


**The Effects of Political Advertising on the
Perception of Political Images: a Case Study of
Polish Presidential Election in 2015**

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Abstract:

The presented article explores the effects of TV political advertising on political images of candidates competing in the 2015 presidential election in Poland. For this purpose, the empirical research (N=507) to check the reactions to campaign spots among voters with different political preferences was carried out. The conducted research shows that political preferences significantly affect both the perception of political images and the emotional attitude to candidates. The study also confirms that political advertising has a moderate importance in creating the images of commonly known politicians. Interestingly, the obtained results prove that emotional attitude towards politicians are more permanent and resistant to change under the influence of advertising messages than political image characteristics.

Keywords: political advertising, effects of political advertising, political image, political preferences, presidential elections in Poland

Introduction

Election campaigns before presidential elections are definitely the most personalized (Garzia 2014: 12). For voters, it makes the perception of the sphere of politics much easier, because data concerning the image of a particular candidate can be processed more easily. Thus, the voters often base their electoral decisions on image characteristics of politicians (Skarżyńska 2005: 212; Hardy 2017). Therefore, campaign staff focus on creating and adjusting candidates' images to the needs and expectations of the electorate. This strategy is also used in Poland. It becomes evident, when we analyze the expenses incurred during the electoral campaigns and the

importance of TV political advertising¹, as well as the growing role of online activity. During the 2015 presidential campaign in Poland, candidates spent almost PLN 7 million on paid TV ads. Traditionally, the highest amounts were spent by candidates from the two main political forces: Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS). Bronisław Komorowski running for re-election had spent nearly PLN 3.5 million on the broadcasting of spots even before the first round, and Andrzej Duda spent over PLN 2.8 million (KRRiT 2015). Interestingly, Paweł Kukiz did not use this communication tool at all due to his limited budget. Instead, he broadcast his messages in the unpaid time all the candidates could use².

The aim of this article is to determine how the images of the main presidential candidates were evaluated by different electorate groups during the 2015 campaign, and to find out whether TV electoral ads³ affected the perception of candidates' images and emotional attitude to them.

Theoretical Framework

Poor knowledge about political issues shared by the citizens is a common phenomenon in many contemporary democracies. This trend occurs both in consolidated Western democracies (Stroud et al. 2005: 26) and new democracies (including Poland). What is more, the youngest voters display significantly poorest political knowledge (Żerkowska-Balas et al. 2017). As a result of the lack of political sophistication, citizens tend to focus on other factors when they make electoral decisions. One of the most important factors is definitely the emotions evoked by particular politicians. Emotional attitude is the first reaction to the politician, which also has an impact on their image (Turska-Kawa 2012: 153). Furthermore, voters do not need to have any knowledge about the politicians to be able to express their emotional attitude to each of them (Wattenberg 1987: 58-59). Empirical studies reveal that the level of liking for politicians has a much stronger influence on voting preferences than cognitive judgements concerning particular components of the candidate's political image, such as e.g., honesty or competence (Pawełczyk & Jankowiak 2013).

¹ Expenditure on the broadcasting of paid electoral advertisements. In the case of the 2005 presidential election: PLN 2.9 million (KRRiT 2005), in 2010: PLN 8.4 million (KRRiT 2010).

² Pursuant to the Election Code of 2011 (Journal of Laws Dz.U. 2011, no. 21, item 112), the division into free "election broadcasts" and paid "electoral advertisements" was used. Electoral committees have the right to use free broadcast time starting from 15 days before the election until the end of the election campaign.

³ Election broadcasts emitted in free electoral time slots were used in the study. There were two reasons for that. First, most candidates in the election did not use paid electoral advertisements. Second, the candidates who did presented the same materials in the paid and unpaid time.

Electoral ads are one of the most important instruments used in election campaigns to shape the images of parties and candidates. Apart from the cognitive and conative dimension, researchers studying the political advertising identify the affective dimension, which involves the perception of the candidate's image and emotions associated with the candidate (Wimmer & Dominick 2010: 382-388). Analyses of the effects of TV spots on the perception of political candidates show three potential directions of change of the political image. First, political advertising may have a positive effect on the candidate's image (Kaid et. al. 1992). Positive evaluation of the candidate's qualities based on electoral ads may also affect the voting intention (Johnston et al. 2004). Second, they may cause poorer evaluation of political actors' images, especially if negative ads are used (West 1994). Third, the character of the effect may be mixed: exposure to spots does not have a uniform impact on the candidates or the change only occurs in some dimensions of the image (Olszanecka 2014).

