

# Political Communication: An Epistemological Base of Political Campaigns

Sohail Ahmed Ansari

## **Abstract**

*Social structure is the function of personality. The advent of market-industrial society has brought about fundamental changes in social cultural and economic context of pre-industrial societies. Traditional social collectivities rooted in pre-modern economic conditions and formed by regional, religious, ethnic, linguistic, craft, and other local customs could not sustain the blow delivered by sustained technological innovation; the division of labor, and mass migrations from rural to urban areas.*

## **Introduction**

The psychological basis or mental life of urban individuality is formed by his adjustment to the complexity of and the consequent variety of stimulation intrinsic to urban life. Mass media act as mobility multipliers; infusing people with diffused rationality; thus ways of thinking and acting ceased to be articles of faith and became instrument of intention; giving rise to tendencies of evaluating prospects in terms of attainments rather than heritage: Modern man is no longer characterized by personal impotency emanating from fatalism but by a psycho-social complex of norms based on democratic orientation that implied implicit faith on egalitarianism and meritocracy as value concepts.

The rise of political communication as the privileged forum for the transmission of political cues is the response to the needs of time as communication is no longer predominantly personal and oral in direct, face-to-face interactions but is mediated by technologies of communication.

The present article is not an attempt to examine the reasons for shift from rural to urban; but to examine the changes resultant of that shift which made communication an essential tool of election campaign as all parties need political campaign not because they know it will deliver but because they do not know for sure it will not.

Political Communication has become in recent years the epistemological base of political campaigns; which is widely viewed as communication phenomena; and since the value of elections have become constant as the nucleus of democracy, the principles and practices that form the core of political campaign communication have become a subject of great interest for research and used by public relation companies and media professional.

Though historical, sociological, psychological and economic elements have their own role to play and are reflective of the electoral process; these all factors become significant in the electoral system through communication. Communication, therefore, personifies a bridge between the aspirations of the candidates and expectations of voters. 'It is through communication that a political campaign begins. Individuals verbally announce their intention to run or posters/billboards announce nonverbally that election time has begun. During the campaign, candidates debate, prepare and present messages for media commercials, and speak at all forms of public gatherings. All of this effort is for the single purpose of communicating with the electorate, the media and each other. And when the time comes, it is through communication that the campaign draws to a close. Candidates verbally concede defeat or extol victory, and the posters/billboards are taken down announcing nonverbally that one campaign is over, even as another begins. Hence, communication is the means by which the campaign begins, proceeds, and concludes.' (Judith S. Trent & Robert V. Friedenberg 1983: 16)

Pervasiveness of political communication underlines the continuing need to understand reasons that not only brought political communication at the first place but also kept it at the very heart of the process of dynamic change in our political culture. We, therefore, need to draw upon socio-cultural perspectives in seeking to understand how cultural, social and economic changes mediated by industrialization influenced the way in which people related to political parties or leaders.

Industrialization had great impact on the predominant set of images, values, and forms of communication of pre-industrial age and provided a new cultural frame for satisfaction and model of communication. Cultural forms that gave meanings to the world of things underwent a drastic repositioning, such that in the consumer

society parliament and municipal institutions came to replace the patriarch of extended families or tribal chiefs or religious institutions that were important in agricultural societies.

Economic changes resulted in lifestyle groupings that were the outcome of taste culture independent of ethnic differences. 'One had to live with who' was governed by what one earned. Difference in income not in ethnicity dictated the formation of middle; lower and upper class and each class represented distinctive preference patterns and that led to distinctive taste culture and lifestyles and as industrialization had great impact upon general understanding of oneself and what one deserved to have goods had to be integrated into the process of satisfaction and ways (components of political communication<sup>1</sup>) and through which they were assured (to voters) to be delivered (by parties) had to be integrated into election campaign communication.

The developed phase of the market-industrial society is the consumer society. The dramatic rise in real incomes freed most individuals in the consumer society from concentrating on the bare necessities of life. Freedom from concentrating on the bare necessities of life; rise in discretionary spending, and leisure time led to other 'freedoms':

- (a) Freedom to think about issues other than bread and butter.
- (b) Freedom to pursue human wants not directly tied to basic necessities.

