experts and consultants as that makes it possible to identify advantages and deficiencies in the fundraising communication pursued by different political parties and explore potential directions and opportunities for improving such communication. From theoretical perspective, that is relevant for the academic community – the research enables verification of the theoretical normalisation hypothesis in the new context – fundraising communication; in addition, this dissertation for the first time offers verification of the normalisation hypothesis in the political context of Lithuania. Moreover, the dissertation creates the theoretical framework for the studies of online fundraising communication of political parties, which facilitates proper analysis of the use of functions of such communication, therefore, it can be used to verify other theories and hypotheses in the future. The theoretical framework constructed in this research expands the research undertaken to date in the areas of mobilisation of citizens, political participation, political

communication, and political financing. It should be noted that no in-depth integrated research has been undertaken to date in order to analyse extensively the ways, functions and opportunities of the fundraising communication used by Lithuanian political parties online.

This research is also relevant for political parties and political communication strategists of Lithuania and other European states with similar political systems – it helps understand how political parties and politicians of these states may be more effective in fundraising with the help of online communication tools. Notice should also be made of the significance of the research for the public because the donation of funds for political parties and politicians is a form of political involvement, which can be also considered as a form of civic participation. Moreover, the author is convinced that increased funding by citizens can potentially reduce the likelihood that decisions by Lithuanian political parties or politicians will be exposed to the financial impact of different interest groups.

This dissertation analyses how funds are raised in the U.S. and Europe, explores the opportunities of Lithuanian political parties to raise funds effectively not only by taking over the experience of communication from the U.S. and other states but also taking into consideration the law on political funding in force in Lithuania and the elements of competitive situation of its political parties. The developed theoretical framework is applied for the analysis of the fundraising communication undertaken by political parties of Lithuania in order to ascertain how the use of functions of such communication correlates with the competitive situation of the political parties.

Previous research on the topic. The analysis of the trends of communication for fundraising from individual persons in the 21st century is based on the research of the internet as a communication channel for fundraising, however, normally such research covers not

only fundraising online. Most often particular elections are examined broadly – for example, the entire political funding during particular elections is analysed also taking into account online fundraising trends, or the impact of online communication on specific elections is explored also taking into account the opportunities to raise funds online. Joseph Graf has studied the impact of the internet for fundraising during the Presidential elections of 2004, in particular, in the campaign of candidate Howard Dean, and predicted even greater importance of this communication channel in the future (Graf, 2006). Similar view was also upheld by Matthew Hindman who analysed how the internet was used in the communication of Howard Dean and emphasised that the importance of the fundraising pursued by Howard Dean in this campaign was enormous (Hindman, 2005). Meanwhile Costas Panagopoulos and Daniel Bergan suggested that, irrespective of the media focus on the significance of the internet, the number of donors surged as a result of the increased interest in the elections rather than due to technologies (Panagopoulos and Bergan, 2006).

The fundraising communication by Barack Obama during the Presidential election campaign in 2008 has also been widely studied. The funds of the Presidential and Congress elections in 2008 were extensively analysed by David B. Magleby and Anthony Corrado and their team. Similarly to a large number of other authors, they noted that these historic elections and new ways of raising funds can transform the politics of the United States for years to come (Magleby and Corrado, 2011). The research of communication specifics in the 2008 elections, which is often covered in academic works, singles out online fundraising as one, but not the only one, of the objects of research. For example, John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton Jr. investigated how the use of new technologies helped Barack Obama win. They suggest that the main fundraising tool in the campaign of Barack Obama was e-mail (Hendricks and Denton, 2010). Derrick L. Cogburn and Fatima K. Espinoza-Vasquez probed into the impact of the internet on the degree of civic involvement in these elections and

identified sociotechnical factors as one of the three researched elements that enabled the success of Barack Obama in raising funds online. They also noted persistent e-mails requesting financial support as the key factor (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). Mitchell S. McKinney and Mary C. Banwart and their colleagues also investigated the online communication of the 2008 elections, including the raising of funds online. In view of the authors, the main reason of Mr Obama's success in raising funds was an extremely strong team of online communication professionals, which had grown to 30 employees, including also former team members of Howard Dean and one of the founders of Facebook (McKinney and Banwart, 2010).

