

MASS-MEDIA AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION CREDIBILITY

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Abstract: *The problem of new sources of credibility and implicitly the campaign's problem become very important for political parties and for their candidates who want to know how to assign their resources during the campaign. This would help the campaign staff to target the messages and the mass media more efficiently. Such knowledge also provides information about the orientation of adequate messages to certain groups of electors through mass media. Campaign organization needs this knowledge, in this era of market segmentation and of targeted and extended promotion, in order to increase their chances and to use their resources better.*

Key words: *electoral field, mediated public sphere, campaigns.*

1. Introduction

In our country the electoral studies have had a shorter history than democracy itself. This produces a permanent suspicion even if politicians have learnt more or less to deal with it, to accept it and to use it in the process of political communication. What I want to reveal in this article is their real potential regarding the analysis of the voting behavior. The scientific character gives visible profits and leads to the calibration and to the efficiency of the election campaign.

2. Problem Formulation

The election campaign establishes a specific competition regime that is, I think, permanent. But we can't talk about what happens during elections without discussing the period between elections, too.

Political actors refer to one another from competing positions in a temporized and organized space that is legally regulated

concerning its goals, rhythm and legitimacy.

When evaluating the election campaign we shouldn't refer only to the immediate results, we also have to define the electoral situation as a result of compositional effects which depends on the actor's objectives because even if the goal is to win, not all the participants want this. Therefore the election campaign has to be analyzed in communicational terms as the interaction of the strategically oriented interpretations regarding the political situation.

In Romania there are three different elections: local, general and presidential elections. The election campaigns are divided in two types: individual election campaigns that are organized for a person who has to be elected – president, senator, deputy or major and collective elections organized for a political structure. Concerning its process, the election campaign represents the formal context in which the electoral communication

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happens and helps the political actor to achieve his goal.

Because of the vulgarization that the electoral marketing has developed we've got the point where people are more interested in the way the election campaign goes than in the ideas transmitted by these campaigns. The mass-media comments more on the candidate's tactics than on his program regarding jobs, education and the environment [5].

Because an election campaign needs a logistic support and a lot of money, an independent candidate can't succeed and start to disappear. The campaign needs a plan that consist in a calendar dividing the actions into a number of stages that have a priority public, themes, arguments that have to be enlarged (especially mediatic ones).

The interaction between political actors and electors has well determinate procedures within the electoral campaign and defines the electoral background. This is not self-governing, but it can be introduced in a field of complex relations called "electoral field".

3. The mediated public sphere

The differences between public and private sphere have a long history in sociology and political science. The development of the communicational methods especially the television, have decisively transformed the public sphere. Any discussion about the appearance or development of the public sphere in capitalist societies (the public sphere is a product of the capitalist society) must start from Jurgen Habermas's work. It is often said that in the contemporary societies communication is generally mediated by the mass media that cover Habermas's "public's sphere".

Habermas (1998) described the public sphere as: the sphere of particular persons who are reunited in public (even if it's regulated by the authorities, its orientation is against the power, in order to argue the general rules of exchanges).

The public territory becomes the space of political participation, deliberation, decisions and of power control [D. Reynie apud 1, p.146]. Mass media which at the beginning were that essential support of the liberal politic debate, due to the television hegemonic it transformed becoming that instrument of its eradications.

Habermas affirms that people as actors on the public's stage were exiled in the domestic, uniform and isolated space. Reducing the private sphere to more intimate spaces of the married life, depriving it from its own role and reducing its authority gave only an illusion of a perfect personnel and private sphere.

This was the thing that happened when the private persons gave up their proprietary roles preferring their pure personal role of free time users (this led to losing a part of the social control). These people have entered directly under the power of semipublic of authorities without having the security of the protected and official domestic space [3, p. 168].

The public-private dichotomous can be approached from two different aspects:

- The state versus the private economic activity and personal relationships.
- Visibility versus hiding.

Together with the appearance of the mass-communications, of polls and publicity, the communication has participated in transforming the practices of the political field. Their development has yet led to the appearance of the new mediate public forms, which were different from the traditional and public character of the co-presence.

Even if direct meetings (as the protest or the public meetings which support a candidate) remain important we have to remember that they are also explored in the public space which is enlarged by the media.

