

Political Parties in the Global Context

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Abstract

In a more connected world than ever, with an expanding global market, old businesses that once used to dominate the markets found themselves facing big problems when new business models emerged, when the internet led to the birth of e-commerce and different kinds of shopping channels and experiences. Globalization proved to be helpful for those who understood the opportunities and chose to adapt, but fierce for those who did not evolve.

Much the same, the political competition has been influenced by globalization, showing changes worldwide, from status quo infringement in the political debate and public speech, to the electoral wins of new political players against the establishment. This paper will take a closer look on the changes brought by globalization to the political entities, in comparison to for-profit enterprises, and will try to assess whether they can be deemed positive or negative in regard to the society.

Key words: marketing, globalization, political marketing, parties, social media

J.E.L. classification: M31, F68

1. Introduction

Marked by the evolution and adoption of the internet in the 1990's, political communication has evolved rapidly and it has integrated the new means of communication, starting with the websites and e-mails, and advancing to social media and personalised online messages, after the year 2000. Political parties had to adapt to the speed and intensity of the changes, keeping the pace of the society, in order to enter, or to still be a part of the political scenery.

There are more and more voices, inside democratic countries, that ask for a change in the status quo. The representative democracy model, that has deep roots in the Western civilisation, is being questioned more and more. Bowler et al. looked at the American political market and found out that citizens adhere to the idea of direct voting and closer bounds between their opinions and the vote of the representatives. But this does not mean that the electors want to be more engaged and to spend more time in regard to politics. Most of them probably want to feel that they have more to say in formulating policies fit for their needs, while the ones that truly want direct democracy are the ones really disappointed in politics, or the ones that are engaged citizens, willing to fight for changes (Bowler et al., 2007).

In the XXI century, information travels faster than ever before and the national borders started to have less importance in stopping expanding trends. Disappointment in the governmental process and the state is growing in many parts of the world, while the main themes surfaced are becoming transnational. Protesting and radical movements have reached new areas of the globe, as it was in the case of the Arab Spring, and are growing in intensity. The people of non-democratic countries asked for democracy, while the ones under established democratic regimes wanted changes in the way their democracy is working.

Globalization brought back in the public's eye problems that were almost forgotten in most European countries, such as immigration, loss of national identity and internal decision-making, economic problems, or trade wars. This proved to be a fertile ground for the reappearance of extremist political movements, or even populist and radical discourse from some former more conservative parties.

In an interconnected world, politicians have to think and act quicker, they have to be informed about not only local matters, but also regional and world issues. Therefore, the time for slow-paced politics is over. Long-term plans are being readjusted periodically, due to the intensity of the changes in worldwide politics nowadays, and the focus is on understanding and catching the sentiment and the current views of the electorate. Political parties and politicians must understand the globalization of politics and political marketing, in order to gain competitive advantages and to remain relevant in today's society.

2. Theoretical background

Looking at the influence exercised by globalization on political trust, Fischer considers that adopting policies fit for the global markets can alter the perception of the constituents on the policy makers. It is thought that electors can feel that their needs are not addressed by a globally-focused approach from the government, thus considering it a failure in respecting the electoral promises (Fischer, 2012). Conducting a pilot study, Anker discovered that globalization and marketing can come in the help of promoting some democratic values, that can be identified even in non-democratic countries. Through branding and positioning, a corporation can both endorse social values and gain business success (Anker, 2014).

Lilleker and Vedel analysed the evolution of media in campaigns, focusing on the emergence of the internet and its presence ever since. Its influence is obvious, as it is in our daily communicating habits, and it definitely helped bring people closer. The authors consider that the internet and new media cannot lead to success by themselves, but there is the need of a mix between mainstream media and new channels. Alongside the benefits of the new technologies, there are challenges and risks that political entities must understand. Just like businesses looking for profit, that are exposed to the volatility of the new communication channels and their speed, politicians must face these situations and respond (Lilleker et al., 2013).

Archetti researched the changes in the image and self-presentation of politicians, in today's interconnected world, and states that politics is still about relationships, that affect even the impact of the new communication means. The politicians have evolved alongside the society and their image is created through social interactions, with the public being an important part in the process. Therefore, the impact of new media and image building methods depends on the engagement and involvement of the politician, the media and the public (Archetti, 2017).

