The analysis of the candidates' slogans in the Romanian presidential campaign – November 2009

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Keywords: *presidential campaign, Romanian elections 2009, political slogan*

Abstract: *The current study aims at presenting some of the theoretical elements or dimensions of the political slogan in the Romanian presidential campaign 22nd of November 2009. The empirical research we have developed resides in the use of qualitative methods, to be more precise - the projective techniques, based on role-play, word association, story completion and sentence analysis.*

The hypothesis, or better to be said the main research question of this paper refers to the utility of the political slogan in the present context. The legitimate question would be: does the slogan have the force or the capacity to create first rank positive associations nowadays? Is it a foreground element in an electoral campaign?

The conclusions that can be drawn as a result of this analysis, which does not involve the whole corpus of the analytical methodology, show that the electoral symbolic reflects somewhat ordinary, routine images, and the phrases or the ideatic symbols do not converge towards the realities of the moment.

Electoral campaigns are usually occasions when different communicational products take shape from the creative efforts of the political party, the candidates and the electoral staff. Thus, the slogan is a strategic element, of maximum visibility in the economy of the electoral campaign. The first part of the present study aims at presenting some of the theoretical elements or dimensions of the slogan. The empirical evaluation used in the paper does not represent a complete study and it does not pretend to be representative. It is rather an attempt to test the quality of the products, the means by which some communicational products interact with other communicational constructs, such as political symbols, actions or rituals, in a more dynamic and dense context, as is the case of the electoral campaign.

"Some other time, politics meant ideas. Nowadays it means people. Or rather characters." This is how Roger – Gerard Schwartzenberg, in 1977, opened his book *The Superstar Show of Government.* "The political man [he said] tries more and more to impose his own image, able to capture and to catch the public's attention. This image is a more or less accurate reproduction of him. It is a series of features selected to be presented to the public opinion. It is a selection and a recomposition." (1995: 9)

Any candidate should have a distinctive image, one that is able to individualize him in the public space. Once shaped, this image must be promoted by different means, so that it reaches public opinion.

Hannah Arendt (1972: 15) wrote in "Du mensonge à la violence" that "politics is made, on the one hand, for the "trumping up" of a certain "image" and, on the other hand, for the art of making this image a credible one."

In order to become popular, this image must be clear, without contradictions and easily recognizable. These being universally accepted requirements in the electoral marketing, most of the political actors try to respect them in the process of building a campaign image and that is why the candidates' images often overlap. That is when differentiation methods intervene. The first step in this process is the positioning of the political actor on the market. In advertising, the term positioning refers to "the place a brand holds in the mind of the consumer opposed to the competition. It is composed of the target definition and the promise that adds value to the brand." (www.olimpiadelecomunicarii.ro)

In political marketing, positioning represents the place a politician holds in the mind of the electorate comparing to his counter-candidates, especially due to his image and political offer. Politics being a competitive environment, flexibility, creativity and clear strategy become key ingredients for the electoral success.

Together with the poster, the message, the photo, the platform, the logo, the candidates' agenda, the campaign calendar, the themes, the discourse and the symbol, the slogan is one of the differentiation techniques a politician uses in the electoral campaign.

Initially deriving from the Gaelic *sluagh ghairm,* meaning "a battle shout", "the word *slogan* has an adequate semantic base. A slogan incorporates the advantages of

a product, in order to send a short memorable message." (Russel & Lane, 2001: 600). Ioana Paveman believes that "the word slogan comes indeed from the term *sluagh-ghaien*, a battle shout of an old Scottish clan; but from the Scottish clans to the 21st century democracies, it is believed that the term reduces now (only) to that last simplification, to the catch-phrase that conveys the essential and to the power of the impact only, and not the content implied by the term the *sluagh-ghaien*".

