

Electoral communication for illiterate voters, face-to-face, and at a distance, and its impact on the environment

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Abstract. In the political sector, intensifying competition between political parties aims to win over a significant number of voters. To this end, political parties employ political marketing strategies, using several communication and information tools such as advertising, social media, rallies, and election posters. However, despite the considerable exposure of these voters to the electoral messages disseminated via these channels, some of them - in this case, illiterate voters - find it difficult to read and grasp the content. Precisely, it is difficult to quantify the illiteracy rate, including political, among voters in Morocco. Widespread use of the traditional method of election posters is employed by the majority of political parties. The aim of this article is to highlight the correlation between election advertising via posters, the population of illiterate voters, and the environment in which they are disseminated.

Index Terms —Election campaign, environment, illiterate voter, political illiteracy, political marketing, symbol.

1- Introduction:

Political marketing emerged in the United States with President Roosevelt, and developed thanks to political communication personalities in Franceⁱ. At the time, the West was unquestionably a favorable testing ground for the emergence of political marketing, born of the "marriage" between the disciplines of marketing and politicsⁱⁱ.

In Morocco, some political parties use social networks and election posters to get closer to citizens, and more specifically to votersⁱⁱⁱ. However, illiterate voters face difficulties when it comes to decoding the messages disseminated

through these electoral advertising media, despite their active participation in electoral operations. Consequently, it is essential to capture their perception of election advertising in order to remedy the shortcomings of political communication and develop more effective strategies to reach them^{iv}. In this way, political illiteracy represents a major challenge in Morocco, impacting on political participation as well as on the electoral choices of a large number of citizens^v.

1.1 Electoral participation of illiterate voters in Morocco:

1.1.1 Political marketing practices in Morocco

Political parties have diversified their means of communication, given the multitude of existing advertising and political persuasion formats, as well as the challenge of choosing between more than 30 political parties in Morocco, which can lead to confusion among voters^{vi}. This situation is also a challenge for illiterate voters, who constitute a significant proportion of the population who actively participate in elections^{vii}. In Morocco, the rise of new information and political communication technologies has influenced voter behavior. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of people registered to vote increased, with around 50% voting in the 2021 legislative elections^{viii}, compared with 43% in the 2016 elections, according to data presented by the Ministry of the Interior. This political participation demonstrates the country's democratic vitality, enabling citizens to exercise their right to participate in political decision-making.

Several political parties have published their election posters (over 500 communication media)^{ix}, as the National Human Rights Council points out in its report on election observation published in 2021. We have thus been able to note that political advertising plays a key role in our democratic system, as it enables political parties to present their ideas and programs to voters. In Morocco, as in other countries, many people are unable to read, which makes election posters an essential tool for communicating visually with these individuals. However, the excessive use of these posters poses environmental problems. Election posters are often made from paper, and when their use is too widespread, this leads to a significant amount of waste. In addition, the anarchic arrangement of these posters in cities can alter their aesthetics and harm the natural landscape. For example, city walls are often covered with signs and symbols during election periods, and trees and poles are used to display a candidate's photo and a slogan encouraging people to vote, depending on their claim.

1.1.2 The participation of illiterate voters in Morocco: A challenge for democracy

Clearly, it remains difficult to quantify the illiteracy rate among Moroccan voters. This poses a first challenge, given the absence of precise criteria for reliably identifying this category of voters. In order to overcome this shortcoming, we have undertaken a field study carried out in 2019 that relates to the October 2016 elections, and another in the middle of the election period in 2021 face-to-face, aiming to deepen our understanding of illiterate voter participation and address this challenge for democracy in Morocco. However, illiterate voters' relationship with politics is complex. Different types of voters have varied forms of political engagement, such as rural voters who participate mainly in election campaigns in their regions, and those who rely on belonging as a criterion for political expression. As for illiteracy levels, although there has been an overall decline, they remain high among people aged 50 and over. According to data from the latest 2014 census^x, the illiteracy rate among women is 76.4%, while the rate among men is around 45.6%. In 2014, around 32% of the Moroccan population was illiterate, with a significant decrease since the 1960s. These data are based on the 2014 general population and housing census, according to the High Commission for Planning.

