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Using Online Media to Monitor Electoral Promises

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1. Introduction

Online media plays a dual role in shaping political accountability, acting as both a potential vector for electoral harm and a powerful democratizing force. While they can amplify emotive and false content, undermining trust in the electoral process, these platforms also have the potential to empower voters, mobilize electorates, and enhance accountability.

Electoral promises, central to shaping voter expectations and politicians' legitimacy, often face weak traditional accountability mechanisms after elections. Online media transforms this landscape by enabling real-time tracking of promises and their stages of fulfillment, expanding access to critical information, and fostering dialogue between citizens, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the media. By providing dynamic spaces for engagement and promoting transparency, these platforms can strengthen democratic governance.

This paper explores the use of online media platforms for monitoring electoral promises. It aims to highlight successful examples, best practices, and lessons learned from past experiences in various countries, offering a framework that can be applied to future elections in North Macedonia.

2. Online Media as a Tool for Electoral Accountability

Online media is a broad term, including various forms of digital content distributed over the internet. Key examples of the platforms and formats include independent news portals, social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), and video and streaming content such as YouTube, Netflix, etc.

Online media significantly impacts political accountability, with the potential to amplify emotive and false content that undermines trust in the electoral process while also empowering voters, mobilizing electorates, and enhancing accountability. By enabling real-time monitoring and fostering direct engagement with political commitments, online media is a powerful tool for promoting transparency and strengthening democratic governance.

Electoral promises are an important part of political campaigns, shaping voter expectations and serving as a measure of politicians' legitimacy. However, after the elections, traditional accountability mechanisms often struggle to maintain the momentum required to track and ensure the fulfilment of these commitments.¹ Online media have transformed this dynamic by providing real-time communication, allowing direct interaction of elected officials with citizens and fostering transparency.

Online media can transform accountability in governance by enabling the real-time tracking of electoral promises and their stages of fulfillment. These tools expand access to critical information, ensuring that politicians' commitments are widely disseminated and easily accessible to the public. They also provide dynamic spaces for dialogue, where CSOs, media, and citizens can engage directly with elected representatives, fostering transparency and empowering stakeholders to assess progress.

¹ Some traditional accountability mechanisms are parliamentary hearings, budget discussions, anticorruption lawsuits, audit reviews for financial and operational practices, etc.

3. Empowering Stakeholders Through Online Media

The effectiveness of online media lies in its ability to equip key stakeholders with tools for monitoring electoral promises. This paper focuses on the [following](#) groups: the general public, [CSOs](#), journalists, [and political parties](#).

General Public

The general public is at the heart of any democratic accountability mechanism, and online media empowers citizens to play an active role in monitoring electoral promises. By providing platforms for expression, online media enables individuals to voice their concerns, share experiences, and actively contribute to accountability efforts. Whether through blogs, forums, or comment sections, citizens can engage in meaningful discussions about electoral commitments, amplifying their collective influence. This democratization of communication ensures that voices from diverse backgrounds are heard, promoting inclusivity in the accountability process.

Online media also fosters collaboration and digital activism among citizens. Platforms like Facebook groups, WhatsApp channels, and dedicated forums allow for crowdsourcing information, enabling communities to collectively track and evaluate the fulfilment of electoral promises. Digital activism, exemplified by movements such as #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter, demonstrates the power of citizen-driven initiatives in pressuring politicians to deliver on their commitments. By leveraging these tools, the public can transform individual concerns into collective action, strengthening the overall accountability framework in democratic governance.

CSOs

CSOs play a crucial role in bridging the gap between citizens and governance, and online media enhances their ability to monitor electoral promises. By leveraging online platforms, CSOs can amplify awareness around unfulfilled promises and political accountability. Campaigns using targeted hashtags, infographics, and video content can bring attention to critical issues, encouraging public discourse and pressuring contestants to honor their commitments. The extensive reach of online media ensures that conversations around electoral promises are inclusive and accessible to diverse audiences.

