

INSTAGRAM AS A PLATFORM FOR PRESENTING VARIOUS FORMS OF SUBJECTIVITY IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION²

Abstract. *Every politician, either a state or a party official, acquires the status of a political subject in political communication. In the case of party officials there is a double subjectivity, since the subjectivity of a political party, as a group, is in the background of the subjectivity of the officials who communicate and represent them in public. As far as state officials are concerned, there are three types of subjectivity: the first is the subjectivity of the state officials as individuals, the second is the subjectivity of the party through which they accomplish their party goals, and the third is the subjectivity of the state authority and them being their members (Slavujević, 2009). Thanks to its global popularity, Instagram, a social media platform, has oriented political subjects toward the concept of visual communication with citizens, as well as towards adjusting different forms of subjectivity to this social media. In this segment of the empirical research, the author analyzed the Instagram account of the president of the 12th convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. Ivica Dačić, as an official of the highest representative body and the holder of the constitutional and legislative power, but also the president of the Socialist Party of Serbia, the second strongest parliamentary party in the convocation of the Assembly constituted after the 2020 parliamentary elections. The content analysis method included a sample of a total of 100 posts on Instagram between July 23, when the account was activated and November 23, 2021. The main research questions are: 1) What type of subjectivity is the most represented on the profile?; 2) Do the posts contain emotional and humanizing segments or simplified photographs aimed at representing a political subject as “the people’s man”? The findings of the research indicated that in his Instagram posts, the president of the Republican House of Representatives and the president of the Socialist Party of Serbia has expressed all three types of subjectivity in political communication. Among them, the most represented is the subjectivity of the state authority that he represents, followed by the subjectivity of the political party and finally, the personal subjectivity particularly containing an emotional and humanizing segment aimed at creating the image of “the people’s man”.*

Key words: *political communication, Instagram, subjectivity, politicians, political parties, state officials*

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² Received September 2022 / Accepted October 2022

1. Introduction

As individual subjects in political communication, politicians can potentially achieve three types of subjectivity. The first type of subjectivity refers to the individual themselves, the second is the subjectivity of the political party they represent; and finally, if they are appointed to a position in a particular state body by that party's distribution of the "election treasure", in that case they also acquire the subjectivity of the state body whose members they are (Slavujević, 2009). According to Slavujević, the main problem with individual officials is that it is not often possible to recognize when they are expressing their own opinions, and when those of the group they belong to (a party or a state body). However, the basic assumption is that they share the opinions of the group they belong to, that they publicly declare those opinions - particularly, that they participated in forming them and they are willing to risk their authority and reputation for them (Slavujević, 2009: 31).

In the era of traditional media, political subjects did not have the opportunity to present all three types of subjectivity to public opinion in an easy way. The subjectivity of a party or a state authority they represented in the public was available through informative content, whether it was the press, radio or television. However, personal identity was more challenging to present, with the exception of political subjects who were invited to make guest appearances in entertainment-type shows on the radio or television or when they gave a profile interview³ to print media journalists, and shared details from their private lives.

With the emergence of social media platforms, we have encountered an entirely new situation. Political subjects were given the opportunity to construct an image of themselves in the public, and create their own model of introducing different types of subjectivities. The social media platform, *Instagram*, which is based on visual content such as photos and short video formats, has become especially interesting to politicians around the world when it comes to the direct political communication with citizens (Filimonov, Russmann, Svensson, 2016; Lalancette, Raynauld, 2019; Munoz, Towner, 2017). It is important to point out that today traditional media use politicians' visual content from *Instagram* and other social media in order to deliver their comments, statements and assessments of various socio-political events to the public. In this way, the media-literate citizens' credibility and trust in the traditional media is further undermined, since journalists are those who should ask political subjects a question instead of uncritically distributing information from their social media, which are carefully designed by their public relations teams. Also, the increase in the usage of social media networks for the purpose of modern political communication is also influenced by the overall global trend of the personalization of politics (Holtz-Bacha, Langer, Merkle, 2014). According to Slavujević, the personalization of politics "represents the identification of a certain policy with a certain politician, and brings a certain political program, attitude, or action into an

