

The Role of Image in the Political Campaigns

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Abstract In this paper we explore the role of the image in contemporary political campaigns, in particular, to what extent that can determine the winners of the election. The image since the very beginnings of sociological and communication studies from 50ties of the twentieth century, is an unavoidable part of a successful campaign. Several case studies (some of them mentioned in this paper) show that the image-building tactics were changed over the years. Specifically in this paper we pointed out the difference in the way of building the image of the political campaigns of the 80's and 50's of last century, indicating the growing importance of the emotions that are causing the audience. Also in this paper we took a note of the types of image building (long-term and short-term) and we offer some clarification between image and style. At the end of the text there are some examples of image building of several world famous politicians.

Index Terms — Image, Politicians, Political Campaign, Election, Style.

1 INTRODUCTION

According to Lilleker (2006:95) image is the public representation of the political leader, the candidate in elections, the political party etc. The representation which viewers get about the political leaders, the candidates for performing public matters etc. is the intersection point of the messages which the political leader sends and the manner how he behaves on one hand and the expectations that the audience has from the political leader on the other hand (Trent, Friedenberg and Denton, 2011:73). As a construct, the image exists in the heads/the mind of the audience, but it is based on the ability of the individuals to decode the messages and to interpret the behavior of political leaders, the candidates in elections and the political parties. Besides the behavior they have and the messages that political leaders, candidates and parties send while building their image, what has an important position is the media coverage of the activities of political leaders and parties, as well as the communication skills and the style of communication of the party leaders and the political parties.

The image is primarily based on the visual representation we have about a given politician or a political party. In this sense, the image is based on the idea that the photography, and later on, the camera, offers us an objective image about a given politician, about how he looks like and reacts verbally or nonverbally to given situations. In this regard, a photograph on a cover page which can be seen quickly and easily most commonly means much more than the speeches of the politicians and the articles written about them or by them.

2. IMAGE IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AS A SPHERE OF RESEARCH INTERESTS:

All information without coverage in appropriate graphical illustration significantly loses part of its value. One of the greatest advantages of the image is that it enables shortening of the time for reception of the message. Especially today when people to a certain extent show saturation from the politics, shortening of the time when the citizens will receive the message is extremely important. In electronic media, viewers remember the impression which politicians leave with their performance longer than the exact words they use during their performances (Grabe and Bucy, 2009: 53). Probably for this reason, according to Manin (1997), politicians in the contemporary politics are increasingly starting to behave like media personalities. Hence, he notices that the representative democracy transforms into democracy where the audience has the last and the most important word. Maybe the first politician, who was aware of the influence that images have in the creation of the representation of the politicians and who seriously took care of his image, was Roosevelt, who was simultaneously the first one who used the possibilities provided by the radio as a medium for communication with the voters. An important element of image that was built by Roosevelt, was that he can go, although he was disabled. Out of 50.000 photographs in his summer villa in New York, in two he was photographed sitting in a wheelchair.

The beginnings of the scientific research of the image (in political campaigns) as a concept started in the 1950s. Most important elements according to which the image is built include: symbols, colors, interior, exterior, clothes, logos, commercials etc. As Orzekauskas Petras and Smaiziane Ingrida (2007) note, as time goes by the concept of the image

deepens, becoming more complex and it no longer relies on impression or construct created by the graphic designers. The contemporary concept of the image is multidisciplinary and includes maintenance of the already created image. Hence, a characteristic of the scientific disputes for the image in the 1950s was:

- the connection of the image to a specific product, politician, political party
- neglecting of the emotional factors which impact on the creation of the image
- neglecting of the objective-oriented and systematic creation of image

As Orzekauskas Petras and Smaiziane Ingrida (2007: 91) note, already in the 1980s these trends change, whereby:

- more attention is paid to communications in image building
- the influence of emotional factors in image building is pointed out
- the importance of the systematic building of relations is pointed out, with more factors that contribute for image building

The importance of the image of a particular person today is also shown by the fact that certain politicians engage even special stylists who arrange not only clothes and hairstyle for the public performance, but they also work on the stylish and appropriately arranged background of the interview in home atmosphere (furniture, images etc.), the car that is used during the campaign, even the appropriate music that one listens in order to achieve an effect between the specific cohort of voters.

