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Ukrainian Presidential Candidates Use Internet Ineffectively

During the current presidential election campaign, the five most prominent candidates -- President Viktor Yushchenko, Premier Yuliya Tymoshenko, opposition leader Viktor Yanukovych, Front for Change leader Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and businessman Serhiy Tihipko -- all established an Internet presence as part of their election campaign strategy. According to media assessments, however, the Ukrainian candidates have not understood the intricacies of Internet marketing and therefore have not used the web in an effective manner during this election campaign. Internet use is growing rapidly in Ukraine and future candidates' sophistication in the use of web tools will likely increase out of necessity.

Media claim that the candidates do not understand the "intricacies of Internet marketing" and therefore do not use the Internet effectively in promoting their candidacies (*Delo*, 24 November).

- According to the business analytic weekly *Vlast Deneg*, the presidential candidates use the Internet "in such an awkward manner that it harms their ratings instead of attracting more supporters." According to Oleksandr Olshankyy, who sits on the board of the Internet Association of Ukraine, "the candidates generally do not encourage feedback from users and offer static information such as press agency releases or photo galleries. And the 'common mistake' of all the candidates is that they do not make any postings personally, they leave it to their staffs to do so; this tends to discourage users" (2 November).

- *Telekritika*, a website which specializes on Ukrainian media issues, asserted that the two fundamental mistakes of all the presidential candidates is the absence of high-quality content on their websites and the "obligatory level of communication between candidate and electorate… This is attributed to the candidates not understanding the significance of and the prospects afforded by the Internet, as well as a fundamental fear of the unknown… the web demands that the candidates let down the political 'Iron Curtain' and demonstrate candidness and a real public presence… however, the majority of candidates have 'skeletons in the closet' which will not permit them a European level of openness" (9 December).

- *Telekritika,* opined that "despite the candidates' intentions to repeat US President Barack Obama's success in using the Internet as an election campaign tool, the Internet blitzkrieg of the majority of the candidates has been a complete fiasco." *Telekritika* also asserted that the leaders in the election campaign who have "relatively high ratings and serious financial resources, prefer to concentrate on traditional campaign methods" (9 December).

Media asserted, however, that Internet use in Ukraine is growing (See Appendix) and future candidates will, of necessity, use the Internet in a more sophisticated and effective manner.

- The business daily *Delo* opined that perhaps the presidential candidates were "frightened off from the Internet because of the relatively small percentage of the Ukrainian population that uses Internet or perhaps it was the youthfulness of the Internet audience, which as a rule, politicians find harder to work with." *Delo* asserted, however, that the popularity of the Internet in Ukraine is growing, and for the next election campaign candidates will definitely learn how to create effective sites and not just primitive "business card pages" written in "cookie cutter" style containing press releases and nonsensical pre-election programs (24 November).

President Viktor Yushchenko

Delo faulted Yushchenko's campaign website for being difficult to find, "only appearing on the third page of a Google search." According to *Delo*, fake Yushchenko blogs enjoy great popularity on the Internet (24 November).

- The homepage of Yushchenko's campaign website, www.nashvybir.com.ua, does not feature a news feed. Instead, there is a photo gallery slide show of Yushchenko meeting with villagers, kicking a soccer ball, etc. The text of the website follows the format of his advertisements in traditional media; there are statements from members of his Nasha Ukrayina party asserting how much Ukraine needs him, but

From the photo gallery on Yushchenko's website www.nasvybir.com.ua

Yushchenko himself provides little commentary. The site gives visitors the option of becoming a canvasser by filling out a form and "voting" online. Visitors are invited to become "online activists" for Yushchenko by sending out messages or carrying out actions in support of Yushchenko. Visitors can also place widgets in support of Yushchenko on the site, something only Yushchenko is doing among the main Ukrainian presidential candidates. Visitors can also add comments. Also noteworthy on this site is the "Yushchenko TV channel," which features video from YouTube. The site also has an English version called "Our Choice" with translations of some news items and links to the president's official site. His weekly campaign newsletters, which

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are published in English, are available on a separate website www.nashkrok.org.ua (*Delo*, 24 November).

- Students visiting Yushchenko's presidential campaign website in November were solicited to submit their cell phone numbers in a special form. Those who did were supposed to receive a video call from Yushchenko greeting them on Student Day. However, few students actually received the calls because of a technical error according to *Ukrainian Watcher*, a blog about Ukrainian social networks (17 November).