³ According to Jevtović and his associates, a profile interview (portrait) is a combination of a classic interview and a portrait of a person who is in the spotlight. They also state that a profile interview is a combination of "a biographical sketch of a person, a characterization of their exterior, and selective sketching of their statements, viewpoints, anecdotal elements (Jevtović, Petrović, Aracki, 2014: 143).

inextricable relationship with one or more very specific individuals as their bearers” (Slavujević, 2017: 77).

In 1996, McAllister wrote that voters are “generally more willing to associate political power and authority with a ‘visible’, identifiable person than with an abstract institution or a political idea” (McAllister, 1996; as cited in Grbeša, 2004). Over the time period that included McAllister’s analysis, television had dominated the media-mediated political communication between politicians and the public. Since the first television debates between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960, its visual power has influenced the course of political communication and political marketing towards an individual. Party policies, plans for the future and electoral lists with hundreds of candidates were visually much more difficult to present to voters than a charismatic individual who was a guarantee of success in all fields. Today, almost 30 years later, social media networks dominated by visual content such as *Instagram*, *Youtube* and *TikTok* represent the essential channels of communication in the process of personalizing politics and establishing leaders’ reputations.

The key issue with this format of communication is the division of political subjectivities (Slavujević, 2009), as politicians on their profiles under their first and last names present the activities they participate in as individuals in their private life, then the activities they engage in as party members and finally, participating in the activities as the representatives of a state authority. Unless the intention is to manipulate public opinion, the communication of political subjects developed in this way, via social media, cannot be devoid of emotionalization, humanization, simplified images and distractions (Vučković, Črnič, 2020: 4), which are redundant on the profiles of public office holders.

2. Instagram on Serbia’s Political Scene

The social media platform *Instagram* hardly had any significant impact on political communication in Serbia, until February 5, 2019 when the account of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, was launched for the purpose of the “Future of Serbia” campaign, held in a non-election year. In addition, the profile *@buducnostsrbijeav* was initially used to promote campaign-related activities, however, it rapidly evolved into a profile where all of the president’s activities were followed. As a result of the rapid growth of profile followers, as well as the media that published the posts, this social media platform has emerged as a leader in the field of political communication on social media. Since 2017, the opposition politician, Boško Obradović, has also had a profile on this social media platform. However, it is noticeable that only 174 posts were published on the leader of the “Dveri” party’s *Instagram* profile between the time of its activation and 2019, and the increase in the popularity of *Instagram*, whereas 1634 posts were created between February 2019 and August 1, 2022 on the same profile. Another similar example is the profile of the current Minister of Mining and Energy in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Zorana Mihajlović, which was launched in December 2015. Until February 2019, 157 posts were published on

the profile, while between the second month of 2019 and August 1, 2022, the Deputy Prime Minister's profile contained 2458 posts. At the end of January, the leader of the opposition Democratic Party, Miloš Jovanović, launched the profile, while in May 2019, Dragan Đilas, the leader of the opposition Party of Freedom and Justice did the same. All of the previously mentioned examples indicate that 2019 was a turning point for the political subjects in Serbia, since they began to shift more and more towards a visual way of communication with the citizens. Noticing the advantages of the visual depiction, politicians in Serbia gather in one place their photos, audio-visual materials from their personal lives, party activities, as well as the videos of their official and ministerial duties, using every opportunity to portray themselves to the followers as the "ordinary people". In addition, photographs of politicians "shopping with their children are aimed at highlighting that part of a politician's routine, making them look more humane, less institutional, and as a result, less alien to the common man", according to Vučković and Črnič (Vučković, Črnič, 2020: 6).