Online media also facilitates collaboration among CSOs, enabling them to partner with other organizations, media outlets, and citizen groups to drive collective action. By sharing resources, data, and strategies, CSOs can coordinate efforts to monitor and report on political promises more effectively. Additionally, online analytics tools empower CSOs to track political trends and public sentiment, providing valuable insights into the public's perception of electoral commitments. This data-driven approach enables CSOs to identify gaps in accountability and advocate for targeted interventions, strengthening their role as watchdogs of democratic governance.

Journalists

Journalists play a pivotal role in investigating and reporting on political developments, and online media significantly enhances their capacity to monitor electoral promises made by contestants. Online media serve as powerful tools for data collection, offering real-time updates

on politicians' activities, campaign events, and policy statements. They also allow journalists to track electoral commitments as they are made, archiving this information for future analysis. These platforms also provide access to vast amounts of user-generated content, offering unique insights into public sentiment and reactions to political pledges. By leveraging these tools, journalists can create detailed records of campaign promises and analyze patterns in political rhetoric over time.

Online media also strengthens journalists' ability to fact-check claims made by political contestants. Platforms provide immediate access to public records, official statements, and archived content, enabling cross-referencing and verification of information. Interactive features on online media allow journalists to engage audiences directly, fostering collaborative fact-checking efforts. Tools like polls, Q&A sessions, and live streams create opportunities for meaningful dialogue with the public, encouraging collective scrutiny of electoral promises. This interactive approach not only enhances transparency but can also help build public trust in journalism, positioning the media as a vital force in holding political contestants accountable for their commitments.

Political Parties

Political parties can leverage social media to monitor government electoral promises by creating dedicated platforms such as websites, apps, and social media channels to track progress and gather input from citizens, journalists, and civil society. Social listening tools and analytics enable parties to assess public sentiment, identify gaps in delivery, and address concerns proactively. By sharing updates through accessible formats like infographics, videos, and dashboards, parties enhance transparency and build trust. These platforms also foster two-way communication, allowing citizens to provide feedback and highlight unmet promises, positioning parties as proactive watchdogs committed to accountability and democratic engagement.

In addition to using social media to monitor the government's adherence to electoral promises, it is equally important for political parties to develop an effective and impactful online media campaign strategy. Effective digital communication relies on building trust, fostering engagement, combating misinformation, and leveraging modern tools to enhance campaign effectiveness. Trust is foundational and can be achieved through transparency, empathy, and consistent messaging. Political parties should engage voters on familiar platforms and create opportunities for meaningful feedback. In crisis situations, clear, fact-based communication, empathy, and actionable next steps are crucial for maintaining credibility. Proactively addressing misinformation with verified facts—while avoiding the unnecessary amplification of falsehoods—helps safeguard the information ecosystem.

Digital tools like well-designed websites, social media platforms, and email marketing play a key role in outreach and engagement. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube enable targeted communication, while messaging apps like WhatsApp and Signal allow for direct interaction with voters. Strategic use of digital advertisements and analytics helps parties understand their audience, optimize campaigns, and track performance metrics like click-through rates and engagement levels. By integrating these tools with robust databases, political parties can manage voter data, personalize outreach, and build lasting connections. Coupling these practices with a strong, emotionally resonant online presence ensures that political parties not only engage their audience effectively but also strengthen their overall digital strategy and campaign impact.

4. Case Studies: Using Online Media as an accountability tool during elections

This section examines how online media has been effectively utilized as a tool for electoral accountability through case studies from Serbia, Slovakia, and the United States. These examples highlight innovative approaches such as fact-checking platforms, Voting Advice Applications (VAAs), and promise trackers, demonstrating their impact on monitoring electoral commitments, fostering transparency, and promoting informed civic engagement.

Serbia: Istinometer by CRTA²

Crta's Istinomer project provides a robust fact-checking and monitoring tool that evaluates political promises' accuracy, consistency, and fulfilment, offering significant utility for voters and policymakers alike. Using a transparent methodology based on verifiable data, Istinomer tracks statements and commitments made by politicians, categorizing them into ratings such as "Fulfilled," "Unfulfilled," or "Not Even Started." This enables voters to assess whether political parties align with their own values and positions on critical issues.