These freedoms developed new expectations in people. Newly found independence asserted in readiness to endorse anyone who could prove to be capable in effecting meaningful change in the quality of life by matching up to these new expectations.

In the new basis of civilization lay expansion not renunciation of consumption. From the culture of consumption emerged a new type of personality and 'social self based on individuality. 'Gradually set loose from restrictive behavior codes by the crumbling of older cultures that measured persons against fixed standards of achievement and moral worth, this new social self was set against an open-ended scale of success set to whatever criteria happened to be applicable at the time.' (Leiss and Kline and Jhally 1990: 57).

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<sup>1</sup> Political communication includes Campaign News Coverage; Political Advertising; Political marketing and debates

With the transition from industrial culture to consumer culture; political communication was born and the function of older cultural traditions in shaping perception of leader was taken over by media-based messages through which circulated a great assortment of cues and image about the relationship between leaders and expectation of people.

### **The role of Consumer Society in Carving Permanent Niche with Unending Prospects for Political Communication:**

#### **(1) Fashioning the Mask**

Social cultural and economic context of pre-industrial societies conditioned human association typical of that era. But advent of market-industrial system changed everything. 'The coming of the market-industrial system cleared the ground; ground that had been occupied by traditional social collectivities rooted in pre-modern economic conditions and formed by regional, religious, ethnic, linguistic, craft, and other local customs. The division of labor, and mass migrations from rural to urban areas, sustained technological innovation, and the erosion of traditional customs had rent the fabric of social collectivities, common problems and shared aspirations gradually stitched together a new type of human association' (Leiss and Kline and Jhally 1990: 59).

In consumer society, familiar objectives were replaced as ethos of consumer culture set new targets; known solutions to familiar problems were no longer workable as problems were different. In earlier societies, individuals became acquainted with leaders through culture and customs who in turn solved their problems or helped them met their aspirations; but Urban life had its own culture and requirements therefore, in a consumer society, parties and their manifesto had to be introduced by some other means.

Political communication became the chief matchmakers. The burgeoning array of new challenges that emerged from urbanization (jobs/security) and globalization (cultural problems) presented politicians with the challenge of 'binding' solutions (of such problems) to culturally sanctioned formats for the satisfaction of voters. Political communication had to start constructing props for the ball\_ sets of masks for leaders \_ using whatever media technologies and persuasive or 'appeal' formats were available to them.

But partners at the masked ball needed melodies, not words, for dancing; they also needed instruction in forming gauge to evaluate right leader. The music and the choreography for this dance came from ideology and service (or promise of service) of party.

Political communication strategies seek with ever greater efficiency ways of crafting relation between leaders and voters; but the work of political communication experts is never over. Political culture of consumer society brings into a being on a notion that individuals can regard their affiliation with political party as a fluid milieu of temporary associations. A choice of leaders is based on credibility. No one is bound permanently to particular leadership originating in accidents of birth or fortune — that pave the way for the emergence of leadership that transcend ethnic and regional limitation— on the contrary, everyone can participate in an eternal process whereby groupings are dissolved and regenerated.

The cultural/social/political/economic problems provide frame for fashioning the masks for leaders that highlight what is distinctive and unique about them; and as frames change so the masks.

## **(2) Fluidity of Classes**

Unlike traditional societies, industrial societies can not survive and grow unless they have literate population; therefore, accessibility to education is accepted as the right of everyone not the privilege of a few in modern societies. Universality of education opens every option to everyone and anyone can climb up the social ladder; therefore unlike traditional culture in which classes create insurmountable boundaries (classes) and people are born and die in these boundaries, in contemporary culture members of class can move up or down the rung at any time.

Cluster of middle class can expand as the result of economic progress and shrink if reverse is the case. New classes come into being and old ones vanish with the fluctuation in the fortune of country.

