

# APPROACHING THE PROCESSES OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION FROM A MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** *This paper presents the most important concepts of political communication from a marketing perspective, starting with the definition of political communication and continuing with an overview on the political communication mix. The purpose of the paper is to clarify a few key-concepts and to identify the perspective of the political marketing specialists. The paper concludes that the efficiency of a political communication process consists in choosing an appropriate mix of means of communication in order to transmit the same message in one voice.*

**Keywords:** *political communication, integrated political marketing communication, non-profit marketing mix, political public relations, political advertising.*

## 1. Introduction

Used in Ancient Greece, more than 2500 years ago, political communication was approached interdisciplinary by linguistic specialists, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, journalists, marketing specialists, and other related fields. Greek philosophers were the first to develop the theory of human communication but also the ones who used communication for political purposes when free citizens established the first democratic rules (Epuran, 2015).

This paper aims to approach political communication from a marketing perspective. According to the field of activity, the political marketing goes into non-profit marketing, which means that the role of marketing in this case is to “put the organization in a relational context in which it will provide value to clients and other categories served or with which it is in relationship and serves the organization by being an instrument by which it acquires the necessary resources for functioning: people, material, information, notoriety, public recognition” (Pop and Coita, 2005).

The tools available to political marketing specialists that help to fulfill the above-

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mentioned role is found in the 4P of the marketing mix (Product, Promotion, Placement, Price) plus the “additional Ps” specific to non-profit marketing: Publics, Partnership, Policy (refers to all political marketing activities aimed at changing attitudes and behaviour of voters) and Purse Strings (Weinreich, 2006; Chirteş, 2010).

From a marketing perspective, political communication is part of the promotion policy but there are authors who exacerbate the importance of political communication arguing that political marketing is reduced to a “specialized form of political communication (led by professional communicators)” (Fârte, 2005). On the other hand, Brătucu (1998) considers political communication alongside studying the electorate, two directions subordinated to political marketing, representing “the concept of implementation of an electoral campaign”.

## **2. Definition of Political Communication**

Due to the interdisciplinary approach, finding a definition unanimously accepted by specialists is still a challenge. Therefore, according to the author's specialization, political communication was defined as “a teleological action - a targeted, planned action, designed for certain (political) purposes” (Beciu, 2000); “a deliberate communication about politics” (McNair, 2011); a space where there is a contradictory exchange of the speeches of the “three actors, who have the legitimacy to publicly express themselves on politics: politicians, journalists and public opinion through opinion polls” (Wolton, 1989).

Andrei Stoiciu (2000), an expert in strategic communication, continues the idea of a teleological action initiated by Beciu, integrating in political communication “the procedures, norms and actions through which political information is used and organized”. Bosoteanu (2011) also considers the purpose of political communication “as a set of techniques used by politicians, focusing especially on opinion polls, public relations, and advertising or a mix of persuasion techniques used to influence voting behaviour”.

## **3. Integrated Political Marketing Communication**

The political communication mix, “promotional mix” (Chitu, n.d.), “promotional communication policy” (Zaharia, 2007) or “promotional communication” (Epuran, 2015) refer to the same concept of promotion policy.

The promotional mix is made up of “all the means used by a company to carry out a communication process through which information is sent to the target audience” (Chitu, n.d.). These means are:

- ✓ Advertising
- ✓ Public relations
- ✓ Personalized Direct marketing
- ✓ Sales promotion
- ✓ Use of sales force

Political marketing communication, in addition to promotional communication, also has a second component, the permanent communication, with its specific techniques

(the name and the symbols of the party/personal brand, which form the visual identity of the political brand).

Further, the paper will cover the promotional component of political communication as it contributes to a large extent to political and electoral success.

### **3.1. Political Advertising**

Political advertising is focused on promoting ideas, attitudes and concerns related to public issues, including political concepts and political candidates. The *Political Advertising* article available on the All Business website specifies that “the essential task of political advertising is to gain the confidence of the people for their acceptance of ideas and, in the case of political campaign advertising, to influence their vote”.

In Romania, political advertising is regulated by law and is often only used in the electoral campaign. However, if neither the party's logo or anything else relating to the voting option is used, the image of a candidate can be constructed by advertising before the election campaign.