During elections, Istinomer becomes an invaluable resource for voters by offering insights into past performances of political parties and candidates, helping to distinguish between realistic promises and empty rhetoric. Its "Truth Meter" and database of evaluations can be used by voters to compare party platforms with the track records of candidates, promoting informed decision-making.

In non-election periods, Istinomer continues to hold public officials accountable by monitoring the progress of promises made during campaigns. This ongoing scrutiny ensures that politicians remain answerable for their commitments throughout their tenure. Additionally, Istinomer educates the public on the broader implications of political statements and manipulations, fostering a more informed and engaged electorate.

By archiving and regularly updating its findings, Istinomer not only strengthens democratic accountability but also counters the "culture of forgetting," where unfulfilled promises are overlooked over time. This dual-purpose functionality—election-time guidance and consistent accountability—makes Istinomer an effective tool for monitoring and reinforcing trust in democratic processes.

Slovakia: VoteMatch by MEMO 98³

The VoteMatch initiatives for the Slovak Parliamentary Elections 2023 and 2024 Presidential and European Parliament (EP) elections demonstrated the potential of Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) in empowering voters with knowledge and facilitating informed electoral participation. By matching users' policy preferences with political parties or candidates, these tools allowed voters to align their choices with parties that shared their values, shifting the focus from personalities to policies. The 2023 Slovak Parliamentary Elections project attracted over 219,000 tool entries and 107,550 quiz completions, engaging first and second-time voters and increasing youth turnout by 4% from 2020 (and by 16 % in the category of first and second-time voters when compared to their declared intention measured in an opinion poll conducted

² CRTA. (n.d.). *Istinomer*. Retrieved from <https://www.istinomer.rs/>

³ MEMO 98 & KohoVolit.eu. (n.d.). *Volebná kalkulačka*. InfoVolby.sk. Retrieved from <https://infovolby.sk/tema/volebna-kalkulacka>

a few months before the elections). Similarly, the VoteMatch tools for the Presidential and EP elections reached over 358,000 and 108,000 unique visitors, respectively, showcasing their broad appeal and impact.

VAAAs have a transformative role beyond elections, providing a mechanism for ongoing political accountability. During non-election periods, these tools can be adapted to monitor how well parties and elected representatives adhere to their pre-election promises. By cross-referencing the policies voters supported during the elections with laws passed in parliament, VAAAs can offer insights into the consistency between electoral pledges and legislative actions. This approach fosters transparency, keeps voters informed, and strengthens democratic accountability. Moreover, continuous engagement through VAAAs during legislative cycles builds a more politically aware citizenry and reinforces trust in democratic processes.

Beyond monitoring electoral promises, VAAAs can also serve as educational tools to deepen citizens' understanding of political processes and the impact of legislative decisions. By integrating real-time updates on parliamentary activities, such as voting records, proposed bills, and policy outcomes, VAAAs can provide users with a clear picture of how representatives act on critical issues. This transparency helps bridge the gap between citizens and lawmakers, particularly for younger demographics or first-time voters who may feel disconnected from traditional political systems. Additionally, by offering tailored alerts and updates based on users' policy preferences, VAAAs can sustain engagement and encourage active participation in public discourse, fostering a culture of accountability and informed civic engagement throughout the electoral cycle.

*USA: PolitiFact by the Poynter Institute*⁴

PolitiFact plays a crucial role in helping voters assess political accountability by offering tools and methodologies to monitor election promises. Its Promise Meters, such as the Biden Promise Tracker or Trump-O-Meter, are central to this mission. These tools evaluate campaign commitments based on verifiable outcomes rather than intentions, allowing voters to see the progress or failure of promises over time. Each promise is categorized into statuses like "In the Works," "Stalled," "Compromise," "Promise Kept," or "Promise Broken", providing a clear picture of political performance. By tracking promises through rigorous fact-checking, PolitiFact empowers voters with accessible, nonpartisan information about whether politicians are delivering on their commitments.

This tool is especially valuable beyond election periods, fostering continuous political accountability. During governance, voters can use PolitiFact to evaluate how politicians' actions align with their campaign rhetoric and priorities. For example, if a candidate promised major healthcare reforms but progress has stalled, voters can hold them accountable or adjust their support based on the performance data.

