

Audiovisual political advertising in communication strategies of Polish political parties: The case of the parliamentary campaign in 2011



Małgorzata Adamik-Szysiak

MARIA CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA UNIVERSITY IN LUBLIN, POLAND

ABSTRACT: The article presents the results of empirical research on the use of audiovisual advertising by Polish political parties in election campaigns (both on television and distributed on the Internet). The goal is to show the current trends and most often used means of persuasion during the condensed construction, political information-persuasion message, which is the election advertisement. The commercials were analysed of political parties distributed in the period of the parliamentary election campaign in 2011. The results of the analysis were compared with the results of previous research in this matter, which exhibited certain tendencies in the communication strategies of the Polish political parties.

KEYWORDS: audiovisual election advertising, election campaign, personalization, content analysis, political parties, communication strategy



INTRODUCTION

So we are shaking hands, we have to believe that this country is a paradise, let's say stop the war, a new day is rising for Poland. (PSL, 2011)¹

The ongoing processes of professionalization and mediatization can be increasingly seen in marketing actions undertaken by political parties in Poland. The depicted elections offer, in an attractive way (*infotainment*) for the recipients, create chances for political parties to reach potential voters, especially that in the media society “there is no market without advertisement, there is no culture without television, there is no election campaign without the public and there is no credibility without *public relations* [...] what does not exist relatively in media, doesn't exist at all” (Michalczyk, 2008, pp. 44–45).

¹ Fragment of the election song of the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe — PSL) from 2011.

Observed at the beginning of the 21st century, media influence in Poland and even the tabloidization of politics shows changes taking place in the way of constructing and conducting election campaigns. The television spot as the tool of persuasion influence has taken an important place in political campaigns almost since the beginning of the 1990s. It is upheld by a view that a mass medium reaching the biggest part of society, which is television, can be characterised most of all by a high degree of the message's credibility.

These findings are confirmed in the opinions of respondents — results of the study carried out before the parliamentary campaign in 2011 by the Public Opinion Research Centre and the Institute of Public Matters (see Roguska & Zbieranek, 2011), indicate that television is the basic medium from which the respondents derive information on political parties. Next to information and current affairs programmes (63 per cent of respondents), for 31 per cent of the respondents the source of election information is also election commercials on the radio and on television (see Roguska & Zbieranek, 2011, p. 8). Thus, the fact of substantial expenses incurred by political parties in connection with the production, and especially with the transmission of audiovisual election commercials, is not surprising. The comparison of electoral committees' expenses for the transmission of audiovisual advertising on television in recent years (see Table 1) indicates that this channel of reaching its recipients is extremely important, especially for the largest parties.

Table 1. Expenditure of main political parties on the transmission of paid election commercials on television (public and commercial) in terms of one seat in the Sejm of the Republic of Poland from 2005–2011

Political party	Parliamentary campaign		
		2005	2007
		2011	
	Sum of expenditure on the paid commercial [PLN]	Number of obtained seats	Value of one seat [PLN]
Civic Platform (PO)	7 000 000	133	53 000
	8 000 000	209	38 000
	7 780 000	207	38 000
Law and Justice (PiS)	10 600 000	155	68 000
	9 100 000	166	55 000
	3 800 000	157	24 000
Polish People's Party (PSL)	2 800 000	25	110 000
	5 920 000	31	190 000
	780 000	28	28 000

commercials both in television and in the Internet) in expenditure for the transmission of advertisements on television.

During the parliamentary campaign in 2011, in contrast to previous campaigns (see Cwalina et al., 2005; Cwalina & Falkowski, 2006, 2008; Adamik-Szysiak, 2012a), the audiovisual election advertisements were most often used by parties enjoying, according to the polls results, a small amount of support among society. It is worth mentioning that commercials of these parties in the considerable majority were only on the Internet, which was undoubtedly connected on the one hand with a smaller budget collected for the election campaign, and on the other — the potential of the new medium reaching especially young voters. The technical possibilities offered by the Internet allow the political entities to independently construct various messages, especially alternative — often ignored or even having no reason to exist in the ‘mainstream media’ (see Foot & Schneider, 2006). The above mentioned CBOS-ISP research indicates that running the campaign by using commercials is relatively well evaluated by young respondents (18–24 years old) — even though they believe that advertisements are not an exhaustive source of information, but they are still required (60 per cent of respondents). The Internet is for this group of recipients (65 per cent of respondents) the most important source of knowledge about elections (see Roguska & Zbieranek, 2011, pp. 7–8).