The 2012 Presidential election of Barack Obama repeated and even surpassed the previous fundraising success, making researchers focus on fundraising communications even more. Jenny Bronstein studied how the candidates to the U.S. Presidents made use of social media for fundraising and pooling volunteers in the campaigns of 2012; she introduced the term "fandom politics", which describes the relationship formed by the candidates with the electorate based not on reason or logic but on affective sensibility (Bronstein, 2013). Jennifer Stromer-Galley carried out an extensive analysis of the past five presidential campaigns between 1996 and 2012 explaining how each of these elections used the potential of the internet for communication and fundraising. She considered that the success of Barack Obama in fundraising had been predetermined not only by the use of internet innovations but also by a larger number different factors: (1) his campaigning appealed to rebellious and young audiences, to which the internet space was most familiar and close; (2) the message of his campaign that each of us can make a difference was properly tuned up with the online strategy (on the online platforms of Mr Obama people were really able to contribute to changes); (3) the team of professionals pooled by him realised better than anybody how and when communication should be used (Stromer-Galley, 2014).

These changes result not only from changing legislation but also from the fundraising potential enabled by the internet. The 2004 Presidential elections and, in particular, the campaign of Howard Dean during the preliminary elections only showcased the potential of the internet in raising funds, but the Presidential elections in 2008 and 2012 made it clear that the possibilities of internet communication for pooling citizens and raising funds can have a decisive impact on the outcome of the elections. Therefore, it is not surprising that online communication and its potential for fundraising is becoming a relevant object for research in the U.S. Such research is also important for European scholars in order to understand better the fundraising trends of European political parties and politicians – a considerable number of such trends comes from the experience of election campaigns in the U.S.

Fundraising communication, as one of the components of a successful and effective political communication, is continuously included in the research of political communication functions. Such research analyses different functions of political communication on the internet, however, the most prevalent functions are information and promotion of participation – the latter are explored almost in all research of that type. Such functions always include fundraising, which is normally attributed to the participation promotion (mobilisation) function (Lilleker et al., 2011; Vaccari, 2013) or the involvement function (Foot and Schneider, 2006), however, it also stands out as an independent function called resource generation (Gibson et al., 2003). Such attribution is so complicated because fundraising communication includes different activities – both presentation of information about donations and argumentation, encouragement of a donation act itself and assistance in its implementation.

The research of online fundraising functions normally aims at verifying or ruling out the theoretical normalisation hypothesis that suggests that political figures in a better competitive situation make

more active use of online communication tools. So far such research mostly validated the normalisation hypothesis (e.g., Lilleker et al., 2011; Schweitzer, 2011), however, in some studies, the efforts to verify the normalisation hypothesis failed (Vaccari, 2013) or it was countered in support of the equalisation hypothesis (Gibson and McAllister, 2015). Mutually antagonistic hypotheses of normalisation and equalisation still remain an important subject of discussions for researchers of online political communication and the exploration of this topic in the context of fundraising communications may offer intriguing results.

Although research on fundraising communication has become one of the key components of research in the areas of political funding and political communication in the U.S., the extent of research on this topic in European countries is much more limited. There is research in larger countries – for example, Justin Fisher analysed the trends of fundraising by political parties in the UK (Fisher, 1997), Achim Goerres and Martin Höpner investigated these trends in Germany (Goerres and Höpner, 2014). Such research most often focused on fundraising from business organisations rather than from individual supporters. Studies of online fundraising and from individual donors in European countries are sporadic, one of them being the research by Jana Godarová and Marek Pavlík which explores the specifics of fundraising by major political parties of Czech Republic (Godarová and Pavlík, 2015). That predetermines that modern research on fundraising in European states does not address the relevant issues dictated by the U.S.

Problems addressed by the research. The analysis of the extent to which the topic has been researched reveals that the research of political communication on the use of internet tools analyses the trends and impact of the use of such tools for opportunities of politicians to win in elections, while the research in the area of political funding mostly focuses on the impact of legislation on political funding in

different countries, on the activities of political action committees (the U.S.) or on the specifics of financing political parties by State funds (Europe). Online communication for fundraising by political parties and politicians, irrespective of its importance, is covered by such research only sporadically.

The importance of fundraising for activities of political parties and politicians, the scope and opportunities of fundraising online indicate a visible shortage of research that would create the theoretical basis and research methodology for analysing the communication used by political parties on the internet for fund raising. The research of political communication normally uses the approach enabling an analysis of diverse communication specifics by attributing them to different functions (Gibson et al., 2003; Foot and Schneider, 2006; Lilleker et al., 2011; Vaccari, 2013). The analysis of fundraising communication, however, may not rely on such approach because many of the communication features are not relevant for fundraising. Moreover, such approach does not distinguish the features of communication important for fundraising, such as methods of argumentation.

