

Information campaign directed by the government or ‘government political marketing’? by Rafał Riedel

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Abstract: This article attempts to define the term information policy, so common in politics and the media, as it has not yet been defined properly in scholastic literature. The author discusses social, public, political, persuasive communication as well as political marketing, information campaigns and general communication policy in order to analyse the issue on a broader scale.

An example for this study is Poland’s information policy during the discussions on Poland’s access into the EU, before the referendum. It was a crucial issue in Polish history, also determining its future, therefore, wise decisions had to be made based on a wide scale and factual public debate on many issues such as i.e. entering the “Euro” zone. In this context information policy methods are imperative. A precise understanding of this phenomenon in a theoretical sense is significant as it has a crucial practical dimension.

As far as Poland’s accession into the EU referendum in 2003, the accompanying campaign arouses some doubts regarding the government’s appropriate stand on adequate communication policy. Can or should the government authorities remain objective, limiting themselves to solely informing society or should they support their accession policy with an appropriate information policy in order to ensure success and be legitimate?

Also in the Polish press, toward the end of the last decade, there was discussion on whether the government should just be an objective informer or whether it should be determined to convince its citizens of the righteousness of their policy regarding the EU.

The Polish governments between 1998-2003 (from the beginning of accession negotiations until the referendum) carried out various information policies, ie. Jerzy Buzek’s government policy was predominantly informative, realising the PIS (programme of informing society) campaign, while Leszek Miller’s policy was *stricte* promotional in character. The examples from other European countries are also different and do not provide us with a clear answer on what the desired European standards should be.

For instance, the Austrians, before their accession in 1995, carried out a very persuasive campaign, almost propaganda like. The government ‘privatised’ the entire campaign and chose a PR agency to convince Austrians to vote ‘yes’ in the referendum. The information that reached people was solely positive, in favour of accession into the EU. During the referendum the society showed great support for membership which dramatically fell after accession (political scientists explain this by the phenomenon of populist parties and right wing politicians popularity within the first years of Austria’s membership in the EU). It

seems that the political campaign had a great influence on the party as well as the entire political system in the country.

An entirely opposite situation was one that took place, at the same time, in Finland. Since the Finnish government decided on an information campaign, educative in character, the Finnish people entered the EU very well informed. Their decisions were based on facts which were well supported. During the campaign presented were both, the advantages and the disadvantages of entering the EU, as well as the forecasted positive and negative results and consequences. Different information channels were used in the campaign, radio, TV, the Internet, phone-in information, press publications (free and paid) available in libraries, at the post office, etc., and many others.

The above examples prove that the phrase information campaign is not enough to characterise the type of campaign that it may be. The activities, although carried out by the same subjects, with the same goal and using the same means, can take very different shape. Depending on the initiator's intentions, we are dealing with communication activity which is strongly political in character, due to which we should deliberate on the adequacy of the phrase information policy. Although this phrase is present in many various texts, its use has not been developed precisely enough to be satisfactory. In the meantime, since in Poland there keep springing up new ideas for carrying out referendums¹, we should take some time to analyse what kind of phenomenon we are dealing with and what type of activity would be adequate in this type of situation. Should it be persuasive communication, making use of socio-technical means available part of political marketing or should it be an information campaign, educative in character and similar to social campaigns from other spheres of life (less political, ie. on violence in homes or work for handicapped). Or perhaps we should even mention political propaganda, defined as, "influencing society by government authorities and institutions, political parties, administration, political elites or other pressure groups"². Its basic goal is to modify people's behaviour according to the sender's interests.³

Generally, among the various ways of categorising social communication, researchers have difficulties with determining the scope of proper terminology to be used such as:

¹ For example, regarding Poland's entry into the Euro zone or the anti-missile sphere.

² From J. Klebaniuk, *Psychologiczne mechanizmy propagandy neoliberalnej*. in: P. Żuk (ed.), *Media i władza*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2006, p. 79

³ Recipients will be able to systematically process the communication content only on two conditions, 1) if they are motivated, 2) if they are capable to process it, ie. are not too tired, the surroundings allow it and they can critically asses it. (Klebaniuk, 2006; 87) The goal of propaganda is to provide information and to disrupt people's cognitive processing of information on an intellectual level. Propaganda is successful when specific emotions are evoked in people, one of the most powerful is fear.

political marketing, political communication, information campaign, communication policy, information policy, etc.