At the time of the 2014 European Parliament elections there was a context of Euroscepticism and an Eurozone crisis, according to Nulty et al., which, with the presence of micro-blogs and social networking sites, could have turned the round of elections into more than an extension of the national political fight, towards European-focused matters. The scholars analysed the discourse and reactions on Twitter, finding that although there were common subjects, they were debated at a local level, not transnational. The ideological positioning between left and right did not divide the electors, as it often used to do, but rather their attitude towards the European Union and its challenges (Nulty et al., 2016).

In a research about e-governing and its effects on the level of confidence, Tolbert et al. discovered that the constituents who have already voted, who are educated and have a higher income, are more likely to interact with e-governing, rather than the ones who actually come in contact with governmental agencies in their daily lives. Also, it resulted that the young are the most interested in e-governing, due to their openness to new technologies (Tolbert et al., 2006).

Albertazzi et al. consider that in Europe the context helps the populists expansion, due to the fact that party membership numbers have declined substantially. Also, the populists show the capability to convince the disenfranchised electors that this time the votes truly matter, or that they are different from the mainstream political class. The authors believe that the trend of rising populism in the Western European countries, that took speed in the last decades, is not near of losing its power, but is even heading towards more exposure and electoral gains. Nowadays, populism is present in governments, in parliamentary coalitions and at a local level, through radical parties and politicians, or even in the the discourse of mainstream established political figures (Albertazzi et al., 2008).

According to Pasquino, the emergence of populism is possible in any contemporary democratic state, because of the different nuances given to the principle of people's power in a democracy. The rise in populist claims and hate speech, or even in the number and power of populist political entities, reveals a lack of functionality on the political stage. Appearing as a result of instability and poor democratic ruling by the existing politicians, populism does not improve the functioning of the system, but it rather hurts a democratic state. On that account, populism cannot deliver its claims, and it drives constituents towards radical actions, hate and violence, or towards political apathy and a deeper lack of trust. The author identifies that the major problems of populist movements and some potential reasons for their failure to improve societies are: the hate and total opposition towards other political entities and the refuse to consider political enemies as competitors; the massive belief that the populist leader can by himself solve all of the problems, replacing competency with charisma and tough speeches, while ignoring the whole party or other influential members; and the decline in trust in the institutions that are meant to act as a liaison between constituents and the elected, because of populist politicians promoting a direct leader-electoral relationship as an alternative, therefore hurting the existing system (Pasquino, 2008).

3. Methodology

I have chosen a systematic literature review based research, starting from the rapid expansion of political communication, that took place since the 1990's, until today's evolutions on the political market, in order to assess the transformations that political entities have suffered and the possible connections to globalization. In building a proper framework of political players nowadays and of their place in the globalised world we live in, there is a need to understand and correlate many factors, belonging to domains such as: social, economic, technological, legislative or international affairs. The goal of this paper is to try to explain if globalization's influence on politics has improved the society we live in. I researched whether it has helped more representative parties and politicians to come to the stage and have a chance, or if these changes made the voice of the people be heard and, thus, their needs be better addressed. On the contrary, the global nature of political marketing and its advancements could have served only as a tool for identifying winning strategies, with the intent of coming into office and promoting powerful and impactful messages, without being representative and a real change for the better.

4. Findings

Focusing on the rise of populism in Western Europe, Mastropaolo revealed that most of the parties have adapted to today's politics of rather solving urgent problems, than to strategic planning and developing. The ones with extremist positioning and discourse are not necessarily opposing the established democratic system and values, but they are promoting ideas that belong to a believed to be better past, before the globalization's effects and the Establishment's negative ruling. Plausible reasons for the changes on the political market, that are affecting all of the parties, could be: the social and economic evolution that led to different types of businesses, with more consultants, distributors and experts, than with large number of employees, model that has been adopted by mass-market parties, who relied formerly on their members, and are now more professionalized and use external PR and political marketing; the switch in the public discourse and in setting the agenda, now moved from the political parties, into the media's playground; the increasing number of intermediaries between politicians and constituents, such as lobbyists or interest groups and organizations; and the changes in the cultural, social and political status quo, with a dissolution of ideologies, with new forms of participation, and with social boundaries fading more and more (Mastropaolo, 2008).

