

POSITIVE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

The paper presents research on the correspondence of the theoretical definition and the practical understanding and application by Bulgarian candidates for political posts in the elections hold in 2014 – 2019 of the concept "positive election campaign". The questions are: does the meaning that the candidates attach to the term "positive campaign" correspond to its scientifically determined theoretical definition and how do the concept and its application correlate? The hypothesis states that (1) the phrase "positive campaign" is a key statement in the rhetoric of candidates; (2) the more conquered a country turns out to be, the more often the candidates for power build their pre-election political statements on the concept; (3) most often the election candidates mean a campaign with no compromising materials or hate speech, held in a spirit of good tone and ethics, promising more effective governance and a better future when they use the concept "positive campaign"; (4) the theoretical definition of the concept needs to be further developed and conceptualized within the paradigm of positivism. The hypotheses are tested by a media monitoring which identified 130 media publications covering candidates' statements with the phrase "positive campaign" and content analyses.

Key words: election campaign, positive campaigning, elections, political communication, pre-election rhetoric, positivism

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Introduction

Free and fair political elections are a key tool for establishing power in democratic societies. In Bulgaria, for the last 30 years, a total of 28 elections have been held – local, parliamentary, European, presidential [1]. Until 2011, the holding of each type of election was regulated by a relevant individual legal act. In 2011, the legislator adopted the first Electoral Code (State Gazette, issue 9 of 28.01.2011) regulating election campaigns and the holding of all types of elections. In 2014, a new Electoral Code (State Gazette, issue 19 of 05.03.2014) was adopted, which is still applicable to date.

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The Electoral Code defines an election campaign as a time period of 30 days before the Election Day and sets out the rights and obligations of the main subjects – candidates, observers, advocates, the media, sociological agencies, election commissions, within this time period. This legal definition of election campaign is adopted in the paper.

Election campaigns have been the focus of political science, sociological, financial (Мано́лов, 2019), and economic, legal, socio-psychological, and psychological analyses. Public intellectuals analyze the course of the campaign, the behavior of the candidates, the media, the sociological agencies, the voters, the election commissions and the governmental institutions involved in the holding of elections on traditional media platforms – on television, radio, on the pages of paper or Internet newspapers (Михайлова, 2019). Campaigns and candidates are discussed live on a daily basis in personal conversations or on social media.

It is noteworthy that one of the most common promises of candidates for power at the very beginning of their election campaigns is that they will run a positive election campaign. In their post-election analyses, both successful and unsuccessful candidates also often tend to claim that their campaign has been a positive one. During the campaigns, we hear statements such as: "*we strive to run a positive campaign, unlike our opponents*" (TV Европа, 2019). Such observations became the basis of the hypothesis that the phrase *positive election campaign* is key statement in the political election rhetoric of candidates. Moreover, the more conquered a country turns out to be (Нончев, 2017), the more and more often the candidates for power in that country build their pre-election political statements on the concept of *positive campaign*. The hypothesis was tested through media monitoring during the election campaigns in the period 2014 – 2019. The results of the research are presented in this study.

Media monitoring brought out a list of media publications of candidates' campaign statements. The list represents the set of research units in the course of this research study – their total number for the campaigns held in the period 2014 – 2019 is 150. Each of the publications was subjected to a content analysis, which answers the question of what meaning candidates attach to the term *positive election campaign*. The hypothesis is that most often they would mean a campaign with no compromising materials or hate speech against opponents, held in a spirit of good tone and ethics, promising more effective governance and a better future for the community, the country or society as a whole.

Questions arise. Does the meaning that the candidates attach to the term *positive election campaign* correspond to its scientifically determined theoretical definition? How do the theoretical definition and the practical understanding and application of the concept correlate? These are the leading questions which the research study will seek to answer.

The study of the correspondence of a theoretical definition and the practical manifestations of a given concept has a theoretical and methodological nature, insofar as it aims to verify, to enrich the definition of the concept in order to optimize the tools and methodology for its research. It also has a theoretical-applied nature, insofar as it examines the application of known theoretical definitions in a specific practical situation. In a pragmatic, daily plan, and specifically in an election campaign plan, such a study can provide specific guidelines and steps for its planning and holding as a positive one.

In 2012, I conducted a research of the correspondence of the theoretical definition of cyberbullying among children and its practical manifestations among Bulgarian children, of the forms and ways in which they commit, suffer, observe, and make sense of it. The research was part of the European project COST IS0801 "*Cyberbullying: prevention of negative and stimulating the positive use of new technologies in relationships in the educational environment*". The idea for the comparison of a theoretical definition and practical manifestations, as well as the research methodology, was developed by an international research team led by Prof. Ersilia Menesini, within the above-mentioned project in the period 2009 – 2010. The research in Bulgaria was conducted under the project "*Approbation and supplementation of a methodology for studying the nature and spread of cyberbullying among children*", funded by the UNWE Research Institute (2008 – 2011) (Михайлова, 2012).

