

COMMUNICATON MANAGEMENT IN THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract— Political and especially electoral campaigns are more developed and complex than ever. In order, for an electoral campaign to be successfully performed its necessary to establish communication management and to develop a communication strategy. This paper explores communication management for electoral campaigns in all its phases form strategic study through research of public opinion to development of communication strategy.

Index Terms — Communication management, Electoral Campaign, Communication Strategy

1 INTRODUCTION

The electoral campaign is a campaign organized by the entities that participate in the elections with a specific political goal. Thus, it is possible to speak about one and only electoral campaign which comprises of the separate campaigns of the candidates that compete in the elections, the political entities that candidate or support them, as well as the pressure groups which compete to get the support by the voters. In this regard, Simon [1] speaks of *monologue* and *dialogue* electoral campaign. In the *monologue* electoral campaign the candidates address their voters, by ignoring the campaign, the attitudes, the events, the performances of the electoral opponents. In the *dialogical* campaigns which are more often in practice, the candidates respond to the performances of the electoral opponents, their performances, positions etc. The response to the campaign by the electoral opponents creates a dialogue and opens a door for debate. Also, campaigns can go in the direction to inform all citizens of the political offer of the political entity and his candidate at the elections, but they can be directed towards certain groups of citizens and they can transit from informing to convincing the citizens, even criticism of the electoral opponents. Regardless of the direction of the political campaign, as a precondition it sets the turnout of voters, especially the supporters of the political entity and his candidate. Hence, large part of the resources of the political campaigns is directed towards provision of turnout of the supporters and the members of the political parties. This issue is particularly emphasized with the fall of the turnout of voters, which at a level of narrow party interests means that with a lower number, whereby one should seriously consider the solid electorate, it is possible to reach the possibility to manage public matters. Observed from more extensive aspect, the fall of the elections turnout can reduce the value of the democracy, as a political system that bases its legitimacy exactly on the inclusion of citizens in decision making for management of public matters. In general, we

could indicate two groups of factors about the reduced number of citizens that participate in the elections. One group of factors includes the long-term factors such as the poor political offer, the reduction of the ideological differences between political parties and their focus on the average voter that led to inclusion of the PR agencies in the campaign, the feeling that the political parties do not have serious differences, whereby the result of the voting is the same or similar in terms of resolution of the serious social problems, the weaknesses of the educational system which does not create a feeling of social responsibility between voters. The other group includes short-term factors and they refer in regard to what political entities can do when attracting the citizens to vote through the electoral campaign. According to the example of Green and Gerber [2], the interest here will be concentrated on the short-term factors for voting, with a special focus on the technique which political parties use not only to convince the voters to vote, but also the manner how they do that, by favorizing their own political offer.

Depending on the social role of social actors, the electoral campaign has different meaning. Hence, for the candidates it is a possibility for their programs and attitudes to get publicity, to address to the voters trying to convince them in the properness of their positions and politics. The campaign itself is directed towards causing positive emotions in the voters in regard to given candidate or political entity. On the other hand, the elections are a good opportunity for the voters to get information about the candidates and the political programs they represent.

From communicological point of view, in general, electoral campaigns can be categorized within three types of electoral campaigns [3]. The first type of electoral campaigns is such where the participating political entities do not have clear representation of what they want to achieve i.e. they do not have a message in whose necessity and

truthfulness they want to convince the public and voters. What is missing to this type of campaigns is thoughtfulness, a direction within which the campaign moves for achieving the ultimate goal. The second type of campaigns are the ones where the organizers i.e. the political entities have clear goal and message they want to transfer to the voters, but they miss a plan how to transfer the messages to the voters in a convincing manner. What is missing in this type of campaigns is a well thought-out communication strategy and the ones who participate in such campaigns spend the financial and time resources on reaction of messages by the public or the political opponents. The third type of campaign has clearly set out goals, messages that are being sent, electorate that they address to and a manner how this is done through the communication strategy. Unlike the remaining categories of campaigns, the third type of electoral campaign is not a spontaneous occurrence, but a well thought-out activity that is planned in advance. Although every campaign is unique and has its specifics, there are elements that cannot be foreseen in the preparation of the planning of electoral campaigns. According to Milarovic [4], the parts which make the plan of the electoral campaigns include the following:

- strategic researches and strategic studies
- communication strategy and public relations
- tactics of performance of the campaign including the key decisions which are made by the bosses of the electoral headquarters

