

FUNCTION OF THE POLITICAL ELECTORAL ADVERTISING DURING THE 2015 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA

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Abstract

The paper is divided into two main areas. First, it analyzes the communication strategies and tactics of the Albanian political actors in the local elections of 2015 in details. Also, it identifies the elements that confirm the combination of commercial marketing with that of political marketing. Through the content analysis of the election advertisement of both the main candidates for the municipality of Tirana, we will be able to identify the functions carried out by the political advertising towards the voter and the modern political actors. The aim of this paper is to identify the techniques, styles, and formats of the political advertising used during the electoral campaign in 2015 local election in Tirana. It aims to achieve this objective through the content analysis of political advertising in qualitative terms, and by identifying the keywords used by both political candidates. The manner and forms of expression of each candidate, the themes, and the content of political discourse in the election advertisement will be analyzed in this study. Through this analysis, the identification of the marketing strategies used by the staffs of both candidates was realized. The paper aims to verify the hypothesis that the content of the electoral advertisement during the campaign for the local elections in 2015 has dominated the image of the candidate and is shading the real electoral proposals.

Keywords: Advertising, political marketing, communication, electoral campaign.

Introduction

The media system has played and will continue to play an important role in forming public opinion on political issues. Consequently, the media in the democratic political systems is positioned as an important actor in the political process. For this reason, the analysis of the media and the electoral

advertising in particular, will help us to understand the development of the political process in Albania.

The complex relation between the media and politics is not something new. Thus, this is also reflected in the drastic changes in the form and content of the television campaign. The latter has multiplied the possibilities of communication for the parties and the candidates has enabled in various forms, the achievement of the targeted audience (Mazzoleni, 1998).

Through the process of communication, the political parties aim to influence the political behavior and the outcome of the elections. The political advertising in this process is an important factor which influences the attitude and opinion of the public on a party or candidate. Also, it expresses the formation of voting behavior. It serves to transmit information and to raise awareness among the citizens about the political offer.

The election political advertising began in the United States in the early 1950s. Therefore, since its inception, it is considered as one of the most efficient tools that fosters communication between the candidate and the citizen (Pezzini, 2001).

The political advertising through colors, logo, slogans, and sounds, expresses the political identity of a party or a candidate. Mostly, the political advertising is usually studied in political marketing. However, it is closely connected with the democratic electoral procedures.

According to Schumpeter, in the political sphere, the ordinary citizen submits to an irrational, prejudice, and impulse influences. The political class through sophisticated techniques of political marketing aims to win the trust and affect the consciousness of the electorate (Muca, 2009).

The power of advertising is exercised majorly at two levels. First, the political advertisement helps in spreading information about the program of the candidate or party. Secondly, the advertisement is programmed to convince the public. At the same time, we cannot omit in mentioning the fact that advertising is the only form of mass media whose influence is completely under the control of politician (McNair, 2009).

However, the classification made by Norris on the effects of the electoral advertisement helps us to understand the role that the electoral advertising plays in the political process. This role helps to inform citizens on the various political offers. They include:

- Advertising realizes reinforcing effects of the existing behavior. It aims to crystallize the existing predisposition.
- Advertising enables the mobilization of the society. Through its contents, it may affect the participation of the electorate in the elections.
- Advertising through persuasive techniques intends to form a certain image about the party. Also, it aims to convince the swing voters.

The studies on the effectiveness of the political communication during the electoral campaigns largely focus on the ratio established between a multiplicity means of communication and the information level of the audience.

In Albania, in the 90's, the use of television in the society has radically transformed the communication of the politicians during election campaigns. The multiplication of the communication opportunities brought out the simplification of the political communication through the formulation of clear, short, and concise messages.

This trend is verified by a study conducted by Axhami and Zela in 2012 in Albania. Consequently, this study confirms that Albanian voters are influenced by political advertising and direct marketing. The study also shows that foreign consultancy and political advertising occupies an important place in the balance of the costs of the Albanian political parties. Furthermore, in this study, we will discuss the importance of political advertising in the election process and in informing the citizens.

Functions of Political Electoral Advertising during the Electoral Campaign of 2015

The objective of this paper is to study the analytical and empirical electoral advertisement used by the two political candidates. Subsequently, the candidate right coalition People's Alliance for Jobs and Dignity with its candidate for Tirana, Halim Kosova, and the candidate of the Alliance for the European Albania, Erion Veliaj, appeared in the media during the period of the official occurrence of the election campaign from May 22nd to June 20th, 2015.