This research experience gave me the idea to check the correspondence between the definition of a positive election campaign and the understanding that the candidates put into the concept. Methodologically, the two researches differ. The research object in 2012 was a new phenomenon in the world of children – cyberbullying committed by children against children. The object of this research study – the positive election campaign, has a long history and world practice. At first glance, it seems clear what a positive election campaign means and how it is practiced.

In terms of subject, the two researches look alike – it is the correspondence of a theoretical definition and practical manifestations. If back in 2012 it was a matter of a new phenomenon both in the field of practice and in the field of theory and the leading motive was to study the practice in order to define the phenomenon, the motives of this research are based on the specificity of the macrosocial context in which election campaigns are held. In the ever growing crisis of legitimacy (Фотев, 1999) and social capital in Bulgaria (Ракаджийска, 2014), given the increasing imposition of the "*little man*" in power (Градев, 2015) and consequently – methodical isolation and the marginalization of the social sciences (Минев, 2011), science and the applicability of its theoretical

achievements are often the target of fierce criticism bordering on rejection. Science faces the challenge of constantly testing itself in and through practice.

In addition, nowadays there is a kind of fashion for the positive – to speak positively, to think positively. The third element – to act positively, is as if left behind. We witness a reduction of the positive to what is nice, good for me and the others, to the belief that if I think positively, good things will happen to me. The link of the positive with positivism somehow remains out of fashion. The question arises whether this positive fashion has influenced the understanding of the candidates for a positive election campaign and whether there are sufficient grounds for it to influence the theoretical modeling and definition of the concept? The hypothesis is that there is an influence on the practice, which leads to the simplification of election campaigns. As regards the theoretical definition of the concept, the hypothesis is that it needs to be further developed and conceptualized towards the essence of positivism as a scientific method.

The methodological bases of the two research studies differ too. In order to explore the directions of theorizing the phenomenon, both back then and now again, I use literature analysis. In order to study its practical manifestations in 2012, I applied focus groups methods and a projective test, while now I use media monitoring in the election campaigns within the period 2014 – 2019 and content analysis of media publications.

Media monitoring is a widely used method for studying the activities of the media in election campaigns (Михайлова, 2019a). In this study, through media monitoring, media publications that reflect candidates' statements regarding the nature or type of the election campaign they are running are identified. More than 400 media publications made in the campaigns for the European and Parliamentary Elections in 2014, Local Elections in 2015, Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections in 2016, Parliamentary Elections in 2017, European and Local Elections in 2019 have been identified. The publications were discovered through the Google search engine by the keywords *positive election campaign* alone or in combination with the relevant elections. A review was made of the publications to eliminate the recurring ones – it is a common practice of the PR offices of the candidates to distribute the same message to all media which they have concluded contracts with for the provision of media services. A logical review of the publications was also performed in order to verify the date, candidate, and authenticity of the statement. With today's widespread dissemination of fake news, which, in an election campaign, despite the promises for it to be a positive one, tends to grow, such a verification review is a must. The procedures of review and logical review of publications reduced the number of research units down to 150, distributed as shown in Table 1.

The second methodological step in this study is a content analysis of the selected 150 media publications. The analysis indicators are derived from the working definition of the concept *positive election campaign* and they are presented in Table 2 and 3 below (see the column "Indicators").

At the third methodological level, the study compares the theoretical definition and the practical applications of the concept of *positive election campaign*.

The research is limited within the time period from 2014 to 2019, firstly, because all elections held are regulated by the new Electoral Code adopted before the European elections in 2014, i.e. the legal basis is the same. And secondly, because in this period a full election cycle was practically performed – all four types of elections were held, with the European, parliamentary and local elections even held twice (in 2014 and 2019 EP elections, in 2014 and 2017 early parliamentary elections, and in 2015 and 2019 local elections). This allows for the tracking of certain dynamics within one full election cycle.

Table 1: Distribution of research units in the sample

Elections	Units (number)	GERB [2]	BSP [3]	MRF [4]	President [5]	Other [6]
EP 2014	8	3	3	1	1	0
General 2014	10	4	2	1	1	2
Local 2015	35	16	6	4	1	8
Presidential 2016	22	9	7	3	1	2
General 2017	15	7	3	2	0	3
EP 2019	8	4	0	2	0	2
Local 2019	52	26	10	7	0	9
Total number:	150	69	31	20	4	26

There are also some limitations with regard to the selection of research units. If they are identified by specialized media monitoring software, it is quite possible that their number will increase sharply. Of course, the number of recurring publications will increase, but the number of unique publications reflecting statements from a wider range of candidates will increase as well. The method used to select research units does not make it possible to draw a definite conclusion as to which political parties or coalitions are more likely to use the term *positive election campaign* and which are less likely to do so. The perceptions of individual parties and coalitions of a *positive election campaign* can be considered as a guide and hypothesis for further research. The emphasis here is on the candidates' and their political parties' understanding of a positive campaign and its comparison with the adopted theoretical definition.