What is confirmed in this case as well, is the viewpoint for overweighing the well thought-out and the planning character of the entire campaign, against the recent reliance on the inspiration of the moment or the charismatic traits for the candidates

2 STRATEGIC STUDY

The strategic researches of the electoral behavior of voters are the beginning and the foundation of every well thought-out electoral campaign. The strategic researches in their foundation are researches of the public opinions that are used for getting knowledge of the electoral preferences of the voters and their relatedness to certain social-political questions, their value orientation, determination of the differentiation of the identity of the candidates and the parties, the advantages and the weaknesses of the candidates and their electoral opponents, the channels for communication (the media) etc. Although usually politicians consider that they have best understanding for the preferences of the voters and that they do not need strategic researches, without preparation of a systematic study, the entire campaign would be wondering around, in search of the objectives which could not be wrongly set or not to be set at all. As O'Day [3], notes the organization of the electoral campaign without preparation of a strategic study would be like driv-

ing a car in dark, without lights.

When preparing the strategic studies, usually what is taken into consideration are also the experiences from the previous elections, the events and the behavior of voters, the characteristics of certain regions, as well as the strengths and the weaknesses of the political actors that participate in the elections and their candidates. These data are used as a basis for preparing a communication strategy as the next stage in the development of the electoral campaign. Without appropriate data obtained from the research of the public opinion there is serious danger to make irrelevant the messages that are sent in public for the entire group that we address to. The strategic study is prepared on the basis of thorough research of the public opinion about certain political party and the extent of its acceptance or unacceptance by the electorate, as well as the causes for the acceptance or the unacceptance of the given party.

The strategic studies usually recommend two types of campaign. Wide (extensive) campaign which would not restrain from exceeding the ideological limits in the attempt to reach as many votes as possible. When defining extensive campaigns, usually what is considered is the past of the political entity and the candidate who leads the campaign. Narrow (focused) campaign which will put an emphasis on few issues in the attempt to keep the ideological core of the political entity that participates in the elections. These types of campaigns are much more realistic in the establishment of the objectives of the electoral campaign and the expectations from the same [5]. The specialists for conducting campaigns usually recommend narrow campaigns focused on few issues in regard to which the political entity or his candidate has advantage in relation to his opponents, which is data obtained from the research of the public opinion.

3 RESEARCH OF PUBLIC OPINION

The design of political campaigns, the speeches of the candidates, the interviews, the political commercials and press conferences are formed depending on the needs concluded by measuring the public opinion. Alsina, Davies, Gronbeck [6] speak of a vicious circle where the researchers of the public opinion take into consideration, that is, like their subjects consider the messages which the political parties send in the public space, while at the same time the TV stations and the political parties create the messages which they send in public space on the basis of the results they obtain from the researches of the public opinion, while the voters form their own representation of the colorfulness of the selected mosaic and their own electoral behavior, among other things, on the basis of the spins that political parties are trying to place every day.

The researches of the public opinion primarily in the 1930s were being made for commercial purposes [7]. In

politics they are used in an advance determined manner, by using appropriate methodological techniques (most commonly questionnaires) in order to get information about the opinion of voters for a certain topic. In this regard, the researches of the public opinion, determine it as a distribution of the individual opinions for topics of public interest, whereby every individual opinion has equal weight. The researches of the public opinion determine the direction, the intensity and the stability of the public opinion and the possible changes. The public opinion is an important indicator for the electoral behavior of voters, and this is the reason for the interest of the political entities for its research.

Simultaneously, the dynamic characteristic of the public opinion on the importance of the factors that may cause changes of the public opinion: the public communication with all its forms in marketing, the advertising through the public relations to the debates etc. and particularly the entities included in the public communication. Hence, this dynamic characteristic of the researches of the public opinion provides measurement of the effect of the political campaign in different time intervals, compared to the starting support of given political entity/candidate, at the beginning of the electoral campaign.

