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Political Advertising in Local Electoral Campaign. A Case Study

1. Introduction

The electoral campaign from Bacau 2004 has mobilized not only candidates, but also the mass media and, to a much smaller extent, the electorate. The behavior of the three actors was concordant with the roles that they play traditionally in every campaign: the candidates launch in the competition projects for the improvement of the town administration, the mass media informs the citizens about their existence and / or try to convince the electorate about the fulfillments / failures and the candidates` competence / incompetence.

In the electoral competition for the town hall of Bacau city the following candidates enlisted (table 1):

The candidate	The political party	The results obtained in the first ballot	The results obtained in the second ballot
1. Dumitru Sechelariu, business man, mayor	PSD	34,02%	37,31 %
2. Ovidiu Budeanu, business man	PNL	10,41%	
3. Mihai Banu, business man, candidate in 2002 from PNL`s part	PD	7,43%	
4. Romeo Stavarache, business man	PUR	39,22 %	63,69 %
5. Aurel Damian, ex competitive sportsman	PRM	3,58 %	
6. Vasile Botomei, jurist	PNTCD	1,13 %	
7. Rodica Luchian, engineer	PMR	0,63 %	
8. Ana – Maria Popovici, insurance insurance adviser	URR	0,87%	
9. Dorel Luchian, engineer	PRM	0,63 %	
10. Vasile Neculcea, jurist	FD	0,51 %	
11. Mihaita Postolache, engineer	PSD	0,48 %	
12. Ioan Andone, engineer, ex prefect	AP	0,43 %	

Table 1. The candidates enlisted in the electoral competition and the obtained results.

2. The characteristics of the political publicity

The political publicity represents a huge resource to which the political actors appeal to, especially in the electoral periods. In change of buying the diffusion/ broadcast place, the candidates and the parties send controlled messages to the voters. After the diffusion, certain candidates or certain themes are familiar to the voter, that means something to him.

From the debut registered in the 50s in U.S.A., the political publicity has changed continually, becoming more sophisticated, refined and expensive.

Mc Nair mentiones the following changesⁱ:

- the standard duration (30-60 seconds);
- the personalization – focusing on the candidate`s image, especially on his personal and professional qualities;
- the psychologizing - using of some materials that explore the collective emotions;
- the use of the authority` s symbols – the revaluation of the presidential status , of the career and of the political experience;
- the ordering of the positive attributes – the American model that obeys the following successful algorithm: presenting of an identitary attribute of the candidate, the evaluation of a political objective of this, the placing of a negative attribute of the politics/ person of the opponent and the final stage concluded with a positive attribute of the candidate and expected by the electorate;
- the negative publicity.

At the political stage, the advantage of publicity is that of offering to the voter a synthesis of the existing political offer, a “translation” of the political speech in words, phrases and key – images on everyone`s capacity of understanding. Besides, the messages of all the candidates have the chance to get to the addressee. Conceived in the form of a bombardment, the publicity eliminates the selective exposure of the voters to the image/ messages of the preferred candidates. None manages any more to get rid of it.

There is also a major accusation brought to publicity – that of distorting the political reality. Conceived in the form of a communication that is mainly emotional, the political publicity prevents the audience from voting only on basis of some rational criteria. The used language, which most of the time is vague and ambiguous disinforms and scares. We remember the warning formulated more or less explicitly regarding the consequences of the

non voting of the candidate that symbolizes the positive or negative "world". The slogans substitutes the political argumentation and on a long term it contributes to the trivialization of democracy. The negative publicity causes absenteeism, it accelerates the voters` cynicism and the lack of trust in the political institutions. Moreover, the advanced technology allows the "confectioning" of some imaginary political images (the alteration of voices and images, the montage of some pictures in order to introduce a false interpretation).