Positive election campaign in a theoretical perspective

The first impression that the review of scientific literature on the topic gives is the almost invisible, very weak presence of scientific research specifically on the positive election campaign and its effectiveness (Bernhardt, D., Ghosh, M., 2017)., unlike the research on the negative campaign (Ansolabehere, S., Iyengar, S., 1995; Sigelman, L., Kugler, M., 2003; Fridkin, K., L., Kenney, P. J., 2004). For the purposes of this research study, a review was made of the Bulgarian scientific literature from 1990 to the present time, scientific databases in the English were also used. The reviewed research focus is mainly on the negative election campaign and the effects it produces Wattenberg, M. P., C. L. Briens, 1999; Lau, R., Pomper, G. M., 2002).

A probable reason for this is the fact that the negative election campaign is a well-known phenomenon with a long history – it dates back to the time of Cicero and the Roman Empire (Kamber, 1997). In 1984, researchers noted a kind of boom in the orientation of American candidate politicians to negative political messages and campaigns. Negative political campaigning in America reached its first peak in the 1988 presidential election campaign (Basil, 1991). In our country, in the period 1990 – 2003, the negative campaigns were again prioritized – 14 campaigns defined as being negative were held, 9 – were positive, and 1 was a mixed campaign (Манолов, 2020).

Numerous scientific researches have been conducted on the reasons why candidates tend to choose negative political messages and negative campaigns. Part of them led to findings on the psychological predisposition of voters to negative messages (Haddock, 1997), the stronger and more lasting impact of negative messages as compared to positive ones (Ito, 1998), the need for negative messages in voters themselves (Kahn, 1999).

Negative political speech is part of the so-called dystopian (anti-utopian) discourse which in recent years has become increasingly preferred by candidate politicians and public intellectuals in our country too, not only in election campaigns, but also outside them. At the macro level, discourse is synchronized with the peculiarities of the risk society (Beck, 2013), the disintegration of the community (Bauman, 2003), the great regress (Ападурай, 2017). With a general socio-psychological mindset of crisis, insecurity, mistrust, dystopian discourse quickly and relatively easily finds its supporters.

At the meso level, dystopian political speech claims to reveal and defend the truth in the general flow of misinformation and the spread of false news. Dystopics usually present themselves as being well-informed, making use of special information and enjoying the trust of high-ranking circles of gray cardinals. This is the basis that gives them the right to claim a monopoly on the

truth and to suggest that it is they who, possessing information and the ability to operate with it, are the expected saviors who deserve voters' trust.

At the micro level, political dystopia has an impact first on the psyche of the individual voter, by being linked to the above-mentioned predisposition to negative speech and then, following the model of the two-tier flow of communication (Lazarsfeld, 1948), it has an impact on small social groups as well. In today's social media environment, such micro-impact is easily and quickly spread through social media to huge networks of voters.

All this makes negative campaigns more preferred than positive ones. They turn out to be easier to implement, which becomes their huge advantage, given the lowered intellectual level of today's Bulgarian candidate politicians. It turns out that it is also their effects that are realized and spread faster and within a wider geographical range. And this is not to be neglected, given the short duration of an election campaign – only 30 days. In addition, their financial plan may be more favorable for the candidates themselves.

However, the study of the negative election campaign will also pay attention to the positive one, insofar as the scientific definition of a phenomenon methodologically requires first defining the phenomenon as it is, only for itself and immediately after that, defining its opposites in terms of nature and functions. The absolute opposite of a negative election campaign is a positive one, and in this sense, the latter is also present in scientific publications. For this reason, Table 2 makes a comparison between the two types of campaigns, on the basis of which a working definition of a positive election campaign has been proposed.

Table 2: Comparison between positive and negative election campaign

	Indicator	Positive campaign	Negative campaign
1	Orientation	Towards the candidate Reveals and presents the candidate's competitive advantages, political platform, ideology, and vision for the future	Towards the opponent Reveals and presents their personal weaknesses, compromising biographical moments, problems in their political platform, ideology, and vision
2	Philosophy and Ethics	Constructive approach and civilized attitude to the opponents	Destructive approach relentless denigration of opponents

	Indicator	Positive campaign	Negative campaign
3	Discourse	Positive Emphasizes opportunities for better development and prosperity. Focuses on eternal values and virtues – patriotism, work. Relies on high-vibration emotions – love, joy	Dystopic Propose and insist on a negative vision for the future based on objective problems in the present. It focuses on the personality of the candidate, the party as a "savior". Relies on low-vibration emotions – fear, anger, resentment
4	Style	Peaceful, tolerant of the opponent. Evidence-based critique (Warren, 2012; Kamber, 1997)	Aggressive, exposing, compromising. Scandalous
5	Tone	Dialogic An active connection with the voter and forms of cooperation are sought.	Monologic The campaign is rather closed in on itself, the speech is directed towards oneself and one's peers.
6	Candidate's profile	Candidates with a higher personal rating and lead (Skaperdas, Grofman, 1995), more attractive, charismatic candidates (Harrington, Hess, 1996)	Candidates with a lower rating, second or next in the race (Skaperdas, Grofman, 1995), unattractive, uncharismatic (Harrington, Hess, 1996)

The development of a definition of a positive election campaign, even a working one, that is valid in the framework of this research study, needs to take into account, in addition to the results of the literature review, two other grounds as well. The first refers to the positioning of the positive campaign as a type of campaign in the systematic classification of election campaigns as proposed by Georgi Manolov (Манолов, 2020). The second refers to the conceptual link between a positive election campaign and positivism as the main method for achieving scientific knowledge. In examining this link, it is possible to establish more essential characteristics of the positive election campaign.