- The official presidential website, www.president.gov.ua, is updated daily with news releases and reports on presidential meetings. The site contains a section on the activities of the presidential secretariat. The president's wife, Kateryna Yushchenko, also has a section dedicated to her activities.

- Yushchenko's Twitter page, http://twitter.com/President_UA, is in the Ukrainian language. He uses it as a campaign platform. Campaign slogans and pro-Yushchenko articles abound. Articles from his campaign website are also posted here. The page is updated regularly -- sometimes up to ten times a day -- by his press service. *Delo* claimed, however, that Yushchenko is not managing the page personally. Currently there are 1,589 followers and 245 tweets (*Delo*, 24 November).

Premier Yuliya Tymoshenko

Tymoshenko is generally polling second to Viktor Yanukovych but according to *Telekritika*, Tymoshenko's online campaign efforts have ground to a halt. It is rumored that this is because of conflicts within the elements of her staff responsible for the online campaign. According to the website *Telekritika*, the main problem with Tymoshenko's campaign, as with the rest of the presidential candidates, "is a complete paralysis of the communication process between the candidate and the electorate." *Telekritika* asserted that early on visitors to Tymoshenko's official blog recognized that, contrary to Tymoshenko's assertions, she was not personally writing her blog, and, in fact "used the computer extremely rarely" (9 December). *Delo* opined, "of all the presidential candidates' sites, Yuliya Tymoshenko's is most effective from a marketing point of view; however, even her site is far from perfect" (24 November).

- Tymoshenko's campaign website, www.vybory.tymoshenko.ua, contains her election platform, biography, campaign events, and collects information on her followers via a question form posted on the site. Up to 20 news items a day are posted. The site is available in English and Russian as well as Ukrainian. Visitors can register to volunteer for Tymoshenko's election campaign. There is also a meter posted on the site which ticks away the seconds to election day.

- Tymoshenko's official website, www.tymoshenko.ua, is kept up to date and posts links to her external web accounts such as LiveJournal, YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/user/tymoshenkoua), her personal blog, her campaign site,

and the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc website (www.byut.com.ua). It also contains a photo gallery and latest news from the cabinet.
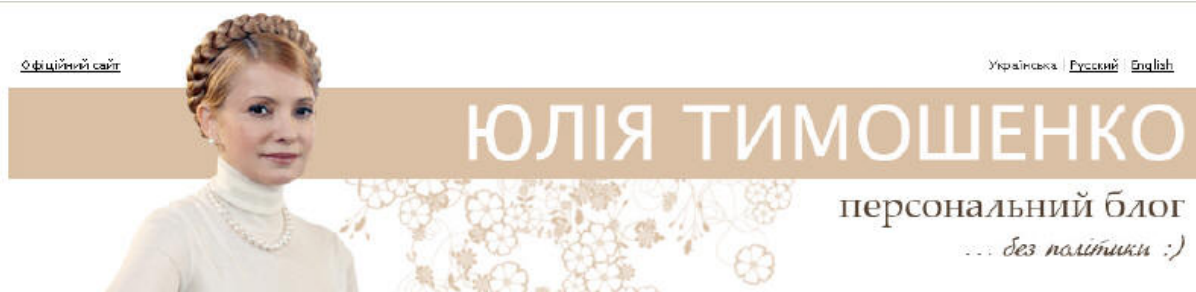
Banner from Tymoshenko's personal blog http://blog.tymoshenko.ua

- Tymoshenko has a personal blog located at http://blog.tymoshenko.ua. *Delo* opined that this is the "showcase" of her sites and closest to what the "natural blog of a real person would be." Tymoshenko attempts to be intimate and personal on the blog. The blog is titled, "Yuliya Tymoshenko's politics-free personal blog" and explicitly states "no politics on this site." Once a week her staff post news about her lifestyle, travel, and opinions on various matters such as her thoughts on the "destiny of the nation," combating the flu epidemic, reports on her interactions with the albino tiger cub Tigryuliya which she received as a gift last summer. Photos and videos of her family are included, as well as her reading and music preferences. She answers some commentaries on this site in the form of separate posts. There are links to her LiveJournal and YouTube sites, and to her supporters at https://viryu.tymoshenko.ua. There is also an RSS link (*Delo*, 24 November).

