

By Tomasz Płudowski

**The Normative and Commercial Models of Political Advertising in the U.S. and Poland.
A Comparative Content Analysis of Television Electoral Broadcasts in Presidential Elections**

Key words: political advertising, television, media, persuasive communication, political communication, US, Poland.

ABSTRACT:

This paper is a comparative content analysis of televised political advertising in Poland and the U.S. The objectives of the study include: 1) establishing how advertising meets the informational needs of American voters (inclusion and degree of discussion of issues), 2) verifying the degree of Americanisation of Polish televised political advertising. To those ends, a multivariate statistical analysis was performed (factor analysis, analysis of variance, and correlation analysis). In order to capture multifactor relationships, the author constructed two models of advertising. The first one, which he calls the traditional or normative model, refers to non-controversial ways of message delivery, based on the idea of rational vote by well-informed citizens. The second model, named commercial, is based on practical guidelines of American political consultants. This study carries out a comparison of the use of both models in Poland and the U.S.

TOMASZ PŁUDOWSKI, dr, *Fulbright Fellow* at the Communication and Political Studies Faculties at Stanford University in California. The author of over 40 articles and editor of four books on political and international communication published in Poland, Germany and the USA. Chief editor of "Global Media Journal" (www.globalmediajournal.collegium.edu.pl); t.pludowski@collegium.edu.pl.

Introduction

In the second half of the XX century there have been significant changes taking place as far as the construction and carrying out of political campaigns. A crucial role is played by television which has become the key medium between the candidates and their electorate. Thanks to it the average individual gained almost direct access to politicians aspiring for office. The growing power of television leads to changes regarding the candidates' requirements and the lessening power of political parties. Television specificity as a mass medium, reaching the largest recipient groups and giving wide opportunities of channel choice, has made TV the predominant battlefield in modern democratic election campaigns. At the same time the broadcasted content and the influence of this medium have become the subject of various academic research and the growing popularity of communication studies.

Research Achievements

The United States possess the most comprehensive research literature due to their long history of using modern TV technology and marketing methods in election campaigns and the commercial character of their media system. Regarding the use of television in such campaigns of most interest has been the use of political advertising. The earliest, known to researchers, usage took place during the presidential elections in 1952 when Dwight D.

Eisenhower recorder forty 20-second advertising spots broadcasted during the last few weeks of the campaign¹.

The key role of TV advertising in American elections is well documented in research literature.² This is because TV commercials have been the only (until Internet age) type of mass media communication which the candidates could fully control³.

In the US, all presidential candidates have used the services of advertising agencies since the mid 1960s. McGinniss⁴ research was one of the first which established the conviction that TV advertising is manipulative and superficial as it solely bases on the candidates image from the picture screen. This theory became popular in academic circles, as it was critical of the candidates' approach to the most prestigious position in the country. The reasoning was either technologically determined⁵, post-Marxist⁶ or clearly pragmatic⁷ due to the commercial character of TV advertising its brevity and superficial message advantageous to the paying candidate. However, the majority of research carried out using empirical methods did not support these accusations⁸.

Within the last few years, research done using the content analysis method has widened the scope of research in this area also introducing comparative studies. So far political advertising research has been done in France⁹ and other Western European countries, the USA (including various ethnic groups¹⁰), Israel¹¹ and Korea¹². In 2006, published was comparative analysis research for most regions of the world¹³.

¹ P. C. Wood [1990], *Television's First Political Spot Ad Campaign. Eisenhower Answers America*. "Presidential Studies Quarterly", nr 20.

² E. Diamond, P. Bates [1993], *The Spot*, The MIT Press, Cambridge; K. H. Jamieson [1996] *Packaging the Presidency*, Oxford University Press, New York.

³ L. L. Kaid [1981], *Political Advertising*, [in:] D. D. Nimmo & K. R. Sanders (ed.), *Handbook of Political Communication*, Sage, Beverly Hillp.

⁴ J. McGinniss [1969], *The Selling of the President 1968*, Trident Press, New York.

⁵ N. Postman [1985], *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Penguin Books, New York.

⁶ D. Kellener [1990], *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*. Boulder: Westview Presp.

⁷ R. Spero [1980], *The Duping of the American Voter*, Lippincott & Crowell, Publishers, New York.

