

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS AND MARKETING STRATEGY – THE CASE STUDY OF KAREL SCHWARZENBERG’S CAMPAIGN

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Abstract

Main focus of presented case study is electoral strategy and its role in campaign strategy. Campaign strategy is a very complex process consisting of various interdependent processes such as market analysis, research, polling, segmentation, strategic communication, opposition research, timing, constant analysing process of political environment and of course crucial role-plays candidate itself. Lastly strategy always changes with different type of election and depends on electoral system.

Firstly we will define what the strategy is and how it is understood from the view of political consulting. Secondly, we will describe specific electoral campaign and use it as explanation of the strategy creating and role of consultants. Thirdly, we will try to combine theoretical approach with practical experience from campaigning and insider information. Therefore we describe very specific electoral campaign of presidential candidate Karel Schwarzenberg. This article is contribution to evolving research within the field of political marketing and electoral studies in the Czech Republic.

Political consulting is evolving industry in the Czech Republic and the role of consultants has not yet been widely analysed. Our analysis is an explorative study and will contribute to further research.

Key words: campaign, strategy, Karel Schwarzenberg, political consulting, Czech Republic

JEL classification: F50, Q50, Q54

Introduction

The role of professional political consultants in campaigns is not very well understood, at least from a theoretical perspective. As a result, we know very little about how campaign strategy is developed. This article is an attempt to think about what strategies can be used for candidates. Strategy is the cornerstone of electoral campaign. However, we find there is no consensus among scholars on the definition of the term. We can meet number points of view. Some scholars work with the strategies as a (market, marketing etc.) orientation of the party or candidate (e.g. Lees-Marshment 2006; Shama 1976; or Wring 1997), others see parallels with military strategies (Marland 2003; or Smith 2006) or as a positioning strategies (Baines and Worcester 2006). However, while the area of political marketing instruments and their use by candidates is now a commonly researched issue, questions of political marketing strategy and strategic frameworks of electoral campaigns have been neglected (Ormrod et al., 2013). Many of the studies that address campaign strategy do so indirectly,

taking an organizational perspective. While this body of research was valuable in understanding how a campaign's strategic operation might function, it did not address the content of the campaign's strategy itself (Medvic, 2006).

Regardless of our perception of the strategy, we can agree it is an essential element necessary for electoral success (Lynch et al 2006, Collins and Butler 2002). How do we define strategy in political marketing? As mentioned above, there are plenty of definitions. Let's mention at least minimal definition by Sigge Nielsen, who sees political marketing strategy as a identification of a political entity's purpose and the scheme through which that purpose will be achieved (Nielsen 2012). This minimal definition contains three basic elements, which are common for many definitions: political entity, purpose and scheme. In this article by political entity we mean Karel Schwarzenberg, presidential candidate in elections 2013, which defines a purpose to get best possible election outcome, ideal win the elections. Empirical part of the paper will be focused to the scheme of the campaign, it is a mechanisms or procedures to be stated purpose achieved.

While each of these elements is important for developing a sound strategy, they foundation of the strategy is the candidate.

In essence, marketing strategy represents a broad general set of principles – or, in Kotler's words, a 'game plan' – that will achieve the marketing objectives of the organization (Baines and Lynch 2005)

According to most existing marketing strategy approaches, a sequence of analysis, options, choice, and implementation is regarded as appropriate (Baines and Lynch 2005). And so this was the case of the presidential Karel Schwarzenberg's campaign.

Marketing strategy is at the heart of electoral success because it forces a campaign to put together, in a very short period of time, a winning relatively stable coalition of diverse and sometimes irreconcilable groups (Kotler and Kotler 1981)

The emphasis on strategy shifts the focus from the techniques of promotion to the overall strategic objectives of the candidate (Scammell 1999).

No professional campaign would develop a campaign strategy without the use of polling.