Methods

The presented study followed the experimental procedure involving before-and-after measures, used successfully in studies on effects of TV political advertising by American (Kaid & Chanslor 1995), Italian (Mazzoleni & Roper 1995) and Polish scholars (Cwalina & Falkowski 2006, Turska-Kawa & Olszanecka-Marmola 2016). The research procedure involved three stages. In the first stage, the group of participants anonymously filled in a study questionnaire (pretest), including questions concerning their interest in politics⁴, political preferences, self-identifications on the left-right scale⁵, their emotional attitudes to the candidates competing for the office of the head of state, and the evaluation of the candidates' image characteristics.

Then, the participants were shown three randomly chosen electoral spots of each running candidate (in each group, the order of the candidates was also chosen randomly), acting as a stimulus that could potentially change the perception of the analyzed politicians. After watching the ads of each candidate, the third stage of the experiment followed, in which the participants filled in a posttest referring to the political image characteristics and their emotional attitudes to the candidate.

⁴ Interest in politics was measured using a 1-5 scale, where 1 meant that the respondent was not interested in politics at all and 5 meant a very high interest in that sphere.

⁵ Self-identification on the left-right scale was tested using a 1-7 scale: 1 reflected an extremely left orientation, 2 – left, 3 – center-left, 4 – center, 5 – center-right, 6 – right, and 7 – extreme right. Apart from that, the respondents could choose the option “I don't know / It's hard to say”.

The instruments used in the study were semantic differentials and the feelings thermometer scales⁶. For the purpose of this study, 13 seven-degree scales were produced⁷: *dishonest vs honest, conflicting vs conciliatory, unreliable vs reliable, effective vs ineffective, focused on the good of the party vs focused on the good of Poland, inexperienced vs experienced, incredible vs credible, lazy vs hard-working, incompetent vs competent, weak leader vs strong leader, arrogant vs tactful, looking bad in the media vs looking good in the media, physically attractive vs physically unattractive*. They were used to prepare the index of evaluation of each candidate's image, calculated as the mean value based on the mean scores obtained in all scales of the semantic differential. The coherence of the instrument was confirmed by the test of reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient⁸.

The study was carried out in the week before the first round of the 2015 presidential election. The study sample was made up of students of international security, internal security, European diplomacy, journalism and social communication, European studies, foreign language studies, physiotherapy, medicine, political studies and sociology from six Polish universities: University of Warsaw, University of Wrocław, University of Silesia in Katowice, University of Economics in Katowice, Medical University of Silesia and Silesian University of Technology. The final analysis involved 507 persons, including 311 women (61.3%) and 196 men (38.7%). Their voting preferences (see table 1) considerably corresponded with the distribution of support in this age cohort in the studied election (TVP INFO 2015). The highest number of respondents declared to vote for Paweł Kukiz (23.3%). Support for Bronisław Komorowski (14.4%), Andrzej Duda (11.6%) and Janusz Korwin-Mikke (10.8%) was much lower. The other candidates had the support at the level of 6.9%. One-fifth of the respondents were unable to decide at that stage of the campaign who they would vote for. 12.2% of the respondents declared electoral absence. Due to marginal declared support for the remaining candidates, I decided to include in the analyses the electorates of four candidates plus the undecided ones and the non-voters.

⁶ Emotional attitude to the candidates was assessed by the respondents using a 101-point scale (0-100). Scores between 0 and 50 degrees meant that the respondent had negative feelings toward the candidate, 50 degrees meant a neutral attitude, and values above 50 degrees indicated the respondent had positive feelings toward the candidate.

⁷ Semantic differential is also sometimes called the semantic scale, the semantic projection test, or Osgood scale. Despite many attempts, a uniform scale used by all researchers has never been produced (Kanievska-Sęba 2016).