Slogan definitions:
1. The slogan is "a concise and striking advertising message – usually composed of a group of suggestive words, a sentence or a phrase, up to eight words, easy to catch, funny etc. – that is meant to signal and remind the present and potential consumers of one company or brand, of its existence or qualities (for example: prestige, savings, entertainment etc.)." (www.iqads.com)
2. "The slogan is a word or sentence that describes either the benefits or one of the most important attributes of the product. […] It has two major purposes: first, to maintain the continuity of a campaign for one or more years, and second, to encompass in a few memorable words the key idea or the theme that is intended to be associated to the product or to the company" (Aggarwar & Gupta, 2002: 317).
3. "The slogan is a word, a group of words or a phrase, that carries the essence of the message." (Petrescu, 2002: 102)

Aggawar and Gupta (2002) identify two types of slogans:
1. "A slogan that emphasizes the product or the reward: every product has some reward to be offered to the consumers. It may have some hidden qualities that differentiate a product from the competitor's. The trick then is to find some way to dramatize the advantage of a particular product in effective words.
2. "Slogans that emphasize the action to be taken: the slogan might urge directly that you use the product or service."

We distinguish between the *company slogan* (or the institutional slogan, as Russel and Lane call it) and the *campaign slogan*. The company slogan does not change, except for some rare situations when the company faces a rebranding process. Yet, the campaign slogan or slogans are always contextualized and uniquely adapted to each campaign.

A good slogan must comply with a series of requirements, among which Sean Brierley (2002: 213) mentions:
- to state the main benefits of the products or of the brand for its potential users or buyers
- to imply the difference between the promoted product and the ones of the competition (of course, within legal limits)
- to imply a simple, concise, brisk and witty statement
- to be funny

- to adopt a distinct "personality", of its own
- to offer a credible image of the brand or product
- to make the consumer feel good
- to make the consumer feel a desire or need
- to remain in the mind of the user or consumer (whether he likes it or not), especially if it is accompanied by mnemonic artifacts, photographs or movies.

Aggawar and Gupta (2002) also sum up the main features of a good slogan:
1. "A slogan should be brief, well balanced and easy to say.
2. It should be built on one idea.
3. Easy to remember.
4. Make it help differentiate the product.
5. Make it provoke curiosity, if possible.
6. Make sure it highlights either a product, reward or an action.
7. Use rhythm and rhyme.
8. Make sure the slogan is not to confuse the consumer."

On the other hand, Timothy Foster mentions a few aspects that are to be avoided in building and choosing a slogan, as a slogan:
- should not be in current use by other companies
- should not be bland, generic or hackneyed
- should not prompt a sarcastic or negative response
- should not be pretentious or negative
- should not reek of corporate waffle, hence sounding unreal
- should not be a "So what?" or "Ho-hum!" statement
- should not make you say "Oh yeah??"
- should not be meaningless
- should not be complicated or clumsy.

The political slogan

In politics, the slogan is seen as one of the basic elements used in an electoral campaign in order to differentiate the political actor from his opponents, and is defined as:
- "a short statement about the reasons why a candidate should be elected or why the voters should vote for your measure" (Shaw, 2004: 37)
- "a motto or phrase that expresses a goal or an aim, used for a political purpose" (Wiktionary)
- "a memorable phrase (often used in political speeches, marketing, or advertising) that expresses a key idea (or accomplishes some other key purposes) in a political campaign" (All Experts Encyclopedia)
- "short expressions associated with commercial or political advertising meant to express ideas, aims or the nature of an individual or organization in ways

that are simple and easy to remember or to communicate" (Sharkansky, 2002: 78).

A successful slogan will motivate the electors and will influence them in directing their vote towards a certain candidate.

The political analyst Ruslan Tănasă (2009) believes that: "the slogan offers the devoted voters a reason to maintain their political behavior. To the undecided, the slogan, along with other components of the electoral offer, should give sufficient reasons to choose the respective candidate […]. A well thought slogan should bring only benefits to the political party, and these benefits are summed up in the people's votes. The slogan should express the electoral message that emphasizes the different sides of the electoral offer. It should be the concentrated information of the electoral platform. A well crafted slogan will highlight the differences between the candidate and his opponents and will give the argument for voting him", says the expert.