The basic service, which was used to spread the audiovisual commercials by Polish political parties in 2011 was the YouTube channel, enabling the free posting and watching of film materials by Internet users. From the point of view of goals of the political parties carried out especially during the election campaign, this undoubtedly convergent communication service, combining the advantages of television with the possibilities of the Internet, not only makes the free publication of numerous and various number of materials possible, but it also enables the almost immediate reaction of subjects and the strategic exposition of media or their right directions (“targeting”).

Using tools of political marketing by political entities can be an indicator of the professionalization of electoral operations. One of the elements of marketing is the positioning of the political entity (see Newman, 1994, p. 86; Nimmo, 1970, p. 146; Bowler & Farrell, 1992, p. 9), which may carry the signs of the ideological positioning (concentration on the views and values exhibited by the candidates/politicians), situational positioning (highlighting current problems and promoting proposals of their solutions) or innovative positioning (relying on creative, original proposals, ideas, forms of communication). The final goal of positioning is the candidate/party’s choice of such a way of presentation of their own political offer, so that it gets the acceptance of the previously defined target group.

Innovative positioning played a special role in the strategies of outsiders on the Polish political stage in the parliamentary campaign in 2011. Unconventional ideas to create one’s own image and to present the programme offer appeared in electoral rivalry conducted both at a national and regional level. Vivid examples of

the political leader in election commercials? What kind of arguments prevailed in marketing communications — positive or negative?

The preliminary analysis of the collected source materials allowed us to issue two research hypotheses. According to the first hypothesis in the Polish parliamentary campaign in 2011 there dominated audiovisual advertisements exposing most of all image issues with the relative marginalisation of media of the substance character (programme). The second hypothesis is a refinement of the first one, stressing that the crucial role in the parliamentary campaign in 2011 was played by advertisements constructed on the model of the music video, which as a result contributed to the slogan representation of the assumptions of the electoral programme, and thus the concentration of subjects mostly on the creation of the specified image.

FORMATS OF AUDIOVISUAL ELECTION ADVERTISEMENTS

Examination of the source material from the point of view of the content and its form allowed us to classify each of the commercials to one of two basic categories: a message dominated by the verbal layer and a message dominated by the visual and musical layer (see Figure 1).

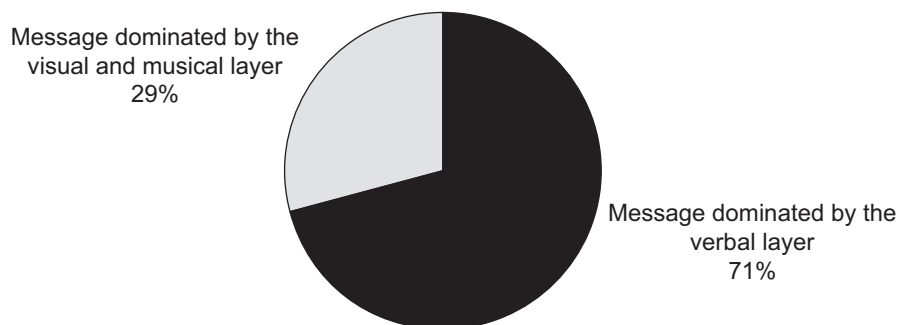


Figure 1. Formats of election advertisements from the parliamentary campaign in 2011

Source: research data.

Results of the detailed analysis of formats (see Kaid & Johnston, 2001, p. 36; Diamond & Bates, 1992, pp. 289–345; Cwalina & Falkowski, 2005, p. 302)³

³ In the literature researchers suggest various typologies of formats, most often distinguishing subsequent ones based on existing ones, e.g. Lynda Lee Kaid and Anne Johnston distinguish the following formats: documentary, introspective, certificate, questions — answers, concentrating on the rival, dramatisation of the problem, music video (Kaid & Johnston, 2001, p. 36), while Wojciech Cwalina and Andrzej Falkowski documentary, introspective, social support, question — answer, confrontation, dramatisation of the problem, mutual enthusiasm and effort (Cwalina & Falkowski, 2005, p. 302).

hip-hop, the recipient got to know not only that Rzetelski “gets the cha-cha and is a good guy,” but also about his contributions for the local community, including the construction of the ski lift (see Rzetelski, 2011). The need to support the representative of the younger generation, as the 37-year-old PSL leader was created — Krzysztof Hetman, was expressed by the words of his electoral song: “Lublin is our home, this guy knows it. He deserves my vote — Krzysiek Hetman is ok” (Hetman, 2011).