No individual can be classified for long into any particular class, hence expected behavior of individual due to association with any particular class becomes unexpected as member can or forced to switch their allegiance from one class to another at any time they find themselves eligible to do so, or no longer belong to due to the unfortunate twist in fate.

There is no permanent lifestyle, rather ever-changing way of life defined by its distinctive array of values, drives, beliefs, needs, dreams, and special points of view.

Political communication experts expend enormous amount of energies in tapping cluster analyses, and then craft approach tailored to voter differentiation in order to fit candidate type and characteristics, and its relation to ever-changing aspirations of ever-changing lifestyle.

### **(3) Relative Standing and Receding Horizon**

For the sake of structural intactness; traditional culture permits individuals to flourish only within not beyond. As boundaries that set one class apart from others are permanent; individuals of one class can aspire to be better than what they already are by birth. Every class has its own heroes and pursues to emulate only their achievements. 'Traditional cultures established quite firm guidelines for intersubjective comparison, presenting a limited set of role and behavioral models to guide tastes'. (Leiss and Kline and Jhally 1990: 295).

In traditional culture 'Best' is relative to class. Best of lower class can be worse than worse of upper-class; but urban societies are egalitarian believing in equality of opportunities and rights; and each class is fully alive to safeguard its rights to have more or less same access to facilities as others classes have; and any inequality in this regard unleashes potent backlash: 'The consumer society creates an 'open set' of intersubjective comparison' (Leiss and Kline and Jhally 1990: 296). It is not so much what one has as the relationship between what one has and what others (the more successful) have that is most relevant: the concern with 'relative standing,' the continual scanning of the social landscape to ascertain how others are doing and to compare one's condition with theirs'.

No society can be egalitarian in perfect sense of word. Certain policies can leave certain classes with impression of being persecuted or any policy can have inadvertent or ricochet effects that create social imbalance. Sense of being discriminated and consequent emanating of ire is cashed in on by parties; and ads appear featuring pledges to redress the wrong and restore equality.

Urban societies are marked by discontent; insatiable cravings to have more and more underlie malaise that imbues every segment of

population. There is always something not in possession that is better than possessed best, and when that better is attained another better is simply in the offing. 'Unlike traditional societies where forms of wealth and social success, like the forms of satisfaction, tend to remain the same over long periods, a market society undermines fixed standards. Competition for social honor is freer, but victory is fleeting, since criteria for success are always subject to redefinition. An individual's striving for a permanent place of distinction is like the pursuit of a mirage across the desert. The horizon of social honor recedes as one approaches it'. (Leiss and Kline and Jhally 1990: 296).

Contentment as a virtue is good for individuals but bad for political marketing; as lies in insatiable craving the alluring promises ads can dangle to tantalize voters; this is to say, that mirage is fertile breeding ground of ideas employed in constructing messages and contains within it the unending prospects for the future of political communication as the 'HORIZON ALWAYS RECEDES.' As long as animal keep chasing its tail the supply of ideas for running election campaign would never dry up.

#### **(4) Broader Realm of Comparison**

Urban societies of industrial world are characterized by ubiquity of media which has transformed world into global village, enabling all members of this village to know what others have. Consequently, perceptions, feelings, and responses of people are determined by crime statistics, employment rates, and level of affluence in the rich countries of the World.

Members of society measure 'quality of life' by measuring degree of satisfaction in the various aspects of their lives. The horizon of satisfaction however is a moving line because as economic conditions advance, so too does the social norms, since this is formed by the changing economic socialization experience of people; but in the media-dominated world of today social norms advance even in those countries that lack corresponding economic advances as exposure through media to the changing economic socialization experience of people of any part of the world triggers hankering to have comforts at the level the better part of world has.

Mass content therefore is not generated even by affluence of country but by the ratio between what people have and what they think

they ought to have in order to maintain self esteem in the face of the normal consumption standards accepted by richer peers of global village.