Photo with tiger cub Tigryuliya from Tymoshenko's personal blog http://blog.tymoshenko.ua

- Tymoshenko appears to have abandoned her LiveJournal account, http://tymoshenkoua.livejournal.com. The last posting is dated 28 October.

- *Sarafannoye Radio*, an independent site specializing in Internet technology and Web 2.0, asserted that Tymoshenko's Twitter page, http://twitter.com/tymoshenko, cannot be authenticated because it does not contain any external links to other Tymoshenko sites. There are no personal postings from Tymoshenko, however, it is updated regularly. About half the messages are campaign slogans, and events announced on the Twitter page are always posted after the fact. Currently there are 359 followers and 1,782 tweets (18 November).

Tymoshenko is also registered on popular social networks such as Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/tymoshenko.yulia), VKontakte (http://vkontakte.ru/id48232237), and Odnoklassniki. Tymoshenko also belongs to two business networks, LinkedIn and Profeo and to the political social network Politiko according to BBC Monitoring (18 November).

Opposition Leader Viktor Yanukovych

Banner from Yanukovych's personal website www.yanukovych.com.ua

Although Viktor Yanukovych consistently ranks first in the polls, he lags behind other presidential hopefuls in establishing an online presence. His senior advisor Deputy Hanna Herman stated that he "cannot afford such a waste of time as keeping a blog" (*Sedgodnya*, 12 October). *Delo* opined that Yanukovych's personal website site is the way "sites would look if the USSR had not fallen apart."   The site is dominated by a huge portrait of Yanukovych under which there are campaign slogans, aphorisms, news items "in the style of Soviet tabloids." *Delo* said "it is noteworthy that the site of the candidate who supports giving Russian status as an official state language is dominated by the Ukrainian language." News in Russian is published with a delay and there is twice as much news in Ukrainian than in Russian. There is no open communication between Yanukovych and visitors to the site but visitors are invited to "write a letter to Viktor Yanukovych" or register to receive commentary and publications (24 November).

- Yanukovych's personal website, www.yanukovych.com.ua, is kept up to date and contains campaign rhetoric and notification of meetings. The site also contains a prolific photo album -- mainly photo ops and public appearances -- and video materials of Yanukovych delivering campaign speeches, primarily from YouTube. Visitors must register on the site to leave comments.

- Yanukovych's Twitter page, http://twitter.com/yanukovych, is not accessible by the public and states, "This person has protected their tweets." It has 20 followers.

Front for Change Leader Arseniy Yatsenyuk

The independent website *Ukrayinska Pravda* opined, "Unlike many other politicians, Yantsenyuk fits in quite naturally with cyberspace." *Ukrayinska Pravda* asserted that Yatsenyuk's spin doctors have attempted to position him as the "Ukrainian Obama," referring to the President's successful experience in using "modern media" to further his election campaign (15 July). Yatsenyuk quickly alienated visitors to his sites, however, by the "openly coarse and insulting responses posted by his staff in response to visitors' comments" and in blogging circles he was given the derisive nickname "the Pisser" (*Telekritika*, 9 December).

- Yatsenyuk's personal website, http://arseniy.org, functions as his primary election website. The site features Yatsenyuk's election program, biography, a photo gallery, articles, and news from and by the candidate, but there is no two-way communication with visitors. *Delo* characterizes this site structure as "primitive" but "orderly" (24 November).

- Yatsenyuk's campaign website, http://frontzmin.org, repeats most of the entries on his personal website. The site has a meter indicating how may people are following Yatsenyuk and invites volunteers to join the campaign by filling out a questionnaire. The site is updated quickly in both Ukrainian and Russia and allows visitors to follow practically all Yatsenyuk's campaign travels online. An innovation introduced by Yatsenyuk's election team is online television (frontzmin.tv) embedded within the campaign site which contains video clips and online broadcasts -- not simply reposted from YouTube but allowing the visitor to use his own player to view the videos -- of Yatenyuk's important speeches during visits to the regions. *Telekritika* claims, however, that it is not evident who the intended audience is considering the relatively slow speed of connecting to the Internet from the site (*Telekritika*, 9 December).

The Yatsenyuk family from the candidate's personal blog http://arseniy.org

*Banner from Yatsenyuk's campaign website http://frontzmin.org*

- Another website, arseniy.com.ua, was created to monitor publications about Yatsenyuk, but this site is not updated regularly. It is, however, littered with Google ads. *Delo* opined that this is most likely "banal negligence" on the part of the "system masters" who "not only created Yatsenyuk's site but also decided to make a buck on him" (*Delo*, 24 November).

