

**THE EVOLUTION IN NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING OF PARLIAMENTARY
CANDIDATES IN THESSALONIKI
IN THE PERIOD 1989-2000**

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Abstract

This paper deals with the changes in the advertising material published in the newspapers by parliamentary candidates in the Thessaloniki “A” electoral district (Greece) in the period 1989-2000. The reason for the choice of period was the significant alteration that took place in political communication in Greece over those dozen years, as it moved into a ‘modernisation’ phase. This was characterised inter alia by the introduction of private commercial television, political marketing and the hiring of communication consultants, as well as by more general changes in the political culture. Another reason for this choice was the fact that six elections were held during that period, a number sufficient to permit a comparative study.

The research, which covered eight widely read local and Athenian newspapers, reflecting all the political tendencies represented in the Greek Parliament, revealed significant changes in the advertising material published by the various candidates over the course of the period in question. The differences observed fall into six categories: (1) increasing emphasis on image over text, (2) advertising increasingly accompanied by a photograph of the candidate, (3) gradual move away from personal information in advertising texts, (4) use of coloured inserts, (5) front page advertising, and (6) a general improvement in the design and appearance of advertising material.

The methodological tools employed were content analysis and semeiology, the latter being used in the analysis or comparison of specific items, the better to illustrate the historical changes in the candidates’ advertising material.

Keywords: *political advertising, Greek MP, campaigning*

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Early in the 1990s, political communication in Greece began to enter a 'modernisation' phase. The principal causes of the alteration in the manner in which political communication was carried out were the modernisation of Greek society, the deregulation of the Greek broadcasting system and such broader political changes as the sovereignty of the free-market philosophy and country's entry into the EMU. Political communication in Greece has in recent years been characterised by, *inter alia*, the dominance of 'media logic' and the marked degree of 'marketisation' and 'professionalisation' (Kotzaivazoglou and Zotos 2006; Papathanassopoulos 2000; Yannas 2002, 2005; Samaras 2002; Chondroleou 2004; Zotos, Boutsouki and Kosmopoulou 2004).

This climate of change shaped the evolution of political advertising, both on the level of the political party and on that of the individual candidate. This paper attempts to examine the changes that took place in the press advertising of parliamentary candidates in the 'A' electoral district of Thessaloniki in the period 1989-2000. In those eleven years six elections were held: 18 June 1989, 5 November 1989, 8 April 1990, 10 October 1993, 22 September 1996, 10 April 2000.

The research was carried out in eight large circulation daily newspapers, six national and two local, covering all the hues of political opinion that are represented in the Greek Parliament. The nationals were *Ta Nea*, *Eleftherotypia*, *Kathimerini*, *Eleftheros Typos*, *Avgi*, *Rizospastis*, and the locals *Thessaloniki* and *Macedonia*. The methodological tools used were qualitative content analysis and semiology, the latter playing a supporting role in the analysis or comparison of specific advertisements, enabling a clearer perception of the changes in candidate advertising over time.

The research is based on the doctoral dissertation of one of the authors (Kotzaivazoglou 2006) and is a sequel to the paper that was presented by the same researchers at the 2004 PSA Conference in Lincoln. That paper, it should be noted, found, using quantitative content analysis, that in the period in question advertising was an important means of promotion for both elected and non-elected candidates, that the number of photographs in press advertisements multiplied, and that

candidates preferred local to national newspapers for their campaign advertising (Doulkeri and Kotzaivazoglou 2004).

Research findings

The research identified progressive and significant changes in candidate advertising over the period in question. These changes fall into six categories:

- (1) increasing emphasis on image over text,
- (2) advertising increasingly accompanied by a photograph of the candidate,
- (3) gradual move away from personal information in advertising texts,
- (4) use of coloured inserts,
- (5) front page advertising, and
- (6) a general improvement in the design and appearance of advertising material.

More analytically, these changes may be described as follows:

(1) The increasing emphasis on image over text

In the advertisements published in the period in question the visual part of the message and the picture gradually acquired increasing importance, usually constituting the chief part of the message. In the earlier electoral campaigns the advertising messages were centred on the text, and the picture played a supplementary role. Gradually, however, the image displaced the text, frequently coming to constitute the major part of the message.

