
Nicolae LUPASCU

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Nicolae LUPAȘCU

Abstract:

This study aims to present the electoral campaigns in Romania after December 1989. Electoral campaigns are designed, at least in theory, to inform voters about candidates and to help them better understand their position on problems of the moment, the causes for which they stand up for and party affiliations. Knowing the candidates and being aware of their conceptions and actions, the electors can decide who to vote for, whether to adjust or not their electoral options or if there is a need of changing the political power. Unfortunately, electoral campaigns succeed only partially to achieve these goals, failing most of the time to inform the electors and help them to vote according to them.

The construction of the political figure, the notoriety of the candidate, the credibility, the slogan, the media agenda versus the population agenda, are matters of discussion absolutely necessary for a suitable analysis, and we cannot create an image of coherency in the planning of a campaign or, even more specific, in the construction of a political product.

After the first part, which is to some extent theoretical, in the second part I will put forward a practical study which in this case can only be the presentation of a fragment of electoral campaign. It is a fragment because the amplitude and complexity of approaching an electoral campaign with all of its elements would overcome the time allocated during this conference, this is the reason why I will analyze the electoral campaign through the construction of the political product.

The research's presentation consists of the local campaign for the Mayor's office of Iasi, in 2004, considered through the national electoral context: the realization of the

1 Nicolae LUPAȘCU – Ph.D. Candidate, "Al. I. Cuza" University, Iasi, Faculty of Philosophy and Social Political Sciences, E-mail Address: nicolae.lupascu@yahoo.com, Iasi, Str. Pinului, Nr. 5, Jud. Iasi, Romania
D.A. alliance between PNL and PD in the autumn of 2003, meant the beginning of the actual electoral struggle in Romania. If when the alliance was launched, in the autumn of 2002, the two parties were almost alike, around 10-12%, after one year, PNL rose to 18-20% and PD remained at 10-12%.

In order to have a clearer image upon the political „market” of Iasi I have presented the first five „brands” (political parties) with their „the political products” (candidates for the position of Mayor) resulted from this campaign and, bearing in mind the criteria announced above, I found interesting the evolution of two candidates for the seat of Mayor of Iasi: Dan Carlan- Democrat Party (PD) and Relu Fenechiu- National Liberal Party (PNL). Finally, I was concerned with the construction of the political product of PD and PNL, and moreover, the logical conclusions of the scientific study.

Keywords:
Electoral campaign, local elections, political product, USP (unique selling proposition).

Electoral campaigns are designed, at least in theory, to inform voters about the candidates and help them better understand their position on immediate problems, the causes for which they stand up for and party affiliations. Knowing the candidates and being aware of their conceptions and actions, the electors can decide who to vote for, whether to adjust or not their electoral options or if there is a need of changing the political power. Unfortunately, electoral campaigns succeed only partially to achieve these goals, failing most of the time to inform the electors and help them to vote according to them.

The question whether a campaign is about manipulation rather than information has grown substantially. The superficiality of the information and the accent more on political spectacle than relevant issues trigger the shallowness and instability of the electoral options. Some consider the media is also to be blamed. This lack of information is due to the manner the media reflects the electoral competition. The preference for scandals and the presentation of the electoral competition as entertainment are the main directions for many newspapers, radio and television stations in Romania. Finally, a factor that shapes electoral campaigns (beyond the parties and the press) is the political culture of the society.
Undoubtedly, electoral campaigns are at the highest peak of any political marketing activity. In 30 days, how long such a campaign lasts in Romania, absolutely all known techniques of advertising, public relations, lobbying, negative campaigns, direct mail, etc. are being used. The human, financial and logistic efforts are impressive and the amount of used information exceeds the medium level effort from any other year.

The campaign is a sort of Olympics of politics, in which, more or less known persons, develop an entire arsenal of forces to convince voters in order to obtain votes. Beyond the noise and the fury of the political arena there is but a cold calculation and a global vision that makes the whole assembly of means, information and techniques a weapon more or less powerful. The electoral campaign often decides the fate of elections, if it doesn't always change the winner, at least it changes percentages.

1. Local electoral campaigns

The local campaign is the main barometer of general elections. The local trends were always observed in general elections. In 2004, some additional factors were added that raised the stakes in local elections. The candidature of Traian Basescu in Bucharest from the position of co-chairman of the opposition party was a test of voter's mobilization in the most important stronghold of PD party. Secondly, PSD chose two "heavy" personalities of the party, Mircea Geoana, the Foreign Minister and Ioan Rus, the Interior Minister, for Mayor's office in Bucharest and Cluj.