The goal of this article is an analysis of information policy used to describe a fragment of political reality, a tool that government authorities use to communicate to their people regarding the undertaking of important decision making such as accession into the EU or accepting the Euro currency. Bogusława Dobek–Ostrowska defines communication policy as a collection of communication activities undertaken consciously and with a plan by public institutions servitory to a particular policy. Through control and management of information flow realised is the goal of the institution, its image internally and externally and its policy⁴. Also, this author, in accordance with her theory outlined in a work from 2006, “Political and public communication”, equates the two terms communication policy and information policy.⁵

This is how she explains the definition issue regarding information policy, “In academic literature the term ‘information policy’ (of the government, district) is often used. It is an imprecise term as it does not reveal what it really means. The word ‘information’ may suggest that the actions are limited to solely informing. In reality, however, a lot of the activity taking place is more persuasive in character, ie. as the case with most social campaigns. The term ‘communication policy’ is broader and, thus, more precise”⁶. Without doubt, information policy can be considered part of communication, understood as a process of interaction between individuals, groups or institutions.⁷ Its goal is the exchange and sharing of information, knowledge and ideas. This process takes place on several levels, via various means and with differences consequences.⁸ At the same time, the analysed communication policy is part of public communication with a goal to inform society for its general well being.⁹ In other words, we should position information policy as part of information communication with a goal to create mutual understanding between the participants of the process (through sharing of knowledge, explanation, instructing, etc.). Management of public data, through an effective process of communication and transmission of information, is a government responsibility just as is education of a conscientious civic

⁴ B. Dobek – Ostrowska, R. Wiszniowski, *Teoria komunikowania publicznego i politycznego. Wprowadzenie*. Wydawnictwo Astrum, Wrocław 2002, p. 49

⁵ B. Dobek – Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 355

⁶ B. Dobek – Ostrowska, R. Wiszniowski, *Teoria ...* p. 49 - 50

⁷ See also: Kolczyński M., Sztumski J., *Marketing polityczny*, Wydawnictwo „Śląsk”, Katowice 2000 and Muszyński J. *Leksykon marketingu politycznego*. Wrocław 2001.

⁸ J. Muszyński, *Leksykon marketingu ...*

⁹ B. Dobek – Ostrowska, R. Wiszniowski, *Teoria ...*p. 37

society, active and taking part in public life, engaged in public debate and reacting to social problems.¹⁰

Let's not forget that the process of mutual communication between public institutions and society is the essence of democracy. That is why, imperative issues, concerning public interest, should be resolved via public debate leading to a consensus. Deliberative democracy means successful communication between all interested parties, understanding different people's varying points of view and persuasion to reach the best common solutions. These processes serve the strengthening of democracy and, according to Anthony Giddens, "democratising democracy".

According to Juergen Habermas, real consensus is possible only when ideal communication takes place, when there is symmetric dialogue and where members are partners. Democracy based on dialogue creates social relations which greatly influence the construction of social solidarity.

Within the context of civic communication and deliberative democracy, the question on the essence of information policy seems especially imperative. In colloquial and journalistic language, the term "information policy" is used in various contexts but generally it means activities associated with a given institution's cooperation with media (or more narrowly – government activity of using the media as tools to carry out specific policies ie. migration) or strategies of information management as a resource, ie. making confidential information public.

Despite reservations about such information policy definition (present in public debate), it should be noted that it does correspond with the term political marketing, understood as a combination of theories, methods, techniques and social practices geared toward convincing people to support a candidate, group or political project.¹¹ But since the subject of this article is government activity, let's talk about 'government political marketing'.

"Government political marketing" is a phrase which encompasses two terms rather different in meaning from each other. Generally, government is not associated with marketing and 'ultramarket' free competition, pluralism and tolerance. In the phrase 'government

¹⁰ B. Dobek – Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 85 and B. Dobek – Ostrowska, R. Wiszniowski, *Teoria ...* p. 43

¹¹ The complex phenomenon of political marketing does not allow it to be easily defined or compared to similar phrases such as Public Relations, public communication, persuasive communication, sociotechnics, social campaign, communication campaign, information campaign, etc. Very often we are dealing with overlapping of these phrases. Their categorisation is theoretical, however, in practise we are often dealing with activities and practices encompassing more than one of these categories.

political marketing' 'government' is the only 'monopolistic' category. The other elements of 'government political marketing' include all characteristics of traditional marketing.