Innovative musical convention in the Polish electoral campaign was used by the SLD candidate from the district of Szczecin, Jędrzej Wijas. The 34-year-old candidate constructed a spot (see Wijas, 2011) based on the music video for a heavy metal song. The main character of the advertisement and at the same time the leader of the band was the aforementioned Wijas growling, to the accompaniment of electric guitars and drums, slogans of his electoral campaign which were simultaneously displayed on the screen in the form of subtitles.⁴

Media resonance not only at the regional or national scale, but world scale (see mk/tr, 2011), was sparked by one of the spots of the SLD candidate from the district of Lublin — Katarzyna Lenart. Constructed only on the basis of the methodical line and image, the verbal layer was completely omitted. The theme of the spot was a striptease performed by the candidate, and in the climax naked breasts were covered with the inscription: “censored.” The culmination of the message were the subtitles appearing on the screen: “You want more? Vote for SLD! Only we can do more!” and on the official Lenart electoral billboard — the only elements in the advertisement indicating to the recipient that he is watching an electoral spot. The candidate, stating her reason for adopting such original electoral advertising on the pages of the national press explained:

I wanted to catch the attention of the media to my programme. When I presented it previously, it remained unnoticed. I decided that I needed to shock. That was one of the concepts. I don't think this was something vulgar. There is nothing obscene in there, to be honest you cannot see anything. Only a bra and that's all [...] I bet on the body, because my campaign is aimed at young people. Unfortunately, the young can only be interested in something controversial. (Kublik, 2011, p. 2)

The mentioned example seems to be a perfect exemplification of this phenomena occurring in mass culture, also known as the “culture of revealing” due to the clearly apparent sexualisation of public and media life (see McNair, 2002).

It is noticeable that the described category of formats (video clip, animated film) was directed primarily to Internet users, which is proven even by promoting them mainly in the network. The leader of the audiovisual commercials spread on the Internet was the PSL commercial presenting the election song entitled “Man is the most important,” where the number of hits to the end of November

⁴ Slogans are: “secular country, worth life, freedom.”

2011 had reached more than 220 thousand. The second place in terms of the number of hits was the RP message, entitled “Do not wake up too late” — more than 100 thousand. Making the election message even more attractive by using modern technologies is an undoubted attempt to interest and stimulate a certain approach, especially by young, often passive recipients, towards activities of specific political parties.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The study of advertising political parties from the parliamentary campaign in 2011 for the arguments based on constructing and/or promoting the particular image of the given party (own or political rival) and presenting election demands, showed a clear dominance (apart from PO and PjN commercials) of messages, whose goal is most of all the creation of the image (see Figure 2). The image of one’s own party was the fundamental element of the construction of advertising of PSL and RP, which constituted respectively 71.5 per cent and 87.5 per cent of all advertisements of these two parties. Exactly half of PiS and SLD election commercials (50 per cent) were devoted to the creation of a negative image of political rivals, especially members of the previously governing coalition of PO and PSL. Most information about the election programme and/or the position of the group in certain cases the voter could find in PO advertisements — 70 per cent and PjN — 50 per cent of all commercials, the least — in RP commercials (12.5 per cent).

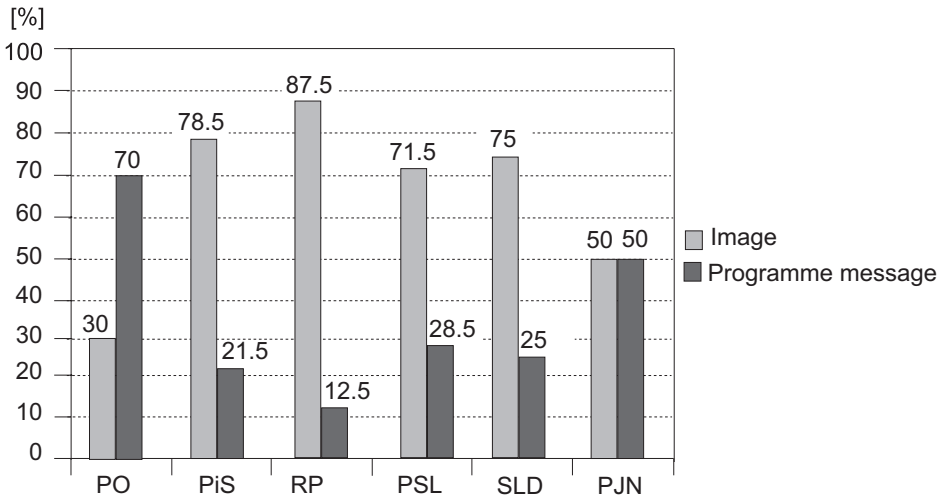


Figure 2. Image and programme message — audiovisual commercials from the parliamentary campaign in 2011

Source: research data.