In the empirical segment of the paper, the *Instagram* account of Ivica Dačić, the president of the 12th convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia⁴, the highest representative body and the holder of the constitutional and legislative power, and the leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia, which was established after the 2020 elections, became the second strongest political party with 32 mandates⁵ won, will be analyzed. The politician's profile, *@ivica.dacic.rs*, was chosen for the analysis because it reflects the triple subjectivity in political communication and it was created in July 2021. In addition, its launch happened half a year before the parliamentary and presidential elections held in Serbia in April 2022, with a noticeable necessity of this channel of communication in modern political communication and marketing. Furthermore, the selection of one profile corresponds to the current methodological tendencies of the research in this field (Lalancette, Raynauld, 2019; Mendonça, Caetano, 2021), since political subjects have different positions, whether it is a party, a state authority, and therefore have different approaches to communication on social networks.

3. Methodology

For the research, a mixed type of content analysis was applied, involving both the quantitative and qualitative analysis. The basic unit of analysis is a single post (a photo, a video clip) on the Instagram profile *@ivica.dacic.rs*, while the sample consisting of 100 posts was generated between July 23 and November 23. According to Srbobran Branković, the content analysis is defined as "a method of analyzing media material, different documents, written, audio or visual records and other forms of spoken or written communication between people" and its goal is to: 1) describe the significance of certain

⁴ The 12th convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia was established on August 3, 2020 and was dissolved on February 15, 2022, more information at the link: <https://otvoreniparlament.rs/saziv/63> (accessed August 9, 2022).

⁵ Source: <https://otvoreniparlament.rs/saziv/63> (accessed August 9, 2022)

forms of communication; 2) to classify it; 3) that by relating it to socio-demographic, biographical, or other features of the author’s document, as well as those for whom it is intended, explain or understand it in the context of time and space in which it was created and used, and grasp its meanings and significance for those who produce it, and for those to whom it is intended” (Branković, 2009: 89). With the help of the mentioned methods, and by placing Instagram posts within the framework of the subjectivity in political communication, our goal is to answer the following research questions with the help of the analysis: *What type of subjectivity in political communication is the most represented on the profile @ivica.dacic.rs, as well as whether there are emotional, humanizing segments, or simplified images aimed at representing a politician as “the people’s man” to the public?*

4. The Findings of the Research

The results of the quantitative analysis suggest that out of 100 examined posts, 83 posts indicate the subjectivity of the state body represented by the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. As the President of the Socialist Party of Serbia and its representative, this party’s subjectivity can be noticed in 9 posts, while Ivica Dačić’s personal subjectivity may be detected in 8 posts with visual content (Table 1).

Table 1 Types of subjectivity in political communication on the *Instagram* profile *@ivica.dacic.rs*

Types of subjectivity in political communication	Number of posts on the profile @ivica.dacic.rs
Politician as a person	8
Politician as a political party’s representative (The President of the Socialist Party of Serbia)	9
Politician as a representative of a state body (the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia)	83
Total:	100

The disproportion in the number of posts is not surprising. Also, the position of the Speaker of the National Assembly involves numerous activities on both the international and national level, and the team in charge of administering the profile has carefully recorded all the activities of Ivica Dačić, while using visual content to emphasize to followers his effort and commitment to his role as the first man of the most important institution in Serbia (83 posts). As far as the subjectivity of the party he represents is concerned, there were 9 posts which indicate various party activities of its leader such as meetings with coalition partners, the party’s anniversary celebration, party gatherings,

etc. In the segment of the personal subjectivity, there were 8 posts depicting Ivica Dačić as a family man, with the pictures of his closest family, as a man fond of football, who enjoys supporting his national team and singing, or shortly - as “the people’s man”.

4.1 Qualitative Analysis

Due to the size of the sample, two examples from each of the categories of the subjectivity in political communication were selected for the qualitative analysis.

