



PHD THESIS REVIEW

By Associate Professor Svetlana Ivanova Stankova, PhD, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, for the award of PhD Degree in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Political Advertising and Audio-Visual Media Services) based on the PhD Thesis entitled „Traditional and New Audio-Visual Media Services in the Political Marketing of Modern Political Parties in Greece”, presented by Athanasios Sotirios Gunas, PhD candidate (distance learning) at the Department of Communication and Audio-Visual Services with the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, under the guidance of Prof. Teodora Radoeva Petrova-Ivanova, PhD, acting as scientific supervisor.

Grounds for participation in the scientific jury: Decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, dated 14.01.2021, Protocol No. 06.

I. Presentation of the PhD candidate on the basis of submitted documentation

Athanasios Gunas holds a BA in Economics from the University of Sunderland, Great Britain and an MBA in International Marketing from the same university. He was awarded a second MBA by Roosevelt University, Chicago and has specialised in the field of marketing (Solving Business Problems) at University of M.I.T. Boston, USA. The candidate was enrolled as a long-distance PhD candidate at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski in 2013.

Athanasios Gunas has varied professional experience – in the state administration, in private companies and, over the last decade, in the field of education. Gunas commenced his professional carrier as an advertisement manager at The Torch newspaper in Roosevelt University, Chicago between September 21998 and November 1999, while pursuing a Master’s Degree in the same university. In the period of 2000 – 2002 he worked as an economist-promotion manager at his father’s company where he acquired experience in drawing up and analysing marketing studies as well as basic knowledge in promotion. Between 2002 and 2011 he worked as an economist-management consultant-designer at his own company and, simultaneously, as a scientific collaborator-adviser-manager to the Greek Parliament, Ministry of Public Order (2002 – 2004).

In the course of the last 10 years, since 2011, Athanasios Gunas has lectured at the Alexander Technological Educational Institute of Sindos (Thessaloniki) in both theoretical and practical disciplines. Among the subject taught are: Advertisement Sales Presentation, Marketing Plan Advertising; Consumer Behaviour; Advertising Creative; Political Marketing; Introducing Advertising; Sales Organisation and Management; Marketing Strategy; Marketing Research.

II. Evaluation of thesis quality

II.1. Topicality and significance of the issue investigated in the thesis

The issue investigated in the thesis – the capabilities of traditional and new media, the advantages and disadvantages of using their media mix in political marketing and advertising – has recently gained topicality and significance. Digitalisation and social media have created new formats of political marketing and are gaining an increasingly important share the field. Some tend to even see the future of political marketing entirely through the lens of such media – politicians consistently



post in social media, create video portals and podcasts. Mr Gunas thus reveals that the question is no longer of left or right, but of old and new, of traditional and digital in political communication, all of which has a very clear objective – to persuade and convince. The investigated issue is current and important, given that – in societies with a strong democratic tradition such as the Greek society – the significance of social networks in political communication is expected to become even greater.

II.2. Thoroughness and comprehensiveness in the examination of theoretical sources

Athanasios Gunas has listed 227 theoretical sources in English and Greek which demonstrates an evident ambition for thoroughness and comprehensiveness in examining the theoretical sources related to the thesis topic. It must be noted that these include both contemporary scientific interpretations of media impact, political communication and election campaigns in the Internet era, as well as fundamental works on media theory and the structure and process of political marketing (e.g. the emblematic work of Philip Kotler and Sidney Levy from 1969 “Broadening the Concept of Marketing”; “Media Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media” by Shirley Biagi from 2007, etc.).

II.3. Validating significant aspects of existing theories, hypotheses, etc., through new means

In his research, Athanasios Gunas has performed a theoretical review of existing concepts on the role of political communication and its capabilities to attract wide voter turnout, on political marketing techniques and their implementation in election campaigns. It must be noted that this conceptual review is performed with the clear intent of introducing current views and, respectively, current developments and uses of concepts. At the same time the PhD candidate proves that, independent of the different communication situations in the American and Greek political post-election context and their different addressees, social networks are becoming an increasingly influential component of the political communication between the government and society, turning into an effective instrument for political competition;

II.4. Proposition of new interpretations, definitions, etc., of current and already analysed objects of scientific research

Reviewing current political practices in Greece, Athanasios Gunas traces the genesis of media behaviour of the primary and secondary players in Greek political life. He offers a new interpretation of the opportunities provided by traditional and new media by pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of using this media mix in complex social situations. For the purpose of illustrating his conclusions, the PhD candidate has presented 65 original diagrams and 117 tables. The proposed model for the division of politicians and citizens/voters into two subgroups depending on the different media channels for receiving/sending of political information is also novel.