⁸ In all cases, Cronbach's alpha was over 0.90, which proves the good fit of the applied semantic differential scales. Cronbach's alpha for respective pre- and posttest image scales were .94/.96 for Andrzej Duda, .95/.96 for Bronisław Komorowski, .93/.94 for Janusz Korwin-Mikke and .93/.94 for Paweł Kukiz.

Table 1. The distribution of political preferences in the research sample

Electorate of candidate	N	%
Andrzej Duda	59	11.6
Bronisław Komorowski	73	14.4
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	55	10.8
Paweł Kukiz	118	23.3
other candidates	35	6.9
undecided voters	105	20.7
non-voters	62	12.2

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

During the study, three research hypotheses were made concerning the image characteristics of the candidates and the political preferences of the experimental procedure’s participants.

H1: Political preferences will significantly differentiate the evaluations of the candidates’ images.

It was assumed that in the specific conditions of the 2015 presidential campaign (including Bronisław Komorowski’s image problems, PiS appointing Andrzej Duda as their candidate, and high support for candidates from out of the political establishment), leading to strong polarization of electorates, the competing candidates will be evaluated significantly better by their own voters and perceived negatively by the electorates of their competitors.

H2: Regardless of declared political preferences, TV electoral ads will not lead to reconfiguration of image characteristics of commonly known candidates.

The above-mentioned hypothesis is based on the findings of Andrzej Falkowski and Małgorzata Michalak concerning changes caused by positive and negative information in the case of familiar and unfamiliar politicians. The study proved that both negative and positive messages have a less influence on the perception of a commonly known candidate, of whom the voter already has an established opinion (Falkowski & Michalak 2009: 252). This results from the fact that if the image of the politician is stronger and more permanently established in voters’ awareness, so it is harder to change it using contents shown to them. Presumably, a similar mechanism will occur in the case of TV electoral ads. Therefore, it was assumed that the change under the influence of

political spots will be smaller in regard to Bronisław Komorowski and Janusz Korwin-Mikke, who are well-known candidates with long-established images⁹.

H3: The presented spots will have a greater impact on undecided voters.

First studies on the impact of the media suggested that all the viewers receive information from the media in the same way (hypodermic needle model). Hence, in this case, campaign activities reaching the highest number of viewers would be the most effective (Postelnicu 2008: 793; Cwalina 2000: 62). Following analyses, however, changed this approach to media influence towards focusing on factors that would increase the campaign's effectiveness. One factor that reduces the influence of campaign content presented in the media is political preferences. As researchers show, individuals with established preferences resist campaign messages that are incompatible with their opinions (Franz & Ridout 2007). Undecided voters are much more susceptible to this form of persuasion (Bowen 1994). Presumably, a similar tendency will be diagnosed in the presented study.

Results

First, the hypothesis that political preferences would cause significant differences in the evaluation of candidates' images was verified. It was performed using one-way ANOVA, which confirmed the hypothesis: political preferences affected the evaluations of image characteristics on semantic differential scales in the case of all the analyzed candidates. Political preferences explained the highest percentage of variance in the case of evaluation of the image of Bronisław Komorowski [$F_{\text{Welch}}(6, 178.483) = 45.888, p < .001, \eta^2 = .36$], followed by Andrzej Duda [$F_{\text{Welch}}(6, 180.180) = 42.290, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$], Paweł Kukiz [$F_{\text{Welch}}(6, 175.744) = 39.337, p < .001, \eta^2 = .32$] and Janusz Korwin-Mikke [$F_{\text{Welch}}(6, 183.348) = 32.219, p < .001, \eta^2 = .28$]. Post-hoc tests (Games-Howell) showed that the electorate of each politician evaluated own candidate significantly better than did the voters of other candidates, undecided ones and those who did not intend to vote. Interestingly, the evaluation of the incumbent president by his electorate was the least positive, and the evaluation of Andrzej Duda by his voters – the most. The respondents who

⁹ I assume that Andrzej Duda did not have an established political image in voters' awareness. This is proved by public opinion polls carried out six months before the presidential election, directly after Jarosław Kaczyński's announcement that Duda had been appointed as the candidate of Law and Justice. In the research by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), nearly half (43%) Polish voters declared they did not know Andrzej Duda (CBOS 172/2014). Paweł Kukiz did not have a clear political image, either. He was perceived by the voters as an artist engaged in promoting single-member districts rather than as a representative of the sphere of politics.

did not yet have particular preferences assessed the image of Paweł Kukiz as the best. This candidate also received the best mean, involving all the respondents.