4.1.1. Personal Subjectivity

For the purpose of their own political success or the success of the party, individuals in political communication frequently publicly assert their own authority and privacy. With the aim of presenting themselves to the followers and the general public as family people, they post pictures of their children or closest family members on social media. On August 26, 2021, Ivica Dacic posted a picture with his son Luka Dačić on his Instagram profile, stating that: “He is the happiest when he can spend every free moment with his family”⁶ (photo 1). Such posts aim to bring the politician closer to the people and put him in a different visual context from the predominantly bureaucratic and institutional one, which is further enhanced by the informal dress. Pictures of family members and pets on social media were “patented” by the former U.S. president Barack Obama, with the goal of developing a stronger relationship with the citizens (Vučković, Črnič, 2020). In addition, posts of that kind are intended to emotionalize communication and evoke positive feelings among the followers. Vučković and Črnič state that this is a well-known strategy that politicians “implement in their campaigns by trying to take pictures with children while at rallies” (Vučković, Črnič, 2020).



Photo 1 Personal subjectivity – a family man

⁶ The entire post is available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CTCfzz2NHAY/> (accessed August 9, 2022)

The second example in this segment of the qualitative analysis refers to a short video clip of Ivica Dačić singing a well-known folk song, posted on the profile @ivica.dacic.rs on October 17, 2021. The video clip represents an announcement of Dačić's guest appearance on *Hype* television in the entertainment show "Sunday Afternoon with Marina"⁷ (photo 2). Publicly known for his love of singing, which was often "a diplomatic activity" reported by numerous world agencies and the media⁸, Ivica Dačić highlighted this segment of his personality on his *Instagram* profile. Moreover, the purpose of posting such content is to portray the politician as a spontaneous and fun-loving individual, as "the people's man", but also to initiate a different type of communication with his followers compared to the posts that express the subjectivity of the party that he represents or a state function he carries out at the moment. Noticing that social media users are increasingly focused on entertaining content (Obradović, 2020), politicians or teams responsible for administering their profiles are increasingly publishing this type of content in order to attract followers and initiate interaction.

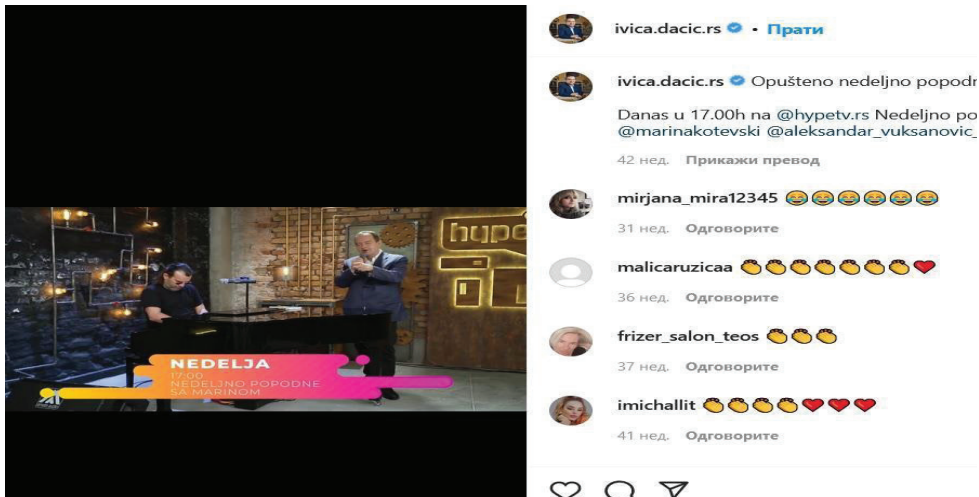


Photo 2 Personal subjectivity – spontaneous, ready to sing and have fun – “the people’s man”

4.1.2. The Subjectivity of the Political Party (the Socialist Party of Serbia)

During the analyzed period, the subjectivity of the party represented by Ivica Dačić was mostly displayed through protocol posts. Posted on August 18, 2021, the first post of this segment refers to the celebration of the Socialist Party of Serbia's 31st anniversary of founding. Alongside the poster featuring all the slogans that SPS has used throughout

⁷ The entire post is available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVICHElxbT/> (accessed August 9, 2022)