Through the content analysis of the electoral advertising of the two main candidates for mayor of Tirana, we will be able to identify the function carried out by the political advertising for voters and the modern political actors.

Before taking on the analysis of the function of the advertisement, it is worth mentioning that during the constant monitoring of the electoral offer transmitted on the private national TV in this campaign, as in the campaign for the parliamentary elections of 2013, the auto-referring feature of the Albanian media system can be observed clearly.

In this regard, the Albanian electronic media has been reluctant to follow. This is in order to direct and autonomous the activities organized by the political parties preferring to transmit the information produced and distributed professionally by the staff of each party.

By analyzing the reflection of the 2015 electoral campaign in the electronic media, it results in a trend of the Albanian media system to broadcast news that are more focused on the strategies, tactics, surveys, and

alliances, than the issues that affects the interested citizens directly. However, the above trend is also reflected in the strategies that are used by the Albanian political actors in determining the main political directions to promote themselves and the party they represent.

The classification of the advertisements in several categories helps us to illustrate the types of advertising used by the Albanian political actors (McNair, 2009):

- Half body advertising whereby it is the candidate who speaks.
- Negative advertising where the formulated arguments are against the opponent.
- Cinema verite where the moments of the life of the candidate are brought into the advertisement.
- Documentary advertising which illustrates the political and professional life of the candidate.
- Advertising interview with statements by ordinary people.
- Testimonies of well known celebrities to set out the qualities of the candidate.

During the election campaign of the candidates analyzed, the neutrality offered by the half body advertising, the advertising with the statement by the ordinary people, and the celebrities' testimonies were preferred. Contrary to the 2013 campaign, there is a lack of cinema verite and a moderation in the implementation of negative advertising.

Therefore, the two candidates' political advertising aims to achieve four main goals (Muca, 2009):

- To popularize their political ideas.
- To enable the citizens to participate in the elections.
- To take a defined position.
- To criticize the competitors and to bring them under a negative light.

Halim Kosova: *"I will improve the hygiene of our city, improve the schools, fix the roads and sidewalks", "I will cut taxes for small business", "As a manager, I will control the budget and will require the things to be done properly", "I will work to raise Tirana", "Poverty is growing while Erion Veliaj spends our taxes for its two luxury weddings", "Nobody knows from where the money comes, and he often lies and hides. Therefore, he should not be trusted"*.

The content analysis of the messages of the political advertisements confirms a tendency to simplify the political messages and the electoral platforms resulting in the circumvention of the topics. Furthermore, it results to complex issues by the left candidate, while the right candidate focuses more on his strengths and professional success.

Erion Veliaj: *“My vision for Tirana is a metropolitan Tirana”, “Tirana may be the dream of every young person trying to realize something in life”, “I always had the passion to work with people, to change lives”, and “We have every chance to bring Tirana to the right direction”.*

“In just eighteen months with Edi Rama, we have achieved a lot”, “Erion has increased the economic support, and Erion have raised our pensions”, “During his youth, Erion was a civil society activist; he took care of retired persons and women; therefore, he should be an excellent mayor of the municipality”, “Thanks for your vote. We would begin work in order to make real every of our promise”.

In the advertising analysed, the left candidate leaves more space for the achievements and successes of the Ministry of Social Welfare, directed by him since 2013. In the message, he focuses on giving details which have an emotional burden. In addition, through the advertising with witnesses, ordinary people, or artists, it helps to demonstrate the support of the simple voter for the candidate.

As it happened in previous campaigns, this campaign also has a negative advertising focused on the alleged weaknesses of the opponent or phrases which criticize the work done by the competitors. “Basha, Berisha, and Halim Kosova left Tirana in the mud and have no plan for the future. They are past.” “In the last four years, Tirana have had as a priority, one's name or the party membership card.” “After years of complete failure, it is time to work”. Compared to the parliamentary elections campaign of 2013, the campaign of 2015 results in a decrease in negative advertising.

Phenomena of Political Marketing in the Albanian Context

In various field studies of political communication, special attention was dedicated to the election campaigns. This was done because it was precisely an important moment for the political future of a state. However, the communication process of political actors and their efforts to communicate with the electorate have been intensified.