Creation of a new theoretical framework would enable not only the research of the use of functions of online fundraising communication but would also identify, through the use of the theoretical normalisation hypothesis, the potential reasons why political parties carry out communication differently. Verification of the normalisation hypothesis and the opposing equalisation hypothesis leads to different results in research: these mutually antagonistic hypotheses have been verified in various studies to date (e.g., Lilleker et al., 2011; Schweitzer, 2011; Vaccari, 2013; Gibson and McAllister, 2015). The verification or ruling out of the above-referred normalisation hypothesis often depends on the contexts of research. Therefore, it becomes important to find out what results the verification of this hypothesis would reveal in the context of the Lithuanian political system and in the context of its fundraising communication. For this

purpose, efforts are made to identify the links between indicators of the competitive position of political parties and the use of communication functions in the above-referred contexts.

The scientific problem of this dissertation is formulated by asking the question: what is the relationship between the competitive position of political parties and the use of functions of online fundraising communication?

In order to answer to this question, the theoretical framework should be created and the existing theoretical approach should be expanded, which would allow adapting the chosen approach used for the analysis of political communication functions to the context of fundraising. The newly developed theoretical framework should embrace the most important aspects of online fundraising communication. That makes it possible to analyse the specifics and functions of online fundraising communication undertaken by political parties as well as verify the normalisation hypothesis in the new context – fundraising communication; that also makes it possible to find out how the disparities of the competitive position of political parties existing beyond the internet are manifest in their communications for fundraising online. The newly developed theoretical framework would enable the analysis of quantitative indicators, however, the fact that it does not cover qualitative aspects of the phenomenon may be considered as its shortcoming.

This dissertation and its research expand the studies already performed in the area of communication of political parties and political funding, allow scholars to identify the problematic issues common for the fundamental areas of political funding and political communication, and provide the basis for future research of these areas. That also allows communication practitioners to better distribute political campaign resources, focus on the forms most suitable for the Lithuanian political system for the funding of political parties and politicians and on the most suitable instruments of communication. Therefore, it may be stated that an answer to the

research question is necessary for members of the academic community who deal with the issues of civic mobilisation and political participation, explore communication of political parties and political funding; it is also relevant for various political figures, communication specialists and practitioners engaged in political fundraising communication.

Object of the research – online fundraising communication by political parties.

Purpose of the research – to identify the specifics of functions of the online fundraising communication carried out by political parties of Lithuania and its correlation with the competitive situation of the political parties.

Tasks of the research:
1. To analyse the trends of political funding and the use of online communication tools from the perspective of mobilisation of citizens and political participation and identify the potential of online political fundraising communication.
2. To identify the specifics and intensity of online political fundraising communication undertaken by political parties in Lithuania as well as the functions and attributes inherent in such communication.
3. To identify the differences and similarities in the online fundraising communication of different political parties of Lithuania.
4. To identify the correlation between the use of functions of online fundraising communication by political parties in Lithuania and the competitive position indicators of the parties and reveal the presence or absence of any indications

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of normalisation in political online communication in Lithuania.
5. To identify the correlation between the use of functions of online fundraising communication by political parties in Lithuania and fundraising results and identify the presence or absence of the effectiveness of online fundraising communication.

Statements to be defended:
1. Lithuanian political parties are actively engaged in online fundraising communication using the functions of information, participation and delivery. The specifics and intensity of such communication is suitable for the verification of the theoretical normalisation hypothesis in the context of fundraising.
2. The political parties of Lithuania that have more financial resources more actively make use of the functions of fundraising communication than the political parties with fewer financial resources.
3. The number of members held by political parties of Lithuania has no relationship with the degree to which the political parties make use of the functions of online fundraising communication. Political parties with more or fewer members can be equally active in the use of such functions.
4. The Lithuanian political parties with more members in their parliamentary political groups are more active in using the functions of online fundraising communication compared to the political parties which are not represented at the Parliament at all.
5. Differences in the competitive position of the Lithuanian political parties predominant beyond the internet are also

manifest in the fundraising communication these political parties carry out online: the political parties holding a better competitive position are more active in using the functions of participation and delivery; a better competitive position shows a more active use of various online communication tools and their functions for fundraising. Therefore, the online fundraising communication carried out by political parties of Lithuania shows indications of normalisation.