Most important elements in the researches of the public opinion are indicated by Stempel III and Gifford [8]:

- design of the research
- skills of the researchers (their training)
- the appropriateness of the used research techniques
- the competence of the ones who conduct the interviews
- the representativeness of the sample
- the interpretation of the results

The researches of the public opinion are not only a reflection of the opinion of citizens for a certain issue, often they can have influence on the decision of the citizens to support certain political candidate in the elections. In a similar manner, the relatively big and stable advantage demotivates the voters, because it gives them a feeling that the winner of the elections is known in advance. This demotivating element by many is indicated as one of the factors for the electoral result in the parliamentary elections in Great Britain in 1992 [7]. Namely, in these elections, the Labour Party had relatively big and stable difference in the measurements of the public opinion, which is why many people believe that their voters were not sufficiently motivated to vote (considering that the difference in the support is so big, that even without their vote, the Labourists would win the elections), which will enable victory to the conservatives. Also a part of the voters, especially the undecided ones, will make their decision for who to vote under the influence of the researches of the public opinion, whereby they incline towards the political option which

has more support by the voters. McNair [7] indicates the findings by Robert Worcester, according to who, in the parliamentary elections in Great Britain, 3% of the voters vote under the influence of the results from the researches of the public opinion. The influence of these 3% on the final electoral results can be very significant. Still, the use of this type of arguments requires serious analyses of the causality between the causes (the results from the measurements of the public opinion) and the consequences (the voting). However, the arguments about the influence of the publication of the results on the electoral results get additional credibility when serious shortcomings happen in the prognosis of the winner in the elections, as was the case in Great Britain in 1997. At the time, the results of the research of the public opinion showed that victory of the Labour Party should be expected, which lost the elections. Such serious mistakes in the measurement of the public opinion happen exceptionally rarely, but they indicate the imprecisions of the instruments which are used and the reserves which we need to use when accessing the analysis of data.

The results that will be obtained, as well as their meaning depend on the access to the elements of the research of the public opinion. Foster [9] indicates that political parties use few types of research of the public opinion:

- quantitative researches
- qualitative researches
- psychographic researches

4 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Quantitative researches are designed so that they can measure the answers by the respondents of the questionnaires in a specific time period. If researchers estimate that it is required, they can divide the respondents into subgroups in order to inspect their reaction to specific information which in the meantime can be given to one of the groups. Qualitative researches are divided into tracking surveys, which collect the results from the answers of different respondents in different time intervals. These tracking surveys show the changes in regard to certain issues about the public opinion in the time continuum. What is of special interest for the public, is the part of the quantitative researches that measures the rating of political parties and their leaders. Although these researches usually show satisfactory precision and show the winner and have relatively small mistakes in the determination of the difference of the obtained votes and mandates, and often, especially when the race between the candidates is tight or the campaign significantly changes the mood of voters (which happens relatively rarely), the researches of the public opinion are not sufficiently accurate or cannot register the change of the mood with the necessary precision. Such was the example with the electoral campaign in 1988, when Dukakas at one moment had 17 percent points before Bush, so that he loses the elections in the end [10].

Acher [11] distinguishes few types of quantitative researches:

- Benchmark researches which are performed before a certain politician accepts candidacy in order to map the good and the bad traits of the candidate
- Electoral researches which are conducted for many candidates which have become part of the electoral race
- Daily researches which should indicate the effects of the campaign and the rating of the candidates
- The panel researches. These researches are concentrated on the results of the answers of the same group of respondents in different time intervals. The panel researches explore the changes of the researches and the behavior of the respondents more comprehensively.
- Exit poll researches that are performed immediately after the voting and are aimed to foresee the result of the same, in relatively short time interval

Political parties are regular users of the services of researches of the public opinion. The first political party that used the services of the researches of the public opinion in Great Britain is the Conservative Party. Already from the end of the 1980s, the two dominant parties, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party regularly and systematically use the researches of the public opinion. In this period, they mainly used the services of American experts for research of the public opinion, such as Richard Wirthlin and Stanley Greenberg. So for example, for the needs of the Labourists, when Tony Blair was prime minister, the researches of the public opinion were conducted by Philip Gould and Stanley Greenberg who previously performed research of the public opinion for the needs of Clinton and Mark Penn [12].

5 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Unlike the quantitative researches that are satisfied by answering the question of what a certain group of respondents thinks on a certain question, the qualitative researches go a step further and try to answer the question why the respondents think in a precisely determined manner. The data from the qualitative researches indicate the opinion of the voters on a certain issue, and often they are taken as the foundation to examine the reasons why a certain opinion is formed, which may help in the formulation of the campaign message.

The most commonly used method of qualitative researches are *focus groups*. They are a small group of volunteers selected for their individual profiles. The members of the focus groups are usually accommodated in a certain room where they are given the opportunity to dispute on a certain issue, such as the candidates or their politics. The

specialists for development of the communication strategy monitor the dispute and observe the reactions of the respondents. In practice, focus groups are segmented according to specific target groups. In such case, what is particularly important are the focus groups of the undecided voters, their emotions, the manner of thinking and what could motivate them to vote for a specific political entity. Focus groups are used in order to test how people react on a certain type of candidate, certain specific candidate, the message of the elections etc. Also, focus groups are used for testing the mood of voters in regard to certain issues such as economy, labour market, health care system, legislative system, ecology, certain moral issue such as abortion, for example. Focus groups try to reveal the manner of reaction of voters to each of these issues, the motives for the reactions and the dynamics of the reactions depending on the access to the issue.

