

MSC 2020
**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»**

**SURPASSING RIVALS TACTIC AS A POLITICAL POSITIONING
MEANS**

Oxana Issers (a)*, Natalya Ekhlakova (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Dostoevsky Omsk State University, Omsk, Russian Federation, isserso@mail.ru
(b) Dostoevsky Omsk State University, Omsk, Russian Federation, eknatalya@yandex.ru

Abstract

The paper is devoted to surpassing rivals tactic as an essential argumentation, persuasion and political positioning means. It attempts to transfer marketing positioning basics and such key notions as 'positioning', 'competitive advantages', 'unique value proposition' and 'surpassing rivals' to the realm of politics. Marketing positioning means based on surpassing rivals tactic are examined in terms of political discourse strategies. Surpassing rivals means are analyzed in speeches of Vladimir Putin, in particular Provincial and Home Media Forum 'Truth and Justice' 2019 and Press conference by the President of the Russian Federation 2019. The analysis makes it possible to elicit utterances disclosing rivals image and their performance assessment. Surpassing rivals tactic is addressed on both personal and country-wide levels. This tactic implies subject and object categories. As a result, explicit and implicit conversational techniques and their combinations are highlighted and analyzed. All the utterances classified according to their semantic similarity present various linguistic ways of surpassing rivals tactic implementation and its peculiarities. Special attention is given to conversational techniques combinations comprising more than one sequential technique. The paper presents the key surpassing rivals ideas of the President on both personal and country-wide levels. Besides surpassing rivals, 'swim with the stream' tactic is discovered, which can be the case of interest for further political positioning researches.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Competitive advantages, political discourse, political positioning, rhetoric of Vladimir Putin, surpassing rivals, unique value proposition



1. Introduction

Generic dependency relation between political and commercial marketing determined expediency of some commercial notions into those of political market. A market driven approach to politics caused borrowing of not only economic theoretical constructs but also management technologies. So, the emerged political marketing theory is based on the idea that politicians' activity aiming at expansion of influence (Hirsch, 2016; Jung, 2020; Larsen, 2020) involves not only specific political product development but its promotion.

The main difference between commercial and political marketing is the end goal. The commercial marketing end goal is to increase sales whereas that of political marketing is to further support in a financial, political or any other way. As noted in the introduction to 'Political Marketing' by Mauser (1983), though there are differences, the common is great enough to justify political marketing preoccupation in commercial marketing range of tools.

Marketing range of tools can be appropriate for political sphere owing to similarities between commercial and political products. It should be highlighted that the idea of a politician and product identification is one of the core aspects of marketing approach to political campaigns studies. Any politician as well as a product may have 'a certain reputation' and rivals, offer benefits and apply similar promotional practices (Harker, 2020).

Marketing strategy as a system of deliberate impact means was gradually generated in politics. One of its effective impact means is positioning. Originated in 1972, the positioning theory has its fundamental premise. Positioning always starts with a product and implies impact on consumers' mind. This primarily defines its aim which is to denote the product advantage ground (Ries & Trout, 2001).

It is highly necessary to provide conditions for the promotion of a product taking its competitiveness into account. Positioning is based on customer value proposition which is brought to the target audience's attention by communication means demonstrating competitive advantages.

A prominent French social and political scientist Bourdieu (1993) dwells upon political sophistication importance in terms of positioning. It allows political actors to be aware of what is going around and to foresee plausible changes in other politicians' strategies and tactics. The described knack can be used to anticipate rivals' positioning means.

Politicians always have to position themselves in the most favourable way. It is conditioned by the subject area of political marketing and competition in general (Stoughton et al., 2017). The point is to demonstrate the desirable quality or feature that rivals do not possess, thus surpassing or, in other words, outperforming them.

2. Problem Statement

Surpassing rivals tactic is an effective political positioning means. Finding distinct/indistinct competitive advantages of a politician in comparison with rivals can be used as a target audience manipulation by argumentation means via unique value proposition. Rivalry can be the case even when it is of low rate. It can be strongly exemplified by the current Russian President's political campaign which is aimed at raising his credibility.

3. Research Questions

3.1. Is it possible to transfer marketing positioning basics to political field in light of its specific features?

3.2. Which marketing-based surpassing rivals tactic means are relevant for political discourse?

3.3. Which conversational techniques are mostly used by Vladimir Putin?

3.4. What are the key ideas of the Russian President's positioning scheme?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore typical conversational techniques which rhetorically indicate the Russian president's political positioning. In summarizing the functions of the described conversational techniques, the article presents the key surpassing rivals ideas.

5. Research Methods

Study material is presented by 2019 milestone speeches of Vladimir Putin, in particular Provincial and Home Media Forum 'Truth and Justice' (Provincial and Home Media Forum 'Truth and Justice', 2019) and Press conference by the President of the Russian Federation (Press conference by the President of the Russian Federation, 2019). The choice of the empiric material is primarily conditioned by immensity and scope similarity of the mentioned political events.