As many observers have interpreted, PSD tried by this maneuver to win the general elections. A defeat of Basescu in Bucharest and of Funar and Boc in Cluj would have meant the undoubted supremacy of PSD (given the fact that in Iasi the Mayor's office was already theirs) and would have weakened the position of Traian Basescu and PD within the Alliance.

The campaign from Bucharest had a strong influence on how the candidates were seen across the country. In Bucharest, the opposition leader, Foreign Minister Mircea Geoana faced the Mayor in office, Traian Basescu. Because the vast majority of electoral advertising space in the national media was occupied by the messages of candidates for Bucharest, voters from all over the country voted according to the electoral performance in Bucharest. The popularity of the candidate for Bucharest...
had an effect of irradiation and expanded by the appointment of well-known political leaders in several cities. One example was the largest city in Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca. The success of opposition in the two cities, but also in other large cities created the impression that the ruling party lost local elections, although it had good results at national level and in some big cities (Iasi, Constanta, Galati, Craiova, Ploiesti).

The most important surveys have defined the main concerns of the population and the issues for discussion during the campaign.

1.1. Building the electoral figure

One of the main features of the candidate, whether it concerns the fight for presidency, or that for the Mayor’s office, is that the winning message must be sent to a majority, obviously heterogeneous, in terms of election. A man who wants to be President of Romania, or Mayor of a town has to collect the votes of over 50% of the voters (After 1992, the President is elected in Romania with 5-6 million votes).

It is clear that an important candidate for presidential or local elections is not invented a few days before the election. His notoriety in the early campaign must be at least 75%. The notoriety of his gesture – to go to the polls - must be very high. An overview of the Romanian political scene shows that all presidential candidates who matter were well known persons, with numerous public appearances and a consistent public path. The year 2000 brought two surprises in presidential competition - Mugur Isarescu and Theodor Stolojan, both figures which have occupied important positions in the structures of the Romanian state (they have long been at the forefront of the Romanian political life, having a degree of notoriety over 90% and a confidence level of 50%). Notoriety is the first step towards credibility and credibility is the key of a winning message. It is very difficult to be seen as reliable, within a given time, if you are an unknown character. The first thing to be done for a candidate is to be visible.

After the notoriety test, the second step to be done is the “building” of the electoral figure. A presidential candidate must also be characterized by USP (unique selling proposition). The electoral figure, a continuation of the political figure based on reputation and trust, is in fact a simplified copy of it. A good correlation between the electoral figure and its slogan is another point that builds credibility. It is important to note that the electoral figure can not be fundamentally different from the...
political figure, but it should be easier, more schematized. A fracture between the well-known image and the electoral image is devastating, both for him and the campaign itself. The electoral figure once built, the role of campaign strategy is to put him in position to transmit messages in areas of public interest where he receives the maximum credibility.

In a campaign, the dissociation between the political program, the governance program and the presidential program of the parties or of the presidential candidates and presidential campaign must be clear. If these programs are developed by specialists in all major areas of activity and contain answers and solutions to national problems, the messages within the campaign should not cover all this vast and very often arid area. In fact, when a certain chocolate is promoted in advertising, the details of the recipe are not presented. There are some elements considered important by the producer and by the author of the promotional campaign. The more elements (mandatory real) are convincing, the product has a greater market success. This technique is valid also in an election campaign. From the political program of the candidate’s vision for governance in Romania, or in a city, during the next four years, those items that interest the widest possible majority must be chosen, elements that the electorate support and the credibility of the candidate are based on.

2. The 2004 electoral campaign, elections for the Iasi City Hall- the first round
2.1. The offer of the political “market” in Iasi, May 2004
We can analyze this contest like any advertising campaign of products on the market.

Thus, the brand will be the political party, the product is the candidate and the campaign is the campaign from 2004 - local elections for Mayor’s office. To get a clearer picture of the political "market" I will be presenting five "brands" (political parties) with "their political products" (the candidates) in this campaign:

- PSD - Gheorghe Nichita - "Iasi is a great city that needs a strong Mayor"
- PD - Dan Carlan - "Everyone has a hero, who's yours?"
- PNL - Relu Fenechiu - "I will make money for Iasi"
- PRM - Constantin Neculau - "A fair and honest Mayor"
- PUR - Ionel Oancea - "Here comes the man who knows"
Given the criteria outlined above, the evolution of two candidates seemed interesting:

- Dan Carlan - Democratic Party
- Relu Fenechiu - National Liberal Party

2.2. The political evolution of the two candidates

Dan Carlan, member of the National Liberal Party from 1995 and the party's candidate in the elections of 1996 and 2000, goes to the Democratic Party before the elections of 2004 - January, as he was not supported anymore by the PNL for a third time. He immediately found a place in the PD party and was able to run for Mayor. The traditional PD candidate, Gheorghe Nichita, migrated to PSD, a party that had given him on a tray the Mayor’s office in 28 nov.2003, after the departure of Constantin Simirad as ambassador to Cuba.