Systematic classification of the positive election campaign

Georgi Manolov (Манолов, 2020) made a systematic classification of election campaigns at the macro – and micro-political levels. At the macro-political level, the main criterion for typologization is the nature of the political system. Under totalitarian political regimes, we are not witnessing too many types of election campaigns. In democratic political systems, despite the down warding democracy index (Благоева, 2019), as it is in Bulgaria, a variety of election complain types

could be observed. On the micro-political level, the author distinguishes between several types of campaigns classified according to:

- (1) political tactics – positive, negative and mixed;
- (2) the psychological impact – aggressive, non-aggressive;
- (3) the management and leadership of the campaigns – centralized, decentralized;
- (4) the pace of the campaign – dynamic, inert;
- (5) the types of political advertising – diverse, monotonous;
- (6) financing – with large and limited financial resources.

The classification lacks the meso-political level, which is the linking systemic level between macro and micro. This lack is not in the focus of interest of this paper. Here, the use of the proposed classification is intended to provide more clarity to the definition of a positive election campaign. It makes it clear that a positive election campaign is positioned at the micro-political level and refers mainly to the tactics used to run the campaign. So far we have considered the opposition as being either positive or negative political campaign tactics, yet Manolov introduced a third one – probably this is the balancing third tactic of the mixed positive-negative campaign. In terms of the psychological impact, a positive campaign should be a non-aggressive one. Its management, pace, political advertising and financing may be of the two types mentioned.

Link between a positive campaign and positivism

As is well known, classical positivism has the following foundations:

- (1) scientific knowledge derived through the use of objective methods of scientific research;
- (2) verifiability and verification of the scientific knowledge obtained not through argumentation, but through the possibility for testing;
- (3) the scientific research aims to explain the existing phenomenon and to predict its development (Halfpenny, 1982).

If these basic principles are transferred to the positive election campaign, then its definition would take the following form. A positive campaign is run on the basis of an approbated objective methodology. The choice of methodology is essentially a management decision and depends on the election headquarters and their competence in the field of political marketing, and not on the PR offices and campaign experts. If a positive election campaign is conducted as a positivist scientific research, it means that it should comply with the objective principles, i.e. with the laws and norms of the society and the state in which it is held. The imperative of legality applies to every type of campaign, but the positive one should not allow itself to violate it.

A positive campaign is based on verified facts and not on imaginary or desired realities, post-truth and false news, both in relation to the opponents and in relation to the candidate and their supporting political structure. A positive election campaign operates with objective data, facts, reliable information, not with subjective opinions. It offers voters the opportunity to check, test the adequacy and authenticity of election messages by themselves. Impact is achieved on the basis of factual, rational argumentation, not on the basis of demagoguery and populism.

If we transfer the third positivist principle to a positive election campaign, it should fulfill two functions. The first one – to explain to voters what is happening, what the causes and consequences of what is happening are. The second one – to give forecasts for the future. Each campaign seeks to present the views of the relevant political force on what is happening. A positive one should offer not a subjective but an objective analysis, observing the methodological principle for distinguishing the object from the subject of research. This, among other things, means that a positive campaign should be planned and run on the basis of regular electoral and rating surveys, but in no case should it distort and interpret the results thereof in its favor. Each campaign provides a forecast for the future. In most cases, in our country it is like – if you elect me, I will lead you to a better future. Such a forecast is a positive one as long as it does not attack opponents. In fact, it is a negative one because it does not provide an objective framework for development.

The link between a positive campaign and positivism defines objectivity as a basic distinctive principle of the campaign. Objectivity in the analysis of the public and in particular of the pre-election situation. Objectivity in the candidate's attitude towards their opponents. From the standpoint of the principle of objectivity, a positive campaign has the right to point out the problems, to criticize, to make its demands. If this is done on a subjective basis, then the campaign goes to the negative side.

We should add here four more principles from Auguste Comte's (Comte, 1998) course of positive philosophy – he is known to be the father of positivism.

First, according to Comte, human progress is achieved through the systematic development of four main areas – intellectual, material, physical and moral. A positive election campaign should also be oriented towards social and human progress. In this sense, following Comte's first principle, it should be planned in such a way as to stimulate the intellectual, material, physical and moral development of both the candidate and its opponents, and the voters as well, during and, where possible, after the campaign.

Second, Comte formulated a law on the intellectual development of mankind, according to which human thinking and consciousness have passed through a

theological, metaphysical stage and have reached positivism. This law makes a positive election campaign correspond to the stage which the development of human thinking has reached. It suggests that in order for a campaign to be positive and successful, it should take into account both the existence of all three types of thinking at the time in certain groups of voters, and the reconciliation of the three of them in others. This would be useful in electoral analysis and action planning and political communication.