For the purpose of the study utterances disclosing rivals image and their performance assessment, either explicitly or implicitly, were elicited in each analyzed speech. More than 40 utterances were under examination, the most illustrative ones are presented in the paper. Their pragmatic analysis revealed the addressant's intentions that are based on positive self-presentation attitude and that of shaping negative background by the effect of other political players.

All the utterances are classified according to their semantic similarity and differ on linguistic ways of surpassing rivals tactic implementation. The tactic is addressed on both personal (surpassing other political players) and country-wide (surpassing other nations in terms of quantity and quality) levels. The considered tactic implementation means are discovered by explicit and implicit (Ksiazkiewicz & Hedrick, 2013) conversational techniques (CT) understood as minor communication means (Issers, 2008).

6. Findings

Presidential discursive practices as institutional power resources are important for political communication (Chou, 2019). Their studies can be of a great value for defining the role of a political player and the extent of leadership efficiency (Aaldering & Van Der Pas, 2018; Tourish, 2019). Presidential discursive practices are to be considered as a special-purpose political technology used for good governance (Rogowski, 2016) and successful positioning.

The term 'surpassing rivals' became common in the advertising sphere in 1993. Western marketing and AD&PR theory use the term 'differentiation'. Both concepts implicate the idea of a product positioning in a competitive environment.

It should be greatly emphasized that surpassing rivals is not a strategy but tactic which complies with high order objectives, for instance, to win a target audience by means of displaying competitive advantages. It is also viewed as essential for political positioning by means of persuasion and argumentation. In addition, it is a valid method of one's image making contrasted with that of rivals. Surpassing rivals tactic implementation means fit into the researched marketing theory field (Klouda, 2016; Vasilevsky, 2006).

It is necessary to differentiate between the surpassing rivals subjects (those who outperform others) and objects (those who are outperformed). Subjects can be presented by political players, government or even states whereas objects can also be other states, political players, images and etc. Note the fact that this tactic involves negative comparison objects that can either be personified or represent a situation/fact/phenomenon. In this regard, a rival can be represented not only by a certain person, but also by an image like a 'negative past' or a 'negative present', which can be associated with some politicians.

6.1. Findings from Provincial and Home Media Forum 'Truth and Justice'

Both analysed political events have their own particularities. For example, about 500 participants among whom there were TV journalists, news reporters, experts and bloggers sixthly took part in Media Forum 2019. In the very beginning of the speech at the Media Forum Putin clearly asserts one of his competitive advantages with the help of CT 1 '*Unlike others I work towards a meaningful result*':

- 1) *It is the sixth event of its kind <...>. It doesn't only move on but, in my opinion, it does contribute to what we all do;*
- 2) *We are to make decisions that can be put into effect.*

The examples specificate the result-oriented focus of the maintained policy. The President emphasizes that this drive to results is not just professed but put into action. The foreground semantics of direct results and another state of things opposition is one of the effective surpassing rivals means.

CT 2 '*Unlike others I am receptive to constructive criticism*' reveals one more competitive advantage of the President. It helps him surpass those politicians whose attitude to criticism is different:

- 1) *Nobody likes you?! Intelligent and meaningful results-driven people probably like you. Why? Criticism unless it is constructive helps you assess your efforts, reason from past experience and failures.*

This example presents three linguistic surpassing rivals means: indirect self-indication through ranking among '*quite prestigious*' reference group (*Intelligent and meaningful results-driven people probably like you*), indicative attributes introduction (*constructive criticism*) and generalization for the purpose of '*majority*' shaping.

It is important to pay attention to the following explicit CT 3 '*We are the world's top*' or '*Our competitive advantages*'. It is the so-called unique value proposition and its main message is to find an unoccupied niche in the marketplace:

- 1) *In fact, our social development projects are unprecedented.*

According to the data from Ozhegov Online Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language, '*unprecedented - is having no precedent*' (Ozhegov, 2015, p. 285), or any prototypical case that could serve as a model for such like cases. This concludes that distinguishing features of achieved results are proven

unrivaled. The example also represents a metonymy-based positioning which means that the head of state considers the state progress to be a result of his personal efforts, thus extending the range of potential rivals.

CT 4 *'Unlike others I am conscious of the need for change'* contributes to the positioning scheme. It also introduces one more competitive advantage of the President:

1) *We have to make additional inspection and change the dynamic. The reality is that what has been done in this field (monuments conservation) doesn't work out.*

The presented conversational technique expresses *'negative present'* idea. This helps Putin position himself as a politician who realizes all the unresolved issues and is ready to tackle them.