Government political marketing possesses a lot of specific features, one of which is the absolute requirement of reliability. Information coming from the government has got to be entirely dependable. As far as competition, it is rather not existent. Of course, a political party or a politician can present opinions in opposition to official government policy but it will not be treated on the same level. Another characteristic feature of government political marketing is the fact that objective information should be treated as public welfare.¹²

We should also attempt to define the phrase 'information policy'. It seems that (according to Bogusława Dobek–Ostrowska on information communication) information policy should be understood as communication policy with a goal not just to convince or change people's views on an issue¹³, but reaching this goal due to better informing and understanding of an issue by a given audience.

This take on information policy can be considered within the category of public communication which is a form of "formal communication with a goal to exchange and share information of public interest and maintain social ties for which responsible are public institutions"¹⁴. Examples of such information campaigns are society's reactions to existing or new social problems which can only be solved by communication activities combined with legal, technical and economic ones. Politics is a sphere particularly encompassed by information campaigns, ie. such as the referendum campaign¹⁵. The goal of such campaigns is to modify existing views and influence individual and group behaviour of people, etc.

Literature on the subject distinguishes three types of such communication:

- informing and explaining the decisions made, the work of public institutions, rules of conduct, new regulation, activities undertaken, etc,
- promotion and increasing of public institutions' offers and services,
- consulting of new resolutions and projects, promotion and discussion on elections and public offers.

¹² T. Goban – Klas, System informacji w państwie a system komunikacji społecznej – from "Polityka informacyjna PRL", "Przekazy i Opinie" IV – VI 1989. See also: P. Bulak, Wykorzystanie internetu w marketingu politycznym ... p. 7 – 14

¹³ Undoubtedly they can modify opinions and behaviour of people through its education goal.

¹⁴ B. Dobek – Ostrowska , Podstawy komunikowania społecznego... . Cf: E. Aronson, Człowiek – istota społeczna, Warszawa 1998

¹⁵ P. Michalczyk, Komunikowanie polityczne, Wydawnictwo „Śląsk”, Katowice 2005, p. 260

U. Roettger understands political information campaign as, “dramatic, thematically limited, but timely communication strategy carried out in order to draw public attention.”¹⁶ S. Michalczyk, on the other hand, states that these types of campaigns are realised in the political sphere, later in time in comparison to social, cultural and economic campaigns.¹⁷ It should be noted that there was no such thing as the phenomenon of information policy in Poland before 1989. However, there was some theoretical discussion on the issue back then. Michał Sulczewski, in his work from 1977 entitled “Polityka informacji” (Information Policy) defines it as a combination of assumptions, decisions and activities on structure, development and practical actions in the sphere of information coming from the government regarding its present social goals.¹⁸

Regarding information policy understood the above way, including public communication and government political marketing, a good example is policy of West Germany’s government. In the 1950s, there was an active on-going campaign to promote capitalism and market economies. A special organization was created, the WAAGE (Gemeinschaft zur Forderung des Sozialen Ausgleichs) or Organization for Development of Social Egalitarianism, which made society familiar with existing then social and economic problems, informed about advantages of a free market economy, improved the image of entrepreneurs (viewed negatively due to war experiences) and promoted cooperation between employers and employees. There were hundreds of articles in the press, brochures, films and school education; an information campaign on a large scale coupled with surveys of public opinions.

In democratic Poland an example of such wide scale action was the accession referendum campaign. The government’s information policy regarding Poland’s integration with the EU was launched in 1998 when accession negotiations began. There was such an overload of information everywhere; commentaries, opinions, statements and reports on different aspects of Poland’s entry in the Union that initially support for accession fell and government ‘intervention’ was required. Consequently, in 1999, government information policy on integration issues was established. It technically finished the moment of our entry but it did not mean the end of information policy which continued much longer after our accession. The same is true in other European countries, which have been members of the EU for decades, where information policy continues to be carried out regarding different aspects

¹⁶ U. Roettger, Kampagnen. In: O. Jarren, U. Sarcinelli, U. Saxer (Hrsg.): Pilotische Kommunikation in der demokratischen Gesellschaft. Opladen 1994, p. 667

