



The following article was first published in *Media Development* 3/2014.

---

## **WOULD YOU HIRE THIS PERSON? EMPOWERING VOTERS IN PERU**

---

Democratic processes may have seen resurgence in many developing countries and emergent economies in recent years, but elections often remain a context for political manipulation and consequently alienation of the economically disenfranchised. Much political communications modelled on practices in North America and Europe is about marketing of particular candidates, parties and/or platforms. This article documents the genesis of an innovative voter education campaign developed by an advertising agency in Peru having a strong social agenda. The campaign distilled political choices for national leadership into more manageable selection criteria via analogies from daily life. It was designed to cause citizens to self-examine their own political awareness and motivate them to utilise their voting privileges thoughtfully to further a public policy agenda they favoured. The article seeks to analyse the campaign's effectiveness in a previous Peruvian presidential election as well as assess the possibility of its diffusion worldwide. Public policy-makers, election officials and social activists in those countries could learn from this case-study a fresh approach to communicating with citizens on how they might evaluate their political choices, exercise their democratic rights, even shape the national agenda.

---

### INTRODUCTION

Most political education campaigns simply urge citizens to vote. There is an element of unenthusiastic effort by governments that run these campaigns lest the status quo of general apathy jeopardise their hold on power. Many political communications, modeled roughly on practices in North America and Europe, are concerned about marketing of particular candidates, parties and/or platforms. The mass of voters in developing countries, often the poorest of the poor, are justifiably cynical of their vote counting for anything, given their past experience. Invariably the chant is that politicians appear only around election time, promise the earth, attempt to bribe their vote, but no sooner are the results announced, no change for the better is seen. So while democratic processes have seen resurgence in many developing countries and emerging economies

in recent years, elections often remain a context for manipulation of the populace and invariably the alienation of the economically disenfranchised.

#### POLITICAL CONTEXT

Such a situation might be said to exist in Peru which, as with many developing countries in Latin America and beyond, has seen its fair share of political turmoil, including military dictatorships and ineffectual politicians, not to mention a home-grown terrorist scourge. In 2000 President Alberto Fujimori contested for a third term, like many politicians worldwide who find themselves unwilling to relinquish the reins of power and overstaying their welcome. It took a scandal over corruption via the drug trade by his close aides to see him flee the country and the establishment of an interim government. Into the breach came President Alejandro Toledo who held much promise as a former shoe-shine boy turned World Bank official and the first indigenous person to be elected to the presidency. But he struggled to deliver on populist promises of jobs and poverty alleviation and became immensely unpopular and beset with corruption towards the end of his term. In the 2006 elections, Peruvians were faced with the unusual choice between Alan Garcia, a former left-of-centre president who in his previous time in office had mismanaged the economy spectacularly by his own admission and repentance, and a nationalist former army officer Ollanta Humala backed by the even more left-leaning president of neighbouring Venezuela.

#### APPROACHES TO VOTERS

In the Italian context, Caprara et al (1999) demonstrated that personality traits did explain actual voter behaviour beyond political partisanship. Berman (1997) proposed the concept of political cynicism represented a distrust of aspiring politicians, political parties, incumbent office-holders and government in general. In the US context Schiffman et al (2010) found a strong link between the personality trait of trust and political trust, suggesting that political candidates and their parties seek to build bridges to build trust. Cynically they seem to propose that the candidates listen and embrace the concerns of various segments of the electorate and thus capitalise on their apparent alignment, which seems more political market orientation than independent voter empowerment. Various marketing scholars as far back as Butler and Collins (1994) have argued that market orientation ought to be adapted from commercial and non-profit sectors into political marketing beyond the election campaign, making the latter a profitable multi-billion industry in its own right. In seeking to research this, however, Ormond and Henneburg (2010) found that an internal orientation and one towards the public had the strongest influence on voter behaviour, more so than voter orientation of the political parties.

Most research on political marketing is US- or Europe-based and not necessarily transferable to other contexts. Nonetheless some findings such as that of Zaller (1992) that voters of low levels of political awareness have a greater probability of accepting a political message uncritically would seem to hold in other countries. Likewise Popkin's (1994) argument, that voters are investing in collective goods that about which there is imperfect information and under conditions of uncertainty, would seem to apply universally to democracies. Later Popkin and Dimock (1999) went on to affirm that less

politically-informed voters were more likely to evaluate candidates on personal characteristics, rather than policy platforms. In the U.S. context, such voters are often identified as being Latinos who Marcus, Neuman and Mackuen (2000) found relied on cues about the about candidates' personal qualities. Abrajano (2005) confirmed that low-education Latinos tended to use non-policy cues in evaluating candidates. What would seem to apply to this significant minority in the U.S. is arguably true of majority of the populace in many Latin American countries. This was certainly the premise on which the voter empowerment campaign in Peru is based and seeks to change.