The content of any given campaign strategy is a complicated mixture of emotional and cognitive appeals. Much of the emotional component is based on a connection the candidate makes with voters. That connection can be based on a variety of factors, but the most important (and most obvious) is "likability".

Case Study of Karel Schwarzenberg

Presented study offers insight to presidential race (both authors were involved in the campaign. Anna Matušková worked as chief strategist and Miloš Gregor was involved as an analyst) in the Czech Republic 2012/2013. The Czech Republic had almost a hundred year long tradition of non-direct vote. Parliament and Senate have always elected president. The electoral change came in 2012 and very first direct vote was scheduled for the January 2013. The electoral system was a two-round majority electoral system, which means that one can be elected if he or she gets an absolute majority of votes in first round. If no candidate obtains it, the two with the best result from the first round proceed into the second round, which was held in two weeks from the first one.

Our study focuses on campaign of Karel Schwarzenberg, who was a clear underdog and he successfully entered second round, which was considered as big success (in polls his support was around 6 per cent). The winner and first directly president of the Czech Republic is Miloš Zeman, former Prime Minister and very experienced social democratic politician. There was no doubt that Mr Zeman will be one of the favourites in the race. However his opponent Mr Schwarzenberg was rather a surprising candidate – he was minister of foreign

affairs and the leader of conservative political party TOP 09. While in government his popularity dropped from 70 to 20 per cent and he was member of historically most unpopular government. As we already mentioned he had support of 6 per cent in summer polls but he finally got 23,4 per cent of votes in the first round and 45,2 per cent in the second round of election. Mr Schwarzenberg was also the oldest candidate in the race, he was 75 years old and his campaign was considered the most lively, modern even shocking and he was the most active in social media and Facebook. Therefore, we find this campaign as a very successful example of grass root campaign and successful implementation of various campaign strategies, which are normally associated with USA (such as fund raising, GOTV, endorsement, door to door campaigning, direct marketing including emailing and phone calling etc.)

The Campaign Strategy

From marketing point of view the most important is the market analysis. The campaign of Mr Schwarzenberg was launched officially on October 24. However he announced his candidacy already in May 2012 during his party gathering. The first step was to differentiate him as candidate from his party TOP 09 (the party was a member of coalition centered right government and was highly unpopular).

The core team consisted of 20 people and campaign manager was Marek Vocel. The team had sub teams such as strategic team, creative team, logistic team, scheduler, event team, social media team and PR team. During the campaign the whole team reached to 40 people and hundreds of volunteers.

Team started to work in mid-August and facing a lot of obstacles. The electoral law came with few obligations such as candidate nomination, transparent account, electoral committee etc.

The nomination process was different for partisan candidates (with party represented in parliament) and independent candidates. Mr Schwarzenberg was a partisan candidate so all he needed for nomination were signatures from MPs from his party. Independent candidates had to collect 50 000 signatures. So a lot of team was in action since the summer in order to get the necessary number of signatures. This created interesting situation – the deadline for signatures was second week in November, which made very difficult polling, opposition research and timing since it was unclear who will run, and who is the main opponent.

Campaign had four stages (three for first round and fourth for the second round). The first stage was to introduce Mr Schwarzenberg as solid and real candidate. Media and public (according to polling) did not consider him as proper candidate – the arguments were: he is too old, he is not taking the candidacy seriously and he is distant to people. Mr Schwarzenberg is coming from one of the oldest Czech-Austrian aristocratic family. His family was forced to leave the country in 1948 and he spend most of his life living in Austria, he got back to the country after the Velvet Revolution in the year 1990 and worked as president Vaclav Havel chancellor. Vaclav Havel was exceedingly popular politician and Mr Schwarzenberg was his close friend. Unfortunately he passed away in November 2012 and one strategic step was to present Mr Schwarzenberg as a logical successor of Mr Havel.

The campaign description is based on factual experience of authors and cited materials are inner campaign sources.