Table 2. The evaluations of presidential candidates’ images among voters with specific political preferences

Electorate of candidate	Komorowski’s image	Duda’s image	Korwin-Mikke’s image	Kukiz’s image
Andrzej Duda	2.76	5.75	3.67	4.28
Bronisław Komorowski	5.34	3.15	2.99	3.46
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	2.83	3.65	5.54	4.63
Paweł Kukiz	2.98	3.97	4.18	5.39
other candidates	3.12	3.82	4.09	4.08
undecided voters	3.86	3.90	3.50	4.21
non-voters	3.75	3.88	3.55	4.01
all respondents	3.56	3.99	3.87	4.40

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

In the same way, political preferences caused differences between the feelings towards candidates expressed on feelings thermometers with regard to all the analyzed candidates. Political preferences explained the highest percentage of variance in the case of Bronisław Komorowski [$F_{Welch}(6, 179.976) = 54.922, p < .001, \eta^2 = .40$], followed by Paweł Kukiz [$F_{Welch}(6, 175.354) = 48.252, p < .001, \eta^2 = .37$], Janusz Korwin-Mikke [$F_{Welch}(6, 184.307) = 44.038, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$] and Andrzej Duda [$F_{Welch}(6, 182.755) = 43.478, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$]. Post-hoc tests (Games-Howell) showed that the electorate of each politician had warmer feelings for own candidate than the electorates of other candidates, undecided voters and non-voting ones. Also in this case, the electorate of Bronisław Komorowski liked him less than the voters of other candidates liked their candidates. Undecided voters had the warmest feelings for Paweł Kukiz, although the score of 52.29 shows that he is a neutral candidate for this group of voters.

Table 3. Emotional attitude to the candidates in different voter groups

Electorate of candidate	Komorowski's feelings thermometer	Duda's feelings thermometer	Korwin-Mikke's feelings thermometer	Kukiz's feelings thermometer
Andrzej Duda	21.86	82.20	35.76	55.25
Bronisław Komorowski	76.99	20.96	18.22	35.48
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	18.55	31.27	85.09	62.00
Paweł Kukiz	23.81	39.41	45.76	81.78
other candidates	28.86	36.00	42.86	53.14
undecided voters	44.29	36.86	30.67	52.29
non-voters	39.52	38.71	33.87	47.10
all respondents	37.18	40.00	40.12	57.55

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

To verify the second hypothesis, the t-Student test was carried out to compare the means of candidates' images in pre- and posttest. The hypothesis was only confirmed for Bronisław Komorowski, because the presented TV ads did not have an impact on the perception of his image. As regards the other candidates, watching the spots caused the significant changes. The affective impact of political advertising was twofold: the image of Andrzej Duda was perceived as worse after watching the spots, while the images of Kukiz and Korwin-Mikke were evaluated better by the study participants. It is interesting that – contrary to the hypothesis – the greatest differences were observed in the case of Korwin-Mikke. It may result from the fact that the spots created an image of this politician that was completely different from the one established in media, focusing on his controversial declarations concerning women or disabled people.

Table 4. Candidates' images before and after viewing the spots (all voters)

Candidate's image	pretest	posttest
Andrzej Duda	3.99 ^{**}	3.88 ^{**}
Bronisław Komorowski	3.56	3.60
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	3.87 ^{***}	4.04 ^{***}
Paweł Kukiz	4.40 ^{**}	4.48 ^{**}

*** test results significant at the $p \leq .001$ level

** test results significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

* test results significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

In-depth analysis allowed to identify particular image characteristics whose evaluation changed after watching the spots. As a result of the effect of the stimulus of political advertising, Duda was perceived as less honest (pretest $M=3.83$; posttest $M=3.66$; $p=.001$), less effective (pretest $M=3.97$; posttest $M=3.78$; $p=.001$), less hard-working (pretest $M=4.51$; posttest $M=4.37$; $p=.010$), less competent (pretest $M=4.20$; posttest $M=3.99$; $p<.001$) and less tactful (pretest $M=4.27$; posttest $M=3.95$; $p<.001$).