Additionally, PolitiFact offers transparency on how well political parties or individuals align with voters' positions. By showing which promises are kept or broken, it helps citizens gauge whether their elected officials truly represent their interests. These insights allow voters to make informed choices in future elections and advocate for stronger representation in real time, making PolitiFact an indispensable tool for monitoring democracy in action.

⁴ The Poynter Institute for Media Studies. (n.d.). *PolitiFact*. Retrieved from <https://www.politifact.com/>

Beyond tracking promises, PolitiFact's work is a powerful tool for fostering civic engagement and combating disinformation. Its Truth-O-Meter ratings provide a clear, accessible way to evaluate the accuracy of political statements, offering voters a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. This helps individuals identify whether their representatives are delivering on their commitments or engaging in misleading rhetoric. By focusing on transparency and relying on primary sources and expert analysis, PolitiFact helps build trust in the political process. Moreover, its nonpartisan stance ensures that its tools and findings are credible for voters across the political spectrum, further encouraging informed dialogue and accountability in governance.

5. Strategic Framework for Effective Implementation

The lessons learned from the examples of Serbia, Slovakia, and the USA highlight the importance of innovation, accessibility, and ongoing engagement in using online media for electoral accountability. Here are some important things to take into consideration when thinking of using online media for monitoring electoral promises:

Transparency and Verifiability: Tools like Istinomer (Serbia) and PolitiFact (USA) demonstrate that accountability mechanisms must rely on transparent methodologies and verifiable data. Categorizing promises with clear metrics, such as "Fulfilled" or "Broken," ensures credibility and allows voters to assess political performance effectively.

Voter Empowerment through Personalization: Slovakia's VoteMatch highlights the power of personalizing voter engagement. By matching voter preferences with party policies, such tools not only facilitate informed decision-making during elections but also sustain political accountability by tracking legislative actions against campaign promises.

Continuous Engagement Beyond Elections: A common strength across these examples is their commitment to fostering accountability throughout the electoral cycle. Istinomer's year-round monitoring, PolitiFact's Promise Meters, and VoteMatch's post-election functionality illustrate the value of maintaining public awareness and scrutiny beyond election periods.

Education and Inclusivity: Each case emphasizes the role of public education in strengthening democratic processes. Whether through fact-checking, voter matching tools, or progress tracking, these platforms engage diverse demographics, particularly young or first-time voters, fostering a politically aware and inclusive citizenry.

Combating Disinformation: The proactive stance against disinformation, as seen with PolitiFact's Truth-O-Meter, demonstrates the necessity of integrating disinformation detection and correction into accountability efforts to build public trust and prevent manipulation.

To maximize the potential of online media for electoral accountability, it is also crucial to establish clear and measurable metrics for tracking promises, such as deadlines, budget allocations, and policy implementation milestones. Transparency is further enhanced by fostering public engagement through interactive tools like polls, live Q&A sessions, and platforms for user-generated content. Hashtag-driven campaigns, such as #HoldThemAccountable, serve as powerful tools for rallying attention and sustaining conversations around political commitments, ensuring that public officials remain under

scrutiny. Additionally, leveraging advanced data analytics, including sentiment analysis and trend tracking, allows stakeholders to monitor public opinion, evaluate political performance, and identify gaps in governance in real time.

Collaboration and education are equally vital. Building partnerships with media outlets, CSOs, influencers, and tech organizations amplifies the reach and impact of monitoring campaigns, with media providing visibility and CSOs ensuring data accuracy. Promoting digital literacy through workshops and awareness campaigns equips citizens with the skills to verify content, counter disinformation, and engage constructively online.

Implications for North Macedonia

Truthmeter.mk by the Metamorphosis Foundation is a platform designed to enhance political accountability and transparency in North Macedonia. The platform analyzes political promises made by parties and leaders, categorizing them as fulfilled, partially fulfilled, unfulfilled, or inconsistent. These assessments are presented in a clear and accessible format, supported by statistical data and thorough explanations. By simplifying the complexity of political commitments, Truthmeter empowers citizens to critically evaluate electoral programs and track the progress of promises over time, making the political process more transparent and understandable for everyone.