Third, Comte speaks of three solidarity logics that serve human progress. These are the logics of feelings, images and signs. Words provoke images in the mind. Images evoke feelings, emotions. Emotions and their power trigger intellectual activity, which in turn gives birth to thought. Applied to a positive election campaign, this principle suggests, first of all, that the campaign should be planned on three levels – images, signs, feelings. The same goes for the negative and the mixed campaigns. The essential difference comes from the decision on what emotions the campaign should be charged with and what emotions it plans to arouse in the voters. A positive campaign should rely on high-vibration emotions, which have the potential to expand the perimeter of consciousness, to encourage imagination, to release human initiative and will. The other campaign – on the contrary – will be built on mostly negative emotions such as fear, which create thoughts and feelings of insecurity, hopelessness, the end. The other essential thing in this sense is the synthesis of emotional and intellectual impact. A positive election campaign will balance the two spheres – by stimulating emotions, it would drive and develop the intellect. A negative campaign would mainly rely on emotional impact.

Fourth, Comte paid special attention to language as a mediator between the micro- and macrosocial level, between the family and the small, tribal community and society as a system. Language is also a defining factor in a positive election campaign. It would, of course, reject hate speech. But more importantly, in order to be positive, it should speak a language that, as Comte said, connects the family, the clan with society and transmits cultural and civilizational codes. Within each state, this role is most fully performed by the official language of that state, by the mother tongue. Only it has the potential to connect a family, clan, society and state.

The language in an election campaign is a big topic in today's Bulgarian election reality. To some extent it reflects the problem of the inner "other" in the Bulgarian state (Бакалова, 2019). According to the Electoral Code and every patriotic consciousness, an election campaign should be run in the Bulgarian language. However, there are many and especially insistent proposals from international institutions, political parties and individual MPs for the recognition of other languages in the Bulgarian election campaign (Михайлова, 2019a).

Toward a working definition of positive election campaign

Based on the analysis so far, it can be assumed that a positive election campaign is a phenomenon at the micro-political level in democratically organized social systems. It is characterized by the principles of:

- (1) legality – insofar as it is realized within the adopted regulatory basis;
- (2) objectivity – it is built on objectively existing facts and phenomena;
- (3) rational-emotional balance and argumentation.

A positive election campaign explains what is happening, gives forecasts for the development and stimulates intellectual growth in voters.

Seen in this perspective, a positive election campaign includes and builds upon the statements about an ethical and civilized attitude towards opponents and a non-aggressive tone. It relies on the constructive approach. It demonstrates the desired change through the candidate and the political formation supporting it. It can be realized not by candidates with high rating and pre-election lead, but by candidates and formations with a high concentration of brainpower, emotional intelligence and maturity, social sensitivity and empathy, natural charisma and paresis (Foucault, 2016).

In recent election years, such candidates are becoming less and less common in Bulgaria. This leads to the hypothesis that one of the most common election promises, namely to run a positive election campaign, in most cases remains unfulfilled. A possible reason for this is that they simply attach another meaning to the concept of a positive election campaign and remain true to their own understanding of it.

A positive election campaign in the candidates' minds

The results from the content analysis of the media publications reflecting candidates' statements regarding the type and nature of their campaigns show that politicians and candidate politicians from all political parties participating in elections and running their campaigns through the media show orientation towards a positive election campaign.

In terms of quantity, the greatest number of messages for a positive election campaign were during the two local elections in 2015 and 2019 (see Table 1). This is an expected result, given the fact that the candidates in local elections are the most numerous in number – in 2015, 42702 candidates were registered, and in 2019 – 36251 respectively. The fewest statements are made during presidential elections. What makes an impression here are the addresses of the current president at the time of the elections and his call on the candidates and their supporting parties for a positive campaign. In parliamentary and European

election campaigns, statements about the type and nature of campaigns are relatively rare.

Party models for the use of the term "positive election campaign" [7]

The publications analyzed show that in the period 2014 – 2019 most often candidates of the GERB political party (Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria) used it as a key in their election rhetoric. GERB was the governing party in that period and, of course, it had a rating advantage over its opponents. The highest established frequency of use of the term by candidates of the governing party leads to a practical confirmation of the thesis that candidates in the first positions and with higher ratings would rather resort to the tactics of a positive campaign (Skaperdas, Grofman, 1995). It should be noted here that this research study does not answer the question of whether the campaigns were actually positive or not, since it is limited to examining the use of the term in election rhetoric and the meanings that candidates attach to it.

It can also be assumed that the use of the term *positive campaign* does not occur as an accidental idea of each of the GERB candidates, but rather is a centrally planned rhetorical formula. The term also appears in publications dated back from 2007, reflecting the election rhetoric of the future Prime Minister of Bulgaria – Boyko Borissov and his nominating party. In 2007 he was a candidate for mayor of Sofia and was elected "*Politician of the Year*" by the listeners of the national "Darik Radio". Since then, the same model has been repeated in all subsequent GERB mayoral campaigns – the chairman of the party or the election headquarters would by rule, when launching the campaign, announce that it will be a positive one and indicate what its positivity will be expressed in. After that, the same pre-election statement would be repeated by the candidates as well, with some statements by MPs being also included at times.

