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*The Effects of TV Political Advertising on Changing the Perception of Political Images  
in Polish Presidential Election in 2015*

**Keywords:** political advertising, TV political advertising, political images, elections, presidential election

## **SUMMARY**

The presented dissertation explores the influence of TV political advertising on political images of candidates competing in the 2015 presidential election in Poland. The primary aim of analysis is to verify if campaign spots affect the perception of political images of candidates and emotional attitude towards them. For this purpose, the empirical research (N=507) to check the reactions to campaign spots among voters was carried out.

The presented study was proceeded according to the quasi-experimental research design between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2015 (one week before the first round of the 2015 presidential election in Poland). The study sample included students of international security, internal security, European diplomacy, journalism and social communication, European studies, foreign language studies, physiotherapy, medicine, political studies and sociology from six universities: University of Warsaw, University of Wrocław, University of Silesia in Katowice, University of Economics in Katowice, Medical University of Silesia and Silesian University of Technology.

The study involved three stages. First, the group of participants anonymously filled in a study questionnaire (pretest), including questions concerning their interest in politics, political preferences, ideological self-identifications, level of political alienation, evaluation of political images of the candidates competing for the office of the head of state and emotional attitudes to them. The instruments used in the study were feeling thermometers and semantic differential scales. Afterwards, the participants were shown randomly chosen campaign spots of each running candidate (in each group, the order of the candidates was also

chosen randomly), acting as a stimulus that could potentially change the reactions to the analyzed politicians. After watching the ads of each candidate, the third stage of the study followed, in which the participants filled in a posttest referring to the political image characteristics and their emotional attitudes to the candidate.

This dissertation contains five main chapters. The first two describe the basic concepts related to the topic of the doctoral dissertation and the current state of research on political advertising, referring to the assumed hypotheses. The third part of the dissertation presents the 2015 presidential campaign in Poland. The last two chapters are a methodological description of the conducted research and presentation of its results.

The first chapter (*The electoral behaviors and political image: theory and practice*) begins with the ways of understanding electoral behaviors and the most important research paradigms presented in chronological order (sociological approach, psychosocial approach, rational choice theory, structural models of voter behavior). This section focuses on the role of the image of candidates and media coverage in shaping citizens' electoral behavior. The second part of the first chapter deals with defining issues related to the political image.

The second chapter concerns TV political advertising and its effects on voters. It was noted that there is no one common definition of TV political ad in scientific literature. In presented dissertation this term is used to encompass all audiovisual media messages that are designed to promote the interest of a given political subject (party or candidate). Following Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha it was assumed that TV political advertising incorporates *any programming format under the control of the party or candidate and for which time is given or purchased on a broadcast (or narrowcast) outlet*. This part also briefly introduces the evolution of this political marketing tool, focusing on the growing role of emotions in creating advertising messages. Subsequently, the types of political TV ads are presented. During their presentation, the form (positive and negative ads), content (issue and image ads) and the advertising formats are taken into account. The chapter ends with a presentation of the state of research on the effects of television political advertising in various countries of the world. This section focuses on three dimensions: cognitive, affective and conative. The first one is connected with information efficacy of advertising messages, in other words, their influence on the voters' level of knowledge on the traits and programs of a given party or candidate. The affective dimension involves voters' perception of the political images and their emotions concerning a candidate, whereas the last dimension refers

to the effects of political advertising on voters' behaviors, i.e., voting for a specific candidate, or even a permanent change in political attitudes.

The third chapter (*Presidential election in 2015 in Poland – images and background*) briefly unveils campaign strategies of candidates participating in the 2015 Polish presidential election. This part of dissertation starts with the evolution of legal regulations regarding TV political advertising in the presidential campaigns in 1990-2015. Afterwards, the political situation before the 2015 presidential election is presented, including campaign expenses and support to candidates during the few months preceding the election. This chapter also presents the biographies of candidates running for the office of president, their campaign activities and image building through TV spots.