First Stage – Candidate Introduction

During the whole campaign we worked with various polls, surveys and data. Some polls provided Schwarzenberg's party (standard monthly omnibus surveys). However we needed to

understand why Mr Schwarzenberg is losing popularity and why he is not considered a real candidate.

Firstly we run a benchmark survey with Millward Brown agency. Results were very interesting, they show Mr Schwarzenberg was a number two for huge part of society, which was a little bit frustrating at the beginning but gave us huge chance. The crucial issue was to analyse the country – politically, but also with focus on values and to ask question who should be the president and what values he should represent and then cross-references it with our candidate. These data proved to be exceedingly important. It gave us very clear picture how political forces are divided but also what is general mood in the country.

Following, we run a series of focus groups in Czech big cities (Prague, Brno, Olomouc and Plzen). The outcomes were once again crucial. Generally our candidate was well known, but people could not associate any political results with him (which was quite frustrating since he was minister of foreign affairs); secondly they criticize his participation in current government. On the other hand they perceived positively the fact he is wealthy (therefore according to our focus groups he will not steal and nobody can corrupt him). Following criticism was that he mumbles while talking (therefore people find it difficult to understand him, in fact he suffers from a speech impairment) and he was also known for falling asleep in Parliament. We asked questions about his family, his wife Theresa Schwarzenberg resides in Vienna and other issues. The biggest problem for voters was – his presence in government, his trouble speaking and they found him very distant and too “noble”. Another criticism was he does not understand the life of common people. Shortly, it was rather devastating outcome.

Our first step was to publish health report to prove he is in good state and he is fully capable to focus on his duty. This rather revolutionary attempt in the Czech Republic was received very positively. We also focused very much on explaining why is he running and he delivered numerous speeches about it. Following step was to get out the story of his life, Mr Schwarzenberg refused to talk about his success and charity activities, and therefore we had to have other people to talk about it. We used YouTube for interviews with his supporters (we had the biggest amount of supporters among show business people, but academics and scientist too).

Second Stage – What Will He Do as Your President

Second campaign stage was launched in October and focused on introducing the presidential program. Simultaneously, the new web presentation was launched, social media strategy implemented and big effort was dedicated to door-to-door strategy. As for fundraising - the campaign budget was in the end 30 million Czech crowns (roughly 1.250.000 euro). Two millions donated candidate himself, six millions gave the party and the rest was coming from big donor (fund raising was hugely done by campaign manager). Fundraising is very unusual phenomenon for Czech political environment; political parties are basically financed by state. Small donors donated some money but that was rather unusual. For a presidential campaign our budget was rather small.

Candidate insisted on program strictly referring to Constitution. Czech Constitution clearly defines rights of the presidents. Our program was based on that. At the same moment we were working on opposition research analysing all other candidates, we also prepared huge data set with all possible media attacks and list of possible topics candidate can face. As from PR point of view, media relations were rather fine and candidate had a rather extensive coverage as the minister and Member of Parliament.

Third Stage – You don't vote for Schwarzenberg you vote for a change

The third phase of campaign was launched in the mid November. By November it was clear who is running and not. We had 9 official candidates – independent and partisan. The leading position in polls had Jan Fischer (independent and former prime minister), Miloš Zeman (former prime minister, founder of social democratic party), Jiří Dienstbier (Social Democrat), Pavel Franc (independent candidate, professor of law and art, and with whole body tattoo), Přemysl Sobotka (Center Right Candidate – Civic Democratic Party), Zuzana Roithová (Center Right Candidate - Christian Party), Jana Bobošíková (Sovereignty party – populist), Táňa Fischerová (independent candidate). The pool of candidate was very unclear. There were only two leftist candidates – Dienstbier and Zeman. However the center and center right spectre was too crowded. Therefore we were facing a big problem, we need to explain to people only one candidate really has a chance. We had to explain the electoral system, which only two candidates will go to second round and people have to decide clearly. Basically, we had to get others candidate votes. Therefore this part of campaign was less about Schwarzenberg as a living candidate it was more about values he represents.