1.2 Election posters as an information and communication medium in 2021:

Moroccan political parties make extensive use of technological communication tools such as social networks and advertising spots, while maintaining the use of election posters in their campaigns^{xi}. These posters are generally displayed in urban and rural areas, along main roads and in places frequented by the population. They often feature candidates' faces, political symbols, and concise slogans. During the electoral operations that took place in Morocco on September 8, 2021, election ads were examined by the National Human Rights Council as part of its monitoring of the media and political party communications. Based on daily media monitoring, a total of 607 election-related announcements were recorded, including 79 in the print media (13%) and 528 in the online press (87%). Social networks also played a significant role in the dissemination of election announcements. In the space of just seven days of the election campaign, a dedicated online platform counted over 7409 announcements linked to the elections of September 8. Compared with the national press, this social platform accounted for around

92.5% of the share of election announcements, while the online press accounted for 6.5% and the print media for less than 1%.

2- Methods

The research methodology used in this study is based on a comparative approach between the results of the field survey carried out during the October 2016 elections and the data collected during the study covering the 2021 elections. This approach aims to analyze any variations or trends observed in political communication and voter participation in a five-year period. In order to collect the data, a field survey was carried out using a specially developed questionnaire in dialectal Arabic, suitable for illiterate voters. The survey was carried out face-to-face, with the aim of exploring the perception of the sample studied of electoral communication through posters, with a particular focus on political party election posters. This approach made it possible to obtain direct information and to gather the opinions and impressions of illiterate voters concerning these communication media. It also allowed the obtention of precise and significant results concerning the evolution of electoral communication and its impact on illiterate voters, as well as on the environment. Thanks to this comparative analysis, key information has emerged, offering a better understanding of the changes observed in electoral communication and the resulting consequences. The sample studied was made up of people met in various localities, namely the areas of Sidi Bennour, Had Soualem, Nouacer, and the outskirts of Agadir city. These areas were selected because they provided a representative population of our target group of illiterate voters.

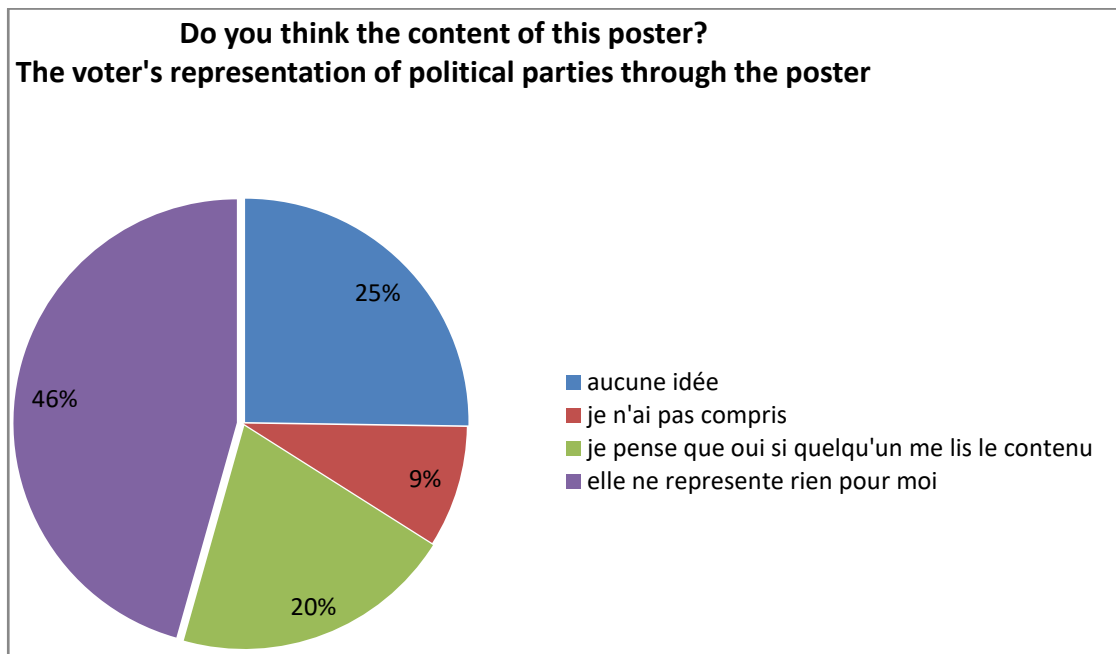
The sample is made up of around a hundred illiterate people who took part in voting in the elections of 2016 and 2021. To analyze the responses collected, we used Excel as our spreadsheet and analysis software

