

**A.I.CUZA UNIVERSITY IASI**  
**FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL-POLITICAL SCIENCES**

**COMMUNICATION AND ACTION DURING ELECTORAL  
CAMPAIGN.**

**LOCAL ELECTIONS IN IASI, JUNE 2012**

**- Thesis-**

**Scientific Coordinator,**  
**Prof. univ. dr. George POEDE**

**PhD,**  
**Nicolae LUPAȘCU**

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## Abstract

The society we live in and develop as well defined entities, marked by the high development rate of technology requires that human beings and organizations should be quickly adjusted to the prerequisites of a diverse and pretentious market. We are everyday almost squashed under the assault of a huge amount of diversified and quite contradictory information. It is difficult enough under the given conditions to assemble all the amount of information in a realistic picture, one that should aid us to correctly evaluate the situation that needs to be analyzed.

The analysis of the complex communicational relation between politics and citizens, set in the local election campaign of a European and democratic country, will always be a more than exciting research theme. The aim of this thesis is the study of the communication and the action in the local election campaign from Iasi, 2012. This will be brought to completion through a case study focused on the campaign polls and on the way these have influenced the electorate's behavior. Accordingly, the present paper consists of six chapters, out of which the first five are theoretical in nature, while the last is dedicated to the case study itself.

The first part, the one that has a theoretical leaning, will devote itself to the analysis of the public opinion and mass communication. A satisfactory treatment of the first theme required answers concerning the definition of the correspondent concept, how and when it appeared, how it evolved, who studied it, how it is used and for what purpose, the scope of its influence, the different perspectives on the concept and so on. The study of the second theme will bring me in the situation to disperse the confusion that originates in the connection to the concept of mass-media communication, that is to say to communication through printed press, television, radio, publicity, internet and so on. A specialized analysis that takes the point of view of communication will show us the differences between the two concepts. The study will not be complete if the characteristics, the models and the effects pertaining to mass communication will not be brought to the fore.

In the second chapter I tried to determine *the most important steps in an election campaign*, out of which I decided to discuss to following three: the selection of the candidate, the option for the appropriate strategy and the setting up of the campaign plan. My endeavor at this

point was marked by the introduction of a certain novelty that throws light on the campaign strategy from an American perspective, one that has as its center the "golden rules" established by one of the founders of the political consultancy industry, namely Joseph Napolitan. I have completed the American perspective on the election campaign through the aid of a pragmatic point of view on the articulation of a campaign plan, one that belongs to Ronald Faucheux, who stated that "*the plan of a campaign is like a map to victory*". Lastly, following the principle according to which "*the most important element in an election campaign is a well-chosen candidate*", I have tried to pin down a new conception on the selection of a candidate, which I decided to call *the selection of the appropriate candidate by overlapping images*: the real image of the candidate (seen from the perspective of the electorate, which is determined by market study), the desired image (in the electorate's eyes - market study) and the image that the candidate has on him/herself (in its own eyes - the way the candidate perceives her/himself).

The third chapter is devoted to the development of high-tech technologies and their influence on the traditional mass-media. I think it is of vital importance for every organization, especially for a political one, to develop a friendly relationship with the mass-media elite, because it is already well known that this is the easiest way to get to the targeted public. Even though the way that needs to be taken in order to achieve the mentioned courtesy will not be discussed within the pages of the present study, the motives that fuel the search for a good relationship with the press and its effects, due to their close relatedness to the theme's paper, will nonetheless find a place here.

On the other hand, the state-of-the-art technology (new media) puts in the shade the traditional mass-media, a situation that has at this moment an undecided outcome. No one knows how far it will go, but the technical and scientific evolution enhances to the highest degree the possibilities open to communication. Will the sciences of communication keep up the pace? Of course that everybody has access to the new channels. But this is not enough, if we bear in mind that there are big differences between conducting activities in a blog oriented medium, which has a strong competitive nature, and within the pages of a newspaper or on television and radio. These media are somewhat prohibitive, as long as they continue to stand out by denying to the public access to the backstage, to the microphone, on the printed page or in front of the camera.

The voices that are constantly to be heard in the traditional media belong to the press people, to the professional journalists, to the specialists from all kinds of domains, which to a

certain point in time exercised a monopoly on the propagation of information and articulation of commentary. As soon as they started to compete with the free market of internet users, the press professionals, the famous journalists lost the security, the space and reputation belonging to the channel that employed them. They are on their own, in a vast medium populated by human beings that have free speech and opinions, which make comments and keep themselves constantly up to date. The majority of those that are tied to the blogosphere are inhibition-free, unimpeded by a deontological code and which are, when it comes to media communication- why not acknowledge it-, the product of an educational process conducted by our free press in the last twenty years. Under these circumstances it is a lot harder for voices to be heard, pertinent commentaries to stand out and for journalists to exercise their profession in accordance with the old codes and rulebooks.