⁸ 1) Ivica Dačić singing to the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, during his visit to Belgrade: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QTKsla4BrI> (accessed August 9, 2022), 2) Ivica Dačić singing to the President of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during his visit to Belgrade: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WP-Nt6H7G84> (accessed August 9, 2022)

its election campaigns, the number 31 and the slogan “Let’s move on!” at the very top, there was also a message written in the first person singular: “*I would like to wish a happy birthday to Serbia’s oldest political party. I congratulate us on all future triumphs, because those triumphs are for the Republic of Serbia and Serbian people!*” (photo 3)⁹. It is important to note that in relation to the posts displaying personal subjectivity, there were no followers’ comments on this post. Activities on social media require an interactive approach, and contents that will motivate followers to engage in the interaction, according to the principle of Politics 2.0 (Campante et al., 2017; Gomes et al., 2009). Posts about the protocol created on the basis of a press release or party posters are certainly not a way of successfully presenting this form of subjectivity in political communication.

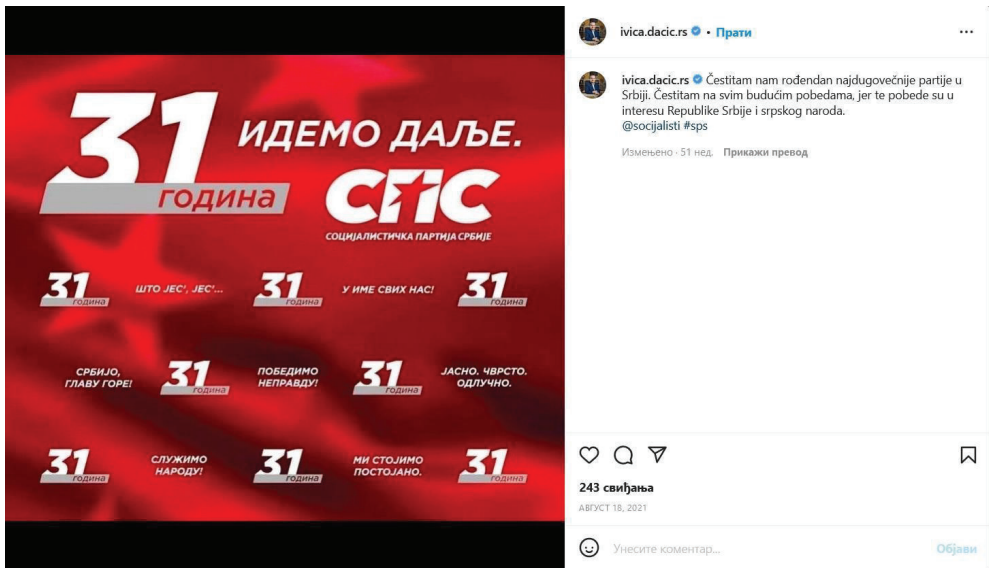


Photo 3 Subjectivity of the party – a protocol post referring to the celebration of the SPS’s 31st anniversary of founding

In this part of the paper, the second analyzed example was posted on September 19, 2021 and, unlike the previous post, it refers to the specific party activity. In addition, it refers to a visit to the city of Negotin and is related to the start of the campaign for local elections scheduled for October 17, 2021 (photo 4)¹⁰. In contrast to the previously analyzed post, there were significantly more likes and interactions by this profile’s followers (comments). In a short video clip, Ivica Dačić is seen surrounded by the people who approach him, shake his hand, hug him or talk to him amicably. In addition to the personal subjectivity, this case indicates the party’s subjectivity, the informal dress code (omitting a tie and suit) and the visual impression of a party leader who is close to the

⁹ The entire post available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CStuar4A2Lv> (accessed August 9, 2022)

¹⁰ The entire post is available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUASK07FcfH> (accessed August 9, 2022)

citizens also contributes to this, which undermines the formality typically associated with politicians. Furthermore, there is a message written within the post: “*Always with our people...*”. Also, the Socialist Party of Serbia participated in the local elections and the goal was to demonstrate that the members of the party and the leader are always “among the people and willing to listen to their problems”.