DEPICTING THE CONCEPT

At the prompting of civil society groups, a Peruvian advertising agency, exceptional co- led by a partnership of a creative person and an anthropologist, devised an political communications campaign to encourage voting. Most importantly, it addressed the skepticism of voters over the effectiveness of their vote and suggested a radical re- thinking of their role. Instead of seeing politicians as all-powerful leader, it encouraged citizens to see themselves as their potential employers. Thus the voter was empowered to evaluate aspiring candidates by using the analogy of day-to-day experiences as a worker, a parent, a small entrepreneur, even a student.

The billboard seen in figure 1 carries what might well be the theme of the campaign. The headline in translation states: 'The current candidates are to become our employees' while the subheading says: 'Let us examine them'.



Figure 1: Street Billboard

The corollary of this message seems to be embodied in another element of the campaign directed at politicians but with an indirect confirmation of the original message to the voter. The advertisement in figure 2 states plainly: 'Seeking this chair?' accompanied by an ornate chair draped with presidential sash, the ad goes on to say: 'First take this chair' illustrated with a humble chair typically used in university lecture

rooms, especially examination halls. It implies then that any aspirant to high office needs to be highly scrutinised for competence.



Figure 2: Print advertisement

The wall poster in figure 3 shows two elaborations on the theme. The one on the left reads: 'Would you entrust him/her with the future of your children?' It has overtones of whether you would be happy for them to be under his or her foster care if you are no longer able to look after them. The other on the right reads: 'Would you entrust him/her with managing your business?' Again this has overtones of delegating control in one's absence. One other elaboration not pictured is: 'Would you entrust your house to his/her care?' suggesting either house-sitting or home-management.



Figure 3: Wall posters

Included at the bottom of every advertisement is the web address for the campaign which leads to an online test for politicians which can be printed out as a pencil-and-paper one. As seen in figure 4, the preamble to the online test reiterates the thrust of the campaign, namely: The candidates are our employees to be; it is time to exercise the power of one who hires, and ask these questions before voting someone to congress or the presidency.

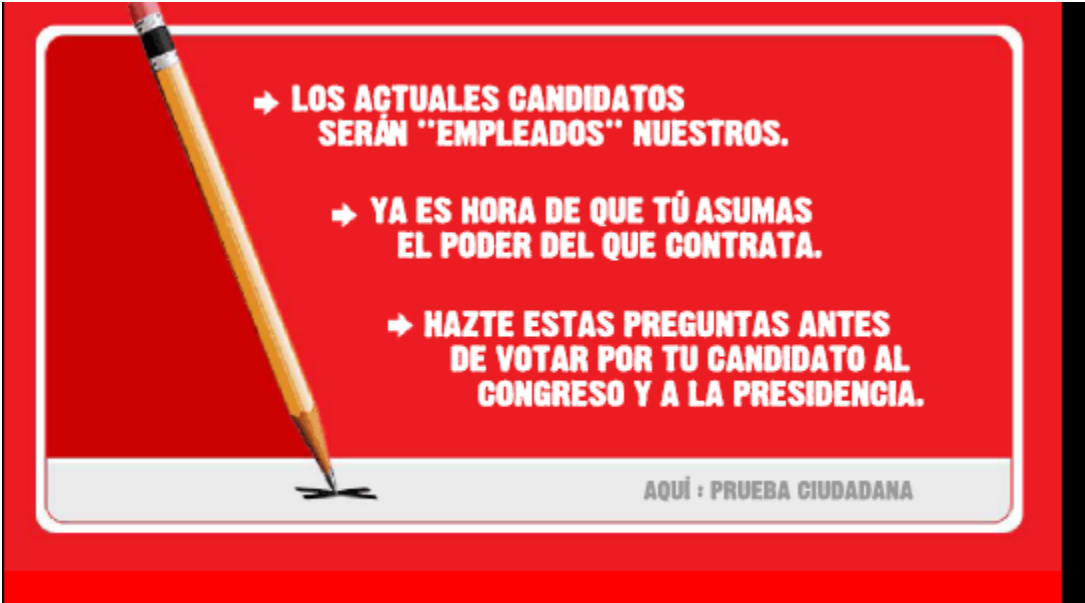


Figure 4: Test preamble

The whole campaign as well as the questionnaire itself is called 'Prueba Cuidana' or Civic Test. As shown in figure 5 the questions are classified as being about integrity, experience and capacity in three distinct sections, using the subthemes of the campaign. The questions have such probing questions as 'Do you know if the candidate has been involved in corruption?', 'Does he have an addiction to drugs', 'Is he recognised as a serious worker?', 'Has he experience in running a complex organisation?', 'Do you understand the proposed plans of his government?' and so on.