Therefore, the political slogan should fulfill a series of qualities, such as:

1. <u>Memorability</u>

"Memorability depends on the length of the slogan and on the words that are used. The shorter the slogan, the easier to remember. […] The ingenuity in using the language and the type of words that make a slogan facilitate its recollection. Verbs, adjectives, adverbs and some pronouns remain in the mind of the public longer than articles, numerals, conjunctions or prepositions. Puns, proverbs, rhythm, unexpected associations etc. also influence the degree of recollection of slogans." (Petrescu, 2002: 102)

Russel and Lane consider that "the slogan differs from the great majority of all the other forms of writing, because it is meant to be remembered word for word, in order to imprint a certain trademark or message in the consumers' mind" (Russel & Lane, 2001: 602).

Some slogans use alliteration (a stylistic trope consisting in the repetition of the same sound or group of sounds in successive words) or "the rule of three" (using a sequence of three attributes).

2. <u>Brevity</u>

The slogan should be short, to the point, and it should highlight the focal point of the campaign. Any slogan longer than ten words is inappropriate. Voters should be able to recall the slogan easily and to associate it with the candidate without any doubt.

At the same time, it is recommended that the slogan should be short because of the fact that it accompanies all the campaign materials (including the small badges, pins or the small size stickers).

3. <u>Clarity</u>

The slogan should be intelligible, easy to decipher; it should need no supplementary explanations in order to be understood and it should not create confusion. It must explain clearly, in just a few words, the core of the electoral strategy.

4. Representativeness

The slogan must catch the essence of the candidate's message. The starting point in creating a slogan should be the analysis of the campaign message. What do we want to say to the voters? What are the main themes of the electoral program? What sets us apart from the other candidates?

The electoral slogan should be associated with the candidate's reputation. It should be representative for the situation, for the candidate and for the party.

Any good political slogan should take into account the campaign themes, the location and the candidate's personality. All these elements should be reflected into the content of the campaign slogan.

An important aspect to be considered is using the candidate's name. A lot of the political actors make a frequent mistake – that of creating excellent slogans but which do not carry the candidates' name. A slogan that does not help the voters remember the name of the candidate is non-existent.

5. Differentiating the candidate from the competition

The slogan individualizes the candidate. It makes him differentiate from the competition. Also, the slogan should indicate as clearly as possible the uniqueness of the political actor on the market.

The process of creating a powerful political slogan (Cone, 2008: 79) covers four steps:

1. Create some new thought about what is ahead or a clear benefit that will occur if elected.
2. Reinforce the personality of the candidate.
3. Create a slogan that can be sung or chanted; rhyming is always a positive;
4. Use the slogan everywhere, in all the media.

Generally speaking, an advertiser will use a slogan especially when he has a basic idea or theme that he wants to emphasize or to continue for a long period of time but this rule does not apply to the political slogan, which is pretty much marked by perishability. In politics, a slogan rarely continues the idea of a previous campaign. This trend is even more obvious in Romania, where candidates quickly change sides from one party to another, having to give up the distinctive elements of the political party they used to be members of. In this respect, the exceptions would be those few candidates that have an excellent performance in a previous mandate and that seek confirmation.

Joe Garecht, the founder of the Local Victory site, which publishes mainly political PR articles, considers that: "Political slogans can be an integral part of your campaign's communications effort. Slogans present an easy-to-remember way to present your candidate's name and message to the electorate. Ideal political taglines should be pithy and memorable, utilize the candidate's name, and tie directly to the campaign's message."

As regards the typology of the political slogan, some authors distinguish between:
- the imperative slogan: implicitly asks for an action or commands the company to do something;
- the descriptive slogan: describes the key feature or benefit of the candidate or party;
- the superlative slogan: exaggerates the message but in a way that makes a point and is something you believe to be true;
- the provocative slogan: makes the listener or the viewer think or reflect on the presented situation.