¹⁷ P. Michalczyk, Komunikowanie polityczne, Wydawnictwo “Śląsk”, Katowice 2005, p. 264

¹⁸ M. Sulczewski, Polityka informacji. Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1977, p. 268

of the integration process. Moreover, it can even be said that often such information policy is even more intensive with time and it changes in character. Many experts have said that since 2001 we have been dealing with a strictly promotional campaign which means that it no longer is an information campaign. This may be true since at that time the government in its activity reversed back to the pre-accession phase which had entirely different characteristics. So far the goal was to inform about the Union but after the negotiations were finalised and once activation of Euro sceptics took place (closer to referendum date) the government switched to a promotion campaign with new goals.¹⁹ It became a priority to convince people to vote 'Yes' during the referendum which meant abandoning initial goals.²⁰ At that moment a promotion campaign was launched.²¹ The opposition called this strategy canvassing. Some journalists even stated that Jerzy Buzek's government exercised information policy while Leszek Miller's – promotional campaigning.²² This is largely an overstatement as the Programme for Informing Society, thanks to Buzek, and despite its drawbacks, was the only information policy plan that all III RP governments ever possessed. The new plan was drawn up by minister Mirosław Wiatr (SLD) in the spring of 2002, which included in its first phase (until negotiations were finalised) solely information goals.

It can be said that this information policy included activities with a goal to inform citizens about integration issues. The activities were coordinated, planned and clearly outlined with a specific goal to attain, that is to increase people's knowledge on the subject. At one stage government activities changed their character from informing to promoting.

The question is – to what extent should the government become engaged in promotion activities of a given project or idea. There is a long list of issues which need to be promoted/communicated to the people for their well being (health, ecology, safety) but if it is about changing people's political opinions through campaigns modifying behaviour by altering values or habits according to politicians' goals it is a rather controversial and questionable issue.²³ In democratic systems there are constitutions created in order to prevent

¹⁹ R. Gutkowski, Witaj Eurpo!. Rządowa kampania "Unia bez tajemnic" "Trybuna", Nr 108. 2002.05.10 p. 3, cf. also: T. Rogowski "Wiatr dezinformacji" (Brochure "Unia bez tajemnic" by Sławomir Wiatr is a compilation of falsities, lies and propaganda) Series: Inne Strony Integracji w Naszej Polsce. "Nasza Polska", Nr 28., 2002.07.09., p. 8, cf: A. Lebioda "Integracja na ekranie. Medialna kampania informacyjna", "Trybuna" Nr 82, 2002.04.08., p. 5.

²⁰ K. Woźniak, Droga pod Wiatr. Fatalna polityka ...

²¹ A. Dawidowski "Prawa ręka w rękawicy bokserskiej. Kampania informacyjna o integracji ma przebiegać pod hasłem "Unia Europejska bez tajemnic" . "Unia-Polska", Nr 4, 2002.03.18, p. 12.

²² R. Gutkowski, Witaj Eurpo!. Rządowa kampania ...

²³ Group work, ed. by P. Dobek – Ostrowska, Studia z teorii komunikowania masowego. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1999, Cf: W. Hłodkiewicz, The Use of the Concept of marketing in political studies. "Management" nr 1 / 2001, p. 77 – 86

excessive ideologisation. There are public institutions established to carry out specific goals to serve society. At the same time, there are certain situations in which all people should be ready to support an initiative.²⁴ However, there are always those for and those against. It is then the government's role to step in and support the righteous issue. Taking one side is technically against the constitution, stated in art. 25 pt. 2, "Public RP authorities should be impartial regarding people's beliefs (...) and world view opinions (...)." In reality however, such a non-controversial, it would seem, fragment of communication activities which is promotion of knowledge of integration issues, has become politicised.

In this article discussed was information policy as part of communication policy with a goal to better inform society and to make it understand certain issues. It was carried out by informing people about integration issues, in a coordinated, planned and clearly defined by a goal way, that of increasing people's knowledge on a given subject . Moreover, it also influenced people's social consciousness resulting in having more factual knowledge and modifying behaviour.

²⁴ M. Marczewska – Rytko, *Populizm: teoria i praktyka polityki*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Marii Skłodowskiej Curie, Lublin, 1995. Cf: C. K. Atkin, *Political Campaigns: Mass Communication and Persuasion...* and P. Bowler, D.M. Farrell, *Electoral Strategies and Political Marketing...*