
 <p><b>Norbert Merkovity</b></p>	 <p><b>20-25 minutes</b></p>	<p>Thing to remember:</p> <p>Not just the help of stars and celebrities, but the help of experts, too.</p>
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## Parties and Political Systems in Europe: Communication of the Actors

### 5. Trends in electoral campaigns in Europe

One of the main trends of political campaigns is **spectacularization**. In the spectacularization of politics, chasing popularity is evident. The popularization of politics presents the attention directing process that comes from the literature saying that politics in today's societies is *not popular*.

We should not decide whether a politician should be popular, but the idea of a popular politician is not a new phenomenon. *Political actors can show up anywhere and anytime and do whatever without seeming strange, pretentious or in any other way not appropriate*. This means that following the general television/internet culture politicians have become celebrities. In the race of being popular, politicians use the fact that media deals with them more than average to show their side that they think can attract the audience's attention in the long run.

### Celebrity politicians

The result of popular politics is the 'celeb politician', who (a) has been a celeb before and uses that in building his

political career (see Ronald Reagan, Donald Trump, or Beppe Grillo’s career) or (b) is a politician who appears with other celebrities in order to attract attention and make his person famous (see Tony Blair or Barack Obama’s political careers). In both cases, the elements of popular culture appear in the political ring.

Do not forget that there is another side to this process; those celebrities who usually have political manifestations and project their own general social role to their political sensitivity. Both parties have got into the realm of popular politics and use popular culture elements to gain attention and wish to achieve more followers (maximizing attention).

The political actors will use helping aides in the campaigns: not just the help of stars and celebrities, but the help of experts, who know how to act and communicate in the environment of different media platforms and different (media) actors. The process [started in the 1930s](#), continued in the 1950s (see: [I like Ike](#) slogan) and became usual since the 1980s (1990s in Europe).

Campaign experts brought professionalization to campaigns:

- Nationally coordinated campaigns
- The creation of campaign units within parties and the use of consultants
- The use of market intelligence
- Communication focused on the media
- [Narrowcasting](#)
- The permanent campaign

## **The image in campaigns (and outside the campaigns)**

Based on a critical approach, we can translate this train of thought to strategic goals. In other words, we can say that

popular politics is related to the image. The connection is easy to realize since popular, just as the image, wants to show something other than reality. The emphasis is on the surface instead of the content. Some dare say that political communication has got into a crisis with the increase of importance of the image since it makes political action dumb and simplifies the complex workings of the political processes to the world of infotainment. The result of such politics is that policies will be taken by the correspondence of public opinion polls, and it will prohibit long-term developments. In the case of discourses about political decision-making, durability takes a back seat, and the actual popularity will take its place. Image has always been an essential element of politics that has formed the politicians' image independent from the political regimes. Just think of the ancient or Middle-Aged or later emperors or leaders who speak to the modern man through their image with phrases attached to them by history like stability, safety and Golden Age, etc.

Politicians have also formed their images by their actions, and they are working on having a possibly positive picture of them even after their death. Those politicians who are the most successful at achieving this process are often called charismatic that refers to the fact that they had more power for only managing a field, and their personality also influenced the way things were going wrong or in the right direction. Image itself then did not have a direct role in the crisis of political communication.

With the appearance of the democratic systems and the already discussed mediatization image, it was made separate from political action. The process was completed by the emergence of political marketing in political communication. The appearance and success of television and political commercials made the influencing effect of image advertising accepted. It has involuntarily placed more emphasis on the exterior instead of the content. From this, it was only a step away from maintaining the created image. The politicians or the team behind them had to keep up the vision created by the image 24/7. This requires a continuous presence in the centre of attention, so the celeb politician appeared who know

that it is the prospect of their survival and popularity to be surrounded by attention.

Media sensitive politicians let publicity in their kitchen through the media. That is how the barriers vanish between political and cultural publicity. Seeing this, there are indeed negative processes attached to the use of the image in today’s politics and the items stating the crisis of political communication could be true. Though the image is only one of the many elements the voters judge politicians.

Let us learn more about narrowcasting and its use:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjpFdFxLIUo>

### Questions

1. What is one of the main trends in political campaigns?
2. Can politicians appear anywhere without seeming strange?
3. Who is the ‘celeb politician’?
4. What types of political campaigns do you know?
5. What is ‘professionalization’?
6. Why are electoral campaigns important?
7. How does image work in the campaign?
8. Did the rulers of the Middle-Age have an image?
9. What (political) marketing tools do you know?
10. What barriers vanish when politicians let the media in their kitchen?

See:

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Pippa Norris, Ronald Inglehart: Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism. Cambridge University Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1108595841.

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