An important qualitative method in contemporary politics which is based on the image and the personality of the candidate and their perception from the voters and the variant of focus groups is people metering or pulsing. This exploratory technique was imported in Great Britain in 1989 by the famous researcher of the public opinion, Richard Wirthlin. This technique foresees that the volunteers will respond to what they see in TV screens by pressing buttons. This technique shows what visual, voice and thematic components of a campaign are most efficient, they give the best results in the reaction of the audience, and which are harmful for the electoral campaign of a certain party or candidate, i.e. they do not cause any reaction, or even worse, they cause negative reaction in the audience.

Focus groups are based on division of voters into many groups depending on their value orientation, behavior, wishes, preferences, problems etc. In this case, the researchers try to research what is behind the decision of a certain group of voters to vote for one candidate in the elections, so that later on, they can build an image of the candidate which is compatible to the preferences of voters. According to Farries Greg [13], there are at least three reasons why focus groups are used as a technique for research of the electoral behavior:

- unlike quantitative researches (the researches of the public opinion which are directed towards revealing the structure of the population where there is certain preference for the elections, the focus groups give us important information about the motives why the citizens have certain preferences;
- the researches through focus groups are more simple for conducting and they are relatively cheap compared to the quantitative researches
- when the researches of the focus groups follow after quantitative research, this enable new ideas for explaining the electoral behavior of citizens.

As Farries Greg [13], notes besides of having advantages, the use of focus groups as technique for research of the public opinion, has its weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses that can be distinguished include the following:

- Focus groups are organized in conditions prepared by the team of researchers, and not by known, natural conditions for the respondents. Namely, the respondents in focus groups are put in a certain room where they discuss, give their opinion and express their feeling about certain issue, in circumstances that are not familiar to them.
- Focus groups can be unpredictable and temporary, the discussions which are developed within them, can go out of the foreseen topic and become trivial
- Weakness of the researches in focus groups is that the opinion of the group can be different than the opinion of the individuals that form it, or part of the individuals that form the group, which can be seen if an interview is made of one-to-one with the people who form the focus group. This particularly applies for more sensitive issues such as race, intersexual relations etc.
- The limited number of participant, the unrepresentativeness of focus groups and the selection of the participant according to certain characteristics enables representativeness of focus groups

This technique of research was used in the preparation of Regan's campaign in the 1980s, and it was later on accepted by the conservatives in Great Britain in 1986 [14]. Namely, on the basis of the results of focus groups in the campaigns in 1980 and 1984 there was a tendency that Regan builds an image of a confident, available and competent president. The same techniques (the research of the public opinion and focus groups) were used also to determine the weakness of the electoral opponent Dukakis, for which the experts for public relations of Regan built an image of an unpredictable candidate characterized by indecisiveness in terms of management with criminal. The same techniques were used by Clinton. Namely, the researches of the public opinion and the focus groups showed that the voters want changes. Accordingly, the strategy of Clinton's campaign was built, which represented him as a new, young politician, a son of an alcoholic. Hence, a message was sent that he managed to cope with the difficulties that he went through privately and is prepared to fight with the establishment in Washington. His parole, *Its the economy stupid*, indicated the nature of the decision being made and need to change something in order to improve the economy. Similarly, during the campaign in 1993 in Great Britain, and the Labourists during the campaign in 1997, twice a week performed quantitative measurements of the public opinion and additionally worked with 70 focus groups, although in the period before the campaign they worked

with 300 focus groups. The Conservatives did not pay so much attention to the researches of the public opinion and used the knowledge obtained by the methods of Wirthlin and the researches of the focus groups of Martin Goldfarb, previously obliged for the researches of the public opinion in the former Canadian prime-minister Pierre Trudeau. The same methodology was used for the elections in 2001 for which the Labourists conducted three researches of the public opinion weekly and six times a week they got the results from the focus groups. Similar case was with the Conservatives for which Nick Sparrow prepared results from the focus groups five times a week, together with the regular researches of the public opinion where the voters were divided into 180 target groups [12].