As social comparison occurs in broader realm; voters evaluated national leaders in global perspective; political marketing practitioners respond by touting cosmopolitan outlook of their candidate. Candidates of poor nations (poor in comparison to richer ones) vow to bring their respective nations at par with the richer nations of the world and leaders of richer nations pledge to maintain their supremacy intact.

### **(5) Fetishism**

The notion of fetish is helpful for investigating to what extent the fixation on particular objects has changed in industrial societies. In pre-industrial societies certain material objects were regarded as embodying forces that affect human behavior, material objects like Scepter; Cap; or Flag of a spiritual leader were thought to carry special power.

But such objects are replaced by money in consumer society: fetishes of modern world are goods accessible through money. Happiness and relief are achieved not through spiritual power of certain object or by the blessing of one having such objects; but through material objects. There is no longer any halo around anyone; the health of nation lies in the health of economy. The political communication experts capitalize on this shift in fixation by tying economy to leader they wish to project.

A market society is a masked ball. Here we bring our needs to dance with their satisfiers (leaders) in close embrace to the melodies of an unseen orchestra (experts of Political communication).

The discourse through and about material objects is carried on from behind elaborate masks; Political communication experts fashion huge numbers of masks (Image/Persona); and in selecting some, consumers allow themselves to be persuaded that they can serve their dreams. In fashioning masks for leaders, Political communication apply metaphors; idioms and similes to move back and forth across the interface between the production of message and consumption spheres, restlessly creating and refurbishing zones of encounter between aspiration and parties.

Ads mirror the identifying sign of the consumer society\_ the unending play with new possibilities for better life. This sign is

reflected concretely in the general characteristics of leaders themselves. As represented in ads, leaders are bearers of powers; and have all ingredients that can enrich and make our life better. In ads, we encounter a lush and entertaining realm where our fetishes of modern world (goods) are promised to us. 'In modern society goods themselves are not fetishes, rather, through marketing and advertising good are fitted with masks that 'show' the possible relations between things on the one hand and human wants and emotions on the other' (Leiss and Kline and Jhally 1990: 326).

These masks are our fetishes. In modern society leaders themselves are not fetishes, rather, through political communication leaders wear masks that 'try to establish relations between masks (our fetishes) and the mask (persona/image) they wear.

Change in fixation on object holds enormous potential for the growth of political communication as it leads to emergence of new leadership by undermining leadership that elicit voters due to assumed spiritual power or possession of object that assumed to have such power. Any one capable of making electorate believes that he can deliver comforts and luxuries of life can win. New leadership has no permanent following it has to be established and retained through media campaign.

#### **(6) Hedonism and Materialism**

In traditional culture limited needs were fulfilled through limited ways. Evolution of culture created on the one hand new needs and wants and on the other to ensure unfettered and sustained consumption essential for the round the clock running of industries; either false wants were created or appetite for goods was whetted by successive waves of associations between persons, products and images of well-being in an endless series of suggestions about the possible routes to pleasure and achievement through advertising: the appetizer of modern world.

Hedonism consequently came to be regarded as the most prized ideology to abide by; lending fillip to materialism and culture of self-gratification that knew no bounds.

Consumer society is in perpetual search for the ways that intensify pleasure; an essential feature of the political communication is its concern regarding 'what consumption activity' means to individuals in a market-industrial economy that has eroded the

guidelines for the sense of satisfaction and well being laid out by traditional cultures. Into the gap step political ads; fascinated with the communicative tools of symbol, image, and icon; and working by allusion, free association, suggestion, and analogy rather than by literal and logical rule; they pander to whatever voters covet through associating image of person /party with the goodies he/it can deliver. Ads tap the infinitely varied play of potential meanings in the minds of individuals who are keenly attentive to efforts directed to promote their well being; whole ensemble of goods and messages are as 'versatile' as possible, so that it can appeal simultaneously to the entire spectrum of personality types and lawful urges, including those half-formed, inarticulate yearnings that individuals can be brought to recognize and express only through the very place of such images. Furthermore, the metaphors of symbol, image, and icon work by analogy and allusion; they refer beyond themselves to something else; they invite comparison between two states: present state (under A's rule) and past or future state (under B's rule).

