POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ASPECTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The paper was conducted to identify the attitudes and preferences of the specialists regarding political communication in Romania. According to them, political communication should be constant and it should represent a means by which the proposed political program is promoted in order to help raise awareness for a particular candidate. The subjects explained the link between the audience's level of understanding and the intention to vote. In Romania, television communication and door-to-door campaigns prevail. These should be complemented by online communication.*

Key words: *qualitative research, political communication, in-depth interviews, political specialists, political marketing.*

1. Introduction

The need for political marketing research stems from the main changes taking place in the political market highlighted by Mihalache (2012): young people look less interested in traditional politics; voter behaviour has become less predictable; TV and more recently the internet has become a basic source of political information; the number of media genres has increased, and the nature of the competition has changed becoming more commercial; voters are more critical of political elites and institutions; participation in traditional politics has fallen, as well as voting, while involvement in other types of movements and pressure groups has increased; traditional segmentation according to geographic criteria, family profile eroded being replaced by other complex segmentation elements. For example, in Donald Trump's campaign, segmentation has been made according to the data available on social networks and online: interests, preferences, behaviour, connections, etc. reaching what specialists call "behavioural microtargeting" (Puscas, 2016).

Interviewing specialists was considered necessary because the changes we are taking in the Romanian political sphere must be approached first from the perspective of specialists who are directly involved in the field and who are best able to explain the political phenomena presented.

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2. Literature Review

The term "political communication" has been used to describe communication during the election campaign during the governance of a country, to report government activity, to determine public opinion, lobbying, and socializing with citizens (Trent, Friedenberg and Denton, 2011). In the 1980s it was found that the specialized literature of political communication can be classified into four major categories: electoral communication, political communication and news, political rhetoric and, fourth, information, behaviour and political attitudes (Kaid, 2004).

Political communication "includes the so-called near or long-term campaign but also on-going behaviour, ensures that communication they have with the public helps them achieve electoral success, attempt to influence others in the communication process, such as journalists and opposition parties and use selling techniques such as direct mail and targeted communications" (Lees-Marshment, 2001). In political communication process all members and MPs send messages to the electorate, not just the leader.

Qualitative marketing research is a small-scale exploratory research method known in the literature as pilot studies (Constantin, 2009). This type of research aims at knowing the deep causes of consumers' attitudes, behaviours, preferences and opinions, as well as the subjective, emotional or unconscious elements underlying them (Lefter, 2004, p. 36).

Qualitative marketing research has been used to address various issues of politics. Some authors (Lees-Marshment and Lilleker, 2012) have used this type of research among important political consultants to verify the phenomenon of Americanization of political marketing strategies. The results have shown that strategy and strategic marketing tools are shared between all countries and are tailored to suit the political context of each country or, in fact, every election (which remains a unique exercise). Other authors have used qualitative research "to emphasize the importance of colours and non-colours as a symbolic form of communication in online advertising" (Petrovici, 2014).

2. Research Objectives

Qualitative research was required to understand the mechanisms of current political communication.

The proposed research aims to obtain an overall picture of the process of communication initiated by political parties and its implications for the electorate.

Two key objectives were set out to achieve the goal:
 − identifying views on the impact of political communication on voters.
 − exploring the way in which political communication is organized and structured in the political parties.

3. The Research Methodology

Understanding the mechanisms of political communication in Romania was made

possible through political specialists (political party leaders, candidates for political positions, journalists, political consultants, campaign managers from Brasov County). Sample members were not strictly classified as belonging to a category of targeted population because, for example a nominee can be identified with the party leader.

Following the interview guide, the specialists were interviewed on the meaning of the notion of political communication, the impact of publication of poll results on voters / political parties as well as on the link between the audience's level of training / understanding and the intention of the electorate to vote.

The research method is the method of in-depth interviewing, the process being semi-structured interviewing. The main advantage of the face-to-face interview is the possibility to approach the subject in detail, while discussing delicate issues at the same time (Constantin, 2009).

The research results may not be generalized to the entire target population. These are the views of the specialists participating in the interview.