Methodology

The empirical research developed in the present paper resides in the use of qualitative methods, to be more precise – the projective techniques. Inspired from the clinical psychology, the projective techniques assume that when trying to interpret some stimuli or some responses generated from certain stimuli, the individual projects some of his needs, feelings, attitudes and personal experiences (Davis, 1997: 205). Therefore, the subject projects his own personalities onto the stimulus, often revealing personal conflicts, motivations, coping styles and other characteristics. The qualitative methods have also been used due to their in-depth perspective (Ilut, 1997: 74).

The subjects of the current study are some young senior students, aged 20-30, in the last year of study in Communication Science, majoring in Communication and Public Relations. Studying Communication Science implies mastering high knowledge and competency in studying and doing research, which is the reason why these students were to evaluate some aspects regarding the electoral communicational products. The degree of familiarity between these students and Communication Science themes, their theoretical models and practical experiences will contribute to a more thorough and nuanced outcome of the research.

The projective techniques used in the research are based on role-play, word association, story completion and sentence analysis. In this case, the evaluation was carried out individually, each subject being asked to mention his observation and comments on the theme in writing.

The hypothesis of the present paper refers to the utility of the political slogan in the present context. The legitimized question would be: does the slogan have nowadays the force or the capacity to create first rank positive associations? Is it a foreground element in an electoral campaign?

The first evaluation, based on the analysis of the 2009 campaign, states that the communicational contribution of the slogan in the context of the electoral campaign is a diminished one, as the slogan no longer represents one of the key features in the electoral campaign architecture. Nevertheless, when referring to the Romanian context or to foreign societies, one can observe that the slogan has been seen as an important element of the whole electoral product building process. Some examples in this case are the famous slogans of Barack Obama in the US electoral campaign (Y*es,*

We Can) or the one of Traian Basescu in 2004, that still reverberates in the minds of the Romanian voters (*Să trăiţi bine! "Live well!"*). The slogan can have a positive or negative resonance, given the mistakes of the government and the repercussions they have had on the image of the candidate. Of course, in these cases, one must take into consideration both the slogan itself, and the context in which this ideatic symbol appears and develops. Their main function is to suggest positive representations in the collective mentality by joining images and words, along with other symbolic products of the campaign, such as: the candidates' speeches, replies and famous verbal expressions etc. The main mission of the slogan is that of mobilizing the electorate in order to stand for the politician, for a longer period of time and with a more powerful influence. The candidates that attain positions of power are under the influence of the force of images and of the expectations suggested by the campaign slogan, especially when these symbolic products have proven to be successful. Success is mainly given by the memorability, musicality and rhythm of the slogan or by the capacity to synthesize the political program of the candidate or the political platform (Thoveron, 1996).

The present analysis of the political slogans used by the 2009 electoral presidential candidates focuses on the identification of the key elements of the ideatic symbol that guides the communicational effort of the campaign. It is to see whether the ideatic symbol is undertaken by other communicational products or constructs.

The empirical research aims at analyzing the important dimensions of the theoretical ideas presented in the first part of the material. Therefore, there are six dimensions that will identify the strengths and weaknesses of the political slogan. The evaluation was done only a few days after the first round of the Romanian elections (22 November 2009). The selected students were asked to deliver in writing their analytical observations, opinions and comments regarding four aspects:

1. Identifying the official presidential candidates and the slogan used for the electoral campaign. The answers provided by the students were influenced by their capacity to reconstruct sentences and names; given the fact that the evaluation was done less than seven days after the thirty-day campaign was over, forgetting was not an obstacle in this process. The analysis started from the hypothesis that the candidates' media coverage and notoriety are key elements that contribute to the memorability of the slogan.