Since the early 60's, marketing was considered as a communication, a conversation, an investigation, and an important part of success in the competition of the political parties before and during the election campaigns (Muca, 2009). For the first time, the method of marketing in politics is put into effect in the electoral campaigns in the United States, preceded by a period of great impetus of liberalization in the media market and the development of new technologies.

If we had to make a parallel between political marketing and commercial marketing, we would encounter a similarity between them. The political parties, as well as the commercial organizations, have as a prime goal to have the support of the audience. Thus, this is achieved through the

use of channels of mass communication in a competitive environment, where every citizen has the opportunity to choose the best offer (McNair, 2009).

The political marketing is imposed as the basic technology for the realization of the political campaigns in today's society. However, thanks to the development of the political processes in Europe and the United States (Muca, 2009).

With the development of the communication and information technologies, the liberalization of the media market and the persuasion techniques are improved up to perfection through advertisement. The premarketing is focused on the persuasion of the citizens to vote through the messages in support of the candidate.

Referring to the periodization according to the time frame conducted by Norris, it results that the Albanian electoral campaigns of the recent years has combined the characteristic elements of three different stages of the election: the premodern, modern, and the postmodern stage (Norris, 2002).

The last two stages (the modern and postmodern) in Albania are characterized by the presence of the political consultants. Hence, this is reflected in the increasing levels of budgets for the campaigns. Meanwhile, the reports of the expenses incurred by the two coalitions during the electoral campaign confirm the fact that the largest financial investment during the campaign for electoral activities, and the political advertising, is realized by the parties that won the elections.

In this paper, the term “electoral marketing” refers to the techniques used by the consultants of the candidates or the political parties during the election campaign. Therefore, the objective of the techniques is to adapt a product to the market, to make it wellknown to the customer, to diversify it from the competition, and to increase its profitability.

By the means of the political marketing and persuasive communication, the candidate satisfies the electorate and then becomes a popular figure. Through the language of the show, the audience of voters becomes simpler to decodify and interpret the political message. The candidate aims to become more attractive through communication. The information of the electoral advertising talks about the future of the citizens, their family, and the city: *“Tirana is the dream of someone”, “Those who have good energy can become somebody”, “We'll be back in the right direction”, “We will do everything to bring our promise into reality”*.

The graph below reflects the time the televisions with higher audience, referring to the system of measurement of the visibility Telemetrix, have broadcasted the advertisement of the election campaign for the candidate of the right coalition, Halim Kosova, and the candidate of the left coalition, Erion Veliaj. Thus, this was done during three different time periods: at the beginning, at the middle, and at the end of the campaign.

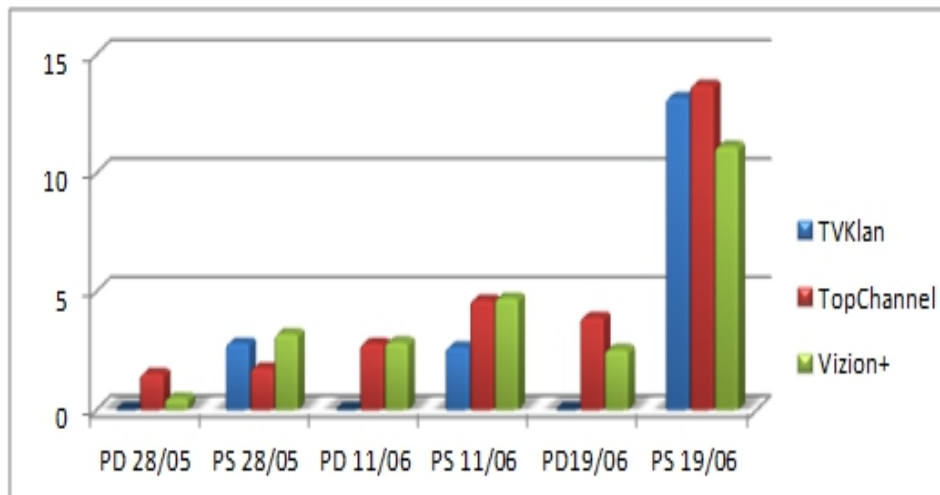


Fig 1. Time space destined to the political advertising. The time is expressed in minutes and seconds.