6. The political parties which make more active use of the functions of online fundraising communication achieve better fundraising results, therefore, their fundraising communication is more effective. This effectiveness is manifest in a larger number of persons who donate online and in a higher amount of the funds raised, however, does not necessarily mean a higher number of persons who donate in general.

Structure of the research

The dissertation consists of the introduction, section one, section two, conclusions and recommendations.

Section one of the dissertation is divided into the sub-sections covering literature analysis and the development of a theoretical framework. The first sub-sections of literature analysis explore the development of political fundraising, the existing situation and prospects in Europe and in the U.S., address fundraising in the contexts of political funding and political communication. These sub-sections also discuss communication and the technological aspects of online political fundraising: firstly, the significance of the internet in communication processes is analysed in the context of the theoretical approach of normalisation and equalisation; secondly, the role of online communication in promoting participation in order to raise funds is discussed; thirdly, an analysis is provided of practical online tools for political fundraising, such as strategies for online political

fundraising and communication tools of online political fundraising. The first section also constructs the theoretical framework of the dissertation: presents, justifies and operationalises the functions of information, participation and delivery; the use of these functions and the competitive position of political parties are analysed from the theoretical normalisation perspective.

The second section of the dissertation details the empirical research of online fundraising communication used by political parties, followed by the presentation of the methodology and results of this research.

Object of the empirical research: correlation between the online communication undertaken by political parties of Lithuania in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax and the competitive position of these political parties.

Purpose of the empirical research: to analyse the online communication undertaken by political parties of Lithuania in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax and identify the specifics, intensity and effectiveness of use of the functions of such communication, as well as find out how the differences in the competitive position of political parties that exist beyond the internet are expressed in the online fundraising communication of the political parties.

Objectives of the empirical research:
1. To investigate the specifics and intensity of the communication undertaken by political parties of Lithuania on websites, Facebook and in e-mail newsletters in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax and identify the functions and features inherent in such communication.

2. To identify the indicators of the competitive position of Lithuanian political parties, indicators of the use of functions of the communication undertaken by them for securing the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax and the result indicators of the support obtained, as well as the distribution of such indicators among the political parties of the country.
3. To identify what is the relationship between the financial resources available to political parties of Lithuania and the use of functions of the communication undertaken by them online in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax.
4. To identify what is the relationship between the number of members held by political parties of Lithuania and the use of functions of the communication undertaken by them online in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax.
5. To identify what is the relationship between the position of Lithuanian political parties at the Parliament and the use of functions of the communication undertaken by them online in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax.
6. To analyse the relationships existing between the competitive position of political parties of Lithuania and the communication undertaken by political parties of Lithuania in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax and identify how the differences in the competitive position that exist beyond the internet are expressed in the online fundraising communication of the political parties.
7. To analyse the relationship between the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by political parties of Lithuania in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax and the fundraising results and identify the

trends of effectiveness of the online fundraising communication used by Lithuanian political parties.

Presentation of research methods. In order to accomplish the tasks of the research, it has been decided to choose the methods of primary source analysis, quantitative content analysis and correlation analysis. The primary source analysis has been chosen in order to collect data about the position of political parties and fundraising results. The method of quantitative analysis has been chosen because it allows identifying the specifics of online political communication, categorising such communication by the functions and their features distinguished in the theoretical framework section, and finding out the degree of activity in the use of such functions and other specifics. According to Klaus Krippendorff, content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. It is emphasised that content analysis does not confine to written matter – images, sounds or other materials also constitute matter and may be covered by research. Most importantly, the material collected for the purposes of research should be produced to have meanings for someone else (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18-19). Thus, the matter for content analysis also includes the online communication tools used by political parties to raise funds and their content.

This method has been chosen due to its several advantages: first of all, it makes possible to obtain data without interfering into the process of fundraising communication in the observer's role; it also allows capturing the information as it is instead of relying on the opinion and comments of representatives of political parties; it also enables the receipt of quantitative data and indicators necessary to find out how fundraising communication functions are applied and to identify its relationship with other indicators – in this case, competitive position or fundraising results.