The local electoral campaign has offered also original forms of publicity:

- after the model of the proof – spot, the electoral stuff of the candidate Dumitru Sechelariu has made two films (3 min) named "Arguments for continuity" that included statements expressed by personalities in the town (artists, teachers, directors, writers, sportspeople) or by common people. These statements were presented also on the local T.V., and in the pages of the newspaper "Deseteptarea";
- "the documentary film" (14 minutes) about the life and achievements of the mayor Sechelariu, that were broadcast at the official launch of his candidature for the third mandate as mayor and then taken over by Alfa TV. The film fulfills the following functions:
 - it presents in a moving manner the successful story of two poor brothers (Dumitru and Sergiu Sechelariu) that now got to be wealthy people having strong political careers;
 - it frames more sides of Dumitru Sechelariu`s character (family man, revolutionary, successful enterprising person, hardworking mayor, social- democratic politician) and makes a real personality cult of him.
 - it answers in a subtle way to the attacks that were brought to the mayor, transforming the illegal acts of which he is accused in "honor debts towards the community", in forms of local patriotism;
 - together with "The Arguments for continuity", the film creates the impression of an omnipotent and omniscient mayor that can be confirmed only according to the popular vote.
- the rhetorical question launched and repeated daily during the campaign by The Democratic Party in the pages of the "Monitor" newspaper from Bacau and which valorizes Dumitru Sechelariu`s declared passion for poker. ("For 8 years the mayor has been playing poker on your poverty. For 8 years he has been playing with your

hopes. Are you willing to invest your incomes, for 4 more years, in a poker game?"

3. The slogan, the poster, the spot – instruments in a local campaign

The fight for winning the attention of the potential voter is timed. The political publicity is guided by this fact, in the center of the electoral strategies being the poster, the slogan and the electoral spot. These are borrowed from the commercial publicity and have registered a real increase in the campaigns from the last decades, managing to transmit as many messages as possible to the voters, in a very short time and at the lowest price.

The slogan is the emblem of a party, program or candidate. It is very hard to polish it as it has to say the essential in a few words, Gabriel Thoveron mentions more rules to follow for a successful slogan: it must be short and loud in order to be easily remembered, original and credible, so that it can stand out, complete and updated, so that it can't be modified by the opponents. It is very important that the slogan responds to the audience's expectations and to resist till the end of the electoral campaign.

The importance of a slogan is very big. Constantin Salavastru draws the attention towards the fact that the slogan is "an act of hidden/dissimulating language", that beyond the direct meaning of his statement something else is hiding, that the voter has to "guess"ⁱⁱ. In the second ballot of the local polls in Bacau it was launched the slogan "Bacau city is yours! I come to the townhall to give it back to you!" It has accompanied the electoral speech of a candidate from the town hall and has won in the electoral confrontation. It was "confiscated" (by certain groups of interests, probably). Besides, the vote for the opponent is a vote for the legitimacy of the state of fact that last for longer time and dissatisfies most of the people. Only the change will manage to give back to the citizens the dignity that was stolen by the present administration

A similar idea valorizes also the slogan of the candidate supported by the URR who, starting from the often used expression by the mayor in charge – "my people from Bacau, not the mayor's people from Bacau". During the electoral campaign the slogan promotes a candidate or a point of view and gets in contradiction with the points of view promoted by the opponents. The slogans that are characterized by a polemic aspect are obviously those that clearly refer to continuity or

change. The slogan “We continue together!” duels with “Bacau city is yours!” I come to the town hall’s administration to give it back to you!”

The poster is a fixed or mobile political image that informs about the existence of a candidate and promotes his image. Although it’s not very convincing, it can transmit a message using the advantage given by the material support and the voters` repeated exposure. His efficacy depends on the space (more panels covered in order to achieve the function of “land’s occupation”) and time (the duration of the poster depends on the wearing and on the cognitive depreciation to which it is subjected). The multiplication in space mustn’t be doubled by the multiplication in time, the rule broken by the posters belonging to the candidate Sechelariu and PSD, that not only that invaded the town until saturation, but they maintained them even after the end of the electoral campaign. Besides, the originality, the attractivity, the optimism the esthetic value or the emotional effect are compulsory for the poster that can be remarked at a glance` length.