Comparing the advertisements in Tables 1 and 2 illustrates this change very clearly. Table 1 presents typical advertisements from the period 1989-1993, and Table 2 from the electoral campaigns of 1996 and 2000. It is evident that it is increasingly the photograph that triggers the basic signals in the advertisement, while the text has acquired an auxiliary - expository role.



Table 1. Candidate advertisements in the period 1989-1993.

In the later election campaigns, and particularly in the most recent (2000), the texts in electoral advertisements were usually sensibly shorter in comparison with the past. Advertisements emphasising the candidates' positions on issues, addressed primarily to the reason, were largely replaced by advertisements emphasising the image projected by the candidate, addressed to the emotions. In other words, the “rhetoric of image” (expression used by Barthes 1988) had displaced the rhetoric of reason. Issues in most cases lost out to impressions. The text was restricted to the iteration of slogans and “was replaced by “passion”, that is, impulse, impression and incitation, which, obviously, are the chief components of commercial advertising” (Papathanassopoulos 2002: 69).



Table 2. Candidate advertisements in the 1996 and 2000 election campaigns.

The reason for this shift from text to image is, in the author's judgement, that advertising inserts, and especially those where the emphasis is on the image, can send more and stronger messages, attract the attention of the viewer more readily, are more easily read and remembered, and exert a stronger influence than those where the emphasis is on the text (Zotos 2000: 214; Doulkeri 2001: 93; Doulkeri 2002: 143). The reading of an image generally stirs up more emotions and offers greater immediacy and rapidity of comprehension (Kress and van Leeuwen 2000: 30).

There are, nonetheless, a number of cases where the emphasis remains on the text. These instances usually project the candidate's political achievements or formulate some political message for the electorate, frequently the candidate's vision. The object of such advertisements is obviously to differentiate the subject from the other candidates and to gain a comparative advantage over them. Even in these instances, however, significant changes in the design and aesthetic of the outlines and

of the candidate photographs were observed, and the size of the photographs increased. Tables 3 and 4 present some examples of this.



Table 3. Advertisements from the elections of November 1989 and April 2000, projecting the candidate’s political achievements as cabinet minister.



Table 4. Advertisements from the elections of November 1989 and April 2000, projecting a political message.

It is worth mentioning, although not surprising, that these advertisements were prosopocentric¹. In those that contained a photograph, the candidates were almost always pictured alone. They lacked the pluralism of communication and design content that is characteristic of commercial advertising (Zotos 2000: 42-53, 141-211; Doulkeri 2001: 87-152). Candidate advertisements were usually simple in conception and design and – especially those from the same campaign period – displayed many common features.

(2) Advertising increasingly accompanied by a photograph of the candidate

In the earlier campaigns there were advertisements in the press that contained only text, with no photograph of the candidate. These were usually leaflets announcing campaign events, and were intended for the information of the electorate. There were, however, times when this type of insert was the candidate’s chief form of advertisement (see Table 5).



Table 5. Advertisements from 1989 without candidate photographs.

Gradually, primary campaign advertising without a photograph of the candidate disappeared. In the 2000 elections only a very few notices of events were not accompanied by a photograph of the focal figure. In most instances these were variations of the basic insert that had been altered in some manner, usually by the addition of the text of the notice (see Table 6). It appears that this form of

¹ Research into the advertising of candidates for the offices of Mayor and Prefect of Thessaloniki in the 2002 elections found that in most cases the messages were also prosopocentric (Doulkeri and Panagiotou, 2005).

advertisement was prepared exclusively for use in the press. Although they cost more, they attracted the attention of more readers and facilitated the identification of person with event. This type of promotion also provided exposure for the candidate while at the same time informing the public about the event.



Table 6. Advertisements from the 2000 campaign in the form of notices of events concerning the candidate in question.

(3) The gradual move away from personal information in advertising texts

In the earlier campaigns many advertisements focused on personal information about the candidates. In these the emphasis was on their personal identity and careers, the object being to demonstrate their qualifications for office and persuade the voters that they were the best choice.