A large number of significant works on political communication and politics (e.g., Foot and Schneider, 2006; Vaccari, 2013) investigating the functions of political online communication were based on the process of content analysis, considered as classic these days, proposed by Rachel Gibson and Stephen Ward. It consists of the following parts (Gibson and Ward, 2000; Vaccari, 2013):

1. devising concepts identifying basic functions of political websites;
2. operationalisation of variables that measure specific content features that fulfil such functions;
3. coding of websites for the presence or absence of these features;
4. development of indices to measure how websites perform the devised functions.

This method is also used for the research of online communication undertaken by political parties of Lithuania to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax. Using the functions of information, participation and delivery as distinguished in the theoretical framework and the features that fulfil them, this research coded the content, which was aimed at securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax and which was communicated by political parties of Lithuania on their websites, Facebook accounts and e-mail newsletters. Based on the coding results, each political party under research was attributed indexes defining their rating for the use of functions of the fundraising communication as well as indexes by separate functions.

The indexes derived formed the basis for investigating the correlation between the indexes and the following variables that describe the competitive position of the political parties of Lithuania:

1. the monetary expression of the financial resources held by the political parties (average of the revenue of the last two years);

2. the number of members held by the political parties;
3. the existence or absence of political groups of the political parties at the Parliament (and the number of their members at the Parliament).

It was also investigated whether there is any relationship between the indexes and the variables describing the effectiveness of the online fundraising communication by the political parties of Lithuania:
1. the amounts raised by the political parties during the research period;
2. the total number of persons who offered donations to the political parties during the research period;
3. the number of persons who offered online donations to the political parties during the research period.

Results of the empirical research. In order to identify the correlation between the competitive position of political parties and their online communication for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax, it is important to identify the correlation between different communication functions and instruments. The most important role in assessing how indicators of the competitive position of political parties correlate with the use of communication functions is attributed to the calculation and analysis of general rating scores. The general rating of the online communication undertaken by each political party for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax consists of the scores it received in all three (information, participation and delivery) functions and in all three communication tools (websites, e-mail newsletters and Facebook). The correlation coefficients between the competitive position of the political parties and their general rating scores are the key indicators showing whether the theoretical normalisation hypothesis is true or false in the case of online fundraising communication by political parties of Lithuania.

The revenue of the political parties and the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by the political parties for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax (general ratings) show a weak but, undoubtedly, positive correlation ($\rho = 0.263$, $\tau = 0.185$).

The number of members held by the political parties and the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by the political parties for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax (general ratings) do not show an adequate correlation to be able to draw conclusions ($\rho = 0.130$, $\tau = 0.123$). Therefore, it is considered that there is no correlation between these two variables.

The *number of members held by the political parties in parliamentary political groups* and the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by the political parties for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax (general ratings) show a positive correlation ($\rho = 0.486$, $\tau = 0.336$), the strength of which could be interpreted as being between average and strong. That is the strongest correlation identified in this research between the competitive position and general ratings of the political parties.

In summary, it may be stated that the competitive position of the political parties correlates with the use of functions of the online fundraising communication by the political parties, however, this correlation is observed not in all elements of the competitive position. As the analysis shows, the number of members held by the Lithuanian political parties does not correlate with the use of the functions of the online communication undertaken by the political parties for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax. That means that the political parties with more and fewer members are equally active in the use of the functions of online fundraising communication.

A clear correlation has been observed between the number of members held by the political parties in parliamentary political groups and the use of the functions of communication undertaken by them online in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax. The political parties with more members in their parliamentary

political groups are more active in the use of the functions of online fundraising communication. Correlation has also been observed between the revenue of the political parties and the use of the functions of communication undertaken by these political parties online in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax – political parties which have more financial resources (receive higher revenue) are more active in using the functions of online fundraising communication. That indicates that the resources (both administrative and financial) held by political parties is an important indicator capable of showing the likely level of activity of political parties in using the functions of online fundraising communication.

The effectiveness of the online communication undertaken by political parties of Lithuania in order to secure the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax can be determined by ascertaining whether there is a relationship between the ratings of the use of functions of the online political communication for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax and the results achieved in that same campaign to secure donations of 1 per cent of the income tax: whether the political parties scored higher for the use of the functions attract more donating persons (in total and online) and whether they raise more funds.

Three criteria of results of the online fundraising by political parties have been chosen for this analysis:

1. the amount raised by the political party during the research period;
2. the total number of persons who offered donations to the political party during the research period;
3. the number of persons who offered online donations to the political party during the research period.