Social media has a central role in most of today's societies, with a growing number of users and with more time spent online, and it could not have excluded politics from its areas of interference. Barbera believes that we are not only exposed to like-minded content and to information fit for our views, but that social media widens the range of information and opinion that we come across online. This is combined with the fact that people with divergent opinions and of different political preference engage in discussion with each other, being exposed to multiple points of view. The

author's research on Twitter users led to the belief that the political polarization can be reduced thanks to this exposure to information coming from multiple sources, weakening the formation of massive groups of captive electorate (Barbera, 2015).

The possibility of increasing participation in politics through social media seems plausible, considering the penetration rate in the case of young people, who are usually disengaged and not a priority segment targeted by politicians. Social media has helped in organising many protests and social movements across the world, with people moving from the online discourse, to offline events, and it has brought into attention new civic figures, people whose opinions gained interest and engagement from other social users, to a level comparing to those of mainstream news outlets, analysts, politicians, or even parties. While the pluralism of ideas and political views is considered to be positive and it can show an increase in social and political participation, for political entities, and for the society as a whole, it can cause more harm than good. With lower barriers for pushing a subject in the public eye, it can be argued that the main problems can be shadowed by numerous others of a lesser importance to the general public, and that the political and professional elites are being replaced, in terms of visibility, engagement and trust, by rising civic actors, often in opposition to the Establishment.

5. Conclusions

Often characterised by speed, the XXI century brought many global changes. Commercial trades are redefining our way of life, with societies being closer one to the other, with more and more global corporations and international business ties, and with an accelerated process of globalization. Faster and more than ever, companies grow and expand, mainly due to the important technological advancements. But with the rise of new companies or with the growth of those that understood and changed to fit the new business context, there are also many established businesses, of all sizes, that failed to do so and have disappeared.

Much the same, political entities face a new paradigm. The mainstream media focused electoral campaign is no longer successful on itself and survival on the political stage depends on adapting to the new state of facts. What was once a confrontation between two big parties, in most of the democratic world, had turned into a busier market, with numerous new figures emerging. The road to popularity and relative electoral success is shorter nowadays, thanks to the Internet's influence in a faster, more connected and unstable world.

Globalization is one of the most important processes that influences our lives. Even if knowingly or not, every important element of our societies is being impacted by exchanges of all sorts. We can consider globalization to be an important and logical step in evolution, thus we need to understand both the possibilities and the threats it is bringing. Political actors must adapt and formulate programmes and policies fit for the globalized world that we are part of. Alongside the opportunities, there is an increasing number of problems that politicians need to address: from radical movements, hate speech, disengagement with politicians and established political parties, to immigration, world economic problems and the legal context.

There is need for research in this field, in order to better understand and to try to establish a framework for a genuine XXI century political entity. Although this paper has highlighted some of the coordinates of today's society and politics, a closer look at the evolution of political players is needed for a full understanding and a correlation between political actions and short or long-term results.

The democratic world has been influenced constantly by globalization and the increasing international exchanges shaped a new attitude towards politics. Even though there probably is no successful framework that can be imported and applied with the same results in a different society, the similarities and influences are visible. In a time of diluted ideology, with a spectacular increase in the number of channels of communication and also with increasing doubt in the governments, the adoption of new political views and positioning, that resulted in successes in other countries, is inevitable.

In the search for success, be it profit for the businesses, or votes for political contestants and parties, learning and adapting to new contexts is essential. We live in the age of disruptive technologies, where business giants failed to respond properly to the changes and to survive with their old

business models, and where new companies have developed and expanded at a rate unlike ever before. This is a lesson that politicians have to learn as quickly as possible, both in order to remain relevant on the market or to successfully challenge the status quo. With more and more radical movements making their way to governing, with Brexit and other nationalist quests, with increasing hate speech and fake news, it is clear that democratic politics is at a crossroads. For all the advancements in knowledge and technology to be helpful in the evolution of the society, there is a need for responsibility and strategic planning on the political market. Politicians have to decide the role of their countries in the global context, their attitude towards change and internationalisation, and how to position themselves accordingly in front of the electorate.

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