4. Research Results and Discussions

Political communication was characterized by participants as "*tool*", "*essential*" (with 3 entries each) and "*important*". In terms of communication as a tool there are two views: one to raise candidate's political image and one which promotes the electoral project. It may prove the responsibility of the voters they represent and that they know their real needs (4 out of 9) through the proposed project. According to 3 subjects out of 9, proof of knowing the real needs can also be done by providing explanations on the implementation of the proposed project, with emphasis on the advantages of the voters.

In the opinion of 3 candidates, political communication must be carried out constantly. Communication is needed, especially when it is found that it is partially impossible to implement the proposed project for the election campaign by explaining the reasons and the situation encountered. Some of the candidates even think it is their responsibility to communicate with their electorate, especially when they must make painful decisions, otherwise, "*the lack of communication leads to lower confidence*".

Party communication is internal and external. In *external communication*, "television is still the most used means of political communication, but it matters a lot online". The door to door campaign is the most used by the candidates and recommended by them, but they believe it can only be applied under the conditions of the notoriety advantage.

Internal communication is difficult at the level of large parties due to the large number of political organizations. Small parties have better communication, but they face organizational problems, lack of staff, and so on.

Trying to explain *the link between the audience's level of understanding and the intention to vote*, it has been specified that those with a high level of training are interested in several aspects, for example: the candidate's intentions, his / her vision, the electoral offer. If the message does not meet its needs and if the offer is poor,

subjects prefer not to vote because they do not have anybody to vote with. However, three subjects see no link between the training and intention to vote because a very well-built message can also mobilize the elevated electors, which is usually more convenient (the right-wing viewer is even more demanding and sensitive). Knowing the political phenomenon motivates voters to come out and / or react by sanctioning (voting anti-system, anti-historical political parties etc.).

The low-level electorate is not so interested in the political program, but rather the immediate benefits. It is the easiest to mobilize by manipulation because it either does not have the ability to discern, or the benefit provided is the determining factor. The majority of those who can easily be manipulated are those directly affected (those who depend on the budget system, social aid, etc.).

The intention of the electorate to vote is closely related to the level of political voter education, with the level of education (culture), the level of information, the level of interest etc.

Political parties mainly send out what the electorate wants after *opinion polls*, which are just "*a photograph of a given time*". They are important to the candidate / political party when properly conducted because they direct the communication axis, but they are often used for manipulative purposes (mobilization to vote - internal and external - or vice versa). Polls influence those who do not have a doctrine and are strongly influenced by the myth of the winner, "*believe in the strong one*".

Because party programs are very similar, political communication should focus on a niche, to that reality discovered by the candidate and to propose solutions to be found in the electoral offers. The situation in the United States has shown that the correct identification of the target voters (dissatisfied electorate) and creating a channel of direct communication with them (via messages such as "Make America great again!") has led to the expected result - winning the election.

Political messages should be constructive, not destructive, to address both members and other categories (sympathizers of other parties). Nowadays, in party messages, ideologies are no longer found, so messages have become so generic that they can no longer be attributed to a party. Detailing programs could differentiate political party communication.

5. Conclusions

Specialists believe that in the process of communicating with the electorate, it would be ideal to have it done in a double and uninterrupted manner. Two-way communication is described by specialists as a common effort to identify a middle way between personality, candidate's ability and needs, voters' wishes. In fact, however, bilateral communication is often used in extreme situations of social imbalance. Practice has shown that most often, communication is done in one direction, from the transmitter to the receiver.

Political communication is seen as a means of promoting, transmitting information, but it is not just about this. It must also consider the electorate's reaction to the political message transmitted.

Party-level communication is centred on the leader, while it should focus on the electorate, on ongoing or future projects and differentiated according to the needs of the receiver. At the level of political parties there are no real leaders, recognized by the citizens, to bring their problems to the leadership.

Opinion polls are generally published with the aim of mobilizing or demobilizing the party apparatus, that is, manipulating. However, they also have less controversial applicability. They are used to establish campaign strategies, the needs of the electorate, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the party for the credibility of the political message, to raise awareness. Few voters understand an opinion poll, which is why it mainly influences the less informed and the easily influenced.

From the interviews of most specialists it can be concluded that the intention to vote is influenced by the electorate's level of understanding. But there are also specialists who consider that there is no link between the intention to vote and the level of understanding. They argue that the citizen with a certain political culture, analysing the electoral offer does not vote because he does not have a candidate to vote for (the electoral offer is poor or unadjusted).

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