This type of advertisement began to disappear in the 1993 and later campaigns. It was replaced by alternative forms, chiefly inserts with little text and the emphasis on the image, as has already been observed. It is worth noting that most of the advertisements in the 2000 campaign that had an accompanying text focused on the candidates' positions or on things they had done for the country, and particularly for the city and its residents. These positions or actions were drawn from a mixture of the voters' needs and desires and the possibilities and personal characteristics of the candidates themselves. The messages of many of the advertisements of the 2000 campaign, and particularly those of elected candidates, had a predominantly "marketing orientation". The emphasis shifted from the candidate himself, his abilities

and personal qualities, to the benefits the voters would derive from his election. The advertisements presented in Table 7 are typical of this category.

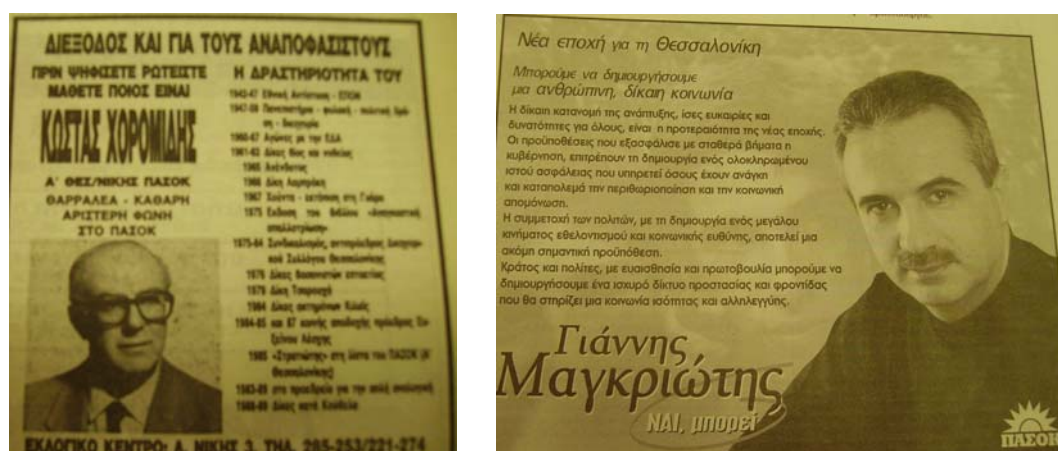


Table 7. Advertisements from 1989 and 2000 respectively, where the core of the message has shifted from who the candidate is to what he intends to do.

(4) The use of coloured inserts

By the beginning of the 1990s coloured photographs were appearing with increasing frequency, particularly in the national newspapers. Coloured advertisements of the reference candidates were recorded only in 2000. It should, however, be noted that coloured advertisements had been used in earlier elections by candidates in other electoral districts. It is also possible that in 1996 there were coloured advertisements for candidates in the ‘A’ electoral district of Thessaloniki in local newspapers that are not covered by this study.

Although substantially more expensive, coloured advertisements do offer significant comparative advantages over black and white ones. The use of colour eliminates aesthetically unattractive blank white spaces. Appropriately chosen colours can accent certain points, suggest a desired style or air, and attract the attention of the intended receptor more easily. Compared to black and white, coloured advertising offers more possibilities for better aesthetic results, attracts the attention of the reader more easily and increases the impact of the message (Zotos 2000: 217; O’ Guinn, Allen and Semenik 2003: 440; Nelson 1994: 212). This appears to be the reason why candidates prefer coloured advertisements.

(5) Front page advertising

Another innovation in the 2000 campaign revealed by the research was the use of front-page advertising. Although front-page advertising is far more expensive, it gives the candidate much greater projection. It allows him to reach beyond the readership of the newspaper to passers-by who see the newspaper displayed at newsagents, television viewers who watch the morning headline reviews, other members of a household in which the newspaper was bought, etc. The effectiveness of front-page advertising becomes even greater when one considers that candidate advertisements multiply as the election day draws nearer. In the final days of the campaign there is strong competition to attract the attention of the reader. Front-page advertisements stand out.