Audiovisual adverts of three parties (PO, PJN and SLD) informed the recipient in the verbal layer (reader/candidate) and/or visual (subtitles on the screen) about specific programme proposals. In the parties' messages we can distinguish, among others, promises regarding: family politics and education (PO — easier access to flats, relief for the third and subsequent child, building schools and kindergartens; PJN — 400 PLN a month for each child, 200 PLN for an educational account, school duty from the 7 years of age, SLD — free kindergartens), public health (PO — better equipment in hospitals, improvement of registration of the sick, PJN — Regional Health Insurance Fund, SLD — jobs for nurses, decrease of drugs prices), pensions (PO — permanent increase of pensions, SLD — significant increase of pensions and allowances) or assistance for the poorest (SLD — free legal aid for the poorest; PJN — lack of tax increases, tax relief). The domain of the advertising message of other analysed groups (PiS, RP, PSL) was the presentation of the election programme based mainly on universal, timeless values, like: justice, honesty and truth, thrift, Poland — modern, prosperous, strong and loyal, decent and safe life, fair work and pay, Poland of equal opportunities (PiS) (see Adamik-Szysiak, 2012b, pp. 66–67), civil country, friendly, social and modern (RP) or equality, freedom, country's safety, economic safety, social and food, environmental protection, equal chances between regions (PSL).

Electoral mottos were used to emphasize and reinforce the leading themes of electoral campaigns of particular political parties in the voters' minds. The properly formulated electoral motto becomes an attribute not only in distinguishing the message of the given entity from the competition, but it also affects the recipient's imagination, prompting him to reflect on the future of the country.

Messages contained in electoral mottos from 2011 referred to the demands emphasized in the campaign, defined the current problems and needs of society, informed, promised and encouraged potential voters to being active in the elections. Electoral mottos were usually accented in the last frame of the spot (visually and verbally), which has additionally emphasized their role in the form of the advertisement's punch line.

A clear competition on the level of electoral motto was observed between the biggest ruling party (PO) and the main opposition group (PiS). PO's message "We will do more" was the party's declaration that after 4 years in power the next term will be even more effective. The slogan "Time for bold decisions" promoted by PiS in the period of the so called "information campaign,"⁵ criticized the actions of the ruling PO-PSL coalition (among others the actions of the government in the area of the pension system), was the prelude to the actual electoral campaign, whose

⁵ Such expression of the conducted campaign has been intensively emphasized by its creators, especially facing the charges of political rivals and media about the conduct of the electoral campaign almost half a year before the statutory time limit.

A moving sequence of frames with touching music was used by PiS in advertisements, distributed about half a year before the official beginning of the election campaign. Adverts, designed as music videos (archive photos shown in the rhythm of melancholic music) evoked memories of the Smolensk disaster, in which died, among others, the presidential couple Maria and Lech Kaczyński. The attention is drawn by the narration of one of the commercials, obtained thanks to the right combination of frames. Images resembling Lech Kaczyński in the period of his presidency (including, among others, meetings with the president of the USA, George Bush or the president of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili) were presented, with the scenes showing the sequence of: remains of the crashed plane in Smolensk visible through barbed wire, social conversation of the Prime Minister Donald Tusk with the Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, frame showing the smile on the face of the president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, presented against the Polish flag during the visit in Poland, and Jarosław Kaczyński kneeling over his brother's coffin. The succession of frames in the described fragment of the commercial suggests relations between the RP Prime Minister and at the same time the leader of the main opposition party (PO) Donald Tusk and the leaders of Russia and the catastrophe of the plane, in which died, among others, coming from PiS, governing from 2005, the RP President, Lech Kaczyński. The mentioned message undoubtedly proves the undertaking of actions entering permanent provocation (see Karwat, 2007, p. 92) especially towards the main political rival — PO.

The mentioned format of talking heads becomes popular in constructing commercials based on the model of “address” — the last advert in the campaign with the function of a punchline of the previous messages. The goal of this kind of advert is the mobilization of society to active participation in elections by emphasizing the importance of the undertaken decision, with the simultaneous indication of one's own party as unbeatable. The final message of the leaders of three parties (PO, PiS, RP) was based on extensive arguments, other politicians have confined themselves in their statements to the spare punchline stressing most of all the electoral slogan of their own party campaign.