The idea of Habermas according to which the mass media marketing and publicity led to the re-feudalization of the public sphere is denied by the modern

communication features in which the visibility, the large number of communication channels that are in direct competition, enlarge both of the range of those who sent the message and the resistance possibilities of the audience.

4. The elements of the electoral field

The electoral field is defined from the dynamic point of view of the election campaign. In this process the direction between the mechanism of the election campaign and the environment becomes visible. As well as the vote, that access to the mediated public space implies certain participation “rules” by which a specific social space is born. These social space is composed by the “mediator class” (political actors, journalists, public personalities) the public opinion and the public (as collective actors).

The field in which the action takes place (the electoral field) is the “new public space”. Comparing this conception with Habermas’s public space we realize that it has additional elements like the television, the publicity and the traditional aggregation between the public opinion, the political actors and the media, also implicit elements like the polls and the Americanization.

Starting with year 1996 the Americanization of the Romanian election campaigns was astonishing [2, p. 150].

But this time the Americanization of the politics already took place in the Occidental Europe [4] so the newly created space was inevitably moving towards East. Everything started to become similar with the American model: employing American political consultants, using polls for the calibrations of the election campaign, broadcasting the convenient results through the mass media. The electorate spots true television and the use of “negative advertising” campaigns.

The electoral field is determined by the interaction that takes place in the public space during election campaigns

(temporary or permanent ones) through the specific methods of public communication. Making an analogy with the informatics, the public opinion is similar to the “soft” (the program that changes and works differently depending on the “hard” configuration) that implies the existence of different public opinion producing mechanism.

If the public opinion is the “electoral soft” then can be programmed in accordance with the incomes and the system configuration, the political communication and its elements the mass media, the publicity, the polls, the television, and the Americanization shows are the “electoral hard”. Different configuration gives different mechanism on which the public opinion is structured.

For example when referring to them, mass media we can analyse the different effects of communication from the point of view of different paradigms: the magical bullet, the two step communication, the silence spiral or agenda-setting. Each one of these perspectives has sense on the public opinion effects, and also in our solid and resulted functional model.

The public is a social structure that is a direct result of mediated practices and an indirect result of the market studies. From this point of view mediating the public is a discursive structure “a character” that has a certain social “biography”, certain media preferences.

In the market studies, the public is a social group that has a certain sociological profile and a collective character that interprets the media products. So, communication field has a peculiarity: it is more liable by the exterior forces than by any other culture producing fields because it depends directly on the request that is submitted to direct sanctions of the market, of the vote and of the field that is integrated in the electoral field.

5. Problem Solution

The research of the political action and

of the political opinion can be done from several directions:

- The measurement of behavioural representations, of direct effects of the action and political actor's messages that are in the electorate.

- The measurement of the efficiency with which the political information is transmitted.

- The analysis of the electoral speech by identifying its strategies.

- The interactive approach that implies the vote structure as a result of the interaction between the candidate and electors and combines the direction that we've previously presented.

When we approach the problem of mass media credibility (the fundamental element for any potential source of influence) it is necessary for us to establish in the end if we are talking about major or minor effects, if there is a different fact determined effect or just a marginal influence. Anyway, we have to take into consideration the "minimum effect" principle. Mass media influences the vote behaviour and the elector's perception on the candidate in several ways (through providing the information about available alternatives, the programming of the discussion agenda, and through the changing of the citizen's mentality who are usually less interested in politics).

We can synthesize several effects which were obtained from empirical researchers and which were previously presented without being structured.

- The campaign messages have the greatest effect on undecided electors, but the directors of this influence is hard to estimate, so the final effect is contradictory (effects cancel each other) is generally a marginal one.

- Regarding the effects of TV news, it seems that in the elector's mind does not appear only marginal modification about the election candidate's point of view in the key problems.

- The ambiguous content from electoral messages sometimes contributes at the

election made by electors for example: in choosing a candidate who favours in fact political values which are opposite to theirs.

- Political publicity in television has effect in changing the feelings for a candidate (their affective orientation) but it is less effective in changing what they believe about the candidate (the cognitive aspect of the candidate image).

- The political publicity which is perceived as informative, interesting, honest, spectacular, the professional product can have measurable effects, on the elector's perception, but the commercial light spots of inferior quality are likely to produce only marginal influences.

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