2. Identifying the main ideas suggested by the ideatic symbol (the electoral slogan) using the projective evaluation. In this case, the students received the candidates' name, slogan and political party. This part of the evaluation was based on the idea accepted by political anthropologists that electoral campaigns are a series of ritualized actions, meant to mobilize the large masses or that politics is almost exclusively expressed through elements of a symbolic nature (Kertzer, 2002: 114). In this context, asking the subjects to associate slogans with ideas or emotions would be a legitimate action, which was intended to identify the degree in which the slogan-phrase succeeds

in determining emotional reactions based on cognitive content, or rather to identify what kind of emotion it was able to trigger.

3. Analyzing the main ideas formulated by these ideatic symbols, in order to identify the specificity elements of each slogan. Students were asked to grade the slogan in order to create a clear hierarchy of the 12 slogans. This effort does not necessarily imply the ranking of the symbolic value but it is rather aimed at evaluating the meaning and perception of these specific symbolic constructs.

4. Providing improving scenarios. In the end, students were asked to provide scenarios that would improve each of the twelve slogans. Certainly, the fact that the subjects are students in Communication Science contributes to a good interpretation and a better scenario provided in the fourth step of the evaluation on the selected theme.

The correct mentioning of the candidates' names and their campaign slogans places the best five candidates, with high media coverage and visibility, on the first positions: Crin Antonescu, Traian Basescu and Mircea Geoană, but also Corneliu Vadim Tudor and George Becali. In the case of the last two, the students were not able to reproduce the campaign slogans. The correct and complete identification (of the candidates' name, party and slogan) was done only in the case of the top three candidates in the election race; at the opposite pole, there are the independent candidates or the representatives of the extra-parliamentary parties, the ones that usually score less than 1% of the votes. Regarding the independent candidates, the mentioning of their names, slogans or political parties seemed to be mostly accidental. As expected, it seems that media coverage is the filter for the candidates' selection for political positions, their eligibility being determined by their access to media channels (Gerstle, 2002). The independent candidates were almost unknown before the presidential campaign. The official thirty-day campaign is surely a much too short period of time for increasing trust in the candidate and the notoriety of the candidate or for winning the electorate's votes, especially given the fact that he does not have considerable resources that could provide him with consistent access to media.

The suggested ideas and words associated with the slogan (see appendix no. 1) place the slogans in an area where they reflect, on the one hand, the adherence to values inspired from the political ideology, and, on the other hand, the features of the candidates' personality. In the case of the top-four candidates, the slogan is by far better crafted, even if it is still a lot lower than the expectations of the evaluators. In the great majority of cases, a top-down type of communication, from the presidential candidates to the voters, is registered. However, the theoretical patterns refer to the *transforming of social relations into political relations*, this leading to down-top communication, reflected in the slogans.

The empirical research shows that the campaign goals can be achieved through political communication when the goals are based on the demands and expectations

of the society. Collective participation, the vote direction and the candidate support are the results of the candidates' attention turned to building and promoting symbolic products that favor public participation (Gerstle, 2002: p. 121). In the case of Traian Basescu, the students mentioned several times the slogan he used for the referendum, and not the one promoted in the campaign ads and posters. At the same time, it is obvious that the formulas used in the promotion of the referendum were more able to motivate and mobilize the electorate because they were less routine and more stimulative towards the participation.

The subjects' reactions, in the case of the five aspects analyzed, are to be correlated with the notoriety, credibility and trust that the presidential candidates are endowed with. As regards the more famous candidates, the students' arguments and comments use more information, more details, while the ones regarding the unknown candidates are short and exclusively referring to the slogan. Synthesizing the subjects' assessment: they emphasize the inflation of words referring to the country or nation. It is obvious that all the presidential candidates are for Romania, and these reference to the country does not succeed in triggering emotion (pathos). The abusive invocation of national values, in the last two decades, has resulted in a decrease of credibility (ethos) when referring to national values. Some slogans have succeeded in capturing the attention due to their conciseness and to the set of values that they promoted (free thinking, reevaluating the public space etc.), but the main problem of the symbolic offer is to adapt the messages to the societal realities of the moment. The length of the slogans and the inadequacy for the Romanian current problems as well as the considerable distance between the candidates' image and the ideas suggested by the slogan are just a few of the most frequent shortcomings of the symbolic products that have been analyzed in this study.