II. 5. Operability of the selected research methods

The comparative approach selected by the PhD candidate for the topic is both operational and relevant. On the one hand, by comparing the political communication prior to and after the emergence of Internet, he outlines the advantages and disadvantages of traditional and new media for the propagation purposes of political players. On the other hand, by studying the first US election campaign won through the active use of Internet and social media by Barack Obama and current political practices in Greece in their entire ideological spectrum, Gunas once again places them in the plane of comparison where the convergence of media and policy becomes the object of a dual



focus.

II. 6. Creation of new classifications, methods, technologies, etc.

The scientific research carried out by Athanasios Gunas creates a new theoretical framework outlining the use of traditional and new audio-visual media in political marketing and their impact on citizens/voters and politicians. The forte of the study, if one may say so, is the intercultural comparison it has drawn, covering the pre-election campaigns in the USA and Greece – two countries with century-old democratic traditions, the media practices of which have provided the relevant empirical samples, examined in a conceptually productive symmetrisation.

II.7. Precision in the collection, processing and analysis of empirical data

The study draws from a large volume of complex empirical material which has been processed with great precision and a strong awareness for scientific responsibility. The study can thus be assessed, from both a sociological and a politological point of view, as highly professional, obtaining verifiable and reliable data which is of great significance for their comparability.

II.8. Reliability of the material on which the contributions are based

The contributions of the present doctoral thesis arise from the impressive volume of examined empirical material. Athanasios Gunas has carried out an independent sociological study via direct questionnaires comprising 28 questions. The questionnaires were completed through the ‘face to face’ or ‘mail survey’ method. The study has a wide scope, has been carried out properly and is empirically reliable.

II.9. Obtaining and proving new facts

Examining the Barack Obama presidential campaign, Athanasios Gunas proves that, on the one hand, the power of social networks has allowed the 44th American president to reach out directly to citizens/voters and to influence their opinions, and has, on the other, simultaneously created an online culture among his supporters as a result of classic political advertising, such as slogans, for example. The fact that classic political advertising has actually contributed to and advanced the new audio-visual media is a novel concept in political marketing, and at the same time is based on the famous Roger Fidler’s hypothesis of mediamorphosis.

II.10. Obtaining facts in confirmation of existing theories, interpretations, etc.

Communication between politicians and citizens/voters is the most important aspect of each election campaign. By examining the Obama campaign and its use of Internet instruments (Facebook, email, text messages, My Party, YouTube), Athanasios Gunas concludes that it is in this manner that Obama is able to achieve effective mass communication with his voters and to create and develop strong, trust-based relations with his supporters, who then go on to support him not only with their votes, but also with the communication aspect of the campaign prior to voting. The charismatic Obama is able to inspire trust and a sense of security in his supporters but this would not have been possible without the directness of social media. In this way, in the course of his research, the PhD candidate reaches the formulation that social networks possess the quality of being ‘personal’ and ‘face to face’ in real time, albeit for virtual citizens/voters and supporters.

II.11. Bibliographic scope

The presented list of 227 sources in both English and Greek demonstrate that the PhD



candidate possesses the competency to interpret and analyse a wide range of scientific bibliography. The listed sources are representative of the field examined by the author, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the analysis and its contemporary inquiries.

II.12. Conformance with the compositional requirements to the thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters with a summary and bibliography. Its structure is balanced. Chapter One and Two introduce the examined issue, presenting the main views of the author on media, political marketing and election campaigns prior to and after the emergence of Internet. The examination of the social network phenomenon and its role in the Barack Obama campaign is methodologically grounded, with Chapters Three and Four outlining the media behaviour of primary and secondary political actors on the Greek political scene (SYRIZA, New Democracy, Golden Dawn, the Communist Party, Potami, Independent Greeks, Union of Centrists) and comparing the websites and social networks used by those. Such a comparison is relevant, given the fact that both the USA and Greece are countries with century-old democratic traditions. Chapter Five presents the study methodology and the instruments employed for empirical data processing. The essence of the study is presented in Chapter Six, which comprises an analysis of collected data. The last chapter – Chapter Seven – is dedicated to summaries and conclusions, to the limitations faced by the study and the possibilities for future development and expansion. This balanced structure fully meets the requirements to thesis composition.

II.13. Assessment of the language and style of the thesis and of any deviations from literary, grammatical, orthographic and punctuation rules

The original text of the thesis is in English and displays very good language and style. The portion translated into Bulgarian does not deviate from literary, grammatical, orthographic and punctuation rules.

II.14. Assessment of synopsis conformity to the thesis

The synopsis, presented as part of the thesis documentation, comprises 57 pages and contains all relevant elements, namely: study subject and object, scientific goals and scientific tasks, scientific outcomes. The synopsis meets the technical and procedural requirements and correctly presents the essence of the thesis, both in terms of contents and of contributions.