In the case of Korwin-Mikke, after watching electoral ads the respondents evaluated him better in terms of eight characteristics: conciliatory (pretest $M=2.22$; posttest $M=2.49$; $p<.001$), physically attractive (pretest $M=2.68$; posttest $M=2.89$; $p<.001$), effective (pretest $M=3.74$; posttest $M=3.97$; $p<.001$), focused on the good of Poland (pretest $M=4.04$; posttest $M=4.43$; $p<.001$); credible (pretest $M=3.71$; posttest $M=4.00$; $p<.001$); competent (pretest $M=4.12$; posttest $M=4.31$; $p=.001$); tactful (pretest $M=2.46$; posttest $M=2.77$; $p<.001$) and reliable (pretest $M=3.95$; posttest $M=4.08$; $p<.001$). What is more, after watching TV spots, the respondents had warmer feelings towards him (pretest $M=40.12$; posttest $M=42.76$; $p<.001$).

With regard to Kukiz, the evaluation of some image characteristics worsened, and of some, improved. This candidate was perceived by the respondents as less honest (pretest $M=5.04$; posttest $M=4.95$; $p=.036$), less hard-working (pretest $M=5.04$; posttest $M=4.94$; $p=.046$) and looking bad in the media (pretest $M=5.32$; posttest $M=5.18$; $p=.016$), but more conciliatory (pretest $M=3.97$; posttest $M=4.30$; $p<.001$), more reliable (pretest $M=4.53$; posttest $M=4.64$; $p=.020$), more focused on the good of Poland (pretest $M=5.30$; posttest $M=5.41$; $p=.025$), more experienced (pretest $M=2.82$; posttest $M=3.07$; $p<.001$), more credible (pretest $M=4.53$; posttest $M=4.67$; $p=.015$), more competent (pretest $M=3.84$; posttest $M=3.96$; $p=.021$) and more tactful (pretest $M=4.25$; posttest $M=4.50$; $p<.001$).

The next step, aimed to verify the third hypothesis, was to check whether and how the TV political ads affected the perception of the candidates and feelings towards them in different groups of the electorate. The voters of Law and Justice candidate proved to be quite resistant to the effect of the messages they saw. A significant change was only observed in the case of Paweł Kukiz, whose image was evaluated more positively (see table 5).

Table 5. Candidates' images before and after viewing the spots (Duda's voters)

Candidate's image	pretest	posttest
Andrzej Duda	5.75	5.83
Bronisław Komorowski	2.76	2.69
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	3.67	3.86
Paweł Kukiz	4.27**	4.53**

*** test results significant at the $p \leq .001$ level

** test results significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

* test results significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

With reference to specific characteristics, Kukiz was better evaluated after watching the spots by people declaring the intention to vote for Duda in terms of the following characteristics: conciliatory (pretest $M=3.90$; posttest $M=4.27$; $p=.010$), reliable (pretest $M=4.32$; posttest $M=4.76$; $p=.002$), experienced (pretest $M=2.73$; posttest $M=3.32$; $p=.001$), credible (pretest $M=4.19$; posttest $M=4.63$; $p=.036$), competent (pretest $M=3.63$; posttest $M=4.00$; $p=.033$) and a strong leader (pretest $M=4.15$; posttest $M=4.46$; $p=.046$).

In the group of respondents declaring support for Bronisław Komorowski, viewing the electoral ads led to a change in perception of two candidates: Andrzej Duda and Janusz Korwin-Mikke. The difference was that after watching the spots, Law and Justice candidate was perceived significantly worse, whereas the image of Korwin-Mikke significantly improved.