<i>Erion Veliaj</i>	<i>Halim Kosova</i>
3,50	0,30
2,03	0,33
0,28	0,35
0,43	0,54
0,44	0,36
0,38	0,37

Fig 2. Time of advertising expressed in minutes and seconds.

In May 28th as well as during the other two periods considered, the left coalition with its candidate has broadcasted more electoral spots in comparison with the right coalition.

As can be seen from the graphic illustration, in the first period of the electoral campaign, the time space dedicated to the election advertising has been at lower levels compared with the final phase of the campaign.

Analysis of the Communicative Strategies Used in the Political Advertising

The constant interaction between the media, politics, and democracy is a matter treated extensively in social sciences. Thus, this is due to the fact that the proliferation of the communication channels, the enrichment of information, and the possibilities of consumption of political information from citizens have multiplied.

The evolution of the electoral communication on television can be considered as a product of constant interaction between the political system

and one of media. Consequently, the use of new media has provided more opportunities and more communicative space for the political actors.

Today, any political and public figure cannot communicate without the mediation of the media. However, to enable effective communication, the candidate must adapt his message to the format and style of mass communication (Mazzoleni, 1998). For this reason, the communication professionals tend to realize short, simple, and clear messages, and messages that carry less argument in order to facilitate the process of obtaining and interpreting the information by the audience (Pezzini, 2001).

In designing the communication strategy, the candidates for mayor pay a special care to the fulfillment of some of the criteria preferred in a political candidate. These criteria are unique, attractive, and reliable.

The selection of the political advertising as an object of analysis is justified by the important role played by the political advertising within the political communication and the communication strategies defined by each party.

The political advertising is broadcasted at a time when the public attention and interest is high. For this reason, simple, attractive, and emotional phrases are used often for the purpose of remembering the message. In addition, it helps to explain the political program of the candidate. Thus, through the figure of the candidate, the political advertising intends to express the identity of the political party.

Through the study of the political advertising broadcasted during the local election campaign in 2015, the keywords used by each candidate and the ways and forms of communication that have characterized them, were identified.

In advertising the candidate of the right, the electoral offer consists of: *“Improving the hygiene of the city, lowering the tax level for small business, fixing of the roads and pavements, the care for the poor”, “I’ll take responsibility, set targets, and enforce standards”, “We will cut taxes by 30% for 25,000 businesses; we will provide drinking water 24 hours without deposits for the whole city; we will create job positions”.*

In communication terms, the reduction of the ideological elements that have characterized the political parties in the past is reflected in the production of simple and comprehensive messaging. Thus, these messages are easily absorbed by the citizens.

In advertising the candidate of the left, the electoral offer consists of: *“We will give to the capital the same power of change brought by Rama”, “We will make Tirana a better city to live, work, and have a family”, “Tirana can be the dream of every young person, the city at the service of citizens”, “Ready for everyone who needs a service from the city”.* From the analysis of the electoral advertising content, the aim of both candidates is to

stimulate a sense of empathy with the citizens-voters and win their sympathy. The synchronization of the words, images, gestures, and sounds, aims to reinforce the content and to increase the efficiency of the message. This is realized through the emergence of a festive, supportive, and energetic background through which the candidates appear. Therefore, a characteristic element of this campaign is the fact that the advertising of the right candidate even if realized in different environments, in the office, or in the road, bear the same message.

Repeating the themes and the keywords is a strategy of the political communication used extensively in this election campaign by both the candidates as a characteristic of advertising campaigns and persuasive communication. Veliqaj: *“My vision for Tirana as a public space, a cultural space, a moral space, an art space, a tourist space”, “Tirana's dream, the dream of every young person”, “Tirana, the new city, the city where all aspire, the city where everybody comes”, “My city, the city where I was born, the city where I grew up”.*

Kosova, in three of the six advertising analyzed, repeated that he is not a typical politician and this is what the people need, *“They have tried and for 25 years, not enough has been done”.* *“The politicians blame each other all the time, I'm not one of such”.*

The two main categories of electoral advertising that were analyzed in this paper are those classified by Diamonds & Bates (1992):

Emotional Spot: Emotional spot are those advertisements which put a special emphasis on the objectives that the candidate intends to achieve. The candidate focuses on his personal and professional powers in order to promote the support of the electorate.