- A Yatsenyuk-related Twitter page, http://twitter.com/yatsenyuk, was begun in February 2009 when Yushchenko launched his own Twitter page but was closed in July 2009. According to *Ukrainian Watcher*, an unnamed individual set up and maintained the account without Yatsenyuk's knowledge. *Ukrainian Watcher* claimed that the account reached the highest popularity rating in the entire post-Soviet area on 24 July 2009. At that point, members of Yatsenyuk's election staff allegedly approached the individual and offered him $2,000 for the account, but he preferred to close it down (30 July).

- Yatsenyuk's Twitter page, http://twitter.com/arseniy2010, is maintained in both Ukrainian and Russian. It has 1,250 followers and 61 tweets.

- Yatsenyuk's Facebook account, www.facebook.com/people/Arsenij-Acenuk/100000103736054, lists only eight friends posted on the main page.

- Yatsenyuk's LiveJournal page, http://yatsenyuk.livejournal.com, contains newspaper interviews and video clips of speeches. The contents do not differ from postings on his personal website or what is covered by television. He has over 1,000 friends on Livejournal, a record amount for Ukrainian politicians using this service (BBC Monitoring, 18 November).

Serhiy Tihipko

Serhiy Tihipko -- a former Economics Minister who has worked for Yushchenko, Yanukovych, and Tymoshenko in the past -- is the wealthiest of the candidates and has created many websites to further his campaign (BBC Monitoring, 16 December). A number of polls in December showed Tihipko in third place after Yanukovych and Tymoshenko but with less than 10% (Interfax-Ukraine, 29 December).

- Tihipko's primary election website is www.tigipko.com. From the homepage, visitors are able to access his accounts on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Yandex, LiveJournal, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and Politiko. Most of his websites, however, repeat official press releases or feature answers posted for Tihipko by his press service. He admitted on his LiveJournal page, tigipko.livejournal.com, that he has a special blog secretary to take care of posts and comments. *Ukrainian Watcher* called him an "analog politician" (BBC Monitoring, 18 November).
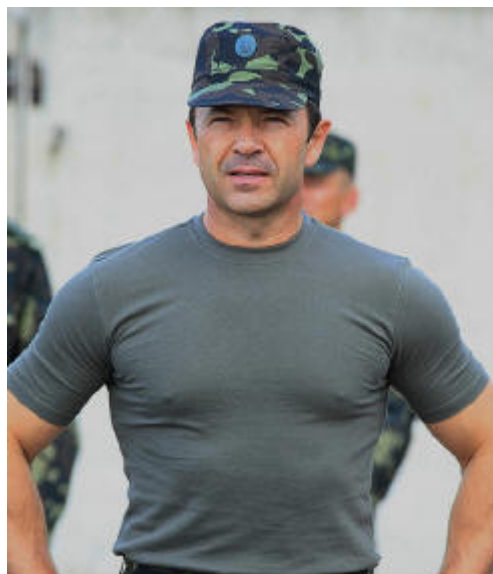
Tihipko from his campaign website, www.tigipko,com

- According to *Telekritika*, the quality of Tihipko's online campaign is the best of all the candidates because his staff attempts to make his web presence technologically sophisticated and broad. *Telekritika* opined that the most interesting aspect of his campaign are the video clips on his websites in which he fields questions from visitors (December 9).

- Tihipko's Twitter account, http://twitter.com/SergeyTigipko, has 527 followers and 331 Tweets.

Appendix: Ukrainian Internet, Blogosphere, Social Networks Expanding Rapidly

At the end of 2008 there were over 10 million Internet users in Ukraine, however, by the autumn of 2009 the number had grown to over 13 million, over 25% of the population (*Bigmir.net*, 15 January; *webrazzi.com*, 10 December).

The *Yandex* search company reported that as of June 2009, Ukrainian Internet users had created 420,000 blogs and 20,000 communities. During the first half of 2009, the number of blogs increased by 70%. During the first half of 2009 the Ukrainian Twitter community expanded by a factor of nine times. By November there were 16,000 Ukrainian microblogs on Twitter, according to *Yandex*.