(6) A general improvement in the design and appearance of advertising material

Over the period studied there was a steady aesthetic improvement in political advertising, a step-change perceptible with each new campaign season. This improvement is observable in both the imaging and the overall design and appearance of the advertisements. As has been mentioned, there was an increase in the size and frequency of candidate photographs in most advertisements, and a decrease in the dimensions of the accompanying text. In the most recent electoral period the photographs were of much better quality, more professional in conception and execution. More attention was paid to the non-verbal messages delivered by the candidate, including body language, gesture, air, dress and grooming. The background was also carefully selected, and many advertisements were in colour.

The result was that, with each new election period, the candidates appeared increasingly reliable, successful and self-confident, and at the same time friendly, familiar and human. Male charm was another element that was frequently emphasised. Research by Kinder *et al.* has shown that politically unsophisticated voters have a tendency to prefer candidates who have the qualities they admire in a friend, while the more politically sophisticated are drawn to candidates with managerial skills (Kapelou 2002). Improved advertising, addressed simultaneously to the politically sophisticated and the unsophisticated voter, broadens the candidates' target market. In the most recent elections the candidate images projected have been an amalgam of the capable politician and technocrat and the decent, sensitive man,

interested only in the welfare of the people. This is in sharp contrast to advertising material from earlier campaigns, where the candidates appeared blank-faced and remote, without a trace of humanity, familiarity or sensitivity.

Significant changes were also observed in the textual part of political advertisements – the banner, the text (if any) and the slogan. In many instances the text was no longer focused on the qualities of the candidate but acquired a marketing orientation, as was noted in section 3. Texts and slogans were more often than not vague, well-turned generalities (the ‘feel-good’ factor noted by Scammell 1999 and Holtz-Bacha 2003), so as to create a general positive impression of the candidate and touch the greatest possible number of people. Image and text were complementary and created a globally integrated aesthetic and communicative result.

The sample advertisements shown in Tables 8 and 9 are representative of this category. The advertisement on the left in Table 8 was published in the November 1989 elections. This is a feeble, poorly constructed, totally unprofessional piece of work: note, for example, the way the contour of the candidate’s shirt has been highlighted in pencil to detach it from the background of the black and white photograph. The candidate’s face is blank, his gaze fixed, more like a criminal on a “Wanted – Dead or Alive” poster than a parliamentary candidate. The choice of costume and the general grooming (hair and beard) leave much to be desired. The textual component of the advertisement is also meagre. The focus seems to be on the candidate’s name. His party is also named, and there is a vague political slogan, “*higher still*”, which is totally unrelated to the interests and expectations of the electorate. The advertisement does not even say which electoral district the candidate is running in, while the reader is left to deduce for himself that the cryptic message in very small print is the address and telephone number of the candidate’s electoral headquarters.

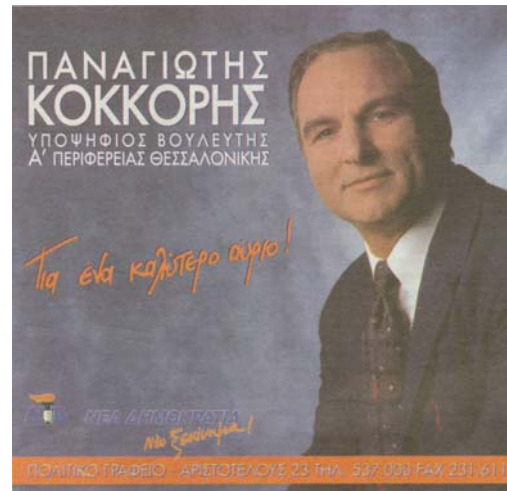


Table 8. Advertisements from 1989 and 2000 respectively, showing the changes in the way candidates were presented.

The other advertisement in Table 8, by contrast, which comes from the 2000 election campaign, is particularly carefully thought out, in design, in choice of colour and in the way the candidate is presented. Here the candidate appears serious, impeccably and classically dressed, with a steady gaze that seems to look the voter directly in the eye² and a hint of a smile, the whole suggesting confidence and self-assurance. The close-up framing creates a sense of intimacy. The slight upward angle of the camera gives the candidate an air of authority and strength³. The photograph indirectly accentuates the attribute of classical male charm. The candidate is portrayed as powerful, successful, mature and charming, creating an overall picture of a trustworthy politician.