III. Thesis contributions

III. 1. Nature of contributions: scientific novelty (new theories, hypotheses, methods, etc.); enrichment and critical analysis of existing knowledge; practical application of scientific achievements, effects accomplished

The main contribution of the thesis is the creation of a new conceptual and typological framework. This framework divides the audience into two subgroups – both for politicians and for citizens/voters – based on the use of various media channels for receiving/sending political statements and appeals. This contributes to a richer and more analytical examination of political marketing and advertising using traditional and new audio-visual media. The new typology regarding the dynamic and non-dynamic use of media can be used as a tool for further studies on political marketing and advertising used by politicians in their voter strategies.

III.2. Assessment of author participation in the contributions of the thesis and



accompanying publications

Using sociological methods for data collection and analysis, Athanasios Gunas has implemented several direct questionnaires containing 28 questions – either on a ‘face to face’ or ‘postal survey’ basis with 142 members of the Greek Parliament, mayors, district governors, municipal councillors, and 457 voters from the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki having voted in the last elections. The findings reached by the author on the basis of extensive empirical material relate to: 1) the citizen/voter profile depending on the type of political communication and the use of different types of media services as the main source of political information from parties and politicians; 2) the profile of political actors depending on the type and use of audio-visual media in their political communication – statements, appeals, advertising, and use of official political websites as the main source of political information.

III. 3. Assessment of the opportunities for practical implementation of study outcomes

According to the results obtained from voters, the reliability of new audio-visual media services is a significant factor for political information, and the greater the use of media, the greater the probability that a certain politician and his/her campaign will be followed; for politicians too, the connection between the reliability of new audio-visual media and political statements is clearly defined, while political communication through those channels plays a significant role for the success of political advertising with various positive effects. These results can be used for future political campaigns both by political actors and by future examiners of the digital political dialogue.

IV. Notes and recommendations

IV.1. Motivated proposal for future work of the PhD candidate with view of improving the presented study

In terms of guidance regarding further work, the present study could be expanded by including countries in which new audio-visual media services are not widely used for political purposes, such as Russia, for example. Other factors which can also be investigated and defined are those that affect voter intentions regarding a specific politician or political party, such as the cultural, social and demographic status of respondents, etc. Finally, comparisons could be drawn for various periods (prior to, during and after elections) or between two different election periods in order to reveal the role of media in the course of such periods and how information and communication technologies are used for political purposes.

Publication of the study would benefit a wide scope of readers – both in the field of political science and among practitioners and experts in the field of professional marketing and advertising.

V. Publications and participation in scientific fora

In the period of 2007–2019, Athanasios Gunas has twenty-one participations in various national and international scientific fora at which he has presented papers and reports. Among those I would like to note the International Conference on Contemporary Marketing Issues held in Kingston University, London, in mid-2015, at which the candidate presented his paper entitled “Political Marketing & Advertisement in the Municipality Hellenic Government“, the Fifth International Conference on Economic Sciences and Business Administration held in 2019 in Romania, in which Mr Gunas participated with his paper on “Political Marketing and Social Media in Greece of 2019”, as well as the Seventh International Conference on Contemporary Marketing Issues, held in Heraklion, Crete, in 2019, co-organised by the University of Leeds, and his paper



entitled “Greece Traditional vs Contemporary Mass Media to Communicate Political Messages: Voters perspectives”.

In addition, the PhD candidate has presented, for the purposes of thesis defence, six scientific publications on the topic of the thesis, published in Greece, Romania, Crete and Great Britain. This demonstrates a profound and enduring interest in the issue and international response to the candidate’s work. I am of the opinion that the requirements of the Rules on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions in Sofia University “St. Ohridski” for approbation and promulgation of study outcomes have been fully satisfied, pursuant to Article 5(5). As for the minimum national requirements under Article 63(1)(4) and Article 69(3), these refer to PhD candidates, enrolled after 2018 and thus are not relevant to Athanasios Gunas.

VI. Conclusion

The reviewed study fills an important scientific gap – the examination of traditional and new audio-visual media services in the political marketing of modern political parties in Greece. The topic has been covered extensively, with a special focus on the communication aspects of the election campaigns of both Barack Obama and of various parties from the Greek political scene. The study demonstrates that within the contemporary election communication situation, campaigns will increasingly unfold in social media. These contributions of the doctoral thesis allow me to wholeheartedly propose to the honourable scientific jury to award to Athanasios Sotirios Gunas a PhD Degree in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Political Advertising and Audio-Visual Media Services for his thesis entitled “Traditional and New Audio-Visual Media Services in the Political Marketing of Modern Political Parties in Greece.”

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Reviewer:

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