⁸ T. E. Patterson, R. D. McClure [1976], *The Unseeing Eye*, Putnam, New York; L. L. Kaid [1981], *op. cit.*; R. Joslyn [1980], *The Content of Political Spot Ad*, "Journalism Quarterly"; L. Shyles [1984], *The Relationships of Images, Issues and Presentational Methods in Televised Spot Advertisements for 1980's American Presidential Primaries*, "Journal of Broadcasting", nr 28; L. Shyles [1986], *The Televised Spot Advertisement: Its Structure, Content and Role in the Political System*, [in:] L.L. Kaid, D. Nimmo, & K.R. Sanders (ed.), *New Perspectives on Political Advertising*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale; A. J. Wadsworth, [1988], *Incumbent and Challenger Strategies in Presidential Communication: A Content Analysis of Television Campaign Ads from 1952 to 1984*. (doctoral thesis, University of Oklahoma, Norman).

⁹ L. L. Kaid, J. Gerstle, K. Sanders [1991], *Mediated Politics in Two Cultures: Presidential Campaigning in the United States and France*, Praeger, New York.

¹⁰ R. M. L. Godoy [1991], *Image versus Issues: The Appeals Used to Reach Hispanic Voters in Texas - A Content Analysis of the 1982 and 1986 Gubernatorial Campaignp*. (doctoral thesis, University of Texas at Austin).

¹¹ L. L. Kaid, C. Holtz-Bacha [1995], *Political Advertising in Western Democracies. Parties and Candidates on Television*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

¹² J. Tak [1993], *A Cross-cultural Comparative Study of Political Advertising between America and Korea: A Content Analysis of Presidential Campaign Ads from 1963 to 1992* (doctoral thesis, University of Oklahoma, Norman).

¹³ L. L. Kaid, C. Holtz-Bacha [2006], *SAGE Handbook of Political Advertising*, Sage, London.

In Poland, due to our history, the first television political commercials for presidential candidates were aired in 1990¹⁴. Five years later advertising became more professional, due to, among other things, the growing emphasis on peripheral indicators¹⁵. This article is derived from the author's doctoral thesis paper¹⁶. Since then, similar research in Poland has been done by Cwalina as well as a few other scholars.¹⁷

Research Plan

The author wishes to make contributions to the development of research in the area of political advertising content by:

- analysing commercials in Poland,
- usage of various statistical analyses (factor analysis, analysis of variance, and correlation analysis), which have not been used by others so far¹⁸.
- proposing two models of political advertising – the normative and commercial.

The goals are :

- to combine the critical¹⁹ and the empirical²⁰ perspectives by researching and verifying other research analysis according to which “(American) political TV advertising does not provide viewers with factual information, degrades the election process by selling candidates as if they were a product, focuses on image and ignores political issues”;
- to verify if and to what degree Polish advertising is becoming 'Americanised', which seems to be a popular process in Western democracies²¹,
- to research how the differences between Polish and US political communication systems influence what is being broadcasted .

The comparative aspect allows a differentiation between a commercial political advertising system and one in which the candidates obtain free air time (*free time allocation system*). The existing variations are a consequence of general, historically motivated disparities between the European and American media policy models and television cultures which influence the overall character of broadcast.

¹⁴ M. Grabowska, L. Krzemiński [1991], *Bitwa o Belweder*, Wydawnictwo Myśl, Warsaw.

¹⁵ T. Płudowski [1997], *Politics and Media in Poland*, paper from an international conference, “Images of Politics”, Amsterdam, October 23-25; T. Płudowski [2000], *Politics and Media in Poland After 1989: The Rise of the Peripheral Strategy of Persuasion in Political Campaigning on Television*, “International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal”, nr 1.

¹⁶ T. Płudowski [1999], *Political Advertising in Two Cultures: A Comparative Content Analysis of Presidential Campaign Television Broadcasts in the United States and Poland* (doctoral thesis, Lodz University).

¹⁷ W. Cwalina [2000], *Telewizyjna reklama polityczna*, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin; R. Wiszniowski [2000], *Marketing wyborczy. Studium kampanii wyborczych w systemach prezydenckich i semiprezydenckich*, PWN, Warsaw; M. Mazur [2004], *Marketing polityczny*, PWN, Warsaw; M. Jeziński [2004], *Marketing polityczny w poszukiwaniu strategii wyborczego sukcesu*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń.; W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski [2005], *Marketing polityczny*, GWP, Gdańsk.