From a theoretical point of view, the local companies use on a large scale the advantages offered by posters. Actually, some of them were brought into anonymity either due to lack of creativity or due to breaking of some rules (proper composition of colors, successful slogan, the relationship character – elements). Most of the posters were conceived at central level, without their adaptation to the specific character of the towns. The candidates of the parliamentary parties got to be known due to a unitary poster in the whole county (same color, same placement of picture, same background, same slogan). Another common point was the appeal to what Jean – Paul Gouveritch named the principle of “the tutelary figurants”ⁱⁱⁱ: the appearance on the poster of the image of the central leader that governs the candidature of the local leader. This way, Traian Basescu guaranteed for the candidate of PD, Theodor Stolojan and declared his trust and support for the candidate of PNL, Petre Roman aimed at getting out of anonymity the candidate named by the Democratic Force.

The spot is a very short publicity film in which to music and image the candidate`s name and his slogan is added. It has the role of synthesising the basic message of the campaign that is centered on the candidate` s moral characteristics or on the intention to get social – political actions.

In the local campaign the spots don't have the same attention as in the electoral campaign organized at national level. The allocated funds for their making are lower, they are broadcast only by local stations and not at a high audience time. For the small parties, making and broadcasting a spot is considered to be a too big investment and one appeals to it only when it's absolutely necessary (the case of the PUR candidate that got a spot only after he went to the second round of the electoral competition for the position as mayor).

I made a short presentation of the sport that was broadcast during the electoral campaign in Bacau town, using the algorithm proposed by Viorica Rosu in the work "Political and electoral marketing":

1) Spot broadcast by Alfa TV.

Subject: PSD – together for Romania / Bacau

Typology: narrative spot

The description of the spot: the message is transmitted in the form of a dialog between remarkable personalities of the party (Adrian Nastase and Mircea Geoana) and known local leaders (Dragos Benea and Dumitru Sechelariu). The retorts are taken from official launchings of the PSD candidates.

Retorts:

"Adrian Nastase: I think that the choice (poll) is simple: we!

Adrian Nastase: Only PSD can continue the way of changes in good!

Dragos Benea: Today Dumitru Sechelariu and PSD propose me and support me in the position of president of the Council of Bacau County.

Adrian Nastase: Man makes the rules in a place!

Dumitru Sechelariu: I don't come to the leadership for 4 years, but for 12 years!

Mircea Geoana: We are many, together we can win!

Adrian Nastase: This means solidarity!

Dumitru Sechelariu: PSD means solidarity!

Adrian Nastase: Our political victories must become the Romanians' victories!

Dumitru Sechelariu: The speed with which we will develop ourselves, I will be faster in the decisions I will take and we will be faster than the others would give us the opportunity to get in the front line; today, the unemployment in Bacau is under 2%.

Adrian Nastase: We win with PSD! We continue together! Victory!

Dumitru Sechelariu: The mayor of the city, together with all the citizens of Bacau are prepared to continue for Europe!
Let's continue together! Let's vote all of us P.S.D.!"

The technical achievement: the sequences are put together in a speedy manner, giving the impression of optimism, energy, firmness. The sound message was doubled by a written one. Over the images there appeared key – words: "Europe, change in good, trust, 12 years, together, solidarity, people are the ones that count, Bacau - economic capital of Moldavia".

The relationship with the candidates: there's no direct attack to the political opponents.

Identity elements

The acronym of The Social Democratic Party
The thematic acronym: "We continue together!"

2) Spot broadcast by Alfa Tv.

Subject: Bacau, thriving town

Typology: descriptive spot

The description of the spot: it contains images of some new buildings/ or representative in the town. In the end the mayor in charge is presented.

Retorts: "We continue together! For the achievement of the water abduction from Valea Uzului, the Sechelariu Administration obtained a non repayable financing of 39 million Euro form the European Union. We, the citizens of Bacau town, are envied by all those that pass by our town because we have the best road infrastructure from Romania.