Table 6. Candidates' images before and after viewing the spots (Komorowski's voters)

Candidate's image	pretest	posttest
Andrzej Duda	3.15**	2.88**
Bronisław Komorowski	5.34	5.34
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	2.99**	3.18**
Paweł Kukiz	3.46	3.54

*** test results significant at the $p \leq .001$ level

** test results significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

* test results significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

With regard to specific characteristics, Andrzej Duda was perceived as less honest (pretest $M=3.08$; posttest $M=2.75$; $p=.006$), less conciliatory (pretest $M=2.77$; posttest $M=2.41$;

p=.033), less reliable (pretest M=3.22; posttest M=2.74; p<.001), less effective (pretest M=3.25; posttest M=2.78; p=.001), less competent (pretest M=3.29; posttest M=2.86; p=.005) and less tactful (pretest M=3.26; posttest M=2.74; p=.004). Janusz Korwin-Mikke was perceived by members of Komorowski’s electorate as more focused on the good of Poland (pretest M=2.75; posttest M=3.34; p=.006), more credible (pretest M=2.26; posttest M=2.66; p=.009) and more hard-working (pretest M=3.73; posttest M=4.04; p=.047).

The voters declaring support for Janusz Korwin-Mikke were definitely most stable in their judgements and resistant to impact of spots they watched. In this group of voters political ads did not have a significant influence on the perception of any of the studied candidates (see table 7).

Table 7. Candidates’ images before and after viewing the spots (Korwin-Mikke’s voters)

Candidate’s image	pretest	posttest
Andrzej Duda	3.65	3.63
Bronisław Komorowski	2.83	2.87
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	5.54	5.63
Paweł Kukiz	4.63	4.72

*** test results significant at the $p \leq .001$ level

** test results significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

* test results significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

The electorate of Paweł Kukiz perceived Janusz Korwin-Mikke significantly better after watching the spots. They perceived this candidate as more physically attractive (pretest M=2.59; posttest M=2.86; p=.009), more effective (pretest M=4.06; posttest M=4.39; p=.007), more focused on the good of Poland (pretest M=4.53; posttest M=4.91; p=.008), more credible (pretest M=4.24; posttest M=4.59; p=.005), more competent (pretest M=4.46; posttest M=4.75; p=.018) and more tactful (pretest M=2.53; posttest M=2.96; p=.002). In this group, the feelings for the candidate also grew significantly warmer after viewing the ads (pretest M=45.76; posttest M=51.69; p<.001).

Table 8. Candidates' images before and after viewing the spots (Kukiz's voters)

Candidate's image	pretest	posttest
Andrzej Duda	3.98	3.98
Bronisław Komorowski	2.98	3.03
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	4.18*	4.34*
Paweł Kukiz	5.39	5.37

*** test results significant at the $p \leq .001$ level

** test results significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

* test results significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

The last group identified in the sample was the undecided voters. In this group of electorate, the change in the image perception occurred in the case of Duda and Korwin-Mikke. The former was perceived significantly worse than before watching the spots, and the latter was perceived better (see table 9).

Table 9. Candidates' images before and after viewing the spots (undecided voters)

Candidate's image	pretest	posttest
Andrzej Duda	3.90**	3.68**
Bronisław Komorowski	3.86	3.95
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	3.50*	3.66*
Paweł Kukiz	4.21	4.27

*** test results significant at the $p \leq .001$ level

** test results significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

* test results significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

With regard to specific characteristics, Andrzej Duda was perceived by this group of voters as less honest (pretest $M=3.70$; posttest $M=3.35$; $p=.002$), less conciliatory (pretest $M=3.66$; posttest $M=3.37$; $p=.042$), less reliable (pretest $M=3.93$; posttest $M=3.58$; $p=.004$), less effective (pretest $M=3.88$; posttest $M=3.63$; $p=.032$), less experienced (pretest $M=3.99$; posttest $M=3.74$; $p=.040$), less competent (pretest $M=4.06$; posttest $M=3.76$; $p=.019$) and less tactful (pretest $M=4.05$; posttest $M=3.56$; $p<.001$). The image of Korwin-Mikke was better evaluated in terms of the following characteristics: conciliatory (pretest $M=1.97$; posttest $M=2.22$; $p=.037$), physically attractive (pretest $M=2.24$; posttest $M=2.53$; $p=.007$), focused on the good of Poland

(pretest $M=3.57$; posttest $M=3.98$; $p=.004$) and experienced (pretest $M=4.35$; posttest $M=4.65$; $p=.031$).