3 THE IMAGE AND THE VOTING BEHAVIOR:

As Rein, Kotler and Stoller (1987) indicate, the politics is a profession where image building and transformation dominate. The political communication in its entirety, and especially during campaign could be determined as an attempt to create an image which would be most acceptable for most of the voters. Voters can often vote for the politicians and the political entities with the most acceptable image, and not for the political programs which often they cannot read. Image is closely related to the reputation that politicians have. Politicians with well-built image such as Barak Obama, Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela, Tony Blair, have high reputation, which importantly facilitates their work during electoral campaigns (Orzekauskas and Smaiziane, 2007: 90).

One could say that image has always been important for the electoral results of the political leaders, candidates and the political

parties. Still, it seems that in contemporary social-political circumstances and the reduction of the ideological differences between political parties and their leaders, their image through which their credibility is reflected is an increasingly important factor in making a difference between the candidates and the political parties and the decision making in terms of the candidate to vote for in specific elections. Namely, if political parties concentrate on the average, and not the typical voters, do not show serious ideological differences and differences in the electoral programs, there are more important factors on the basis of which voters make a decision who to vote for, which becomes the image of the political leader and the party and trust or the distrust he reflects. According to Lilleker (2006:96), 30-40% of the voters make their decision to vote for a certain candidate on the basis of their image. The image is particularly important factor when making a decision to vote by the undecided voters. Hence, a research by MORI for the parliamentary elections in Great Britain from 1987 indicated that 44% of the undecided voters make their decision on the basis of the image of party policies, 35% of the undecided voters make their decision on the basis of the image of the political leadership, while 21% of the undecided voters make their decision on the basis of the corporate image of political parties (McNair, 2011:32).

4 THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE IMAGE:

Lilleker (2006:95) finds two sources of the increased importance of image in politics and the political electoral campaigns: one is the lack of interest by media about politics and politicians in general, and the second one is the interest that media show for the famous (celebrity) persons. As a result of this, a need exists not to limit the public presence of politicians only in presence of programs relevant for politics, but rather in amusing, sports, music programs, which makes the politicians celebrities and trivializes the politics. Lilleker (2006:96) speaks about emotions in a politics, indicating the examples of the former president of the Labour party, Tony Blair and his new-born son Leo Blair), which also happened with his successor at the position of president of the Labour party, and Gordon Brown and the loss of his first child and the birth of his son John Brown. The former president of USA, on the other hand, George W. Bush, has the image of a man from the people, who sends simple, short and understandable messages. The macho man, who in 2003 took pic-

tures with a side cap which pointed out his experience in aviation, so that in 2004 he alluded to his farmer (cowboy) origin from Texas (*Silverblatt, Bruns and Jensen, 2006: 13-17*).

What is indicative for the importance of the image is the research by Rosemberg and McCafferty which showed a series of pictures of imagined electoral candidates to a group of students in the American universities. With all the weaknesses that the research has in terms of absence of real political context, the results showed that certain characteristics of the imagined candidates (for example: presence or absence of smile) have influence on the perception of the candidates and the qualities that are assigned to them such as competition, integrity, attraction, which are important factors when making a decision for who to vote (McNair, 2011:32). Having this in mind, the organizers of the electoral campaigns are engaged in image building of the candidates, inter alia, also with commercials focused on the personality of the candidates. Hence, Richard Joslyn, observing the political commercials on the American television between 1960 and 1984, concluded that only 15% are concentrated of specific politics, while 57% are concentrated on the personality and the qualities of the candidates (McNair, 2011:92). Many factors are in the game during image building, starting from the color, through the logo, the clothes, the hairstyle, the style of speaking etc. Image building is directed towards causing positive emotions in the audience. Testing the emotions from different types of image can be done by testing the reactions of focus groups. Same as the importance of the messages that political parties send, what is also important is the clothes that candidates wear, and which should be appropriate to the given context, the hairstyle of the candidate, the colors used in the campaign, the logos etc. Ultimately, all these elements, same as the messages, are based on feelings they cause between voters.

5 TYPES OF IMAGE:

As Orzekauskas and Smaiziane (2007: 90) reveal, two types of image could be distinguished: *long-term and short-term*. The long-term image is sustainable image which is built continuously after longer time period by using the communication tools of the permanent campaign, while short-term image is built for the needs of a specific electoral campaign. Although they differ, these two, long-term and short-term image should not be contradictive. Namely, short-term image should rely on what is already built as a long-term image for a certain politician or political entity and it should reveal only a certain aspect of the long-term image of the politician or the political entity.