A key strength of Truthmeter.mk lies in its dual role as a promise-tracking and educational tool. Beyond assessing political commitments, the platform actively helps citizens, media, and NGOs develop critical skills to interpret political statements and identify inconsistencies. It equips voters with the ability to distinguish between credible and implausible promises, fostering a more informed and engaged electorate. This long-term monitoring of political statements and promises ensures a consistent check on the actions of political actors, encouraging them to remain accountable to their commitments and the public.

Truthmeter.mk also plays a significant role in addressing the growing challenge of disinformation. By combining data-driven analysis with public engagement, it promotes fact-based discourse while helping users identify and counter misleading information. Through its ongoing operations, Truthmeter not only contributes to a more transparent and accountable political environment in North Macedonia but also serves as a model for leveraging technology and civic engagement to strengthen democracy. The platform underscores the importance of informed participation in building trust and reinforcing democratic values, making it an essential resource for both citizens and political stakeholders.

Conclusion

The integration of online media into the democratic process presents a transformative opportunity for fostering accountability, transparency, and civic engagement. By equipping key stakeholders—journalists, CSOs, and the public—with robust tools to monitor electoral promises, online media can bridge the gap between political commitments and tangible governance outcomes. Case studies from Serbia, Slovakia, and the United States demonstrate that transparency, continuous engagement, personalized voter tools, and proactive efforts are essential elements of effective accountability frameworks. These lessons highlight the importance of clear metrics, data-driven strategies, and collaborative approaches in ensuring that electoral promises translate into actionable results while also emphasizing the need to sustain scrutiny throughout the electoral cycle.

For North Macedonia, leveraging these insights offers a pathway to address existing gaps in political accountability and transparency. By adopting digital tools for tracking commitments, strengthening institutional oversight, and promoting digital literacy among citizens, the country can enhance its democratic processes and public trust.

6. Recommendations

To effectively implement online media monitoring of electoral promises, several strategies are recommended:

Develop Accessible Monitoring Tools

Create simple and user-friendly online platforms or mobile applications that allow citizens to track the progress of electoral promises. These tools could include dashboards displaying promises categorized as “In Progress,” “Fulfilled,” or “Unfulfilled.” Using existing low-cost platforms, such as websites or social media pages, ensures accessibility for a young audience with limited resources.

Leverage Online Media for Public Engagement

Use popular platforms like Facebook and Instagram, which have significant penetration in North Macedonia, to run awareness campaigns and engage the public in monitoring efforts. Interactive features such as polls, quizzes, and live Q&A sessions can encourage young people to participate in discussions about political accountability without requiring significant financial investment.

Promote Digital Literacy

Conduct online workshops or webinars tailored for young people to teach them how to verify information, identify disinformation, and actively contribute to monitoring efforts. Partner with schools, universities, or youth organizations to embed these skills in existing educational programs, reducing costs and ensuring wide participation.

Foster Collaboration Among Stakeholders

Build partnerships with local CSOs, media outlets, and tech-savvy youth groups to pool resources and expertise. For instance, CSOs could verify data while young volunteers use digital tools to disseminate findings through social media, creating a collaborative model that maximizes impact with minimal resources.

Utilize Existing Data and Analytics

Make use of readily available analytics tools on social media platforms to monitor public sentiment and engagement with electoral promises. These tools can track how political commitments resonate with the public, providing valuable insights for further advocacy and outreach efforts without incurring additional costs.

Launch Hashtag Campaigns

Start hashtag-driven initiatives, such as #PromisesMatter or #TrackThePromises, to amplify awareness and maintain continuous discussions around electoral commitments. Encouraging young people to create and share content using these hashtags can make the campaign viral and sustainable with minimal expenses.

Ensure Post-Election Engagement

Focus on year-round monitoring by setting up regular reporting on the status of promises through low-cost media like infographics, videos, or blog posts. Sustained engagement ensures that accountability efforts remain relevant even outside of election periods, reinforcing the importance of governance that delivers on commitments. By implementing these cost-effective and youth-focused strategies, North Macedonia can effectively monitor electoral promises, empower its young population, and strengthen its democratic accountability mechanisms.

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