Based on the above-mentioned findings, it can be concluded that the electorate of Bronisław Komorowski and undecided voters proved to be the most susceptible to the influence of TV political advertising. In their case, watching the spots changed the perception of images of two out of four candidates.

Conclusions and discussion

The study showed that political preferences affect both the perception of the images of candidates and the emotional attitude towards them. Candidates are best evaluated by members of their electorate, which seems natural, yet some differences can also be found in this aspect. In the presented analysis, the respondents declaring they would vote for Bronisław Komorowski evaluated him worse and declared cooler feelings for him than the other electorates with regard to “their” candidates. Hence, we may suppose that for some members of his electorate, voting for him was motivated by “the lesser evil”, not his particular qualities¹⁰. The results obtained by Paweł Kukiz in different groups of the electorate are also interesting. In all groups, except of the voters of Bronisław Komorowski, he scored above the mean on the seven-point scale, which indicates that his image was also positively evaluated by people voting for his political opponents. Similar relationships are visible with regard to feelings thermometers. Kukiz evoked positive emotions in most groups (those who declared electoral absence described their attitude as close to neutral). Only the voters of the incumbent president had negative emotions for him.

The conducted research also confirms that political ads have a negligible importance in the process of creating the images of commonly known candidates. This effect was evident in the case of the incumbent, Bronisław Komorowski, whose image characteristics proved to be resistant to the persuasive effect of advertising. Interestingly, the study showed that emotions towards politicians are more permanent and resistant to change under the influence of advertising messages than specific image characteristics, which can be modified much more easily during the campaign. Watching political spots led to shifts in the perception of three candidates (Duda,

¹⁰ In the study carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center after the first round of the election, among the key motivations for voting for Bronisław Komorowski the respondents declared the choice of a “lesser evil” (CBOS 88/2015). From voters’ point of view, such a choice is psychologically not very satisfying, since voters expect some emotional benefits from politicians. Such benefits occur if the preferred candidate evokes positive emotions (Korzeniowski 2002: 251).

Kukiz, Korwin-Mikke), but only in one case (Korwin-Mikke) there was a change in emotional attitude measured on the feelings thermometer scale.

The results were also ambiguous in the case of the impact of TV ads on undecided voters. Although in this group a change in the perception of the images of two candidates (Duda, Korwin-Mikke) was diagnosed, a similar phenomenon was also observed in the case of Komorowski's electorate. Both groups were more susceptible to the effect of political advertising than the voters supporting other candidates.

The presented analysis had some limitations that may have affected the research results. First, there may be some doubts regarding the study sample, made up of students. Samples like this may display a high level of homogeneity, resulting not only from the age of education level but also from the similarity of psychological qualities (Sears 1986). However, I tried to limit this factor, including students of different fields (social, humanistic and medical sciences) in the study. This choice of the study group allows to compare the results with similar analyses carried out in American and Western European conditions. Second, in the applied experimental procedure it is impossible to eliminate factors that could distort the findings. Such factors are i.a., the experimental stimulus in the form of real messages used in the campaign by the candidates. The participants could be exposed to these broadcasts before the study. I tried to reduce this problem by asking the respondents whether they knew the presented spots.

Research on the affective impact of political ads in Polish conditions requires further deeper analyses. A similar study should be carried out in the future in laboratory conditions with a control group. It is also important to ensure that the experimental groups will be more diverse in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, which would make it possible to identify the groups of voters which are the most susceptible to this form of persuasion. Analyses involving voters with a low level of education and low interest in the election campaign would surely be interesting. Specially prepared advertising messages would allow to avoid the risk connected with previous exposure to the stimulus. Such communications should have various forms so as to investigate the response to different types of political ads (image vs issue ads, positive vs negative ads). Participants should also be asked about their secondary candidate choice, which would allow in-depth analysis of the obtained data.

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