

MANAGING DIGITAL ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN: ACTUAL CHALLENGES AND PRACTICAL FRAMEWORKS

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the management of electoral campaigns as a complex process of strategic planning, voter segmentation, and political message development. It highlights the specific characteristics of traditional, digital, and hybrid campaigns and the importance of integrating these approaches within the context of technological transformations. However, this study emphasizes the need to balance rational appeals with emotionally resonant narratives to strengthen voter relationships. The impact of digital technologies and the use of micro-targeting in enhancing campaign effectiveness are discussed.

Keywords: management, digital, electoral campaign, voter segmentation, political communication.

1. Introduction

The management of an electoral campaign represents a complex process of planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling human, financial, and informational resources to obtain electoral support and win elections[1]. In the context of political competitiveness and diversified communication channels, the efficiency of electoral management can determine the difference between electoral success and failure[2].

Bruce I. Newman is recognized as a leading scholar in the field of political marketing, offering substantial contributions to understanding how marketing principles can be applied within electoral campaigns. His work emphasizes that political marketing extends beyond advertising or isolated communication efforts, representing a comprehensive strategic process that integrates market research, segmentation, candidate positioning, message development, and the systematic use of feedback to adapt campaign strategies to the evolving preferences of the electorate[3].

The effectiveness of electoral campaigns is strongly influenced by the integration of rational policy appeals with emotionally resonant narratives. Addressing voters' aspirations for stability, identity, and security, while simultaneously fostering emotional connections through consistent messaging and narrative coherence, is central to shaping favorable voter perceptions.

2. Literature Review

Electoral campaigns are increasingly characterized by continuity beyond the temporal limits of electoral cycles, reflecting the transition towards a permanent campaign paradigm. Sustained engagement with the electorate, continuous image management, and

systematic communication of policy initiatives contribute to reinforcing candidate legitimacy and maintaining voter connections, thus establishing a foundation for subsequent electoral contests and enhancing democratic responsiveness[4].

Technological advancements, particularly the proliferation of social media platforms and the utilization of data-driven micro-targeting strategies, have significantly transformed the operational landscape of electoral campaigns. Campaigns are required to integrate digital communication tools seamlessly with traditional methods, ensuring message consistency while capitalizing on the agility provided by digital platforms.

The capacity to navigate this hybrid environment is imperative for achieving strategic effectiveness in highly competitive electoral arenas.

A comprehensive approach to campaign management necessitates the alignment of strategic objectives with empirical voter insights, systematic segmentation and targeting, and the coherent development of candidate branding. Flexibility and responsiveness to voter feedback are indispensable for maintaining campaign relevance, while continuous voter engagement beyond election periods contributes to sustaining public trust and democratic legitimacy.

Aragonès & Xefteris propose a theoretical framework conceptualizing electoral campaigns as dynamic contests in which candidates strategically allocate their campaign budgets over time to maximize their chances of winning elections. Unlike traditional static models, this dynamic approach highlights that candidates must decide not only how much to spend but also when to spend it, considering their competitors' likely reactions and the evolving preferences of voters throughout the campaign period[5].

Managing an electoral campaign involves setting objectives, identifying the target electorate, developing

political messages, organizing the campaign team, managing logistics, monitoring processes, and evaluating results[6]. In practice, it implies a mix of political marketing strategies, political communication, and operational management[7].

3. Research Methodology

The purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions of citizens in the municipality of Reșița regarding electoral campaign management, with a focus on message clarity, the use of communication channels, the efficiency of resource management, and the impact of campaigns on voting decisions.

The research conducted was quantitative, using the survey method with a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. This approach was chosen to obtain relevant numerical data on voter perceptions and to enable comparative analyses between different variables of interest.

The instrument used was a questionnaire containing 8 closed-ended questions, along with identification questions (age, gender, education level, voting participation), inspired by the theoretical framework on electoral campaign management and adapted to the context of Reșița municipality.

Responses were predefined using Likert scales and multiple-choice options to facilitate quantitative analysis.

The research population consisted of citizens of Reșița aged 18 and above, eligible to vote. The sample consisted of 151 respondents, randomly selected from various socio-demographic categories to ensure the representativeness of the results.

Data collection was conducted by distributing the questionnaire online (via Google Forms) and through direct, face-to-face application in public spaces (libraries, university campuses, commercial areas) during the period April 1- May 1. Respondents were assured of data confidentiality, and participation was voluntary.

4. Research Results

The objective of this research was to analyze the perceptions of citizens in the municipality of Reșița regarding the management of electoral campaigns, with a focus on message clarity, the use of communication channels, the efficiency of resource management, and the impact of campaigns on voting decisions. This survey aimed to identify the perceived level of digitalization, the adaptability of campaigns to voters' needs, and the importance of balancing emotional appeals with the concrete policies proposed by candidates.