Photo 4 Subjectivity of the party – always with the people

4.1.3. The Subjectivity of the State Body (the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia)

During the qualitative analysis, in addition to the use of emotionalization and humanization, it was discovered that there were attempts to affect the emotions of the *Instagram* followers in two out of the 83 posts, which reflect the subjectivity of the state body represented by Ivica Dačić in the National Assembly. An illustrative example (a short video clip)¹¹ was published on October 16, 2021 (photo 5). Ivica Dačić, as the President of the Parliament, was a guest at the formal sitting of the Beočin Municipal Assembly, on the occasion of the Municipal Day’s anniversary. As opposed to the standard protocol pictures or short video clips to be published by the team in charge of supervising the profile when reporting on the official activities, Ivica Dačić found himself in the role of a choir singer. As stated in the description of the video, “he sang spontaneously with the singing group “Oganj” and the church choirs “Sveti Vasilije Ostroški” from Beočin and “Blagovestitelj” from Susek. Furthermore, such posts are aimed at portraying the President of the Parliament as a man who is close to the people, to the common man, as someone who “breaks” the protocol of formal academies and demonstrates that he is just one of the attendees,

¹¹ The entire post is available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVGA9xzF9f4/> (accessed August 9, 2022)

and not the most important guest and the representative of the highest legislative body in the state.



Photo 5 Subjectivity of the state body – the President defying the protocol

Furthermore, the remaining 81 posts in this segment refer to the protocol of informing the followers about the activities of the President of the National Assembly both in the state and abroad. No attempts at visual or textual personalization and the emotionalization of messages were noticed in the analyzed posts. In the case of the meetings with international officials, Dačić's cordiality and straightforwardness were noticeable, but without crossing the boundaries of a diplomatic protocol. In this segment of the analysis, another example is a post made on August 26, 2021 (photo 6)¹², when Ivo Dačić welcomed Andreas Norlen, the President of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Sweden, during his official visit to Serbia and the Parliament. In the picture, the participants of the meeting can be seen smiling broadly during the public address, which visually indicates good cooperation and strong partner relations, but also confirms the textual segment of the message stating that: "Sweden continuously supports Serbia on its way towards European integration". Also, in terms of expressing the subjectivity of the state body, another significant thing is the logo of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, which can be noticed in the central part of the picture.

¹² The entire post is available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CTCgDCSNCsL/> (accessed August 9, 2022)



Photo 6 Subjectivity of the state body – an update on the president’s protocol affairs

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the conducted research, the answers to the main research questions have been provided. Also, the subjectivity of the state body that he represents is prominently displayed on the Instagram account of Ivica Dačić (@ivica.dacic.rs), the president of the 12th convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and the president of the Socialist Party of Serbia. In order to illustrate an example of this type of subjectivity, in 98% of the cases (81 posts) the team in charge of the profile informed the followers on how the duties associated with the office of the President of the Parliament were carried out. However, it should be noted that in this segment we have two posts which cannot be classified as informative content on the social media platform *Instagram*, but are aimed at evoking emotions among the followers and representing a political subject as “the people’s man”. Also, within the category of the subjectivity of the party (SPS) there were six posts identified as the informative content about party activities, and two other posts - identical to the case of emphasizing the previous subjectivity - contained a post about the emotionalization and humanization of politicians. Finally, the category of personal subjectivity, although present in only eight posts, is full of content portraying Ivica Dačić as an ordinary, family man, always ready to sing and have fun. According to Metz and his associates, a more private and emotional method of running social media platforms is a useful tool for external communication with followers. “Posting emotional and private content has positive effects on audience interactions, suggesting audiences’ demand for more intimate and emotional posts by public figures online (Metz et al., 2019: 1481).