GERB tends to speak about a positive election campaign at the beginning of the campaign and after the elections, in the first post-election analyses. The rhetorical function of the concept would be reduced to a pre-election promise, expression of an intention for a positive tone of the campaign and affirmation of the positive as a formula for electoral success.

GERB also tends to apply this model of using a *positive election campaign* in other types of elections. Such observation leads to the classification of an election campaign, according to which a positive campaign, by form of government, can be centralized (Манолев, 2020).

As early as 2007, the deputy chairman of GERB and chairman of the election headquarters introduced the following definitive markers of a *positive election campaign*. It starts with a prayer (BTV, 2007), i.e. it is related to the Orthodox

Christian code. And it affirms the principles of "*open government*" (Moreto.net, 2007), i.e. it makes a reference to basic democratic values. Thus explained, a positive election campaign is a campaign based on the synthesis between state and politics, on the one hand, and spirituality and religion, on the other.

Further on, GERB's perception of a positive election campaign was further specified through language formulas such as: "*transparent and nationally responsible debate*" (Vesti.bg, 2014), "*step away from compromising and black PR*" (Stzagara.net, 2014), "*face to face with our supporters*", "*without populism*" (Novini.bg, 2014), "*planned, consistent and ambitious work*" (Tvn.bg, 2015), "*constructive campaign, if there are good things done by the predecessors, they will be given credit*" (Dnes.bg, 2015).

In 2016, GERB presidential candidate, Tsetska Tsacheva, added new nuances to the understanding of a positive campaign. "*I am running a positive campaign, not responding to the personal attacks that have been poured on me by all kinds of candidates, because on Monday I will be the president of Bulgaria and I will have to work with all these people*," she said in a statement recorded by BGNES (BGNES Agency, 2016). According to her, a campaign is positive, where it not only does not use compromising information against its opponents, but also it does not respond to personal attacks coming from other candidates, i.e. it upholds the principles of an ethical and highly civilized attitude. The actual application of these principles is questioned by the expression "*all kinds of candidates*", which suggests contemptuous rather than equal treatment of opponents. This does not synchronize with the claim to ethics and civilization. The next new point is the linking of a positive campaign to the desired election result – the winner will have to work with everyone, so they would better not get into trouble but rather run a positive campaign.

In 2017, GERB introduced a positive campaign to the opposition – "*open to people, with fully feasible priorities*" against the background of "*despite all attempted lies, manipulation and masking by opponents*" (Vesti.bg, 2017).

In 2019, the figure of the GERB candidate in the positive election campaign was clearly outlined. The candidate for MEP, Mladen Shishkov, explained the purpose of the positive election campaign as follows: "*So that people can see us, understand that we are part of this society, we have not been dropped here from somewhere above, we are not some imaginary units, on the contrary, we have families and live in this country too and we are well aware of the problems it has*" (RadioK2.bg, 2019). Party chairman Boyko Borissov said that in their positive campaigns, mayoral candidates tend to "*present the job they have done*". With regard to the other candidates, Borisov said that "*we should simply let them talk*" (Dnes.bg, 2019). Undoubtedly, the personality and qualities of a candidate in an election campaign are crucial for its success. In a positive election campaign,

candidates are characterized by high natural charisma and pairesis – the ability and freedom to tell the truth. Apparently, GERB have managed to capture this marker from the theoretical definition of a positive election campaign and try to apply it in practice. To what extent and how they succeed in this is the subject of further analysis.

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The verbal formula of "*positive election campaign*" is also often to be found in the election rhetoric of the BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party) – the parliamentary opposition. Media publications covering the opposition's campaign statements containing these keywords are fewer than the publications covering the governing party. The reason for this may be the technical limitations of Google Search, due to which the identified publications include a smaller number of publications related to the BSP – it is clear that Google Search brings to the forefront publications on sites with high traffic, if the BSP does not distribute its messages through such sites, then their publications will be harder to find. For this reason, the profiles of the models of party perception of the concept of *positive election campaign* presented here should be perceived as a guide and basis for the formulation of further research hypotheses.

Apart from being fewer in quantity, the analyzed media publications reflecting the use of the term *positive election campaign* by the BSP, give grounds for identifying qualitative differences between the BSP and GERB.

First of all, the BSP's campaign speech lacks a centralized model for the use of a *positive election campaign*, as is the case with GERB. Rather, there is a sense of chaotic inclusion of the concept in the election statements of individual candidates. During the reviewed period, 2014 – 2019, the BSP replaced three chairmen and in all three of them the lack of a centralized model is evident.

Left-wing candidates, as well as their opponents, tend to use the term at the beginning of their campaigns to express their initial attitude to the running of the campaign. Successful candidates also use it in post-election statements to affirm the values of a positive campaign as values leading to electoral success.