In electoral campaigns, negative or attack advertising is often used to put opponents into the defensive, even if the recommendation of specialists is to use positive or "visionary" advertising.

Last presidential elections in the US have brought a number of changes regarding the use of advertising for political campaigning. It has been remarkable to previous campaigns that half of Clinton's TV commercials have attacked Trump. Of these, 90% were focused on Trump's character and “fitness for office” and only 10% of the ads focused on policy (Warner, et al., 2018). Clinton's TV ads focused less on policy (only 30% contained personal promotion messages and policies). Instead, 70% of Trump's TV ads were about its policy, and even if an ad contained criticism of Clinton, however, they were included in the same context his own policies (this was called “contrast” spots) (Warner, et al., 2018). Also, in this campaign, the amounts invested in digital advertising (web and social media) were higher compared to previous campaigns.

### **3.2. Political Public Relations**

In politics, public relations are the most important communication technique because political advertising has the disadvantage of high cost, especially when it comes to TV ads. Besides, it is already known that, in politics, credibility remains the most difficult problem to solve, which advertising can not get.

Some authors (Strömbäch and Kioussis, 2011 cited in Lees-Marshment, 2014, p.210) have extracted from the definitions given to public relations three fundamental characteristics: 1) the management of communication between an organization and its publics (or stakeholders), 2) the relationships between an organization and its publics which should be mutually beneficial and 3) the management of the reputation of an organisation. The mutual benefit in politics refers to understanding each other's interests and reducing the conflict which will create trust, satisfaction, openness, and involvement (Lees-Marshment, 2014).

Hence, specialists consider that “political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals” (Political Public Relations, n.d.).

It is interesting to watch Donald Trump's communication campaign. At the beginning, he enjoyed notoriety in business and even if he did not have the most important political support, he took advantage of each attack, creating a permanent rumor. This is why he received more media attention. He took advantage of every opportunity to manage his reputation and keep up with his public, always ensuring and promising them the old future and a better one (Zamfir, 2016).

### **3.3. Direct political Marketing**

Direct Political marketing allows a direct, personalized message to be sent to a single political consumer and also provides a degree of interactivity giving you the possibility of a response, measurable by the response rate. The most eloquent example is communication through Social Media (Trump successfully used Twitter where each message was addressed to a certain category of voters).

Direct marketing can be used for various political purposes such as: increasing political support, recruiting volunteers or members, asking for a donation or asking to vote (Lees-Marshment, 2014). In order to increase his political support, Trump had five speeches a day and impressed the crowds that came to his rallies.

### **3.4. Political sales promotion**

Even if it's a tangible product, there are some key ways to promote “sales” successfully used in political marketing communication. These can be addressed either to the political consumer or to the sales force: promotional materials, publicity at the sale point, by marking the polling stations or making electoral signs that urge to vote, promotional events (Potincu, 2010) placement of tents for various purposes, providing services (e.g. providing transport to the house) etc.

Trump knew how to use this communication tool. He first presented his results and goals to his voters by promising them and inviting them to imagine “America Great Again” and even better. After that, it remains to “complete the sale” (Zamfir, 2016), meaning to keep the promises made to the voters.

### **3.5. Political selling forces**

It is the most important and most credible human resource in a political communication campaign. These are volunteers, party militants, party presidents at county, city, organization, neighborhood, etc. Its main attributions are: to collect funds, to collect signatures for candidates, to disseminate promotional materials, to talk to voters, to disseminate online campaign messages, etc.

#### 4. Conclusions

The main purpose of political communication is to convey the right message and to be received as planned. That is why the most powerful communication campaigns are those which, through an appropriate mix of communication, send the same message in one voice. For a politician, it is recommended to integrate messages into the different channels of communication and for a party it is more useful to set up an integrated marketing communication plan because it can save it from a possible political and communication failure.

A message, in political communication, can be defined as a brief and easy-to-understand communication that transmits the view of a politician. For example, Donald Trump has used in the communication strategy a divisional and pessimistic emotional rhetoric that highlights the shortcomings in the US, picturing it as a country with serious problems. In this context, he presented himself as the only one who can solve them, the essence of the message being included in his campaign slogan "Let's Make America Great Again!"

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