The most important out of these four criteria is the third criterion – how many persons allocated 1 per cent of their income tax online to the political party. This criterion is considered as the most important because it best of all shows the success of the fundraising

communication that was carried out on the internet in particular because the political parties made clear efforts to direct the persons concerned towards granting their donations on the internet – they provided many links to the donation platform (the e-declaration system of the State Tax Inspectorate) and very rarely enabled downloads of declarations to be able to print them out. Besides, other methods may not be considered as most important because, for example, the amount donated as 1 per cent of the income tax only partly shows the effectiveness of the fundraising communication because the persons who grant such support do not choose a specific amount which they would like to donate to the political party, therefore, even one very rich person could distort this indicator. The total number of persons who allocated support may not be considered as the most important criterion because it also includes hard-copy declarations filed by the persons who had not seen any fundraising communication online. For this reason, it should be considered that the most important criterion is the number of persons who donated 1 per cent of their income tax to a political party online. However, in order to get a general picture, it is useful to analyse the correlation existing between the use of communication functions and all the three criteria of effectiveness.

The first criterion. The analysis revealed a weak direct correlation between the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by the political parties for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax (general ratings) and the funds raised by the political parties from the donated 1 per cent of the income tax in 2018 ($\rho = 0.267$, $\tau = 0.185$). The political parties which had a higher general rating for the use of functions of the online communication for securing 1 per cent donations of the income tax raised more funds on average than the political parties with a lower rating.

The second criterion. The analysis revealed that there is no correlation between the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by the political parties for securing donations of 1 per cent

of the income tax (general ratings) and the total number of persons who allocated support for the political parties ($\rho = -0.035$, $\tau = 0.031$). The political parties, which had a higher general rating for the use of functions of the online communication for securing 1 per cent donations of the income tax, attracted the same number of persons who allocated support than the political parties with a lower rating.

The third criterion. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by the political parties for securing donations of 1 per cent of the income tax (general ratings) and the number of persons who allocated support for the political parties on the internet ($\rho = 0.358$, $\tau = 0.277$). The political parties, which had a higher general rating for the use of functions of online communication for securing 1 per cent donations of the income tax, attracted, on average, more persons who allocated support online than the political parties with a lower rating.

Thus, the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by political parties for securing 1 per cent donations of the income tax does not correlate with the total number of persons who donated support for these political parties. It is important, however, that the use of functions of the online communication undertaken by political parties for securing 1 per cent donations of the income tax has a moderate correlation with the number of persons who allocated support for these political parties online. Moreover, it correlates, although weakly, with the total amount raised by these political from the donated 1 per cent of the income tax. That suggests that the online communication for securing 1 per cent of the income tax donations is capable of reaching the audience which makes online donations and potentially encouraging to donate to the political parties which are more active in using online fundraising communication functions.

Conclusions and recommendations. Differences of the political systems in the U.S. and Europe also predetermine how political parties raise funds in different countries. Although fundraising from citizens

online is becoming the principal way of political funding in the U.S., methods of political financing with the funds of the State predominate in European states. Irrespective of this difference, fundraising online is becoming more relevant in Europe. Now it may be already stated that political parties of Lithuania are active in fundraising communication online –they in particular focus on the donations of 1 per cent of the income tax. During campaigns for 1 per cent income tax donations, political parties raise a significant amount of their income: in 2018, four political parties raised more than 100,000 euros and two of them – more than 200,000 euros. Such fundraising results and increasingly more active efforts of political parties to engage in fundraising communication suggest that the situation of political fundraising is in a transitional period in Lithuania and that fundraising from citizens will become more important as a form of political funding. Campaigns to secure donations of 1 per cent of the income tax are actively pursued by political parties, they raise considerable amounts and remain the most relevant object in researching the online fundraising communication undertaken by political parties. Moreover, messages on fundraising are becoming a normal part of political communication, therefore, other fundraising forms should also gain higher popularity both among political parties and among potential sponsors in the future. The importance of online communication tools for these processes will also increase.

The fundraising communication undertaken by political parties may be analysed from the perspective of normalisation. It has been identified during the theoretical analysis that the theoretical hypothesis of normalisation is confirmed by research more often than the opposite equalisation hypothesis. The ability of political parties in a better competitive position to use internet technologies is increasing and that creates preconditions for an effective use of online communication tools to mobilise citizens. Such mobilisation is successfully performed by various online communication tools, however, websites, social media and e-mail are most important in the context of fundraising.