¹⁸ T. E. Patterson, R. D. McClure, *op. cit.*, L. L. Kaid, *op. cit.*, L. Shyles, *op. cit.*, R. A. Joslyn, *op. cit.*, A. Wadsworth, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ R. Spero [1980], *op. cit.*; N. Postman [1985], *op. cit.*

²⁰ L. L. Kaid [1981], *op. cit.*; T. E. Patterson, R. D. McClure [1976], *op. cit.*; L. Shyles [1984], *op. cit.*; A. Wadsworth [1988], *op. cit.*

²¹ M. Gurevitch, J. G. Blumler [1990], *Comparative research: The Extending Frontier*, [in:] D. Swanson & D. Nimmo (red.), *New Directions in Political Communication: A Sourcebook*, Sage, Newbury Park; L. L. Kaid, C. Holtz-Bacha [1995], *op. cit.*; R. Negrine [1996], *The Communication of Politics*, Sage, Thousand Oakp.

General research characterisation and methodology

This article is derived from a more comprehensive content analysis research²² of 55 advertising spots of three main candidates for US presidency from 1992 and 61 election campaign programmes of 6 key presidential candidates in Poland from 1995²³.

The methodology as well as the theoretical framework are communication studies based and vary from sociological ones. This is how Goban Klas, a sociologist, in his habilitation thesis characterizes the relations between these two fields of study²⁴,

"The analysis of present research practices regarding the mass media demands a different way of looking at the status of the various fields of study researching it. American *mass media research* from the start has been developing as an interdisciplinary study including the fields of sociology, psychology and political sciences. It can be debated which of these plays a key role but the cooperation between the three is indisputable [...] It should be stressed that, in this case, the sociological aspect was not considered a separate branch of general sociology or media communication but has become an integral part of a broader study. The present research methodology is going in the direction of further broadening of fields of interest and scope of the cooperating studies."

Due to space limitations, this article will include only selected bibliography and tables with statistical data and analysis of the differences between the two political and media systems as well as the political culture of both countries. Results of this research have already been published in other papers such as American advertising content analysis usefulness as a source of information when making election choices²⁵, partial analysis of subject literature²⁶, and a presentation of the function and influence of advertising for particular elections as well as for the whole political system²⁷. A complete analysis can be found in the author's doctoral thesis paper²⁸.

Research Results

The research has shown that contradictory opinions of TV political advertising so far have been the result of the definitions and methodology used. The researchers, using the empirical method, operationalised terms such as the candidates' *image* and programme *issues* and the results of their research were confirmed. American TV advertising really does put a greater

²² K. Krippendorf [1980], *Content Analysis*, Sage, London.

²³ The omission of Jan Olszewski's candidature occurred independent of the author, his representative, to whom I talked, did not agree to provide me with materials saying that he does not know the researcher's intentions and is not sure whether they will be used in a proper way.

²⁴ T. Goban-Klas [1978], *Komunikowanie masowe*, Ośrodek Badań Prasoznawczych, Warsaw, p. 314.

²⁵ T. Płudowski [2004a], *How Television Serves the American Electorate: The Message of US Political Advertising*, "Studia Polityczne", vol. 16, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warsaw.

²⁶ T. Płudowski [2004b], *Televised Political Advertising Research in the US*, "Ad Americam: A Journal of American Studies", nr 5, Jagiellonian University Publishing, Kraków.

²⁷ T. Płudowski [2005], *Functions, Uses, and Effects of Televised Political Advertising in American Presidential Elections*, [in:] T. Płudowski (ed.), *American Politics, Media, and Electionp. Contemporary International Perspectives on U.P. Presidency, Foreign Policy, and Political Communication*, Adam Marszałek and Collegium Civitas Press, Toruń.

²⁸ T. Płudowski [1999], *op. cit.*

emphasis on visual rather than verbal issues of the candidates²⁹. The strictly verbal and quantity approach, however, is too narrow and ignores the essence of television as a mass medium.

Firstly, a more broadly analysed content analysis shows that American advertising to a large degree uses emotional appeals and peripheral aspects (music) as a supplement to the first. In 50% of the cases, commercials focus on political opponents. Such negative advertising often makes use of the *voice-over* technique and draws attention away from the candidate who is then not associated with the criticism.

Secondly, even if American advertising focuses more on substantial issues rather than the personality of the candidate, the factual information provided is extremely superficial. In most of the cases, the viewers hear generalisations (*issue concerns, vague policy proposals*), for example, "I am for insurance system reform" or "I want every American to realize his American Dream". Only about 10% of commercials provide a more in-depth programme offer. Also negative commercials include more programme details.

