

>> Political Communication of the Municipal Recall Process in Lima

Lima >> 03 >> 2013

Apart from political stances, two clear scenarios can be recognized in the recall process taking place in Lima. The first one is characterized by the recall referenda and focused on the debate —whether lofty or not— on specific topics: management capacity, reforms in transportation, shoddy works, etc. Both sides were engaged themselves in a debate which ended up getting spoilt with insults and so on. That is, the campaign degenerated. And this promoted by the recall referenda, logically, by the nature of a recall which is not the same as an election. A recall questions power. The election is carried out to obtain it in a scenario that assumes equality of conditions. carried out to obtain it in a scenario that assumes equality of conditions.



The second scenario was characterized by the “NO” campaign team, which we could call change of framework or “frame”. What this team did was to withdraw from that scenario and create a new one. Then they were not suggesting messages related to the above-mentioned topics, but to more perceptual concepts: No to violence, No to backwardness, No to chaos, No to exclusion. That is, in other words: the NO team stopped playing on the pitch of the YES team, which had been formed out of the inertia of the debate in the public opinion, and created a new pitch to which it urged this public opinion to go and, to a great extent, the rival team as well. So did it that the rival was dragged by the force of the current in this last wave of memes.

In that framework, two well-marked styles can be identified: the traditional style represented by the side of the recallers, those who support the “yes”, with fairly messages about poor management, incompetence, etc. That is, messages that lumbers the mayor with perceptions which try to take away her popularity and relate her image with negative elements that take deep root among the population. The recallers will continue participating with these messages until the end. In addition, the way in which they communicate them is much less clean but very functional. We should remember that there are segments of the population who appreciate other elements in communication and not necessarily cleanness or tidiness. For example, there are pro-recall adverts or messages on YouTube of up to 5 minutes and with quite modest quality levels. It can be deduced that as different groups participate in the YES campaign, many of them

put their hallmark on it and messages are read under a not very homogeneous line without a face or identity that represents that message which in the end falls imprecisely on two or three people.

On the other hand, there is a more sophisticated style, where a lot of care has been taken on the messages and the way these are presented, with aligned personalities and dissemination channels. Even this proposal has an identifiable name —The Faces of the NO—, with a completely homogeneous graphic line, an exclusive website for the topic, etc. This group has given identity to its message, has provided it with faces, and that closes the circle of good communication, distancing the image of the mayoress separating her from the battles and avoiding the endorsement that the other group can do to her.

1 Recall is one of the fundamental rights to political participation recognized by the Constitution. It consists on the possibility to dismiss elected authorities from office. They can be mayors and councilmen; regional presidents, regional vice-presidents and regional councilors; and justices of the peace chosen by popular election. It was introduced in the Peruvian Constitution framework in 1993, after the closing of the Congress or the self-coup d'état on the 5th of April 1992 in the Government of Alberto Fujimori. It differs from a traditional electoral process as the latter builds representation among several alternatives in competition for the Power. The recall election questions the power and tries to interrupt a mandate



The NO campaign takes care of the esthetic details and uses the faces of public figures with renowned career and reputation.

That is, they not only handle the messages, but also the way in which they communicate it and the channel through which they broadcast it, with all its elements aligned in only one concept. In this way, the message is not only the message itself, but the whole proposal becomes a message in itself.

Another important point is the use of Internet which is becoming a channel of vital importance for an electoral campaign or recall campaign, taking into account the levels of penetration of this channel in the electoral universe or the segments of voters. We should remember that the level of Internet penetration at a national level does not even reach 50 % of the population, with almost 17 million voters. However, in the recall process we are in the face of an electoral population in Lima of almost 7 million voters and with an Internet penetration rate of more than 90 %.



The YES campaign uses press images which show chaos and mess, lumbering the figure of the mayoress with negative features.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the leading role of the campaign consultants in the strategies employed in an electoral or recall process. In this case we should separate the debate between that obscure financing aura of a campaign with the hiring of professionals and experts in political marketing, such as lawyers, engineers, managers or economists. A negative content has been given to the figure of a campaign advisor or political advisor when those activities are professional activities like those of any other person. And in this case as in anyone, the experience and professional capacity are those which determine whether to count on the services of either one or the other, whether national or foreign. It is obvious that, like any consulting firm, consultants also chose with who they work with, as they are aware of the burden that comes with a candidate or bloc that can affect their own reputation. And communication consultants know very well that reputation is the most precious asset of their profession.

PHASES OF AN ELECTORAL POLITICAL OR RECALL CAMPAIGN

We can establish 8 phases or steps which can be clearly recognized in an electoral political campaign:

1. **Definition of the target audience.** In this phase the audiences are divided into segments with the most rigorous and detailed information possible. The consumption profiles of the audiences to be reached with the message should be read carefully. Likewise, the political context, the social microclimates (in the case of Lima) and the cultural phenomena that exist in each one of these segments should also be read.
2. **Establishment of a baseline as starting point.** After mapping the audiences to be convinced to vote for one option, an initial baseline that locates the popularity of the position that will be promoted should be established, in order to measure afterwards the degree of progress achieved result of the strategies proposed and, in this way, reconsider new ways or maintain the same communication line.
3. **Analysis of the competitors' profile.** The weak points of the other side should be searched for by developing a SWOT (Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) so that depending on that information, the strategy and the messages intended to weaken this position can be established.

4. **Definition of the message as a whole**, both in its signifier (which codes you use, how you say it) and its meaning (what you say). At this point it is important to manage the semiotic very well. In other words, the message is not only what it is said, but how it is said, with which elements and through which media it is said. The campaign itself becomes a message.
5. **Elaboration of a mapping of opinion leaders or social actors who support your position**. Public figures who support the campaign with their reputation or their popular influence should be looked for.
6. **Define the channels and the way in which, through them, they will build their message**. Clear and clean messages should be presented, aligned to a homogeneous graphic line through all types of channels: TV, Radio, Print Media, ATL, BTL and Internet. The use of Panels, Flashmobs, Street Performances or activations in areas of high traffic and higher consumption should be considered
7. According to the penetration level of the Electoral Universe, **the use of Internet and the “viralization” of the messages are more or less important**. In the case of Lima, where the Internet penetration rate is higher than 90%, whether through private computers, public telephone booths or smartphones, Internet becomes much more important than in a greater scenario such as a Presidential election, since Internet at a national level reaches almost half of the population.
8. **Update the subject matter permanently or, otherwise, consider the creation of a new scenario or framework for the campaign**. The second phase of the NO strategy was, for example, to clarify the works carried out by the current mayors. Afterwards, the use of popular artistic and cultural expressions (reggaeton and cumbia). In this sense, permanent renovations of the message should be proposed so that the tendencies achieved remain. These renovations will depend on the analysis of the degree of progress achieved after carrying out the actions. If in one week it has been possible to turn over the tendency in the surveys or increase popularity in a number of percentage points, it is possible to deduce that it was a result of the communication actions developed. At this point this new value is established as a new baseline and the process begins again.



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