Dozens of blocks from Bacau have changed their look as result of the mayor Dumitru Sechelariu` s initiative, unlike other towns where the citizens were forced to pay the costs of the rebuilding of the block` s facades, the Sechelariu` s administration didn't take a penny from the citizens. The costs of all the works were paid from the salubrity tax. 18 subsidiaries of the most important Romanian and foreign banks, hundreds of new production places, thousands of new commercial places and places for services, dozens of million Euro - private investments – these are the arguments for which Bacau town is considered the financial and economical capital of Moldavia.

D. Sechelariu: We make, they only promise!

With Dumitru Sechelariu we continue together!".

The technical achievement: sequences that are put together in a speedy manner, giving the impression of optimism. The commentator's voice is manly, firm, with a pleasant sound. The above marked words are written over images.

The relationship with the other candidates: indirect attack towards the opponents enlisted in the competition for the town hall administration.

Identity elements:

The acronym of the Social Democratic party

The identity slogan: "With Dumitru Sechelariu we continue together!".

3) Spot broadcast on Euro Tv.

Subject: Mayor of all the people

Typology: attack spot

The description of the spot: the PD candidate is presented going out of the party's place, going through the town's center and getting in front of the town hall. In a secondary plan, it appears written in capital letters: "preferred by 51% of the citizens of Bacau".

The commentator's voice says in a grave tone: "Until now money belonged to some of the people". It's time that Banu belonged to anyone! Mihai Banu – a mayor for all the citizens of Bacau!"

Technical achievement: sequences put together in a speedy way, the candidate's steps making sound, the commentator's voice being grave, slightly aggressive.

The relationship with the other candidates: direct attack towards the mayor in charge.

Identity elements:

The acronym of the Democratic party.

The stamp Vote for PD

The thematic slogan: "For the first time order!"

The identity slogan: "Mihai Banu – a mayor of all the citizens from Bacau!".

4) Spot broadcast by Euro Tv.

The stirring campaign: at the beginning of the electoral campaign it was broadcast a spot - metaphor in order to catch the attention of the future voters in a special way.

The spot presented a citizen that carried on his back three huge bricks. Almost crashed by their weight the citizen barely sighed.

The commentator asked him with a strong voice: " I anything that hurts you?"

The subject: the fighter mayor

Typology: attack spot

The description of the spot and the technical achievement: In primary plan there are presented the three huge bricks laid one over the other. On the basic one it was written in capit letters "Poverty", on the second one "Lie", and on the third one "Corruption". The candidate comes and with a big enough effort crashes the three bricks.

Comments: "To cure a disease you must treat the causes". To make things right again you must cure the bad part from its beginning. The source of all the bad things must be destroyed! And you must have the energy to crash this huge bad thing that suffocates you! Only someone very strong and very determined can give this blow! It is a finishing stroke!

AIAIA!

Ovidiu Budeanu – strikes where it hurts more"

Text: finishing stroke, Ovidiu Budeanu; strikes where it hurts more.

The technical achievement is good, the images are put together in order to give back the firmness and optimism.

The relationship with the candidates: indirect attack towards the mayor in charge that was for many times accused by the central press, direct attack towards some of the problems of the Romanian society.

Identity elements:

The acronym of the Liberal National Party

The thematic slogan: "Ovidiu Budeanu stikes where it hurts most!"

5) Spot broadcast by Antena 1 and TvR

Subject: the humanist mayor

Typology: descriptive spot

The description of the spot and the technical achievement: the images are filmed in the biggest park of the town in a relaxing atmosphere. The candidate is presented between people, in movement. It is created the impression of determination, dynamism and optimism.

The marked words are written over the images.

Retorts: On the 21st of June the young people have the baccalaureate exam.

A day before, the humanists give Bacau town to the citizens of Bacau!"

Romeo Stavarache: "Bacau was yours! I want to give it back to you! Come with me in the second ballot to get Bacau back, the confiscated town!"

“On the 20th of June make a surprise at national level! Vote for Bacau a young, inventive and above all a honorable mayor! In a word: humanist. Vote Romeo Stavarache! Vote The Humanist Party in Romania!”

"It's not Petrica's stadium, but he wrote that it was his!"