Political parties hire political communication consultants adept at coming up with ads those are in part reality and in part fiction. Each team of political communication consultants has its own metaphor\_ that is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to re describe reality; and reality is nothing more than imaginative creations or artful representations of possible worlds, constructed by taking familiar components of every day life\_ recognizable people, indoor and out door settings, and social situations\_ and conjuring up scene after scene full of hypothetical interactions between these components and a leader and then convert this contiguity into a meaningful relationship.

### **(7) Over-Crowded Terrain**

Given the highly saturated field (every nook and corner is plastered with pictures of different leaders) plus hustle and bustle of urban life; it is virtually impossible task for leaders to break through the barriers (on his own) to attention that people normally build as a safeguard against the constant invasion of messages and capture the attention of theirs by coming away with something novel; therefore, they hire political communication consultants; who are to overcome two challenges: outperforming other practitioners in increasingly difficult

and overcrowded terrain; and to win and retain the loyalty of electorate which is a flimsy affair in the modern world. To this end, either the actual social reality is systematically redescribed to provide a suitable canvas on which the ad enacts itself; the redescription of canvas is tailored to transports viewers into world quite different but better than one presently inhabits or having established the importance of the symbolic attributes of leaders through consumer research the 'package of stimuli' is designed by imagist associations between the leader and the expectations of voter so that it resonates with aspirations already nursed by an individual, and thereby induces the desired behavioral effect. The image of leader is based on the interpretative predilections of the target audience; the personality of leader is enveloped in symbols, and the requirement to enlarge the scope and intensity of the message that accompanies the transition in focal point from the services to the person is attained by highlighting issues like inflation lawlessness and then relating their solutions quite arbitrarily to leader.

Image is constructed either for mass audience by using open codes of interpretation (symbols recognized by the average person everywhere), or for specific (ethnic) subgroups by using restricted codes; but no matter who is targeted, ads become psychological things, as symbolic of personal attributes and goals, as symbolic of strivings and appear as mere receptacles for the generalized play of meanings, as 'fields' for human states of feeling and aspiration that are projected into the substance of the messages incorporated into ads; hence in this sense the realm of needing of someone voters can relate to become immersed within the domain of communication.

#### **(8) Slogan: Projective Medium**

The use of party's slogans as communicators of meanings by electorates is among the most dramatic instances of fundamental continuities and similarities among human cultures, from what we call 'primitive societies' to our own; therefore, the function of slogans in human cultures is significant for our understanding of contemporary political life and helps us to appreciate the full extent of political communication's role in the consumer society.

Political affiliations in pre-industrial world were mediated by interactions between leaders and followers; and sense of belonging

was associated with this physical proximity. Having this physical proximity was out of question in contemporary society. But absence of latter was not to be allowed to become absence of former; if politics and politicians had to survive; therefore medium that could mediate political relation by expressing motives and objectives shared by leader and voter had to be created to act as communicators in political interactions, thus slogans were born.

Slogan-creation is necessity if interaction has to occur and that necessity necessitates the role of political marketing practitioners charged with the task to charge slogans with meanings of interpretive significance and breathe life into them in order to make them seem as if they are alive or endowed with life-force.

Slogans in ads; on leaflets or on the bosoms of followers serve as a 'projective medium' through which political interactions take place. Political marketers and advertisers canvass the whole range of cultural symbols, past and present, and blend their borrowings with the characteristics of current leaders to create this projective medium through which, they hope, the symbolic meanings can be made to resonate.

Discourse through and about party/leader' can not be communicated in the same ways because the market-industrial society is unique not for its obsession with building personality-cult, but for its capacity to transform the characteristics of leader quickly and regularly, therefore, ever-new slogans are to be constructed for the flow of discourse.

Slogans are not simply part of political communication \_ not merely the messages or messengers in the system, but, in fact, very embodiment of the message as they encapsulate theme of one's political philosophy.

## **Reference**

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