By focusing on visual content, *Instagram* has enabled political subjects to independently create an image of themselves in public. In addition, without any restrictions, they have the opportunity to publish photos and videos from their private lives, party engagements and government-related duties. According to the analysis in this article, modern politicians use this social media platform to interact with voters more effectively, share details about their everyday activities and present themselves differently than they would in traditional media. “Privatization” of content delivered by politicians to followers on social media, as Vučković and Črnič indicate, is typically driven by their intention to “please” citizens who “like” to see their emotions, their private side, who view them in a way they follow other celebrities (Vučković, Črnič, 2020: 20).

Whether it is about personal subjectivity, the subjectivity of a party or a state body’s subjectivity, the social media platform *Instagram* provides politicians with unlimited possibilities. Today, politicians have the opportunity to be in a continuous campaign (Jonathan, Lilleker, 2020) in which they will be presented to the public in accordance with their own or the wishes of the PR teams running their profiles on social media. This is achieved by the number of permanent followers, the possibility that anyone can visit the profile because it is “unlocked” and the fact that traditional media often download posts from politicians’ Instagram accounts and further distribute them. Furthermore, the issue of ethics, media and political literacy remains open - Can all citizens who follow politicians’ profiles understand and classify posts that reflect their personal identities, the identities of parties or the identities of state bodies, if there is a possibility that each of these may contain elements of emotionalization and humanization?

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INSTAGRAM KAO PLATFORMA ZA PREZENTOVANJE RAZLIČITIH SUBJEKTIVITETA POLITIČKOG KOMUNICIRANJA

Apstrakt. *Svaki političar, odnosno državni ili partijski funkcioner ostvaruje status individualnog subjekta političkog komuniciranja. U slučaju partijskih funkcionera postoji dvostruki subjektivitet, jer se subjektivitet političke partije, kao kolektiva, nalazi u pozadini subjektiviteta funkcionera koji ih saopštava i zastupa u javnosti. Kada je reč o državnim funkcionerima u igri su tri subjektiviteta. Prvi je subjektivitet državnih funkcionera kao ličnosti, drugi je subjektivitet partije kroz koji realizuju partijske ciljeve i najzad treći je subjektivitet državnog organa čiji su članovi (Slavujević, 2009). Društvena mreža Instagram, zahvaljujući popularnosti koju uživa na globalnom nivou, usmerila je političke subjekte na koncept vizuelne komunikacije sa građanima, ali i prilagođavanje različitih subjektiviteta ovoj društvenoj mreži. U segmentu empirijskog*

istraživanja autor je analizirao Instagram profil predsednika 12. saziva Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije Ivice Dačića, kao funkcionera najvišeg predstavničkog tela i nosioca ustavotvorne i zakonodavne vlasti, ali i predsednika Socijalističke partije Srbije, druge po snazi parlamentarne stranke u sazivu Parlamenta koji je konstituisan nakon parlamentarnih izbora 2020. godine. Metodom analize sadržaja obuhvaćen je uzorak od ukupno 100 objava na Instagramu u periodu od 23. jula, kada je profil i aktiviran, do 23. novembra 2021. godine. Osnovna istraživačka pitanja su: 1) koja vrsta subjektiviteta je najčešće zastupljena na profilu?, 2) da li su u objavama zastupljeni emocionalni i humanizujući segmenti, odnosno pojednostavljene slike koje imaju za cilj da političkog subjekta predstave kao „čoveka iz naroda“?. Nalazi istraživanja pokazali su da je predsednik republičkog predstavničkog doma i lider SPS-a u objavama na društvenoj mreži Instagram ispoljio sva tri subjektiviteta političke komunikacije, među kojima je najzastupljeniji subjektivitet državnog organa koji zastupa, zatim subjektivitet političke partije i naposljetku je lični subjektivitet u okviru kojeg je posebno izražen emocionalni i humanizujući segment sa ciljem kreiranja slike „čoveka iz naroda“.

Ključne reči: političko komuniciranje, Instagram, subjektivitet, političari, političke partije, državni funkcioneri