THE UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD ECONOMY

OPINION

By: Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Stancheva Pelcheva, Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski" scientific specialty - sociology

Subject: dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the scientific specialty Organization and management outside the sphere of material production (Media and Communications) at UNSS.

Author of the dissertation: Violeta Nikolova

The topic of the dissertation: Topic BUILDING THE IMAGE OF POLITICAL PERSONALITIES ON THE INTERNET (ANALYSIS OF THE CANDIDATE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS 2006-2016)

1. Information about the Ph.D. student

Ph.D. student Violeta Nikolova was trained in the Doctoral program Organization and management outside the sphere of material production (Media and Communications) in Professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences at the Department of Media and Public Communications/Economics of Infrastructure, Faculty of UNSS, according to the Order of the Vice-Rector for Research and Development of UNSS No. 1106/28.042023.

The training was carried out in a traditional/form from February 2020-2023. The Ph.D. student meets the legal requirements for public protection.

2. General characteristics of the presented Ph.D. thesis

The dissertation is an up-to-date response to the still-existing deficit of research in the trajectory of political marketing for the Bulgarian political communication activity on the Internet. It is intended to provide rules that are useful for politicians, PR specialists, communication experts, students, etc., .as well as to fill the field of application concerning Bulgarian political practices for building an image.

3. Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is structured by an Introduction, four chapters, a Conclusion, a Bibliography, and Appendices.

The thesis defended in the current dissertation is that "the Internet provides a broad media toolkit for political figures to implement more personalized strategic communications to build an image through which to influence election results. Politicians actively use social media to engage audiences in political discourse and to concertize ideas and messages. The use of digital channels allows participation through communication without a media intermediary. If political communication is constructed on the basis of democratic ideas of honesty and openness, image-building will yield a positive result. And vice versa – if the audience perceives the political messages as irrelevant to reality, the political image will not achieve the set goals.

The dissertation has successfully and reasonably framed the Object of the research - political communications on the Internet in the pre-election period, within which the building of the image of political figures in the period 2006 - 2016 was processed with all their essential objective dimensions.

My assessment of the purpose of the research is intended "to study the strategies for building the image of the candidate presidents of Bulgaria through the analysis of campaigns in the period 2006-2016", is that it is relevant to the thematic effort.

Tasks of the study 1) to examine the image as a category in political and communication sciences and a phenomenon in practice, identifying the main criteria for the image of a political leader; 2) to present the basic concepts of forming the image of a political leader; 3) to determine the role of the Internet in the process of forming the image of a political leader and to analyze the impact of social media on the formation of public opinion about political figures; 4) to examine the formal and informal platforms for political positioning of Georgi Parvanov, Rosen Plevneliev and Rumen Radev in social media", are also relevant to the aim and thesis of the dissertation work.

The research covers the period from October 22, 2006 to November 6, 2016, with an interdisciplinary selected methodology that emphasizes the phenomenon's political, communication, and sociological aspects. A study and analysis of the literature on the topic of the study was carried out, and an appropriate theoretical framework for the dissertation work was built. Observation has been used for sites and social media profiles of presidential candidates to measure the correct perception, registration, and evaluation of communication strategies for building a political image. Due to the time distance from the researched event and the impossibility of direct follow-up of the image, a secondary analysis of empirical research was carried out. However, an author's empirical survey was conducted through a direct online survey with 15 questions answered by 50 randomly selected respondents. The survey seeks an answer to the question of how the audience perceives the political messages and the constructed political image of the presidential candidates Georgi Parvanov (2006), Rosen Plevneliev (2011), and Rumen Radev (2016). The survey was conducted within one week through Google Forms.

4. Evaluation of the received scientific and scientific-applied results

The structuring of the dissertation work in four chapters has allowed the Ph.D. student to anticipate and realize her set tasks, respectively to realize her scientific and scientifically-applied results.

The first chapter reveals the achievements regarding the identification of the image as "a collection of perceptions, impressions, prejudices, knowledge, ideas, moods, experiences, evaluations and feelings that form public opinion", to trace the path of its appearance in the context of political communications, to put the theoretical foundations of critical analysis in a scientific-literary perspective, relying on foreign and Bulgarian authors working on the problem. The formation of the image of a political leader is seen as a process in which rational arguments and emotional impact are taken into account. The interrelationship between political communications and the media through media mediation is examined.

In the second chapter, the formation of the image of the political leader is built in a procedural plan, in accordance with the principles of public communications, the concepts of working with public relations and advertising. This chapter also has a theoretical orientation and serves to confirm the thesis.

Chapter Three focuses on political communications on the Internet in an environment where audiences can be easily identified and segmented, and workable messages can be built, campaigns can be changed on the fly, voters can be talked to in real-time, etc. Bringing out the characteristics of the Internet and, more specifically, of social media as an environment for

dynamic political communication and for building and strengthening a political image is important in view of the author's research on image formation of Bulgarian presidential candidates in the period 2006-2016.

The fourth chapter shows the results of the analysis of presidential candidate campaigns on the social media Facebook and YouTube. Their choice is not accidental but is based on the fact that the two media are among the most popular in Bulgaria. Facebook is the primary channel in the Bulgarian communication practice for spreading information and building an image through targeted campaigns. Youtube is used to create its own branded channel where its television is "broadcast." The selection was based on the following data: Facebook has managed to penetrate the lives, beliefs, and decisions of more than 60% of Internet users and more than 30% of the population of Bulgaria as a whole. In Bulgaria, YouTube is also the third most visited site (before it was Facebook and Google). The research conducted here aims, on the one hand, to describe the strategies for building the image of the presidential candidates Georgi Parvanov, Rosen Plevneliev, and Rumen Radev, and on the other hand, through a survey conducted among voters, to track the success of the run campaigns.

. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and scientific-applied results

• Scientific contribution is the author's empirical sociological research, although conducted online.

• Contribution is the scientific analysis of the transition processes of the political image - from traditional to new digital media. Immanent processes are presented in traditional media environments and social networks, sites, personal blogs, vlogs, etc. Political advertising is explicated in its modifications in the development and digital environment, in constructing new forms of political marketing of advertising messages and political imagery.

• - The most significant contribution of the Ph.D. student is in the construction and formation of a political image on the Internet of the Bulgarian communication environment and the comparisons made between political communications in traditional and online environments.

• an algorithm for the mediatization of the political image on the Internet is derived

6. Evaluation of the author's abstract and publications

The abstract corresponds to the dissertation, and the number and quality of the dissertation's publications are in accordance with the requirements.

7. Critical notes, recommendations, and questions - I don't have any

In conclusion, I would like to express my positive attitude towards what has been achieved in the Ph.D. thesis and certify that I will vote "Yes" for Violeta Nikolova to acquire the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Organization and Management outside the sphere of material production (Media and Communications), Professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences

Member of the Scientific Jury:

Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Stancheva Peycheva,

Southwestern University "N. Rila"

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