PERSONALIZATION AND PRESIDENTIALIZATION OF POLITICS

The image of the political group is built through the prism of its leader, this trend clearly noticeable through the promotional materials of Polish political parties. The leader — the chief — becomes a kind of personification of the party. This is a progressive phenomenon of the personalization and presidentialization of politics, which seems to be justified from the psychological point of view — the voter can much easier refer to the particular person than to general slogans or most often difficult to define or precise explanation slogans (see Wiszniowski, 2000, p. 85; Poguntke & Webb, 2007). The growing meaning of the leader's participation in election adverts in the period of three parliamentary campaigns is shown in Table 3.

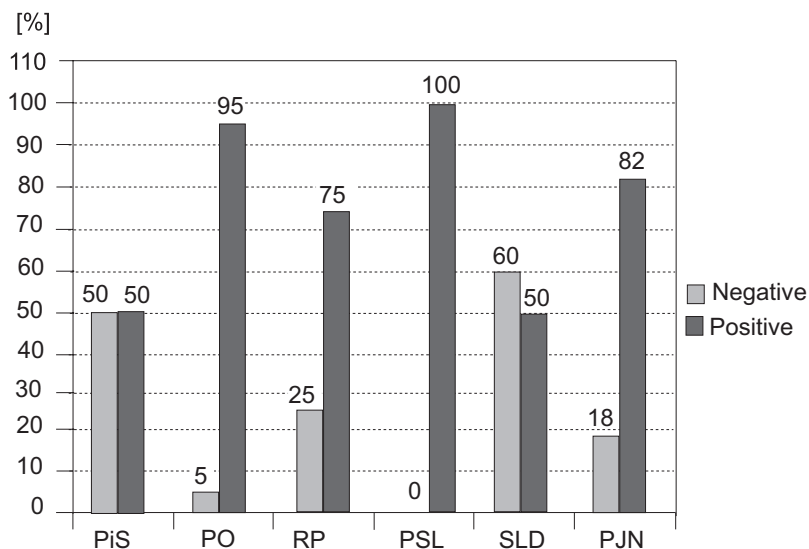


Figure 3. Positive and negative messages in election commercials from the parliamentary campaign in 2011

Source: research data.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the results of the analysis of audiovisual advertising spread in the period of the parliamentary campaign in 2011 have proven the superiority of the emotional argument. A vast majority of groups focused on the advert image, ignoring so-called “the problem advertising,” which informs the outline and plans of a given party. The issues of self-presentation have turned out to be very important in the strategy taken by PSL, and also RP. Comparison of the received research results from 2005–2011 allows us to state that party image is more and more built by the prism of leaders, which proves the personalization and presidentialization of parliamentary campaigns.

The proof of the professionalization of electoral activities taken by Polish political entities both at the national and regional level are spots constructed on the basis of the next phases of the campaign: identification, convincing, comparison and consolidation (see Diamond & Bates, 1992, pp. 289–345). In the tactics of almost all the entities, messages appeared which contained elements of information wanting to distinguish the candidate from rivals, including: concerning the selected aspects of the candidate’s biography (party’s genesis), electoral programme and position on current social and political issues, and direct request of the candidate for the voter’s vote. These elements, corresponding to successive stages of the campaign in the majority, especially in strategies of outsiders of the Polish political scene, constituted the composition of one message.

Modelled on the communication strategies accomplished by political entities on the level of national campaigns the candidates from particular regions have willingly built emotionality and intimacy of the message based on close plans. Establishing eye contact with the viewer aims at the creation of a semblance of direct reality, honest conversation. What is also interesting is the fact of omitting in strategies of entities at the regional level, messages attacking the rival — in the analysed time period there was not stated any kind of such messages, the occasionally appearing allusions and direct phrases in advertisements indicated or suggested the candidate's dissatisfaction with the overall situation of the region, without striking the images of individual rivals.

An important “novelty” influencing the shape and content of audio-visual adverts was, in communication strategies of all parties in 2011, the construction of at least several advertisements only for the needs of the Internet. These messages were usually characterised by the greater immediacy of messages (not only in the verbal layer, but also the visual) from those broadcast on television. The regularly increasing number of Internet users, including potential voters of the younger generation, is undoubtedly an important factor influencing decisions of politicians about the use of the Internet's potential in marketing strategies.

The effectiveness of the applied techniques of persuasion in audiovisual advertisements undoubtedly requires further detailed studies. The final electoral result is decided, however, by many more factors — it is the whole marketing strategy, where electoral spots are only one of the elements. Hence, in spite of great creativity in designing advertisements, often supported by high financial expenditure, the end result of electoral rivalry can be unsatisfactory for political parties.

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