I don't intend to sketch an apocalyptical picture, but nothing resembles anything in the virtual space, everything is constantly moving, which is not *per se* a bad thing. Even though the comfort of habit is struck down, there are always challenges for the adrenaline seekers.

The next theoretical chapter presented in this study has at its center *the effects and the influence of mass media*. The institutions and actors interested by these two themes are: the state, the civil society, the media institutions themselves and, in a higher degree, the political class, with its parties and politicians occupying certain public offices. These two are the beneficiaries of the named effects, especially when it comes to election campaigns.

Further, I have treated the problems that come together with the magnitude of the effects belonging to mass media, using a comparative analysis between the different existent variants. In the end I discovered as appropriate the one that takes into account the temporal markers: the model that exhibits strong and immediate effects, the one that has limited effects and the one with complex and long term effects, the last variant being also the one that I analyzed in an extended manner, due to the fact that it was relevant to my case study.

The "media propaganda" or "magic bullet" model states that a single media message is sufficient to change behaviors, a statement that is to be considered correct if we take into account that the media means of communication act as "magic bullets" or "hypodermic syringes" that inject ideas, attitudes and behaviors into the brains of isolated human beings. This theory did nothing else than to increase those fears concerning the power of propaganda, one that was

proven during War World I and, more predominately, in the years after its completion, when the extreme parties took over the power; the left in Russia and the right in Germany and Italy.

There were nonetheless two other models that enjoyed a greater attention from my part, since they proved to be helpful in the explanation of the results belonging to the polls that surveyed the public opinion in the period leading to the campaign and then in the election campaign itself from June 2012. The exit-polls and the results of those elections were also not left out.

First it was the "*bandwagon*" or regrouping around the winner. I immediately realized a link, which demanded made, between the concept and the name frequently used in the chapter on propaganda, a basic tactic that supposed the "propagandist attempts to convince us that all members of a group he is part of accept its program and we, in turn, have to follow the crowd and jump in the wagon" (hence the second name, "wagon of musicians").

But regarding the "bandwagon" effect of media communication perspective, the explanation consists in the tendency of voters to join the majority's opinion, as shown in the surveys presented on various media channels. Some conclusions about this effects were important for my study: Albert Mehrabian's experiments conclude that six percent of behavior variance during voting period may be due to the "bandwagon" effect and Professor Septimiu Chelcea's findings, who established that the "bandwagon" effect does not appear particularly to those undecided, but especially with those who care about the election results and the way they are perceived by others; and that the "bandwagon" effect is about government activity and voting intentions of political parties or alliances, but not always related to politicians.

We left the "spiral of silence" model for the end, because it represents for my paper the most important contribution in terms of how polls have influenced the behavior of voters in the campaign for local elections from June 2012.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann defined the "*spiral of silence*" as: "*Fear of isolation* seems to be the force that engages *the spiral of silence*. Following others may seem the easiest choice, but, if you fail because you do not share in any way unanimous convictions, you remain however with a second option, to remain silent". The fear of isolation is also the cause for people to seek, when it comes to essential public issues (such as support for candidates or political parties during election campaigns) indications of dominant opinions or opinions that are growing or declining.

So, the *"spiral of silence"* gave me some of the answers to explain the results of the above mentioned campaign. First, I should mention the results of three polling firms (GEOPOL, CCSB and IRES), who conducted exit-polls on election day and they announced as winner in Iasi the Mayor in Office Gheorghe Nichita with nearly seven percent over his next counter candidate, just as they incorrectly predicted in other cities. The conclusion made by the Director of CCSB, Mirel Palada confirms my assumption: *"I made all the same mistakes as the other institutes due to a simple reason: social conformity, based on the spiral of silence phenomenon"*.

The *"spiral of silence"* was present in the case of the final results of the vote in June 10th, manifested especially in the case of PPDD (it obtained a better result for Iasi municipality than estimated), but also in the case of PDL (which won in the county elections with almost 10% more than IRES survey reported in May).

The last chapter emphasizes some theoretical concepts as: propaganda, persuasion and manipulation. We underlined that propaganda and manipulation were related for decades with totalitarian systems, regardless of the name borne by them: socialism, communism, if we consider the left spectrum or fascism and National Socialism, on the right.

Modern man has forgotten that living in a society where mass communication probably reaches its highest peak, and with it mass media, have flourished and diversified more than ever. Maybe we forgot that any society, no matter how democratic it may be, cannot eliminate these two practices, I am referring to propaganda and manipulation, because they are too deeply rooted in it. And the second reason is perhaps even more powerful: the two specters that haunt modern communication are part of the arsenal of tactics used in the political struggle for accession or maintaining power.

In the chapter on propaganda and manipulation I tried to show that the only way to be able to guard against the effects they can produce on us is to be able to identify them, to know their strengths and especially their weaknesses, their channels of distribution, what tactics and strategies can be used in their desire to influence our thinking and behavior.