This dissertation analyses how political parties in a different competitive position carry out fundraising communication online. The analysis of activities of political parties revealed that their competitive position is best of all described and predetermined by three indicators: the resources held by political parties, their parliamentary position and the number of members held by them. The functions of the fundraising communication undertaken by political parties online include information, participation and delivery. The function of information consists of information about donation possibilities, information explaining how to donate, and of use of methods of argumentation categorised as rational, credible and emotional. The function of participation embraces the possibilities of direct participation, downloading, contacting and sharing. The function of delivery includes effective organisation, accessibility and updating frequency. The use of each of these functions contributes to the level of activity of online fundraising communication.

Online fundraising communication is important for political parties – even 12 out of 14 political parties that participated in the last elections to the Parliament used online communication tools to collect donations of 1 per cent of the income tax. That shows that online communication may no longer be regarded as an indication of luxury or a trendy matter – it is used for fundraising by political parties with more and fewer members, with higher and lower revenue. That once again proves that the scientific issue investigated in this research in order to study the correlation between the competitive position of political parties and the use of functions of the fundraising communication undertaken by political parties online, had not been clearly answered before.

The research undertaken shows that not all elements of a competitive position correlate with the ability of political parties to make use of the functions of online fundraising communication – the number of members held by a political party has proved to be unrelated with the use with the use of functions of online fundraising

communication. This finding is different than it was possible to expect. The analysis of the research results, however, suggests that the competitive position of political parties in general is an important aspect giving an indication how active different political parties are in the use of the functions of fundraising communication online. More active in the use of these functions are the political parties with higher revenue and with more members in their political groups at the Parliament. That shows the significance of resources for fundraising communication, because the revenue of political parties is an important indicator determining their financial resources and the number of Parliament members in the political groups held by political parties is an important indicator determining their administrative resources. The resources of both types can also be used in online fundraising.

Political parties with higher revenue may hire better paid communication and IT specialists, use relevant features for fundraising on their websites, social media and e-mail campaigns. Meanwhile political parties with lower revenue are compelled to hire less experienced communication and IT specialists or rely on less skilled volunteers who work without pay. This qualitative difference, which is clearly seen in the fundraising communication undertaken by political parties, contributes to normalisation trends – political parties with more financial resources have better prospects to get more revenue in the future as well. As it is seen from the research results, political parties of Lithuania take advantage of such improved prospects – political parties with more revenue use more communication tools, as well as use their functions more actively.

Political parties with more Parliament members in their political groups at the Parliament have another advantage – administrative potential. A larger political group may employ more desk officers, each member of the Parliament has three full time positions for assistants-secretaries. Some of these positions are often taken by specialists who work not only for a political group or a specific

Parliament member but also for a political party. It should also be noted that political parties which have more seats at the Parliament also receive higher grants from the State and, therefore, this indicator partly, although not always, can also indicate potentially higher financial resources. For this reason, this indicator can potentially be considered as best of all describing the competitive position of political parties because it means a higher control of both financial and administrative resources. The research results show that the number of Parliament members in political groups of political parties had the highest correlation with the use of functions of the online fundraising communication of political parties. This indicator is most important both for defining the competitive position of political parties and its correlation with the use of functions of the online fundraising communication.

Different researchers note that political parties with scarce resources are often compelled to make a difficult decision and choose one communication tool where they can reach citizens most effectively. Whereas online communication tools are still considered as cost-effective, political parties with scarce resources could focus on them. The use of online tools would be especially useful in raising funds because fundraising is an investment that gives financial return and helps increase the amount of available funds to be able to use that money for other purposes in the future. However, in the meantime political parties with poor resources avoid investments in online fundraising communication and in this way prevent themselves from getting more resources.

Such findings provide additional and weighty arguments for the proponents of the theoretical normalisation approach. Such approach is more and more frequently confirmed by various studies, however, it was possible to anticipate unexpected findings from the case of online fundraising communication because this context is especially important (and almost the only way to raise funds) for political parties in a worse competitive position. However, even in this context,

political parties with more financial resources and a better position at the Parliament were predominant.

It should also be noted that no correlation has been identified between the membership count of the political parties and the use of the functions under research. The membership count could be an appropriate indicator to identify a competitive position because a higher number of members in a political party means that there can be more communication and IT professionals among these persons who could agree to help their political party raise funds free of charge. However, it seems that even if such specialists belong to political parties, they are not keen to contribute to the fundraising communication undertaken by the political party online free of charge. Therefore, the number of members in a political party should not be considered as the key indicator in verifying the theoretical normalisation hypothesis – it should be noted that it is used in the research in foreign states less frequently than other indicators. It has been used in this research as one of the three equivalent indicators and it is recommended to not attribute a higher value to this indicator in the future as well.