The fourth chapter contains a detailed description of the research. In this section two main hypotheses and ten detailed hypotheses are presented. They concerns both the impact of TV advertising on the political images of candidates and voters' emotions towards them. The following main hypotheses are formulated:

H1: *TV political advertising affects the perception of the images of candidates.*

H2: *TV political advertising affects the emotional attitude of voters towards candidates.*

The above hypotheses generated ten detailed hypotheses, which posited the following forms:

h1: *Gender significantly differentiates the evaluations of the candidates' images as a result of the influence of TV political advertising.* In relation to this hypothesis, it was decided to make the directional hypothesis: *Women are more susceptible to changing the evaluation of a political image as a result of the influence of TV political ads.*

h2: *Political preferences significantly differentiate the evaluations of the candidates' images as a result of the influence of TV political advertising.* With regard to this hypothesis, it was also decided to formulate the directional hypothesis: *Voters with unspecified political preferences are more susceptible to changing the evaluation of a political image as a result of the influence of TV political ads.*

h3: *Interest in politics significantly differentiates the evaluations of the candidates' images as a result of the influence of TV political advertising.* In the case of this hypothesis, it was assumed that: *Voters who are not interested in politics should be more susceptible to changing the evaluation of a political image as a result of the influence of TV political ads.*

h4: *Ideological self-identification significantly differentiates the evaluations of the candidates' images as a result of the influence of TV political advertising.* In relation to this hypothesis, it was supposed that: *People with unspecified ideological identifications should be*

*more susceptible to changing the evaluation of a political image as a result of the influence of TV political ads.*

*h5: Level of political alienation significantly differentiates the evaluations of the candidates' images as a result of the influence of TV political advertising.*

*h6: Gender significantly differentiates the change in emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political advertising. In relation to this hypothesis, it was decided to formulate the directional hypothesis: Women are more susceptible to changing the emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political ads.*

*h7: Political preferences significantly differentiate the change in emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political advertising. In case of this hypothesis, it was assumed that: Voters with unspecified political preferences are more susceptible to changing the emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political ads.*

*h8: Interest in politics significantly differentiates the change in emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political advertising. With regard to this hypothesis, it was also decided to formulate the directional hypothesis: Voters who are not interested in politics should be more susceptible to changing the emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political ads.*

*h9: Ideological self-identification significantly differentiates the change in emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political advertising. In relation to this hypothesis, it was supposed that: People with unspecified ideological identifications should be more susceptible to changing the emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political ads.*

*h10: Level of political alienation significantly differentiates the change in emotional attitudes towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political advertising.*

The last chapter comprises the statistical analysis of the results of conducted research. The study confirms that TV political advertising affect both the perception of political images and the emotional attitude towards candidates. Interestingly, the obtained results prove that emotions towards politicians are more permanent and resistant to change under the influence of advertising messages than political image characteristics. The study also reveals that political advertising has a moderate importance in creating the images of commonly known politicians.

Research results also suggest that certain groups of voters are more susceptible to the influence of TV political advertising. The conducted analysis shows that gender significantly differentiates the influence of political spots on the assessment of candidates' images – women turn out to be more prone to this form of persuasion than men. Political preferences also proves to be a factor differentiating the effects of TV spots. According to the directional hypothesis, people with unspecified preferences are more susceptible to changing the evaluation of political images of candidates after the presentation of television ads than other groups of voters. Thus, TV political advertising can be considered an effective weapon in the fight for unstable voters. The study also confirms the hypothesis regarding greater susceptibility to influence of TV advertising on the voters declaring a lower degree of interest in politics. The level of political alienation is also a factor differentiating in the conducted research – less alienated voters turn out to be slightly more prone to advertising messages. In case of emotional attitudes, only gender turned out to be a variable increasing the voters' susceptibility to changing of feelings towards candidates as a result of the influence of TV political advertising. Women turned out to be slightly more prone to the effect of presented spots. Other detailed hypotheses made regarding the affective influence of political ads have not been confirmed.