**PRUEBA CIUDADANA**

[Pásala a un amigo, ¡comparte!](#)

---

**INTEGRIIDAD** → ¿LE DEJARÍAS TU CASA PARA QUE TE LA CUIDE ?

1. ¿Sabes si tu candidato(a) ha estado involucrado en casos de corrupción? si  no
2. ¿Sabes si cumple cabalmente con sus responsabilidades familiares? si  no
3. ¿Sabes si es buen pagador(a) de sus deudas y sus impuestos? si  no
4. ¿Sabes si bebe en exceso o es adicto a drogas? si  no
5. ¿Sabes si le han descubierto mentiras en el pasado? si  no

---

**EXPERIENCIA** → ¿LO CONTRATARÍAS PARA MANEJAR TU NEGOCIO ?

6. ¿Sabes si es reconocido(a) como un trabajador serio y cumplido? si  no
7. ¿Has leído su hoja de vida? si  no
8. ¿Sabes si entiende de presupuestos, balances y otras responsabilidades propias de quien maneja el dinero de todos? si  no
9. ¿Conoces si tiene experiencia en administrar organizaciones complejas? si  no
10. ¿Sabes si logra que la gente se ponga de acuerdo? si  no

---

**CAPACIDAD** → ¿LE CONFÍARÍAS EL FUTURO DE TUS HIJOS ?

11. ¿Conoces las prioridades de su plan de gobierno? si  no
12. ¿Sabes si su equipo de trabajo tiene especialistas respetados? si  no
13. ¿Sabes si ha participado en alguna organización que busque mejorar la vida de otros peruanos? si  no
14. ¿Sabes por qué quiere realmente este cargo? si  no
15. ¿Te sentirías orgulloso de tenerlo(a) como líder? si  no

**CALCULA TU PUNTAJE**

[Pásala a un amigo, ¡comparte!](#)

**¿CÓMO SALISTE?**

Figure 5: Online test

The voters-to-be using this questionnaire is then provided with a key for rating their ability to assess the preferred candidate's performance on the various critical factors, as shown in figure 6. If the candidate scores between 0-5 on the positives, the voter is warned: 'Do not complain later' and advised to click through to a site advising him or her on how to improve on their knowledge of the candidate. If the voter scores between 6-10, then he or she is affirmed in making the effort and advised to keep being informed. If the voter scores over 19, then he or she is nonetheless advised as a Peruvian not to waste their vote.

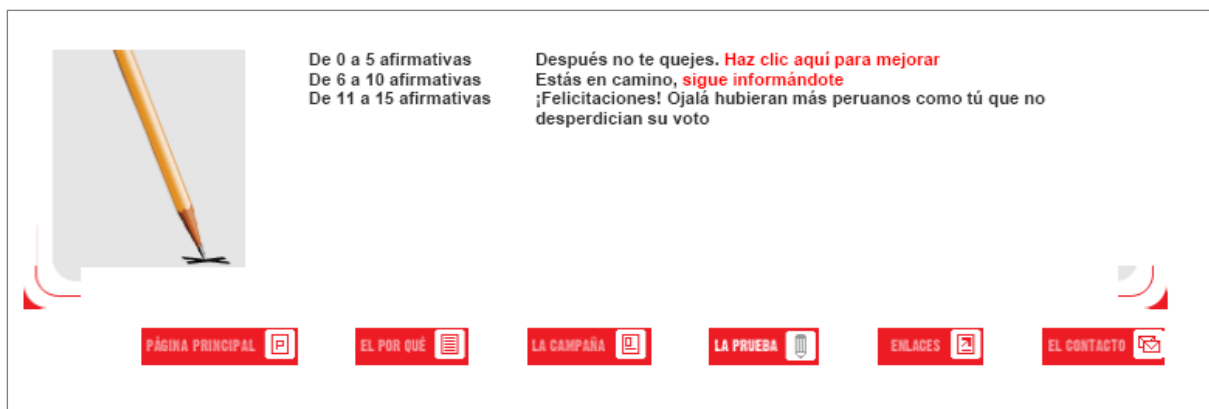


Figure 6: Test scoring

#### EVALUATING THE OUTCOME

It is not known and perhaps cannot be known just how many people were influenced by the advertising campaign not only to vote but to use the test or at least its criteria to evaluate politicians before voting. For one thing, the internet usage in Peru is quite limited at about 10 percent of the population, and so a vital component of the campaign would have been inaccessible to the poor and often politically marginalized majority of the country. On the other hand the billboards and posters were readily accessible which in a land where the literacy rate is over 90 percent, their impact could well have been considerable.