Political parties in a better competitive position are more active in using such functions of online fundraising communication as participation and delivery, which require specific skills and knowledge. For example, the enabling of certain features on websites requires both practical IT skills and practical experience in online communication. These trends, however, are not inherent in the function of information – political parties in a worse competitive position are also able to present information about and arguments on fundraising in a proper manner. Therefore, being unable to make adequate use of the functions of participation and delivery, they focus on information and are even ahead of political parties in a better competitive position.

The indications of normalisation are observed in the fundraising communication undertaken by Lithuanian political parties online

because the disparities existing among the political parties beyond the internet are also manifest in the online fundraising communication of the political parties. The political parties which hold a better competitive position (higher revenue, more seats in the political group at the Parliament) are more active in using the functions of participation and delivery as well as more actively use different communication tools for fundraising.

The trends of normalisation are upheld by the "vicious cycle" situation – the political parties with more resources have better possibilities for online fundraising communication and, as a result, easier access to additional resources. The research identified that the fundraising communication of the political parties who are more active in using the functions of online fundraising communication is more effective. This effectiveness is manifest in a larger number of persons who donate online and a higher amount of the funds raised, however, does not necessarily mean a higher number of persons who donate in general. The first two indicators are sufficient to be able to consider the use of functions of online fundraising communication as an advantage enabling political parties to raise more funds.

Research often analyses the online fundraising communication undertaken by political parties in parallel of other activities by political parties to promote engagement, such as the mobilisation of voters or the pooling of volunteers. Such approach in the research covering multiple activities can prevent from distinguishing unique political communication aspects inherent in fundraising. Therefore, other studies aiming at verifying the normalisation and equalisation hypotheses can help understand whether competitive position differences existing beyond the internet are characteristic of the entire communication undertaken by political parties online rather than of individual aspects of communication, such as fundraising communication. This dissertation focuses only on this aspect of communication of political parties – fundraising communication. That for the first time allowed verifying the normalisation and equalisation

hypotheses in the new contexts: in the political system of Lithuania, during online fundraising campaigns as well as focus on the new method of fundraising, which takes place during the period outside elections rather than during election campaigns. For that purpose, it was necessary to create a new theoretical framework to enabling an analysis of the fundraising communication undertaken by political parties online.

This research suggests that the theoretical framework of political online fundraising communication constructed in this thesis is suitable for the analysis of such communication both in Lithuania and in other states. The empirical research carried out within this theoretical framework yielded valid and reliable results which can also be replicated by other scholars. Therefore, this theoretical framework may also be used in future research for analysing online fundraising communication.

With reference to this theoretical framework and results of the performed research, recommendations are provided for scholars and academics intending to research the issues of online fundraising communication undertaken by political parties. The following directions for future research are recommended:

- It is recommended that research be carried out on the issue of communication undertaken by Lithuanian political parties to raise donations of 1 per cent of the income tax during the period of elections in order to ascertain the impact of ongoing political elections on the process of fundraising. Such research could also verify the theoretical hypothesis of normalisation.
- It is recommended that continued (longitudinal) research be carried out on the issue of communication undertaken by Lithuanian political parties for raising donations of 1 per cent of the income tax in order to assess changes in such communication in different periods of time.

- It is recommended that research be carried out on the issue of fundraising communication undertaken by candidates to the Parliament and to the President's post in Lithuania in order to verify the normalisation hypothesis among individual political candidates rather than political parties.
- It is recommended that qualitative research be carried out on the issue of online fundraising communication undertaken by political parties in order to identify qualitative specifics of such communication. Such research could also cover the qualitative analysis of the online fundraising communication of political parties as well as interviews with representatives of political parties (in particular interview or focus group interviews).
- It is recommended that qualitative research of persons donating support for political parties be carried out in order to identify trends in the motivation, attitude to donation and behaviour or such donors.

It may be recommended to political parties, irrespective of their competitive position, to make more active use of the functions of online fundraising communication, in particular, by focusing on participation and delivery functions. It is also recommended that different online communication tools be used for fundraising. These recommendations are supported by the fact that a more active use of participation and delivery functions and a more frequent use of different online communication tools correlates with better fundraising results.

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NOTES

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