Romeo Stavarache:" In the 20th of June you don't have to write anything, because Bacau is yours! You just have to get it back; it's right by vote!"

"On the 20th of June make a surprise at national level! Vote for Bacau a young.

inventive and above all a honorable mayor! In a word: humanist. Vote Romeo Stavarache! Vote The Humanist Party in Romania!"

The relationship with the other candidates: direct attack towards the opponents

Identity elements:

The acronym of The Humanist Party in Romania

The thematic slogan: "Bacau is yours! I come to the town hall administration to give it back to you!"

6) Spot broadcast by Alfa Tv.

Subject: The hardworking mayor (a)

Typology: narrative spot

The description of the spot and the technical achievement:

Monologue of Dumitru Sechelariu: "To talk to you! To tell you what else I have to do. To also tell you what I've done, but I thought there's no more need of it. In all these years I tried not to disappoint you with anything. You know that I still am a honorable person and a person that doesn't live in a ivory tour. I am near and between the people that...."

The technical achievement is dissatisfactory, there's no appeal to any technique of catching the observer's attention, it reflects a helpless attitude of the character and he's not convincing.

The relationship with the other candidates: there's no attack towards the political opponent

Identity elements:

The acronym of PSD (Social Democratic Party)

The thematic slogan: "Vote the hardworking person!"

Identity slogan: "Vote the person Dumitru Sechelariu!"

7) Spot broadcast by Alfa Tv

Subject: the hardworking mayor (b)

Typology: narrative spot

The description of the spot and the technical achievement:

The commentator's monologue: "On the 20th of June vote a citizen from Bacau for your town! Vote for your children` s future, vote for the welfare of your family, vote for the peace of your parents! Your vote can keep Bacau one of the cleanest town in Romania! Your vote can keep Bacau the city with the best road infrastructure! Your vote can keep Bacau the best lighted and safe town in the country! Your vote can keep Bacau the economic and financial capital of Moldavia! Your vote can stop Bacau town from becoming a colony of the businessmen in Bucharest!

Vote facts, not words! Vote the hardworking person! Vote Dumitru Sechelariu! A good mayor must be kept!"

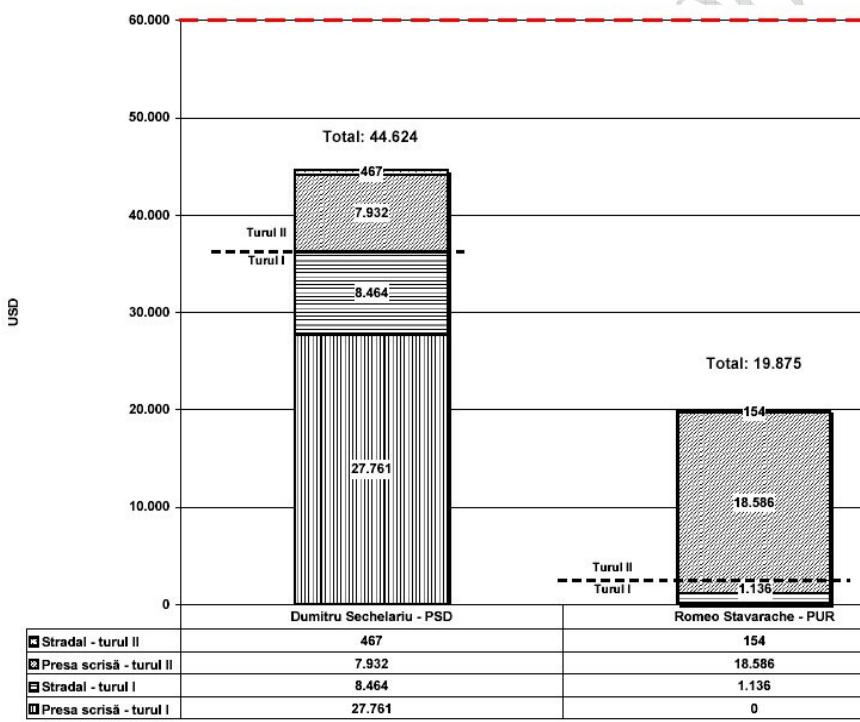
The technical achievement is very good. There are presented images with the most modern areas of the town, with the mayor in his office, surrounded by young and old people. The musical background is taken from a known tune belonging to Vangelis, and the commentator's voice is pleasant, firm and optimist. The marked words in the text are written over the images. The important subjects are repeated from the mayor` s speech.