It can be said that Polish advertising is becoming 'Americanised' but it is also becoming more professional and as Kaid and Holtz-Bach (1995) stated, this is a world wide trend which is characterized by 1) television playing the key role among other media, 2) image being predominant, with a growing personalisation of policy presentation, 3) politicians at work professionalisation over media strategy, 4) decreasing role of political parties. Moreover, visible is also a growing emphasis on peripheral factors³⁰.

In most categories, variance analysis has shown significant statistical differences between Polish and American political advertising, at the high level of significance ($p < 0,0001$). Therefore, it can be said that the theory of Polish advertising becoming 'Americanised' is not supported. The key similarities between the two countries' commercials are the use of emotional appeals as well as the use of music. However, in Poland, regarding emotional appeals these are limited to the video clip part and not the entire spot. Additionally, we do not use black PR as much as it is done in America, in the first round it is mostly on the allusion level. Sometimes even no names are mentioned.

At high statistical significance ($p < 0,0001$) there are also differences regarding dominant broadcast tone (*focus: positive or negative*). In America 40% of commercials are negative in tone, while in Poland there are only 6% of such.

Table 1. Presence of negative opponent advertising. The chi-square test.

Opponent criticism	U.S.A.	Poland
Present	65.5%	47.5%
Absent	34.5%	52.5%

Table 2. Commercial character (mostly positive or mostly negative). The chi-square test.

Character	U.S.A.	Poland
Negative	40.0%	6.6%
Positive	60.0%	93.4%

$p < 0.0001$

²⁹ See T. Płudowski [2004a], *op. cit.*

³⁰ R. E. Petty, J. T. Cacioppo [1986], *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*, Springer-Verlag, New York.

Contrary to American, Polish commercials do not attempt to steer the viewers' attention by using sophisticated production techniques. The candidate is almost always present in the commercial. Even if he is not directly addressing the camera, in most cases it is done in a rather natural way.

Generally, there are two models of advertising. The first, normative (or traditional) consists of non-controversial, researcher preferred information transmission based on the idea of rational vote by well-informed citizens³¹. It includes a focus of factual issues, logical and ethical appeals, the candidate's positive sides (not opponent's negative), his presence in the media, and an introspective element (his policy) with the politician as a source of information. The second model, known as commercial, is based on practical guidelines of American political consultants and is made up of three elements: presence of music, voice-over and negative appeals inducing emotions and fears.

Comparing American and Polish commercials, variance analysis has shown a significant statistical difference for the traditional model, ($p < 0,05$), with Polish commercials higher on the scale. Regarding the commercial model, the statistical difference was also significant, ($p < 0,0001$), this time with American commercials higher on the scale. This partially explains the researchers' reservations with regard to American advertising where creators prefer the commercial model and only occasionally use the traditional in order to wipe away negative connotations of their own candidate. They want the recipients to associate attack with other communicators such as voice-over or the average *man in the street*.

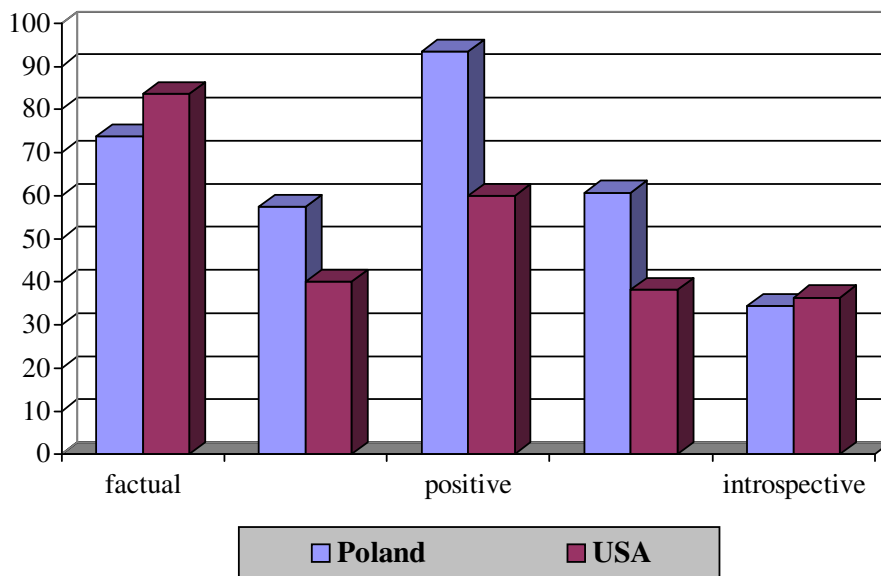


Chart 1. Traditional/normative model for Poland and the USA.