The textual component of the advertisement is limited to the banner, the slogan, the name of the candidate's party, and his contact details. These elements are carefully and attractively presented. The slogan carries the candidate's promise of and commitment to "a better tomorrow". Printed in a special font, it appears to be

² A gaze looking directly into the lens attracts the attention of the viewer, creates a sense of intimacy, inspires confidence and suggests sincerity (Messaris 1997: 21-24; Kress and van Leeuwen 2000: 122).

³ According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2000: 135-140), this angle gives the subject an air of authority and strength.

handwritten, making it more persuasive. The deep blue colour suggests seriousness, serenity and security (Zotos, 2000: 219), blending aesthetically with the other elements of the advertisement and reinforcing their message. Given that this shade belongs to the spectrum of the official colour of the candidate's party, it indirectly identifies his political affiliation.

Table 9 presents three advertisements for the same candidate in different election periods. The first, from November 1989, is simple and communicatively uninspiring. It portrays the candidate as dynamic, assertive, a man of action. The slogan, “*Thessaloniki demands*”, indicates his determination to fight for the city. The second advertisement, from 1993, is similar. Here the text is predominant, and the photograph is smaller. The emphasis is on the candidate's name and party affiliation, and the slogan is more prominent.



Table 9. Advertisements of the same candidate from the elections of November 1989, 1993 and 2000, illustrating the improvement in political advertising.

The third example, from 2000, is much better both aesthetically and communicatively. It is in colour, and the image is predominant. The candidate is shown in tight close-up, which attracts the attention more readily (Messaris 1997: 27) and suggests the so-called ‘close personal distance’ that creates a quasi intimacy between subject and viewer (Berger 1991: 26, 27; Messaris 1997: 27-29; Hansen et al. 1998). The eye-level angle of the shot gives an illusion of equality between subject and viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen 2000: 135-140). The candidate, impeccably

dressed and groomed, is looking the viewer in the eye with a hint of a smile. The whole impression created is one of sincerity, confidence and self-assurance, and it could definitely be argued that the subject also has a certain mature charm.

The slogan, brief and eye-catching, encapsulates the basic message of the whole advertisement: the candidate's interest in the voter as a person and a citizen. The font imitates a script, giving the impression that the text was written by the candidate himself. The insert does not mention the candidate's party affiliation, probably because as a PASOK frontbencher of long standing he was already well known to the electorate. Instead it projects the slogan "*a value for all of us*", which promotes the candidate as a brand. Particular attention has also been paid to the background of the photograph, creating a pleasing global visual effect.

In conclusion

It is thus clear that the advertisements published by parliamentary candidates in the 'A' electoral district of Thessaloniki in the period 1989-2000 improved considerably during that time, both aesthetically and communicatively. This improvement was due to a number of factors, chief among them: (a) technological developments, which led to better and cheaper photo processing and printing, (b) improved professional know-how, and (c) the candidates' own desire to invest in the best possible promotion.

This evolution gave the candidate significant advantages compared to earlier years, enhancing their efforts to project the best possible image of themselves to the voters and to win their votes. The best advertisements attracted the most attention. They also helped the candidates achieve better positioning and more effective differentiation from their fellow candidates, creating what Reeves (1961: 58-59) has called a 'unique selling proposition'.

As has been indicated, this differentiation was increasingly based on an appeal to the emotions, rather than to the reason. This practice, which has been the rule for many years in commercial advertising (Nelson 1994: 11), seems to have been adopted in political advertising as well. The impressiveness of the image, the authority, the appearance, the human element, and even the charm of the candidate are all called into play to win votes. The accompanying slogan is usually a pleasant platitude, without specific meaning. The communicative intent is, in other words, in most cases

to win voter support by creating and cultivating general sentiments of liking for and trust in the candidate, and not to project his political positions and views.

There would be considerable interest in extending the research to campaigns subsequent to the year 2000 and to a comparison with candidates from other electoral districts or countries.

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