6 IMAGE BUILDING:

The image of the serious political entities and leaders is not an accidental mixture of circumstances, something given, something that appears by itself, on the contrary it is well-planned, specialists on communications take care of it, they identify the key characteristics of the image of the political entity or candidate, they manage its development and modify it when necessary. Rein, Kotler and Stoller (1987) indicate that in order to build the image of a politician or a political entity, primarily it should be recognizable to the citizens, which is the first and maybe the most important step in image building. Hence, the primary task in image creation is visibility and recognizable of the politician, that is, the political entity in public. The next thing is trust which citizens should have in the politician i.e. the political entity. Orzekauskas and Smaiziane (2007: 94) indicate seven steps for identification of the current image and building of the desired image. These are the following steps:

- Accurate analysis of the existing image with relevant indicators
- Analysis of the factors that participate in the construction of the existing identity
- Determination of the desired identity
- Identification of the gap between the existing and the desired image
- Preparation of a plan for reducing the gap between the existing and the desired image
- Plan implementation
- Assessment of the influence of the conducting of the plan on the image

Orzekauskas and Smaiziane (2007) indicate that according to Gee (2000) there are four levels of image building:

- *fundamental image*, the first level of image building which includes the individual and the organizational principles, philosophies, objectives and standards of acting
- *internal image*, includes planning and conducting of organization politics and activities directed towards the members of the political party in order to strengthen their loyalty to the party, as well as the party solidarity
- *external image*, includes the activities through which the politician and the political entity are presented in public, the building of appropriate relations with the media and the public as an entirety, the behavior of the politician or the political entity in public

- *unattainable image*, includes the influence of the behavior on the factors that are related to the politician or the political entity, their cultural matrix, education, motivation etc.

The people who work on creating the image are aware that it consists of at least two elements, one of them is more controllable, which includes the subjects for which the image is being built, such as a certain politician or the members of a given political entity and the other is less controllable such as the media, the voters and the audience they address to. There are many attempts to classify the audience according to its influence in the image creation (Orzekauskas and Smaiziane, 2007: 95). Thus, one can speak of primary, secondary and marginal audience. The primary audience has the biggest influence in image creation of the political entity, while the marginal one has the least influence. Depending on the primary dimension, the audience can be classified into traditional and future. The traditional audience is the one which for a long time period follows certain political entity or politics as a whole, while future audience is the one that the political entities would like to attract in future, which could include the people who didn't show interest for monitoring politics and didn't vote in the previous period, or people who were not able to do that before because of the age. Depending on the relation to the political entity, we could divide it into supporters, opponents and undecided. The ones who create the image of the political entities know well enough that they should prepare different activities for image building for each of these audiences.

Kapferer (1992) indicates few characteristics that are of key importance for image building such as: physical characteristics, cultural characteristics, the organizational/personal identity of the party entity/the politician, the reflection of the previously indicated elements in the society and internalization of the same. What is of major, maybe even dominant importance for successful image building are the character traits of the candidate or the political leader. Usually the image should emphasize the good and desirable side of the candidate. In this regard, it would be wrong strategy to build an image of some politician, which deviates from his character traits, which would be similar to wearing someone else's clothes. The image that politicians create in public denotes certain attitude. In this sense, the politician can build an image of rigid and uncompromising person for certain issues, or tender and prepared to make a political agreement, warm and full of understanding for given problems or cool-blooded, rational and pragmatic man. There are two levels of image building: personal style of communication with the communication skills on one hand and media coverage of the activities of political parties on the other hand. The image of political parties is a result of the strains of professionals obliged for public relations for image creation at a level of interpersonal communication or at a level of massive commu-

nication and the perception of citizens of the given political leader. Namely, in a specific social context, the citizens prefer politicians with specific characteristics i.e. with a specific image. So strategic studies are made which among other things, show what should be the image of the candidates at given elections. So for example the image of the preferred ideal candidate in 2004 when the topic "war against terrorism" dominated, importantly differs from the one in 2008 when the topic "economic crisis" dominated.