³¹ B. Berelson [1966], *Democratic Theory and Public Opinion*, [in:] B. Berelson, & M. Janowitz (ed.), *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, Free Press, New York.

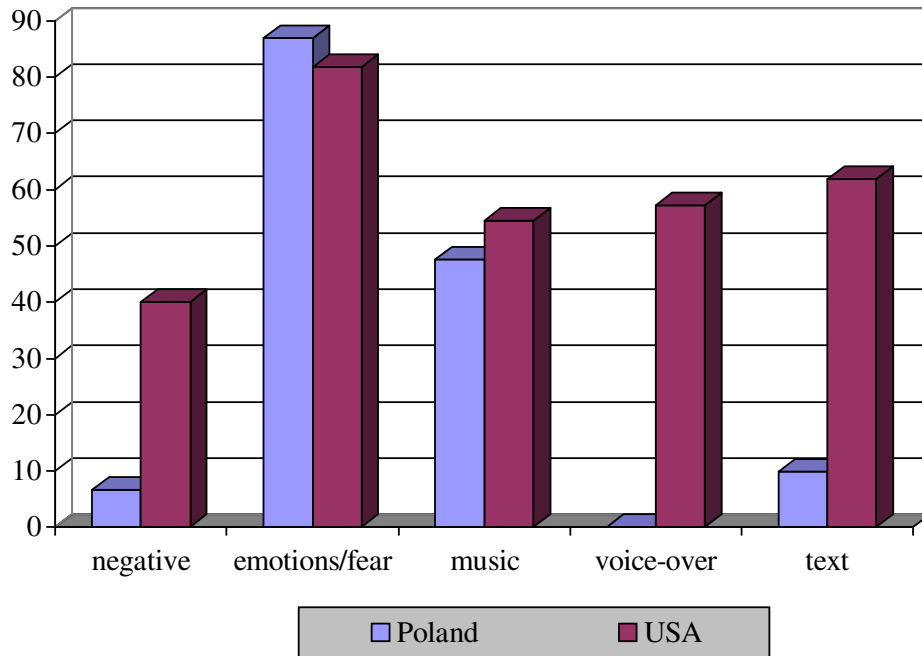


Chart 2. Commercial model for Poland and USA.

Table 3. Traditional/normative model for Poland and the USA. Variance analysis.

Country	Average	Standard deviation	Quantity
USA	2.58	1.41	55
Poland	3.10	1.25	61
Total	2.85	1.35	116

F=4.3813; p<0.05

Table 4. Commercial model for Poland and USA. Variance analysis.

Country	Average	Standard deviation	Quantity
USA	2.82	1.50	55
Poland	1.66	0.91	61
Total	2.21	1.35	116

F=25.9105; p<0.0001

Factor analysis, measuring connections between eleven content factors has shown the existence of two factors, explaining 61.7% of variance. First of them, taking advantage of television, consists of factors such as the use of the candidate as the main communicator,

introspection, formal background and proper dress, etc. The second uses much more complex broadcast aspects such as the use of special effects, visual metaphors and music to strengthen the verbal message. Variance analysis for statistically significant factor one is at $p < 0,0001$ and for factor two at $p < 0,001$. The first factor was more common in Polish advertising, while the second- in American.

Table 5. Factor analysis (n=116).

Factor 1. Basic, non-controversial use of television. (explains 45.9% of variance)		
T57	Speaker: candidate	0.89661
T47	Camera angle: straight	0.89147
T49	Place: formal interior	0.87966
T53	Dress: formal	0.86183
T4	Content: expressing views	0.75758
T48	Take: medium distance or close up	0.72823
T39	Production technique: shot of candidate	0.65025
T51	Gesticulation: none	0.49646
Factor 2. Controversial manipulation of television means. (explains 15.8% of variance)		
P46	Special effects	0.79685
P40	Visual metaphors	0.69817
P44	Music setting the tone and strengthening broadcast	0.58581

Table 6. First factor for both countries. Variance analysis.

Country	Average	Standard deviation	Quantity
USA	2.78	3.08	55
Poland	4.72	1.92	61
Total	3.80	2.71	116

$F=16.9056$; $p < 0.0001$

Table 7. Second factor for both countries. Variance analysis.