Kosova: *“When I was the director of maternity, I managed a budget of 350 million euro and over 700 employees. I have defined the objectives at work, set standards, and showed zero tolerance about corruption”.* *“I take responsibility, set goals, and implement standards in order to complete the job properly”.* The emotional spot serves as a support element to reveal the electoral offer of the right candidate, *“I will cut taxes by 30% for 25,000 businesses, I will fix the roads and sidewalks, I will provide drinking water 24 hours”.*

Testimonial Advertising: In the testimonial format, the left candidate is presented by figures wellknown for their value and their personal and professional qualities in the public arena. Furthermore, the characteristics of the audience to which the message is addressed are personified.

This format was chosen to be used by the candidate of the left coalition in the video titled *“The right direction for every woman and girl.”* In this video, the presence of prominent artistic, intellectual figures, ordinary people who support the candidate of the left and highlight his personal skills

was noted. However, he describes himself to be energetic, positive, dedicated to the villages of Tirana, a wonderful student with high scores, and a guy with a big heart and with a lot of energy and ideas.

Another testimonial advertising is a retired person, a student of a professional school, an invalid, a woman who receives economic assistance, and the representatives of different social strata who attest the results of the work of the left candidate as Minister of Social Welfare.

Both the political candidates through various forms of advertising intended to convince the electorate about their political or professional skills. However, this aims to legitimate and win the support of the electorate. Kosova: *“I have been director of motherhood hospital”*, Veliaj: *“I have been a minister”*.

Meanwhile, the communication styles used by the two candidates are different from each other. The right coalition candidate chooses short advertising from 30 to 54 seconds, filmed in closed spaces such as offices or meeting halls and open places such as gardens, parks, roads, and various facilities within the same advertising.

The left candidate advertisements appear in the form of short documentaries with duration of up to three minutes. This documentary contains the testimony of celebrities and ordinary people who declare their support for the candidate. His campaign aims to be inspiring, demonstrates the management skills of a leader, and promotes optimism through the announcement *“moving forward, the right direction”*. The advertisement thanks the public for their support, encourages their participation, and calls for action. Talking about his achievements, the candidate creates the image of a man with tremendous and inexhaustible energy. Consequently, meetings with citizens help in bringing to light well-known political figures of the ruling coalition, who symbolically gave their support by hugging the candidate for mayor appear and enthusiastic participation in the meetings.

In the electoral race to provide more support, the advertisement try to divert the public interest from more important issues to focus on the individual characteristics of each candidate.

The electoral advertising of the left candidate are based on the candidate's figure and only two of them are classified as negative advertisements. The same for the right candidate in the six posts analyzed, four of them are based on the figure of the candidate, while two can be classified as negative advertising. The uniqueness of negative advertising lies in the fact that it is not the candidate who leads charges in a direct manner, but the party that he represents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper analyzed the strategies and tactics of communication that were used by the two candidates for mayor during the electoral race for Tirana. At the same time, special attention was paid on the characterizing element of the political electoral marketing.

Through the content analysis of the election advertising of both the main candidates for mayor of Tirana, we have identified the function that the political advertising has performed for the voters and the political candidates.

By analyzing the reflection of the electoral campaign 2015 in the electronic media, it results to a trend of the Albanian media system of broadcasting news that are more focused on the strategies, tactics, surveys, and alliances, more than issues which directly affects the interested citizens. The above trend is also reflected in the strategies that are used by the Albanian political actors in determining the main political directions to promote themselves and the party they represent.

The content analysis of the messages of the political advertisements confirms a tendency to simplify the political messages and the electoral platforms resulting in the circumvention of the topics and complex issues by the left candidate. However, the right candidate focuses more on his strengths and professional success.

From this analysis of the electoral advertising content, the aim of both candidates is to stimulate a sense of empathy with the citizens-voters and win their sympathy. The synchronization of the words, images, gestures, and sounds, aims to reinforce the content and to increase the efficiency of the message. This is realized through the emergence of a festive, supportive, and energetic background through which the candidates appears.

During the election campaign of the candidates analyzed, the neutrality offered by the half body advertising, the advertising with the statement by the ordinary people, and the celebrities' testimonies were preferred. Contrary to the 2013 campaign, there is a lack of cinema verite and a moderation in the implementation of negative advertisings.

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