The outcome of the election was the victory of Alan Garcia who had wrecked the economy during a previous term of office as president over a decade prior. Surprisingly for a politician especially on the campaign trail Garcia admitted the failings of his previous government and asked humbly for a second-chance. That earlier government was succeeded by one by Alberto Fujimori who was later implicated in corruption and imprisoned, and then by that of Alejandro Toledo that did not live up to its promise. Did the people nonetheless think Garcia had the integrity and capacity to lead again? What part might the campaign have played? Subsequently his government was embroiled in a corruption scandal over the allocation of oil-drilling licenses and there were demonstrations by the native peoples of the areas where the drilling has commenced. It does raise the question that he and his political compatriots may have passed the test for integrity on paper, yet not in practice.

#### GLOBAL APPLICATION

While democratic processes may have seen resurgence in many developing countries and emergent economies, elections often remain a context for political manipulation. On the face of it, there could to be much mileage in adaptation of this voter education campaign elsewhere to overcome the alienation of the economically disenfranchised. It demonstrates how marketing communications tools can be used for political education about democratic rights, rather than mere voter persuasion about particular leaders or party platforms. A key question however is whether the universality of human rights and social justice issues renders the adaptation requirements of this political education campaign relatively minimal for its use in other developing countries and even developed countries with marginalised groups. Furthermore given the fact that rates of

literacy in Peru are simply not true of many other developing countries, a similar campaign might have negligible impact where elections are dominated by image and rhetoric. Nonetheless public policy-makers, election officials and social activists in those countries could learn from this case-study a fresh approach to communicating with citizens on how they might evaluate their political choices, exercise their democratic rights, even shape the national agenda.

Political education needs to go beyond the quite hackneyed 'go-vote' didacticism which has had no demonstrable impact apart from assuaging the consciences of politicians and officials, to a whole spectrum of messages from 'how-to-vote' to 'why-bother-to-vote'. If the democratic ethos is to be upheld, if not also promoted, then political education needs to be entirely non-partisan politically without any semblance of advocating voting in again the incumbent government to be credible. Otherwise it would be arguably be preferable to have no voter education than partisan voter education. There is sufficient motivation and funding for political marketing by opposing parties without them dabbling in voter education with ulterior motives. Yet there is scope enough within their campaigns to focus on political platforms and agenda to inform voter choice, rather than reliance on personality or rhetoric. Likewise there is a continuum of political advertising ranging from focus on leadership style to party platforms to candidate integrity. Presumably an effective voter education campaign such as the one in Peru, run by credible non-partisan organisations, could nudge political parties to communicate and debate their alternative proposals for the future and on their leaders' integrity rather than on personality and pedigree, to the benefit of the country and its citizenry.

#### REFERENCES

- Abrajano, Marisa A. (2005). 'Who evaluates a presidential candidate by using non-policy campaign messages?'. *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol.58 No.1 (March).
- Berman, E. (1997). 'Dealing with cynical cynical citizens'. *Public Administration Review*, Vol.57 March/April, pp.105-112.
- Butler, P., & Collins, N. (1994). 'Political marketing'. *European Journal of Marketing*, 28 (1), pp.19-34.
- Caprara, G.V., Barbaranelli, C and Zimbardo, P.G. (1999). 'Personality profiles and political parties'. *Political Psychology*, Vol.20 pp.175-97.
- Marcus, George E., Neuman, W. Russell and Mackuen, Michael (2000). *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Robert P. Ormrod and Stephan C. Henneberg, Understanding voter orientation in the context of political market orientation: is the political customer king? *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 26, Nos. 1-2, February 2010, 108-130
- Popkin, Samuel (1994). *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Popkin, Samuel and Dimock, M.A. (1999). 'Political knowledge and citizen competence' in Elkin, Stephen and Soltan, Karol Edward, eds. *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions*. University Park: Pennsylvania State Press.
- Schiffman, Leon, Thelen, Shawn T. and Sherman, Elaine (2010). 'Interpersonal and political trust: modelling levels of citizens' trust'. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vo..44 No.3/4, pp.369-381.
- Zaller, John R. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Amos Owen Thomas is presently a docent/reader at the Stockholm Business School in Sweden. For over three decades he has worked mostly in developing countries in Asia, Oceania, Africa and Latin America in academic, business, government and non-profit organisations. Amos teaches international business and marketing, and researches media industries, globalisation, intercultural communications and trade ethics.