At the end of the chapter devoted to propaganda and manipulation I realized a benchmarking model which includes, alongside propaganda and manipulation, other concepts such as persuasion, public relations or advertising. The purpose of this analysis was to highlight the similarities and differences between these five concepts, that address the most types of known communication (political, institutional, public, social), but especially to emphasize the

defining elements of both mentioned concepts: existence of censorship, coercive aspect of propaganda, and the public's unwittingly exposure to the influence from the source, in case of manipulation.

In the end, I will make some considerations on the case study we conducted.

As I said, the research is designed as a case study of local elections in Iasi, June 2012. An exhaustive investigation of this campaign involved considerable effort that went far beyond the available resources, especially time, given the election date and the deadline of the paper presentation, therefore I had to restrict the investigation in order to be consistent with my possibilities, but at the same time to achieve all the proposed objectives, so that the conclusions of the research to have a high degree of generality required for a scientific approach.

Considering these aspects, I limited my analysis to the election of Mayor and Chairman of Iasi County Council, with a particular emphasis on the campaign held in city of Iasi. On the other hand, most of the information came from the Social Liberal Union, especially from the National Liberal Party, because I had a permissive access to the resources of the campaign staff. Finally, to analyze a campaign from a communicational perspective called for the orientation towards a particular type of communication channel, which are numerous and complex: news, meetings, debates, newspaper articles, events and so on. Each of these may receive an independent inquiry. In my analysis I opted for the survey as a tool for understanding the electorate and the candidates, as well as the ways persuasion and manipulation influences public opinion. Surveys were analyzed from several perspectives: research reports, comparison between surveys to determine trends over time, how the quantitative data obtained from questionnaires was reflected in the press.

The difficulties we encountered in this study were related to the atypical campaign from this year, with a choice from a single ballot. Basically, this new legislative approach killed the campaign debate. One of the candidates, the incumbent George Nichita, the Mayor in Office, did no more than to preserve the electorate, through actions such as: participation in cutting ribbons at Palas, at the National Theatre, the opening of the Pensioners Club from Alexandru cel Bun, the underground passage from Hala Centrala etc. Why was Gheorghe Nichita afraid of? He avoided in any way he could to participate in any election debate, no matter where, on what channel or who organized it. It seems that his tactic was successful, especially in a period when

Iasi is a huge construction site and the citizens are unhappy with the strategy for restoring the infrastructure.

Another reason connected with Nichita's silence was that the pre-election polls indicated there is no important rival, the votes will be divided, but he will have the chance to obtain the highest number of votes.

The campaign for County Council was pretty boring; actually there was no relevant rival for Cristian Adomnitei. For this reason he had a classical campaign, preserving the capital of positive image with plenty of field work, meetings and discussions with voters, media appearances, but no debates.

Taking into account the above mentioned, we concluded the following:

From the two parties that compose USL, the best runners in the polls were nominated as candidates. Although it may seem an objective criterion, one of the polls, conducted by PNL in February 2012, took into account only valid answers, which distorted the percentage of candidates (they appeared with a higher percentage than they really had).

Voters did not really matter in this atypical race. From the beginning to the end of the campaign, the USL candidates were at the forefront of public opinion polls. The candidates sought only to preserve their advantage generated by the anti-PDL feeling. This time, "knowing voters and their needs" meant only to ensure that rates are generous enough to ensure victory.

The non-combat attitude based on the general view settled among candidates well before the campaign started, that in spite of everything, Nichita, Adomnitei (and USL) will win elections, did not stimulate the transformation of the potential market or special interest to bring the undecided voters to vote in favor of their candidates, of those convinced not go to vote or of those determined to vote for another candidate. The USL candidates did not need to do this and all other parties had no power to do so.

Despite the demotivational convictions presented above, there were attempts to stop this trend of events of grouping around the highest ranked candidate. There were attempts to manipulate readers (implicitly their voting options) through newspaper articles, by inoculating the idea that the fight between Gheorghe Nichita and Nicușor Paduraru (PDL) would be less unequal than it really was. There were online surveys that, under the pretext of an "ad hoc representativeness", published data accrediting the idea of a stronger PDL than in reality.

The data confirmed the hypothesis of the rallying voters around the candidate best placed in polls (bandwagon). Thus, Nichita's share increased continuously, although he did nothing in the campaign but to cut ribbons, as the observers pointed out (counter candidates, press and voters). He won just by the simple fact that he was perceived as indisputable winner of elections. In turn, opponents have abandoned the fight, realizing that they did not get the chance to surpass the presumed winner.

The research indicated that the party with a bad image, that people are reluctant to declare they voted, is Dan Diaconescu People's Party. Election results showed that many of those who voted said earlier that PPDD vote for winners: USL and its representatives. Thus, confirming the "spiral of silence".

The overall conclusion of the study is that polls are a valid and indispensable tool for the knowledge of the socio-political reality in which the electoral campaign takes place. But like any other tool, its usability outcome depends on the purposes for which it is used: data of this research can be used for understanding but also for manipulation, for the benefit of or against the electorate.