7 IMAGE CHARACTERISTICS:

Important trait of the image of every politician is the credibility that is built on the basis of the competence for the work that they candidate for and the honesty to the voters. The competence is related by knowing the work for which certain politician is candidate, while the honesty is recognized in the exposure of complete and precise information. These traits help in the increase of the level of trust of the citizens in the candidates, which on the other hand helps the politicians and the candidates for execution of the public authority, to convince the voters of the advantage of their own political offer. The credibility gives additional value to information presented by political entities. What is often more important is who speaks (what is his credibility), what does he speak from and how he does that. If they have experience and success in the work they candidate for or work related to it, in building their image, politicians put these experiences in the foreground and in this manner they suggest the voters that in the elections they have secure, already checked option. It is one of the great advantages of the candidates who enter in campaign for second mandate. So George Bush senior in the campaign in 1988 is his marketing campaign wanted to take advantage of his experience as vice president and former director of CIA and member of the Congress, in order to show the voters that they have secure choice with him. In the attempt to generate credibility of the candidates, usually what is pointed out is the experience of the candidates in all fields covered by the function that they are candidated for. One of the competences of the Presidents of the countries is the external politics, so the meeting of the candidates with the presidents and the prime ministers of other countries are also an important part of the image that is created with the advertising campaigns of the candidates.

When it comes to feelings that should be caused by the candidate image, on one hand it should cause closeness, relatedness to his voters who should feel this person as a popular man, someone they would like to drink coffee or beer with, and on the other hand it should cause respect for the audience. The successful political image in the heads of the audience should cause feeling that the candidate is one of the audience, one

of us, he is our neighbor, our friend etc. and at the same time it should cause a feeling that still he is the most competent, the best one of use, the man who has the most trust in the public.

8. DISTINCTION BETWEEN IMAGE AND STYLE:

Often the style in the electoral campaign was observed as proper choice and use of words and sentences in the speeches of politicians, the height of the tone of voice, the diction, the voice figures used by the politicians, the syntax, even the non-verbal communication. When it comes to non-verbal communication, what is an important integral part of style includes: the view, the body posture, the clothes, the presence or absence from certain events, the symbols, the emblems that are used during the electoral campaign. Since the emphasis was not on the content, but rather on its presentation, the disputes about the style of political campaigns were often followed by controversy (Trent, Friedenber and Denton, 2011:70). In general, the style could be defined as a manner how people, in our case politicians, candidates, present themselves in the public. Again, good style could be determined as nice, precise, convincing use of all means of expression for transferring the message in the campaign¹. So according to this, the style of the electoral campaign is a collection of the speeches of the candidates for performing public matters, the press conferences, the performances of the candidate or his representatives in the media, the commercials being used, the presence at public events during the campaign, saluting supporters etc.

Style is not related to the candidate only, but also to the electoral campaign. In this regard, the style of the electoral campaign is conditioned by the legal regulations in which the campaign can move on one hand and the communication strategy applied by a certain political entity on the other hand (Trent, Friedenber and Denton, 2011:83).

9. THE IMAGE OF SOME OF THE RELEVANT POLITICAL LEADERS:

Good illustration for successful image building could be Ronald Regan who was well accepted by the citizens, because they considered he was close to them, that he articulates his visions for the American society best. His experience as an actor played an important role in the building of his image. In a similar manner Jimmy Carter was accepted as a small businessman, independent from the establishment in Washington, unlike Richard Nixon, who was involved in corruption scandals. Bush senior built an image of a good boy who is ready to sacrifice for the defense of

¹As part of the entire style of the politician, one can indicate the speech potentials and his management with the same. In this regard what is of special importance is the voice color, the intonation, the modulation, the pace of speech, the complexity or the simplification of the language being used in the campaign etc.

the key American values such as liberty. Clinton on the other hand had an image of a young, energetic politician, especially when compared to his electoral opponent, George Bush senior. It was similar condition with George Bush junior and Al Gore. Probably many people consider that Al Gore is more competent, even intellectually superior, but during the debates he was relatively boring, uninteresting for the American voters who accepted Bush as a popular man. Also George Bush junior was building an image of outsider in Washington, which gave him a good basis to criticize the leadership by Bill Clinton and Al Gore and this also represented the basis of his pre-electoral campaign. The best example for the importance of the image for the success of someone's political career is Michael Foot, the leader of the Labourists from 1980 to 1983, who was a top intellectual and an excellent organizer, but in the period of television he was not accepted by most of the public. If we return back to the presidential elections in 2008 we shall see that Barack Obama built an image of a young, inspirational politician who does not belong to Washington's lobbies. In the time of the economic crises, the citizens of USA located great part of the responsibility in the political establishment from Washington and the economic establishment from Wall Street. For this reason Obama was building an image of a new young inspirational leader independent from these centers and by playing exactly on this map, he was promising changes and hope for improving the conditions.

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