CT 5 *'Unlike others I am more self-aware'* somehow reminds of the mentioned CT 2. It refers to self-criticism:

1) *Honestly speaking, I have always thought that there is no such thing in Russia. What a nerve!*

2) *I see. You are right. This issue is to be paid attention to. The government might have given it no thought.*

These examples implicit the lack of attention to the problems the country faces. If the first example shows the attitude to officers (*what a nerve!*) then the other one states that it is the government to be blamed for.

CT 6 *'Unlike others I view conversational interaction as a solution to a problem'* suggests a highly efficient way of solving problems. It is also understood as a competitive advantage:

1) *You see that there is no point in prioritizing own interests and fighting with each other. It is critical to find common ground.*

This is to say that the President is implicitly surpassing those politicians who do not tackle problems by means of conversational interaction or cooperation but do *'prioritize their own interests'*. On the whole, surpassing rivals idea can be reflected in the Media Forum key verbs such as *'to bring positive results'*, *'to take control'*, *'to work effectively'*, *'to find common ground'*, *'to change the dynamic'*. They are to represent top-priority keystones of the implemented policy and meaningful results making the President different from his political rivals who are not able to *'take control'*, *'work effectively'*, *'find common ground'* and *'change the dynamic'*.

6.2. Findings from the Press conference by the President of the Russian Federation

The review of the 2019 Press conference by the President of the Russian Federation was also conditioned by the similar scope of such like media events and their PR aim which is to communicate one's attitude on burning issues to people by representatives of the press.

The difference between these events is mostly the number of discussed conversational techniques. Just to name the CT 1 *'Unlike others I work towards a meaningful result'* which is not as frequent as in the Media Forum:

1) *The first thing to be done in this area was getting production facility renewed. This is where we actually built sophisticated weapons systems <...>. We just did it gradually and timely. And as the record shows, we achieved good results.*

The example shows that surpassing rivals subject features collective image 'We' (government at large). Noteworthy is that the object comprises both other states (their achievements in particular sphere) and other political leaders (their maintained political policy).

CT 2 '*Unlike others I am receptive to constructive criticism*' in this speech stresses the fact that though the President seems to talk about himself, when using an inclusive plural pronoun, he implicitly surpasses those who do not comprehend the impact of constructive criticism:

1) *Criticism is always a good thing. It makes us wonder at least about the topic addressed by critics.*

The main focus of the Press conference is actually CT 3 '*We are the world's top*' or '*Our competitive advantages*'. It involves an emphasis on real strengths:

1) *We have never had such branch as household waste recycling. This is our brand new branch;*

2) *Russia is the biggest wheat supplier. We are the world's top. We have outcompeted the USA and Canada.*

3) *We export our pharmaceuticals out. And I am talking about 90 countries! That didn't use to be the case!*

The '*negative past*' idea in example 1 underlines that the problem of waste recycling has been solved only today. The political discourse basic category '*Us – Them*' in example 2 transforms into '*We-Rivals*' category. One more time '*the unprecedented*' is indicated by lexical items like '*brand new branch*', '*That didn't use to be the case!*', '*the biggest supplier*', '*to outcompete*', '*to be the world's top*'.

CT 5 '*Unlike others I am more self-aware*' emphasizes that there is still a lot of work. It shows results, but the key thing is to achieve more:

1) *We got better at some things, we did the needful but insufficiently;*

2) *Our forest area is large enough but we are not number one. We come third after the USA and Canada. This means that we still have to do more.*

The point here is to denote what remains to be done by means of lexical items like '*insufficiently*' and '*not to be number one*'. The surpassing rivals subject is the government itself. Example 2 also introduces '*swim with the stream*' tactic which implies that Russia keeps up with other countries leading the world.

Problem solving by conversational interaction through CT 6 '*Unlike others I view conversational interaction as a solution to a problem*' is also addressed in this speech. It appears to be Putin's signature move:

1) *Solving problems by force fails to produce any meaningful results. Cooperation makes a positive contribution;*

2) *Cooperation is like a two-way road where you can move in both directions.*

Solving problems '*by force*' in example 1 makes conversational interaction a competing way of doing it. '*A two-way road*' metaphor in example 2 underlines the importance of abidance by traffic regulations to avoid head-on collision. All in all, the examples manifest the President's professional leadership skills and hence those of his team.