The analysis of the publications related to the BSP clearly shows and even confirms the theses that a positive campaign would be run mainly by charismatic candidates with a high rating and pre-election lead. In the 2019 Local Elections campaign, the candidates Donka Mihaylova (Duma.bg, 2019), Stanislav Vladimirov (btvnovinite.bg, 2019), Pencho Milkov (Dariknews.bg, 2019), who were elected mayors of Troyan, Pernik and Ruse respectively, spoke about a positive campaign and ran positive campaigns.

In general, the perception of BSP politicians and candidate politicians for a positive election campaign has been developing as follows. In 2014, two elections

were held – European and parliamentary. There are almost no publications reflecting statements containing the keywords *positive election campaign*. The phrase was once used by Dostena Lavern, a MEP candidate. According to her, a positive campaign is a campaign that has at its core "*our ideas*" (Bsp.bg, 2019). And once by Mihail Mikov, MP candidate. According to him, a positive campaign leads to a "*complete electoral victory*" (Pik.bg, 2014). Since such a thing did not happen eventually, does this mean that the campaign was not positive? According to psychological research on the impact of positive and negative campaigning, the positive has a better chance of achieving an electoral victory (Gregory, 2015).

In the election year 2015, the chairman of the BSP in Sofia, announced a positive campaign and insisted on "*fair play by opponents*" (Duma.bg, 2015). Fair play means a play under the rules and laws. Thus, a positive election campaign was defined as a campaign run as provided for in the law. The candidate for mayor of Kyustendil added two more touches. A positive campaign can be outlined as a campaign without any "*eccentric news in all media*", as a "*competition of real programs and ideas for more effective governance*" (Duma.bg, 2015a). The candidate in Yambol announced a positive campaign too in a "*moderate style*" but showing "*the weaknesses and abuses of the previous government*" (Delnik.net, 2015). According to the candidate for mayor of Smolyan, a positive campaign is searching for "*the good, the contact with people*", it hears their problems and does not make "*empty promises*" (Smolyannews.com, 2015).

In 2016, the BSP-backed independent presidential candidate clearly stated a positive campaign, "*but if challenged, I will go to war*," he said (Duma.bg, 2016). This statement makes one think of the possibility that a positive campaign can, at any time, be transformed into a negative one, into a "*war*" as the then candidate and current president of Bulgaria said.

In 2017, the BSP did not seem to be talking about a positive election campaign.

In 2019, the European elections campaign, in terms of its methods of running, was negative without any statements of positivity. In the local elections campaign of the same year, some of the candidates stated a positive campaign and linked it to fruitful meetings and conversations with people, specific development proposals, policies and solutions, a "*clash of ideas*" (Big5.bg, 2019). They distinguished it from "*insults and agreements of principle*" (Parvomaj.net, 2019), "*pomposity*" (Btvnovinite.bg, 2019). Some of the statements also draw attention to the personality and biography of the candidate who would run a positive election campaign.

* * *

The MRF (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) promised a positive election campaign too. The key word they used to define a positive campaign was

tolerance. In individual speeches, a link was made between a positive campaign and voter turnout, pointing out that a positive campaign would increase turnout, and hence the representativeness of the election result (Infopleven.com, 2014).

In ABV's (Alternative for Revival of Bulgaria) views, a positive campaign "*does not seek enemies, skirmishes and tension*" and does not "*save the truth*" (Trud.bg, 2015).

"YES Bulgaria" added a new perspective to the perception of a positive election campaign, namely its potential to unite "*people's energy and desire for change*" (Bnr.bg, 2019). Such a unification is possible to happen, given that a campaign is built upon emotions with high vibrational capabilities.

* * *

The President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Rosen Plevneliev, also used the term *positive election campaign* in his speeches. Before each election in the period 2014 – 2016, he appealed to Bulgarian politicians for a positive campaign. According to him, this is a campaign without hate speech; taking into account the limits of political behavior, beyond which a social destruction occurs; the principles of ethnic and religious tolerance. A positive campaign excludes "*digging into meaningless causes*", unprincipled opposition and denigration of the opponent (President.bg, 2016).

Positive election campaign between theoretical definition and practical manifestations

The analysis so far allows a comparison between the theoretical definition of the term *positive election campaign* and the perception by political candidates and parties of *positive election campaign* to be done. The comparison is presented in Table 3.

As it is explained below in the study, theoretical definition of the concept "*Positive election campaign*" could be divided into two levels – some of the definition indicators are in the first, other in the second level. The distribution of indicators is shown in column 1 of the table below. The second column shows the number of the relevant definitive indicators. The indicators are not ranged according, they are just listed and distributed at the two levels. In the third column a brief theoretical description of the relevant indicator is presented. The fourth lists the political parties whose statements recognize the indicator.

The table makes it possible to distinguish two levels in the theoretical definition of the term *positive election campaign*. The first can be called a basic level – it includes indicators from № 1 to 6. The second is an upgrading level – from № 7 to 12. The first level is derived on the basis of existing theoretical definitions of

the concept. The second – based on the connection between a positive campaign and positivism.