7 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The communication strategy of one political entity determines how the political entity will organize and mobilize the communication resources for achieving certain political objectives (Foster, 2010:24). The communication strategy is based on the results obtained from the previously performed strategic researches. On the basis of the strategic researches, the objective of the campaign is set, the key message of the electoral campaign is determined, and further on the channels of communication and the target groups of the campaign are attached to it. The determining of the key message (the slogan) of the electoral campaign, can often cause misunderstanding between the specialists for public relations which usually prefer more radical and more original slogans and the members of the political parties which prefer more moderate variants of slogans [9].

On the basis of the objectives that are set, the political party is positioned in the market of political ideas, the target groups are determined, as well as the messages that are sent, the channels through which they are sent etc. [15]. The objectives are explicitly and clearly defined. Their fulfilment is measurable and timely determined. Sometimes only one general objective is set and this objective is related to few additional objectives, whereby the fulfilment of the general objective would depend on the fulfilment of the separate objectives. For example, a general objective can be to achieve better rating of the party leadership. Within this objective, additional objectives can be achieved, the credibility of the leadership in the general audience can be promoted, by emphasizing the credibility of the leadership i.e. the connection between the values of the political ideology and the working ethics of the leadership, to repair the visibility of the party leadership between the voters who vote for the first time etc. Depending on the objectives, the party is positioned in the market of political products, the messages and the channels are selected through which they are supposed to be transferred in order to get to the target groups.

In setting references, few elements are of key importance:

- The public which is the focus of some reference, for example, the hard electorate of the party or the supporters of the party or the general public etc.
- The action which should be undertaken in order to achieve the goal, such as consciousness, acceptance, rejection, acting etc.
- The direction of the action that is being undertaken, such as creation of something that previously did not exist, such as consciousness of the importance of a specific political party or program of certain party or increase of the importance or maximization of the support or support for specific politics etc.
- Specification of the action for satisfying the reference. For example, if the reference is to achieve consciousness, the specification of the specific activity would be the reception of a message that shows consciousness in the public about a given politics
- Focus of the specific effects that should be achieved, such as getting the indicated message above
- Measurement of the performances, which for political parties is done with questionnaires, which show the rating of the political parties, if their repair maintenance is the objective of the communication strategy
- Time interval i.e. time frame within which the communication strategy is supposed to give the expected results [15]

What is important in order to realize the objectives of the political party, is its positioning in the market of political ideas. This practically means to distinguish and promote certain unique positive characteristics of the political party so that it can be distinguished from the remaining political parties and to engrave it in the consciousness of the citizens, exactly according to these unique and positive, desired characteristics. In a period of political campaign, the parties are particularly interested for the positioning of the electoral programs and the candidates, which refers to the reputation of the political parties and their leadership, and this is built before the beginning of the electoral campaigns, and during the electoral campaigns, the voters are only reminded of the already familiar characteristics.

According to its ideological orientation, the party can be left or right positioned, that is, it can enter in a certain niche of the market of the political parties, let's say in the niche of right-oriented parties which in the country have certain percentage of electorate with a possibility to expand this in future, especially between neutral voters etc. What would distinguish the political party from the remaining similar parties could be many characteristics such as the charisma of the leadership or certain original phrases

translated into public politics about some of the most serious social problems. The work of the communication strategy is to separate these key elements which should be emphasized in the relations with the public.

Basic carriers of the messages are the candidates which the political entities propose for conducting public authority. The communication strategy should start from a realistic image of the advantages and the weaknesses of the candidate to transfer a certain message. One should particularly have in mind the manner how the candidate assesses the opponent and the messages he can direct to the opponent in the electoral campaign [3]. Often, especially in personalized campaigns, certain characteristics of the candidate are emphasized, his experience, such as the performance of the governing by previous political positions, family values, childhood etc. What is important when planning the communication strategy is that the organizer should not try to keep silent about possible identified weaknesses in the candidate, even during criticism and accusations from the electoral opponents, rather the organizer should prepare an appropriate answer. The strategy for ignoring the notes and the criticism has often proved to be a loser strategy.

When the strategic researches identify the weaknesses of the electoral opponent, the communication strategy should foresee repetition of the messages which are in the direction of repetition of the weaknesses. The notes and the criticism for the electoral opponent, actually indicate the reasons why the electoral opponents should not vote for a specific candidate. If there are many electoral opponents in the campaign, the notes and the criticism should be directed towards the most serious opponent and towards the opponents which share the same electorate with the candidate, in order to avoid overflow of votes.

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