Special mention should be made of conversational techniques combinations. In this regard, patterns of speech are viewed as communicative-pragmatic syntax (Issers & Gerasimova, 2019). Such like patterns represent a complicated positioning scheme which involves all the possible means of a politician's positive

image shaping in the mind of nation (Schmitz, & Murray, 2017). It's worth mentioning that combinations and their patterns prevail only in the Press conference due to more extensive variety of subjects discussed. The common pattern is a combination of CT 1 and CT 5:

1) *We hold this meeting on a regular basis at the end of the year to find out what we managed to achieve by year worked and what we failed to do so far and why.*

The only example of a more complicated pattern comprising CT 6, CT 1 and CT 5 was found. It combines all the described points and gives the whole picture of the President's positioning scheme:

1) *In order not to face this problem we have to establish cooperation. Our hope is that we will do it. What we do here is insufficient for the present.*

All these examples show that the subject and object of surpassing rivals integrate 4 components like 'I as the President', 'government performance results', 'new political decisions', 'public at large'. The Press conference key words like 'to go ahead', 'to advance', 'to make progress', 'to make changes', 'to take responsibility' reflect the communicative-pragmatic nature of surpassing rivals means expressed by the Media Forum key words. This can be highly important in terms of reinforcing the President's image in the mind of nation.

7. Conclusion

The findings denoted the most illustrative conversational techniques which implement the surpassing rivals tactic. Among all of them there are those that mostly fit surpassing rivals idea: CT 1 'Unlike others I work towards a meaningful result', CT 3 'We are the world's top' or 'Our competitive advantages' and CT 6 'Unlike others I view conversational interaction as a solution to a problem'.

The key surpassing rivals ideas of the President on both personal and country-wide levels are: 'My work has beneficial effects in contrast to those politicians who are more process-focused' (personal level) and 'They follow our cue'/'We set the example due to our achievements' (country-wide level). 'Swim with the stream' tactic adds the key point like 'We look up to others' achievements'.

On the basis of all the above-mentioned it can be concluded that Vladimir Putin positions himself as a responsible politician, thus surpassing those who just give empty promises, those who are not likely to respect somebody's opinion and cooperate with others, those who are more process-oriented, those who slur over the unresolved issues and those who are not receptive to constructive criticism. Setting ambitious goals and making purposive statements he knows his way around and handles the situation assessing the responsibility level and challenges. It is therefore possible to make public at large sure that the President is highly competitive and his political activity does thrive.

References

- Aaldering, L., & Van Der Pas, D. J. (2018). Political Leadership in the Media: Gender Bias in Leader Stereotypes during Campaign and Routine Times. *British Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 911-931. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123417000795>
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sociology of politics*. Socio-Logos.
- Chou, M. (2019). Different Levels of Government, Different Levels of Political Competence? *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 52(2), 256-260. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096518001798>

- Harker, M. (2020). Political advertising revisited: digital campaigning and protecting democratic discourse. *Legal Studies*, 40(1), 151-171. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lst.2019.24>
- Hirsch, A. V. (2016). Experimentation and persuasion in political organizations. *American Political Science Review*, 110(1), 68-84.
- Issers, O. S. (2008). *Communicative strategies and tactics of Spoken Russian*. LKI.
- Issers, O. S., & Gerasimova, A. S. (2019). Description of communicative behavior in terms of communicative-pragmatic syntax. *Language and Method*, 6, 137-146.
- Jung, J. (2020). The Mobilizing Effect of Parties' Moral Rhetoric. *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(2), 341-355. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12476>
- Klouda, U. (2016). Surpassing rivals. *Dental magazine*, 4(148), 72-75.
- Ksiazkiewicz, A., & Hedrick, J. (2013). An introduction to implicit attitudes in political science research. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 46(3), 525-531. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096513000632>
- Larsen, E. G. (2020). Dynamic Political Interest: How Personality Differences and the Political Environment Shape Political Interest. *British Journal of Political Science*, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123419000784>
- Mausser, G. (1983). *Political Marketing: An Approach to Campaign Strategy*. Praeger.
- Ozhegov, S. I. (2015). *Explanatory dictionary of the Russian language*. Peace and Education.
- Press conference by the President of the Russian Federation. (2019, December 19). <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62366>
- Provincial and Home Media Forum 'Truth and Justice'. (2019, May 16). <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60535>
- Ries, A., & Trout, J. (2001). *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. McGraw-Hill.
- Rogowski, J. C. (2016). Presidential Influence in an Era of Congressional Dominance. *American Political Science Review*, 110(2), 325-341.
- Schmitz, J. D., & Murray, G. R. (2017). Perceptions of political leaders: Demonstrating the effect of evolved psychological mechanisms on partisan identification using perceptions of political leaders. *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 36(2), 60-79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pls.2017.22>
- Stoughton, N. M., Wong, K. P., & Yi, L. (2017). Investment Efficiency and Product Market Competition. *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis*, 52(6), 2611-2642. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022109017000746>
- Tourish, D. (2019). Making a difference: Doing leadership research that matters. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 25(3), 364-369. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2019.6>
- Vasilevsky, D. (2006). Common branding delusions of Russian foodstuff manufacturers. *Advertiser: theory and practice*, 10, 72-81.