The relationship with the other candidates: there` s no direct attack towards the opponent.

Identity elements:

Thematic slogan: "Vote the hardworking! A good mayor is to be kept!" The candidates' visibility at the town hall was unequal and this fact was best reflected by the expenses assigned to the electoral publicity, expenses that are monitored by the Pro Democracy Association. His way, Dumitru Sechelariu and PSD spent 25077 USD, out of which 8464 for the street publicity and 16613 for the written press, Mihai Banu and PD have spent 10352 USD out of which only 379 for the street publicity, the rest of 9973 being for the written press, and Ovidiu Budeanu from PNL made street posters with 7427 USD, the rest of 3632 USD being spent for articles in the written press (total of 11059).

In the two ballots, the costs of the publicity from the written press and of the street publicity for the candidates at the Town Hall in Bacau City that got in the second ballot, are presented in the following figure. In the written press things were clear: the “Desteparea” newspaper made publicity for PSD and for the candidate Dumitru Sechelariu, “The Monitor of Bacau” made publicity for PD and the candidate Mihai Banu, and “The Newspaper of Bacau” offered support for publicity in favor of PNL and the candidate Ovidiu Budeanu. Before the second ballot, “Desteparea” preserved its position, and “Monitorul” and “The Newspaper of Bacau” pleaded for the candidate Romeo Stavarache. The maximum admitted extreme limit: 165.079 USD



There were huge lacks of balance: from the “terror” imposed by Dimitru Sechelariu’s posters , that are present all over in shop windows, taxis or buses, from his daily publications in “Desteparea” and at Alfa T.V. before the second ballot, to the balanced exposal of the candidates from PNL and PD, to the almost imperceptible campaign of

the candidate for PUR or to the almost complete absence of the candidates considered as having no chance. The means of transport in commune have encouraged a duel of the posters with the two finalists: the posters of the candidate Stavarache stuck on private buses replied to those belonging to Sechelariu stuck on the buses belonging to the Company of Public Transport.

Conclusions

The local polls from June 2004 in Bacau ended with a big surprise. Dumitru Sechelariu was left by "his citizens from Bacau", at the town hall in the city came the common Romeo Stavarache. That was the emblematic figure of the PUR in Bacau, the locomotive – character that contributed decisively to the majority winning in the Local Council of the team supported by the party, although it wasn't formed of known persons at the local level.

Romeo Stavarache's victory in the competition for the town hall can be built in a recipe about success: a long and continuous "door to door" campaign that proved to be stronger than the campaign through media of the opponents, the focus on administrative projects, the abandoning of the negative campaign, modesty and balance in the few TV showing ups. He didn't get involved in the strong fight of the three quotations with big chances and he did very well because these managed to destroy their credibility by themselves. His letters of presentation sent to the electorate before the beginning of the electoral campaign managed to defeat the posters of the baron – mayor that were present in the whole town. The sums of money allocated for publicity or bribery don't always guarantee the success because publicity is nothing but a tool, it's abusive use destroying the aim that was intended initially.

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- www.apd.ro - Site-ul web al Asociației "Pro-Democrația"
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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Mc Nair Brian, *An Introduction to Political Communication*, Routledge, 1995, in Camelia Beciu: *Comunicare politică, comunicare.ro*, Bucharest, 2002, p. 101 – 102

ⁱⁱ Constantin Salavastru – *Discursul puterii*, the European Institute, Iasi, 1999, p. 291 – 309

ⁱⁱⁱ Mioara Nedelcu – Oferta politică, *Moldova Printing House, Iasi, 2003*, p. 75-84.