The sample consisted of 151 individuals, mostly young people and young adults (57% under the age of 35), reflecting the orientation of the urban electorate

towards digital information channels. In terms of gender, the distribution was relatively balanced (58% women, 40% men), while the high level of education (65% with university studies) suggests an informed electorate capable of critically analyzing electoral messages.

This section presents the interpretation of the responses to each questionnaire item, providing an overview of voters' perceptions regarding electoral campaigns in Reșița. The analysis details how respondents evaluated message clarity, communication efficiency, and the influence of campaigns on voting behavior, setting the groundwork for the analysis of the relationships among these perceptions.

Question 1. Most respondents (63%) considered that the messages delivered during campaigns were clear (to a large or very large extent). However, a significant percentage (32%) perceived the messages as insufficiently clear, while 7% considered them not clear at all. This perception may reflect either the excessive complexity of the messages or a lack of coherence in their presentation, which may affect the effectiveness of campaigns in mobilizing voters.

Frequencies for Clarity_of_Messages

Clarity_of_Messages	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	32	21.192	21.192	21.192
2	27	17.881	17.881	39.073
3	27	17.881	17.881	56.954
4	29	19.205	19.205	76.159
5	36	23.841	23.841	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	151	100.000		

Question 2. Only 52% of respondents considered that campaign strategies were adapted to their needs, while 40% expressed a negative or reserved perception. This difference suggests a possible disconnect between campaign strategies and the priorities perceived by voters, indicating the need for deeper market research during the pre-election period.

Frequencies for Adaptation_to_Needs

Adaptation_to_Needs	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	33	21.854	21.854	21.854
2	31	20.530	20.530	42.384
3	24	15.894	15.894	58.278
4	26	17.219	17.219	75.497
5	37	24.503	24.503	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	151	100.000		

Question 3. Social media was perceived as the channel with the greatest impact (40%), followed by television (30%). These data confirm the digitalization of political communication while also revealing that television remains an important channel for message consolidation. Interpersonal discussions and public events are significant for only a small segment (22%).

Frequencies for Most_Influential_Channel

Most_Influential_Channel	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative_Percent
Events	27	17.881	17.881	17.881
Family/Friends	34	22.517	22.517	40.397
None	28	18.543	18.543	58.940
Social Media	33	21.854	21.854	80.795
TV	29	19.205	19.205	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	151	100.000		

Question 4. A percentage of 74% considered that social media contributes to the efficiency of electoral campaigns, highlighting the importance of digital communication in voter mobilization. However, 21% of respondents remained skeptical about the real impact of this channel.

Frequencies for Social_Media_Efficiency

Social_Media_Efficiency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative_Percent
1	34	22.517	22.517	22.517
2	25	16.556	16.556	39.073
3	32	21.192	21.192	60.265
4	28	18.543	18.543	78.808
5	32	21.192	21.192	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	151	100.000		

Question 5. 83% of respondents considered this balance important or very important, confirming the need for electoral messages to combine the emotional dimension (which activates engagement) with the presentation of concrete solutions (which confer credibility).

Frequencies for Balance_Emotion_Policy

Balance_Emotion_Policy	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative_Percent
1	32	21.192	21.192	21.192
2	32	21.192	21.192	42.384
3	30	19.868	19.868	62.252
4	25	16.556	16.556	78.808
5	32	21.192	21.192	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	151	100.000		

Question 6. Respondents' perceptions were polarized: 41% considered that resources were managed efficiently, while 49% considered this aspect deficient. This indicates a perceived lack of transparency in campaigns and raises questions about the efficiency of fund utilization and campaign priorities.

Frequencies for Resource_Management_Efficiency

Resource_Management_Efficiency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative_Percent
1	32	21.192	21.192	21.192
2	33	21.854	21.854	43.046
3	33	21.854	21.854	64.901
4	24	15.894	15.894	80.795
5	29	19.205	19.205	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	151	100.000		

Question 7. Only 41% believed that the messages reflected the candidates' real values, while 53% were skeptical or considered that the messages did not correspond to reality. This perception indicates a trust deficit that may reduce the impact of campaigns.

Frequencies for Reflection_of_Real_Values

Reflection_of_Real_Values	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative_Percent
1	30	19.868	19.868	19.868
2	30	19.868	19.868	39.735
3	33	21.854	21.854	61.589
4	21	13.907	13.907	75.497
5	37	24.503	24.503	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	151	100.000		

Question 8. The majority of respondents (63%) considered that an electoral campaign greatly or very greatly influences voting decisions, while 22% considered the influence to be low. This result validates the relevance of campaigns as tools for voter mobilization and persuasion.