Relu Fenechiu, member of the National Liberal Party was nominated for the first time to run for Mayor in June 2004. In fact, we could say it was a forcing of his candidacy. The National Liberal Party initially had other options: first, Camelia Gavrila and then Dumitru Oprea. We can say that in terms of reputation and experience, the liberal candidate started with a handicap regarding the PD candidate.

2.3. Building the political product of PD and PNL

Given a lower participation voters at the elections, we are asking whether the USP (Unique Selling Proposition - a benefit about the product that you should communicate to the consumers; this benefit must be unique, motivating and must position distinctly the product in the consumer's mind) should slide to ESP (Emotional Selling Proposition- the perceptual differences between products are rather of emotional nature) or UBP (Unique Brand Personality, according to this theory the most important thing is to build a unique brand personality, without providing benefits, not even emotional). One must not try anymore to persuade the consumers who are becoming more critical and lucid, but establish a relationship of friendship, based on affinity.

Let me explain: regarding commodities or rare products, the companies have almost the same products with the same characteristics, all of them always trying to overcome others, but all these products work in the parameters described by the manufacturer. With the political parties is the same thing but in reverse, negative way, ie all say pretty much the
same thing and all forget their promises after the campaign ended - forgetting to "function in the parameters described by the manufacturer", so..

It is natural then that few voters go to the polls to choose based on emotional reasons - I like or not how X looks like, Y has a pleasant voice, Z inspires force, and so on - or just go for the brand-the party - without having any benefit, even emotional, vote for candidate X because he is in the X party, a party that even the parents, friends etc. supported, and candidate X is just an excuse.

In the 2004 campaign, 16 “products” were launched on the political market in Iasi and the first five I have listed above. In the topic that I analyse, I chose two parties that address the same electorate, PD and PNL, although the spectacular, "pragmatic" campaign belonged to PSD for Gheorghe Nichita, a candidate who in the 2000 elections for PD gained 2% compared to 2004 when he rose in the first round to 47.9% on the PSD lists.

Let's consider now PD party:

PD is based on conservative voters oriented towards either the center-left or center-right ("impartial, as the standard Romanian"), young and middle age (18-45 years old), with secondary and higher education, from all socio-professional categories, with small and medium-income, of both sexes, regardless of marital status, and living mainly in central areas and the city's oldest neighborhoods.

In early campaign, the PD product, Dan Carlan, was ranked in most polls with around 5.7%, and after June 6, 2004 election won 19.3% of the votes in Iasi. It is true that there is a margin of error of the polls, but we can not recognize that there is a substantial increase in the number of voters for this candidate, which leads us to conclude that a good political marketing strategy was adopted and that he was quite well positioned, etc.

Dan Carlan focused his campaign on fighting the forces of evil, so he situated himself as in a Romanian folk tale, assuming the role of the hero who fights the dragon (embodied by PSD) of the local administration, defending the citizens from Iasi and their problems. He used local archetypes, stereotypes, all that could produce a click in the voter's mind, so that “Iasi could become again the capital of Moldova”.

With this approach of the electoral character, Dan Carlan enrolled in the Alliance's overall strategy, an image assumed by the general and
local media: corruption and inefficiency of administration (dominated by PSD).

I propose an analysis that led to the USP’s formulation for this product:

| Attributes                                      | young, earnest, constant in ideas, tenacious, active, experience in local government (municipal councilor for eight years) |
| Benefits                                        | reliable, defends citizen’s interests |
| Values                                          | fair, honest, family man, lover of people and interested in their problems |
| Personality                                     | mature, adult (in the sense offered by transactional analysis), authoritative, energetic and modern |
| Brand’s kernel                                  | fights corruption for the citizen’s interests |
| USP                                            | "Dan Carlan, our hero" |

It seems this USP has been successful, an evidence is the percentage obtained (19.7% for the candidate and 17.63% for the party), considering they started the campaign with 5% and 6% for the party.

The second product I chose to analyze is the candidate from the National Liberal Party, Relu Fenechiu.

The National Liberal Party electorate was, as the PD electorate, focused on conservative voters oriented towards either the center-left or center-right, all categories of age, with secondary and higher education, from all socio-professional categories, with small, medium and above medium income, of both sexes, regardless of marital status, and living mainly in central areas and the city’s oldest neighborhoods, elites, but also nostalgics and supporters of traditional parties, anti-social democrats, etc..