The conclusions drawn from this analysis emphasize the need of political actions on the symbolic agenda, actions that are meant to re-stimulate public participation using both the pathos and the ethos in this efforts. The analysis, which does not use the whole corpus of analytical methodology, shows that the electoral symbolism (the slogans) reflects ordinary, routine images, and the phrases or the ideatic symbols do not converge towards the realities of the moment.

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Appendix no. 1

The slogan: power ideas, elements of specificity, general considerations

The slogan	Considerations: key ideas, associations	The slogan	Considerations: key ideas, associations
Common sense Romania	*through "common sense", the individual corrects Romania* *respect* *lack of originality* *adequate for the liberal ideology* *social responsibility* *moral principles* *confused with the slogan of the Petrom company* *"common sense" is used for the first time* *humanizes the candidate, the political party and the electorate*	**Think big**	*provokes you to be different* *interpretable* *suited for the candidate* *incites to action* *unrepresentative for the situation* *instigates to a different way of thinking, a bold one*
Băsescu for Romania Traian Băsescu The President	*Băsescu is the choice* *trust in a new mandate* *suited for the candidate* *demagogical* *contains the candidate's name* *differentiation*	**A new force, for a cleaner Romania!**	*new direction* *ecological* *ecologist, green* *according to the party's ideology, but it does not have a high relevance for the idea of perfection*
We win together	*the majority wins* *categorical* *cliché* *left ideology* *community* *unity, solidarity* *pure socialistic feature-achieving the results altogether*	**Faith, hope and love!**	*traditional* *emotion* *God* *ridiculous* *lack of association with the candidate's profile* *call for sentiments*
Come on, Romania	*if you are a supporter of Romania, rise and get involved* *concision, memorability, simplicity* *neutral slogan* *does not straightly address politics* *I would suggest an individualized slogan* *imperative way of addressing the voters* *voter's identification with Romania*	**It's time to be together!**	*solidarity* *confused with PSD* *ultimatum nuance*

The slogan	Considerations: key ideas, associations	The slogan	Considerations: key ideas, associations
Save Romania! SOS the Romanian people!	*patriotism,* *grave and apocalyptic* *too long* *risks to be ridicule* *ultimatum for the Romanian people*	**Your Romania, ours**	*ill crafted* *provokes confusion* *too vague* *nothing particular*
Call a spade a spade	*be active* *neutral slogan* *unrepresentative for the situation* *sort of cliché*	**I give you back your country!**	*inadequate promise to the present* *idea of possessiveness* *show revolutionary* *aggressive tone* *identifying the power of the people with a single character – the candidate (the only one that is able to take action)*

Appendix no.2

List of candidates, slogans and political parties competing in the Romanian presidential elections 22nd of November 2009

	Candidate	Slogan	Political party
1	Crin Antonescu	Common sense Romania	National Liberal Party
2	Traian Băsescu	Băsescu for Romania Traian Băsescu The President	Democratic-Liberal Party
3	Mircea Geoană	We win together	Social Democrat Party + Conservative Party
4	Sorin Mircea Oprescu	Come on, Romania	Independent
5	Corneliu Vadim Tudor	Save Romania! SOS the Romanian people!	Great Romania Party
6	Hunor Kelemen	Call spade a spade	Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania
7	Remus Cernea	Think big	Green Party
8	Ovidiu Iane	A new force for a cleaner Romania!	Romanian Ecologist Party
9	George Becali	Faith, hope and love!	New Generation Party – Christian Democrat
10	Constantin Ninel Potîrcă	It's time to be together!	independent
11	Constantin Rotaru	Your Romania, ours!	Socialist Alliance Party
12	Gheorghe Eduard Manole	I give you back your country!	Independent