Data collection:

Table 1. The personal opinion of illiterate Moroccans on politics between the 2016 and 2021 elections

Answers most frequently given by men	Answers most frequently given by women
سيناريو	كتنفع البلاد واخا هكاك

Scenario	Politics is good for the country anyways
ماكين لا سياسة لاوالو There is no politics	ماكيدروش شنوا كيقولو They don't do what they say
موسم It's festival	مابقيناش كنتيقوهم We no longer trust them.
غير الكذوب It's only a lie	
المسرح العام A public theater	
دعاية فيها كلشي مخلص It's an advertising where everyone gets paid	
بروتكول Only a protocol	



3- Results:

The sample of participants involved in this survey is made up of an illiterate population, including farmers, housewives, and unemployed individuals. Respondents number exceeded 350 people between the 2016 and 2021 elections, including the 282 approached to participate in our study. Their profile is characterized according to criteria such as gender, age, professional activity, and place of residence. The results of some questions are shown above.

The table above summarizes the most frequent answers given by illiterate women and men, providing an insight into their personal views on their perception of politics in Morocco. According to the data, 66% of respondents gave a negative answer to the question asked. This finding allows us to assert that the majority of respondents in the sample studied do not feel attracted by election posters.

In the graph presented, the statistics reveal that 47.57% of the participants (31.06% men and 16.51% women) consider that the posters do not convey the message of the political party. Additionally, 46% of the participants indicated that the poster means nothing to them, and that there are other important criteria.

3.1 Results analysis

The data collected during the two election periods were subjected to comparative analysis, enabling the identification over time of trends, differences, and similarities in perceptions. The responses provided by illiterate voters who consented to take part in the survey reveal their clear interest in political issues. They follow political events through sources such as the audiovisual media and by taking part in political discussions in places such as cafés. Although their knowledge of political figures and institutions is limited, they demonstrate a common political sense that enables them to formulate judgments and opinions in this area.

The results of our study highlight a waste of resources on the part of political parties when it comes to the use of election posters. Indeed, these results reveal that voters are not influenced by the messages conveyed by these posters. Among the participants, a rate of 33.98% did not perceive the expression of a partisan message in these posters. In addition, 47.57% of participants have other more relevant criteria than the poster for conveying the message of political parties. Thus, only 18.44% of respondents considered that the poster actually represented a party message. These findings underline the lack of effectiveness of election posters in influencing voters. When asked whether the content of the poster matched their perception of the political party, 46% of illiterate voters answered negatively. Plus, 25% of the population said they had no idea on the subject.

Overall, this behavior does not allow us to draw any conclusions about the degree of political commitment or disengagement of illiterate voters. Rather, it reflects a feeling of disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the political offering. The crisis of the political image and disillusionment with the elites are factors that discourage illiterate voters from taking part. This study highlights the limits of political communication through election posters. It was only able to provide partial answers to certain questions, underlining the need for further investigation to deepen our understanding of this issue.

4- Conclusion :

This study highlights the importance of adapting political communication to illiterate voters, while taking environmental concerns into account. The results reveal that, despite the active participation of illiterate voters in electoral operations in Morocco, they encounter difficulties in decoding the messages disseminated through electoral advertising media. The widespread use of election posters in political campaigns in Morocco is a traditional method, but it poses environmental problems. The survey results also reveal

an evolution in election communication practices, with increasing use of social networks as a means of disseminating election announcements. However, it is important to note that illiterate voters may encounter difficulties in accessing these online platforms and in understanding the political messages they broadcast. Consequently, political parties need to adopt inclusive communication strategies that consider the specific needs of illiterate voters.

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