Country	Average	Standard deviation	Quantity
USA	1.25	1.19	55
Poland	1.93	0.87	61
Total	1.61	1.09	116

$F=12.4746$; $p < 0.001$

The fact that Polish commercials are longer does not automatically guarantee greater focus on programme issues. It turns out that Polish commercials, although longer, use the extra time to concentrate not on factual information but on the candidate's image. In comparison, 61.9% of

American advertising focuses solely on programme issues, while 64% of Polish devote time to both – image and programme.

Table 8. Presence of factual programme issues in Polish and American advertising. Chi-square test.

Broadcast content	U.S.A.	Poland
Programme issues	61.9%	9.8%
Combination of programme issues with image	21.8%	64.0%
Presence of both issues together	83.7%	73.8%
Image/character only	12.7%	21.3%
N/A	3.6%	4.9%
Lack of programme issues	16.3%	26.2%

p<0.0001

Additionally selected were six common indicators every one of which synthesizes 9 to 25 partial indicators. These were indexes of the strategies used, programme issues, image, production techniques, special effects, communicators and broadcast sources. The co-relation coefficient matrix analysis, r-Pearson, has shown a few statistically significant co-relations. In case of American advertising there is a positive average (0.38) co-relation between special effects and production technique indicators, as well as a negative co-relation(-0.40) between special effects and strategy indicators. In Polish commercials, once again, in most cases the content was dependent upon verbal communication. There is an average positive co-relation (0.40) between image and broadcast sources.

In conclusion, research shows that Polish advertising, to a large degree, consists of verbal communication which transmits content. This is supported by the fact that the only statistically significant positive co-relation (0.40) occurred between broadcast source and candidate's verbal image indicators. American political advertising, on the other hand, is specific in that it uses all available options, that is visual, verbal and a combination of the two on screen. Out of three statistically significant co-relations, there were two which included such a combination. Length variable turned out to influence this specific use of television.

Research results show that American advertising makes use of the normative and commercial models in more pure forms than Polish. The co-relation coefficient, r-Pearson, between the synthetic variables characteristic to both models was -0.46 for American commercials and 0.26 for Polish. The conciseness of American adverts does not seem to allow for simultaneous use of both models. Homogeneity of broadcast on the one hand results in greater effectiveness but, on the other, clearly indicates broadcasters' intentions which, in case of commercial model's message, results in more criticism of American commercials. The Polish system, as well as other European systems, characterized by access to public broadcasting with free air time, also does not guarantee a more in-depth presentation of important matters. Still it does not force the candidates to turn to the commercial model, with negative advertising and non-verbal communication. The conclusions that can be made from the presented above research are that it is more advantageous to have access to public free air time and use longer commercial spots.

The goals set by the author at the onset have been achieved. The multi-variable statistical analysis of content has shown the reasons for disparities in the research carried out by Americans. It also rejects the hypothesis that Polish political advertising is becoming

‘Americanised’ by outlining the differences between the applied systems of political communication influencing broadcast character in both countries.

Proposals for Further Research

Within the context of Americanisation of political communication processes³² it would be advisable to carry out a time change analysis of Polish campaign advertising. It would allow a more in depth analysis of the material through a comparative analysis of aspiring politicians (*challengers*) and those already in office (*incumbents*). Another possibility is that of carrying out a broadcasted verbal content quality analysis. In order to get to know the commercial creators’ (the consultants, social psychologists, communication specialists, public opinion researchers) perspective it would be worth to carry out group interviews and in-depth conversations with them. Most of all, broadcast content analysis is advisable. In this case the focus should be on a change of voters’ attitudes as a result of the broadcasts (*pretest* and *posttest*). Lately such research has been done by Cwalina and Falkowski³³.

This type of research should also be done on a larger sample of commercials, from countries which use the commercial system as well as those which have access to free public air time. This is especially important in case of countries which, within the last few years, have been subjected to the so called third wave of democratisation. The issues of creation and stability of new democratic systems in which the “fourth power” plays a significant role should be of particular interest to scientists.

Since the research, Poland has maintained the system of free air time for presidential candidates but, at the same time, we can observe taking place here the same growing trends as in other countries of Western Europe. These include: 1) more paid short, image commercials aired in advertising blocks together with regular commercials, 2) commercialisation of free air time blocks where the commercial advertising model is interchangeably broadcasted with the normative or it becomes entirely predominant.

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³² L. L. Kaid, C. Holtz-Bacha [1995], *op. cit.*

³³ W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski [2005], *op. cit.*

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