Frequencies for Campaign_Influence

Campaign_Influence	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative_Percent
1	34	22.517	22.517	22.517
2	29	19.205	19.205	41.722
3	28	18.543	18.543	60.265
4	35	23.179	23.179	83.444
5	25	16.556	16.556	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	151	100.000		

Subsequently, the correlations between the variables were analyzed, who represents an essential step in evaluating the relationships that exist between voters' perceptions regarding key elements of electoral campaigns. In the context of the research conducted in the municipality of Reșița, this analysis allows for the investigation of how aspects such as message clarity, perceptions of the effectiveness of social media use, the consistency of values conveyed by candidates, and the influence of campaigns on voting decisions are interconnected in the respondents' perceptions.

By applying Spearman correlations, which are appropriate for ordinal variables, the aim is to identify statistically significant relationships between variables measured on a Likert scale, thereby contributing to understanding how the communicational and managerial components of electoral campaigns influence the formation of attitudes and voting behavior. The results obtained provide a solid analytical basis for formulating conclusions regarding the effectiveness of electoral campaigns and for identifying directions for optimizing them to increase electoral impact.

The Spearman correlation analysis highlighted relevant relationships between the variables reflecting respondents' perceptions of electoral campaigns in the municipality of Reșița.

A significant positive correlation was observed between message clarity and the perceived influence of the campaign on voting decisions ($r = 0.419, p < 0.01$), indicating that the perception of greater message clarity contributes to increasing the influence of campaigns on voters' voting behavior. This result supports the importance of delivering clear messages in electoral campaigns to strengthen electoral impact.

Additionally, a positive correlation was found between message clarity and the reflection of the candidates' real values ($r = 0.403, p < 0.01$), suggesting that messages perceived as clear contribute to the impression that they accurately reflect the candidates' values. This underlines the necessity of coherence between the content of messages and the public identity of the candidate.

Another important relationship was observed between the influence of the campaign on voting decisions and the reflection of the candidates' real values ($r = 0.487, p < 0.01$), indicating that the perception of the real values conveyed by candidates can increase the perceived influence of the campaign on voting decisions.

The correlations between the other variables analyzed did not present statistically significant values, indicating the absence of strong direct relationships between perceptions regarding the adaptation of campaigns to voters' needs, the efficiency of social media use, and the balance between the emotional dimension and the concrete policy content of the messages.

Overall, these results confirm the importance of message clarity and the consistency of values conveyed within electoral campaigns, as well as their influence on citizens' voting behavior. The findings align with the specialized literature on political marketing, according to which message clarity and consistency are determining factors in campaign effectiveness and in strengthening voter trust.

Spearman's Correlations

Variable	Clarity_of_Messages	Adaptation_to_Needs	Social_Media_Efficiency	Balance_Emotion_Policy	Resource_Management_Efficiency	Reflection_of_Real_Values	Campaign_Influence
1. Clarity_of_Messages	Spearman rho: 1.000 p-value: —	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Adaptation_to_Needs	Spearman rho: 0.090 p-value: 0.272	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Social_Media_Efficiency	Spearman rho: 0.021 p-value: 0.799	-0.034 0.774	—	—	—	—	—
4. Balance_Emotion_Policy	Spearman rho: 0.064 p-value: 0.436	0.010 0.903	0.097 0.234	—	—	—	—
5. Resource_Management_Efficiency	Spearman rho: -0.063 p-value: 0.440	-0.056 0.402	0.087 0.414	0.129 0.113	—	—	—
6. Reflection_of_Real_Values	Spearman rho: 0.403 p-value: 0.019	0.094 0.249	-0.011 0.892	-0.091 0.264	0.057 0.487	—	—
7. Campaign_Influence	Spearman rho: -0.143 p-value: 0.079	-0.099 0.228	-0.015 0.898	-0.038 0.647	-0.096 0.243	0.553 0.517	—

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The research is limited by the small sample size, which may affect generalizability, and by potential social desirability bias from self-reported data. Spearman correlation revealed significant links between voter perceptions, showing that clear and consistent campaign messages increase campaign influence on voting decisions. These findings align with political marketing literature, confirming that transparency and effective communication significantly impact voter behavior.

5. Conclusions

Political marketing and campaign management constitute a critical analytical lens through which electoral campaigns can be designed, implemented, and valued. By aligning strategic planning with the electorate's evolving preferences, incorporating emotional and rational appeals, and leveraging technological innovations, electoral campaigns can achieve heightened effectiveness while contributing to the consolidation of democratic practices.

However, the analysis of electoral campaign management reveals the importance of adopting a strategic, data-driven, and adaptable approach to engage voters effectively within competitive democratic environments.

In conclusion, the management of an electoral campaign requires a balance between strategy, communication, resource management, and continuous adaptation to the dynamics of the political environment. The use of data and modern communication tools, combined with a well-organized and motivated team, significantly increases the chances of electoral success.

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