Indicator № 6 can be assigned to both groups. There is a presumption of legitimacy of any type of election campaign. The indicator is presented here because the practice of conducting election campaigns in our country in the period 2014 – 2019 shows many attempts, some of them successful, to disregard the law by candidates and parties. Due to this objectivity, which can be verified in the decisions of the election commissions and also in the documentation of election-related court cases, as well as in the election archives of the Prosecutor's Office, and in order to highlight the irrevocability of the imperative for legality of a positive election campaign, the corresponding indicator is incorporated within the term's definition. Another issue is that the principle of legality is relatively rarely mentioned in the rhetoric of the candidates.

As can be seen from the table, the candidates most often reflect in their pre-election rhetoric the basic definitive level. They practically do not reach the upgrade level. The reasons for this can be found in a variety of fields. They should be sought in further research so that the two-step theoretical definition proposed here can be practically tested. Another issue is that the entities that science defines do not always have direct practical applications at the time they are defined. They appear at a later stage when the practice has reached the theoretical comprehension and modeling. Or they may not manifest within a human life.

Table 3: Positive election campaign – comparison between definition and practical manifestations

Level (1)	№ (2)	Indicator (3)	Theoretical definitions (4)	Practical manifestations in candidates' statements (5)
Basic level	1	Orientation	Towards the candidate	All parties
	2	Philosophy and Ethics	Constructive approach and civilized attitude to the opponents	All parties
	3	Discourse	Positive	All parties
	4	Style	Peaceful, tolerant	MRF, BSP, ABV, President
	5	Tone	Dialogic	BSP
	6	Candidate's profile	Candidates with higher personal rating, more attractive, charismatic candidates with paresis	GERB, BSP

Level (1)	№ (2)	Indicator (3)	Theoretical definitions (4)	Practical manifestations in candidates' statements (5)
Both	7	Legality	Complies with the laws and norms of society and the state	BSP, ABV
Upgrading	8	Objectivity	In the analysis of the social and pre-election situation; in the candidate's relationship with his opponents. Objective criticism	Fact based criticism – MRF, BSP, ABV, President
	9	Rational-emotional synthesis	Relies on high-vibration emotions, expanding the consciousness and imagination, freeing human initiative and will	Yes Bulgaria
	10	Language & thinking mode	Language as a mediator between the micro and macro social level. Positivist thinking	Not applicable to any of the parties
	11	Methodology of impact	Voters themselves to verify the authenticity of election messages. Impact based on factual, rational argumentation, not on demagoguery and populism.	GERB – populism. The rest is not applicable to any of the parties
	12	Functions	Explaining what is happening – causes and consequences; predicting the future; contributing to the systemic development (intellectual, material, emotional, moral) of man and societies; increasing voter turnout	Increasing the turnout – MRF, President. The rest has not been found in any of the statements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, following the scientific research tradition, let us return to the research hypothesis and compare them with the research results.

The first hypothesis states that the phrase *positive election campaign* is a key statement in the political election rhetoric of candidates. As the results show, the phrase is most often used in the rhetoric of the ruling party GERB as they used it in all elections in the period at least two times – in the beginning of the election campaign and in the first analyses after the official election results. Other political parties and independent candidates use it much more sparingly.

As the results show, the number of the unique media publications that cover the election campaign statements of the candidates with a key phrase *positive election campaign* is rising in the period of research. This leads to confirmation of the second part of the first hypothesis that the more conquered a country turns out to be, the more and more often the candidates for power in that country build their pre-election political statements on the concept of *positive campaign*.

The second research hypothesis states that most often the candidates mean a campaign with no compromising materials or hate speech against opponents, held in a spirit of good tone and ethics, promising more effective governance and a better future for the community, the country or society as a whole when they use the concept *positive campaign*. The hypothesis is fully approved by the research results. Moreover, they showed that the theoretical definition of the concept could be divided in two levels. The first is the basic one and it appears that most of the candidates cover in their understanding of *positive campaign* just this, not reaching the second upgrade level of the theoretical definition. As regards the theoretical definition of the concept, the hypothesis that needs to be further developed and conceptualized towards the essence of positivism as a scientific method is approved here and a positivistic addition to the definition is suggested.

The mode of basic understanding of *positive election campaign* by the candidates and their supporting political parties leads to the simplification of election campaigns. They could easily turn into negative. Moreover, this confined understanding of the *positive election campaign* could be a reason for the 30-year absence of the positive program for the development of Bulgarian society. These hypotheses could be tested in some further research on *positive election campaign*.

Notes:

- [1] CEC. Elections Portal in the Republic of Bulgaria <http://portal.cik.bg/>
- [2] GERB – The leading political party in Bulgaria in the research period 2014 – 2019. The abbreviation means: Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria.
- [3] BSP – the opposition political party in Bulgaria in the research period 2014 – 2019. The abbreviation means: Bulgarian Socialist Party.
- [4] MRF – the third party in Bulgarian parliament during the research period 2014 – 2019. The abbreviation means: Movement for Rights and Freedom.
- [5] The President of Bulgaria Rossen Plevneliev (2011 – 2016).
- [6] Other political parties such as ABV (Alternative for Revival of Bulgaria), "Yes Bulgaria", political coalitions such as Patriotic Front and independent candidates.
- [7] The quantitative distribution of the publications for each party are presented in Table 1.

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