And we invested a lot of time and money into door to door campaign, we called it city to city, village to village and had more than 300 hundred volunteers travelling across the country and working for the candidate. The number can look small, but it was probably the biggest grass root campaign in the country. We also launched a project “Bier with Karel”, when candidate was travelling across the country and visiting city and having drink and talk with local people. Huge role-played the fact that a lot of musician and actors supported him, so for instance we organize club night “Clubbing with Karel”, where popular music clubs were open and bands supported our candidate.

Another issue was televised debates; we dedicated a lot of time for preparations for debates. We organized media trainings and always paid attention to a simple fact – always have your supporters in the television. We had more than 10 big debated in the last week of first round.

Another big change in the country was that people were openly supporting candidates, we had rather unique campaign symbol – our candidate with a pink Mohawk. Czech famous artist David Černý, who is known for rather controversial art, did this picture and he is a close friend of candidate. The Mohawk picture became gradually campaign symbol and we produced more than 20 000 badges and 5000 t-shirts. Of course the campaign had more classic and conservative layout too, but somehow the pink yellow picture become a symbol. So the oldest candidate had a visual inspired by punk group Sex Pistols.

First round was finished with a huge concert in Prague were all popular Czech musician played. And it was also rounded by a TV debate with all nine candidates, which was won by Schwarzenberg. In spite the fact each candidate has in the end less than five minutes.

24 hours before the election 4 out 5 major newspapers openly stated support to Mr Schwarzenberg and whole country was flooded with our campaign. On the Facebook we hit 200 000 followers (which is so far the highest number, winning candidate had less than 50 000 followers).

The first round was successful and Mr Schwarzenberg came as second with only 200 000 votes difference. It was strategically huge success. However the second round was dramatically different.

Second Round – The Real Game Has Begun

Second round lasted only 14 days. Shortly after the election result, the team had to regroup and came up with the final – fourth strategy. The problem was that almost all energy was spent on the first round. Here the strategy was to show Mr Schwarzenberg is not his opponent

Mr Zeman (a political matador, involved in many affairs, but also considered one of the most successful Czech Politicians). The strategy was to continue the push marketing with our volunteers and online. The rest of energy was dedicated to TV duels. Mr Zeman is exceedingly good speaker and in some aspect stronger. As we already mentioned the dynamics and atmosphere of the second round was dramatically different. Campaign became stronger and attacks tougher. Mr Schwarzenberg in one the debate opened topics relating to Benes Decrees. Mr Schwarzenberg was very critical towards former Czechoslovak president and gained huge criticism from his opponent and it probably mobilised certain part of electorate.

Here we should focus on the opponent – current president Miloš Zeman. He is tireless campaigner, and very tough opponent and he was perceived as “peoples people”. His team was also successful in portraying Mr Schwarzenberg as “foreigner and German figure” therefore somebody he will not take care of Czech interest.

And since Mr Schwarzenberg decided to run a clean campaign and to be honest we did not know how to response to these allegation. Plus we were too slow. One day before the election – all media were flooded with advertisement saying Mr Schwarzenberg is German agent and he will support German interests in the country. So surprisingly issues sixty years old were crucial.

Conclusions: lesson for and from political marketing

Mr. Zeman won with 10 per cent difference. And what is the lesson to be learnt? One should never underestimate the “mood” in the country and never stop analysing the data and never stop asking – do I ask the right questions. One the decisive issue was – our opponents framed our candidate as foreigner. We should analyse this in our polls before the campaign. We underestimate the fact – he lived 40 years out of the country and it can be important for voters (so always test the impossible). Another problem was we could reach to voters in big cities and we basically isolated our campaign from countryside. We were trapped in the bubble of the most successful online campaign.

In the year 2013 Schwarzenberg campaign won the price as the best PR campaign of the year in competition with commercial clients such as T-Mobile or Tesco.

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