Relu Fenechiu oriented almost on the same market segment as the PD, but he comes with a different answer to the question “what makes the product?”: he is a pragmatic, promises to bring strategic investors in Iasi, struggles to open towards Europe, builds an industrial park, a ring road of the city, etc..

PNL and its candidates have entered the campaign, according to surveys, with 6% chance for the candidate and 12% for the party, representing a relatively low market share. At the end of the campaign, first results were: 20.43% for the party and 17.4% for the candidate.
Relu Fenechiu's campaign was not as spectacular as the one of the Democratic Party, being based on public debate, presentation of the political project, virulent attacks against PSD and, especially against its candidate Gheorge Nichita. Coming from the opposition, he could afford to be critical and to exploit the discontent accumulated by the citizens against the Mayor's office and especially against the actual Mayor, a PSD candidate.

Relu Fenechiu did not seem like a charismatic person, he did not appealed to the emotions of the voters, unlike Dan Carlan with his epic story, coming with a rather cool, aggressive, elitist, pragmatic message, hard to digest in a city (although universitary city) from Moldavia.

The analysis grid of the liberal candidate, following the example above, was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>elitist, liberal, young, active, well-trained professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>he represents you, brings investors to Iasi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-develops economic recovery programs in Iasi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>self-assured, superior, offering hope of a better future for citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>liberal, pragmatic, adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand’s kernel</td>
<td>citizens will have more money in your pocket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USP</td>
<td>&quot;I will make money for Iasi&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This USP was a success if we judge it by the percentage in the early campaign and those at the polls.

3. Conclusions:

Dan Carlan – a candidate in elections with 5% chance (according to polls), obtains, after the first round, 19.7% of the votes, after redistribution.

The Democratic Party - was quoted at 6% in the polls before elections and after elections got 17.63% of the votes.

A first conclusion we can draw is that Dan Carlan had, on the one hand, a good image campaign, and on the other, he acted as a locomotive for the Democratic Party, pulling it from the 6% before the elections to 17.63% of the cast votes.
One must consider the fact that Dan Carlan entered the Democratic Party just a few months before the local elections. For this reason his support within the PD was weak. It seems that voters did not blame him for the movement from one party to another. Do not forget that he was the National Liberal Party candidate in 1996, when he won 5% and in 2000, 11% of the cast votes, so he was on an upward trend, especially considering his background as a municipal councilor from the opposition.

In conclusion, we can say that Dan Carlan was a candidate that grew in percentage, with an increasing reputation in time, not being a "revelation" in the political market of Iasi.

In his case, the theory that the candidate matters in local elections more then the party was confirmed.

Relu Fenechiu entered the elections with 6% chance, and at the end of the first round, the result was 17.4% of the cast votes, after redistribution.

PNL was ranked in the polls with 12% chance for the party and after the elections had 20.43% of the cast votes.

In the case of this candidate the situation is a little different: although the PNL’s candidate was county councilor from 2000-2004, it was for the first time he came out "to fight" and not under the umbrella of a party list, unlike the PD candidate who was at his third attempt to obtain endorsement for the seat of Mayor in Iasi. From this point of view the result was spectacular - the main favorite in this race, Gheorghe Nichita, obtained only 2% of the votes in his first appearance before voters in 1996, and Dan Carlan 5%. For this reason, although it may appear that the party was the locomotive, I believe that the party and each candidate boosted mutually.

Neither this candidate has had a full and unconditional support from his party colleagues. Basically, the year before, the party was “beheaded” by Dumitru Oprea’s withdrawal from the County’s office. The organization was already divided in camps and torn apart by internal struggles. In his case, it seems that the voters of the party (but not only) taxed him for the internal disputes with the former leader - an outstanding personality of the city, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University’s rector.
4. Final considerations:

Although the two campaigns were different as technical approach, the candidates focused on an anti-PSD campaign, each in his manner. Both candidates have targeted voters from the center and center-right.

Between these two candidates there weren’t public fights (do not forget that D.A. Alliance was functioning then).

Dan Carlan went on in the second round, ahead of Relu Fenechiu by 2%. I think this was possible due to a greater awareness of the PD candidate and his romantic and moderate campaign.

In terms of electoral agenda approach they had two different targets:

- Dan Carlan has focused his campaign according to the media agenda (which launched the themes like corruption and government inefficiency in the ranks of PSD),
- and Relu Fenechiu stressed mainly on issues related to people's lives in the city and less on those related to the functioning of the state, so the agenda of citizens had a primacy, even if he attacked in force the Mayor in office.

Given the fact that Fenechiu's reputation was very low when he entered the campaign, the score obtained in the elections was very high compared to that of other important candidates, so it seems that the approach of the citizen agenda was successful.
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