- As part of a project entitled, "New Media and Election in the Regions," there will be nationwide Twitter reporting about the final stages of the presidential election from various Ukrainian regions. The project is being conducted under the auspices of the

international public organization Internews-Ukrayina. The Twitter reports will be posted on an Internews-Ukrayina website, www.electua.org (UNIAN, 25 December).

Many Ukrainians prefer to use Russian blogging platforms such as LiveInternet.ru, Mail.ru, LiveJournal.com, and Diary.ru, although some domestic platforms are also used, such as Blog.i.ua, Blog.met.ua, and Bigmir.net (*globalvoicesonline.org*, 19 August). According to a late 2008 *Yandex* report, the following are the most popular blogging platforms for Ukrainian bloggers:

LiveInternet.ru 142,000 blogs
Mail.ru 49,000 blogs
LiveJournal.com 48,000 blogs
Bigmir.net 25,000 blogs
Blog.i.ua 5,900 blogs
Diary.ru 3,900 blogs
Blog.meta.ua 3,000 blogs
Autonomous blogs 3,000 blogs

Prominent Ukrainian Blogs Discussing Elections

Blog	URL	Language	Details
Ukrainiana	http:tap-the-talent.blogspot.com	English	Created by a young Ukrainian from Kyiv named "Taras" who states he offers a "perspective free from the Moscowcentric [sic] bias often found in the Western media." His blog contains up-to-date presidential campaign highlights, video, photos, and profuse cynical political commentary.
Foreign notes	http://foreignnotes.blogspot.com	English	Maintained by "LEvko" who has been blogging since 2006; focuses on presidential candidates, journalism, corruption, and relations with Russia. He is critical of oligarchs, politicians, and especially Yanukovych and Party of Regions.
Ukrayinska	http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/autho	Ukrainian	Blogger is Borys Kushniruk, a 44-year old economist and

Pravda	rs/kusniruk			banking expert, who expresses an anti-Tymoshenko slant.
Ukrayinska Pravda	http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/tsybulko	Ukrainian	Blogger is Volodymyr Tsybulko, a writer, who attempts to position himself as an unbiased blogger but expresses an anti-Yanukovych and slightly anti-Yushchenko stance. Other bloggers have charged that he is pro-Tymoshenko.
LiveJournal	http://vaxo.livejournal.com	Ukrainian	Blogger is Vakhtanh Kipiani a Kyiv-based journalist and blogger of Georgian descent. He has published almost 1,500 postings since 2006 and has focused recently on the presidential election. He has very strong pro-democracy, pro-human rights, pro-Ukrainian sympathies and is clearly anti-Moscow.

According to *Sarafannoye Radio,* a website specializing in Web 2.0 matters*,* at the beginning of 2009, 10% of the entire population of Ukraine belonged to one or more social networks and as of 1 October 2009 the number had increased to approximately 15% of the population. The website claimed that up to 140,000 new Ukrainian users join social networks every month, or about 4,500 every day (*sarafannoeradio.org*, accessed on 20 November). According to *Yandex*, the typical Ukrainian blogger is a 22-year-old female living in one of the country's five largest cities (June 2009). Despite the growing popularity of global social platforms such as Facebook, Ukrainians prefer to use local versions of networks. The most popular social network sites in Ukraine are VKontakte (the Russian equivalent to Facebook) and Odnoklassniki.com (Russian version of Classmates.com) (globalvoicesonline.org, 19 August).

- Ukrainians make up 10 % of all users of Russian social networks according to *Sarafannoye Radio (*accessed 20 November).

- According to *Sarafannoye Radio*, of Ukrainians belonging to social networks, 95 % have joined the Russian networks Odnoklassniki (generally older users) or VKontake *(*accessed 20 November).

- Facebook's popularity is growing rapidly, however. In late April 2009 Facebook had only 60,000 Ukrainian users but the number doubled by June 2009 and more than tripled by November 2009 (more than 200,000 users) (*HiTech.Expert.com.ua*, 29 December; *globalvoicesonline.org*, 19 August). According to *Yandex*, 50% of the Ukrainians using Facebook are 18-25 years old, and another 25% are 25-30 years old (June 2009).

- According to the web information company *Alexa.com*, VKontakte is the second most popular website in Ukraine (after Google) and Odnoklassniki is the tenth most popular. LiveJournal, LiveInternet, and YouTube are also in the top 20 (accessed 29 December).