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BRANDING SPECIFICITIES OF THE ARMENIAN "VELVET REVOLUTION"

Abstract: The so-called modern-day "colored revolutions" implemented in varous parts of the globe have their specificities. The development of social communication and its changes in quality have in fact influenced the implementation of "colored revolutions", as well as its technologies. In the process of branding the Armenian velvet revolution, several important tasks were set: to make actions of disobedience and protests recognizable as revolutionary actions, to present the velvet revolution as a continuation and result of protest actions that were taking place in the country over the past ten years, and the last task concerned the need to unite different social segments around a common idea. The success and desire of a velvet revolution as a brand was conditioned by the following: considering the psychological peculiarities of perception of a person, presenting the revolution as the only opportunity for addressing the political problems in the country and pointing out succeeded key messages, conformity with the target audience's desires, social needs, expectations, and ideas about future; effective and balanced communication mechanisms with the target audience.

Information technologies applied in modern processes of social and political nature tend to become the fundamental indicators that differentiate current processes from the dynamic changes taken place in both political and social fields in the past. D. Evstafiev, a Russian social scientist, mentioned: "Changing the role and positioning of communication within society results in the emergence of new political behaviors, i.e. patterns" (2013, 342). The development of social communication and its changes in quality have in fact influenced the implementation of "colored revolutions", as well as its technologies.

The so-called modern-day "colored revolutions" implemented in varous parts of the globe have their specificities. However, if before the development of the information era they have been fulfilled based on different scenarios, nowadays both the planning and the implementation of revolutions are distinguished by the widespread and coordinated use of a number of technologies borrowed from

corporate marketing and branding. Today, the formation of revolutionary branding has become a unique technology of high demand in both political marketing and branding (Yurakov 2015).

At the modern stage of public policy transformation, the competition for power resources makes a smooth transition towards media and virtual domains. Political brands as instrumental resources often act as "soft power" for the purpose of strengthening the positions within political institutions, subjects, territories, nations, and countries.

The construction of political brands is a continuous process, and if the brand's appearance to the majority of the public is ceased, it simply stops its existence. Therefore, not only the technology of brand formation but also its long-term management strategy gains particular importance (Kazimirchik 2015, 2).

As one of the key tools in solving the proposed political problems, every political brand shall be in compliance with the expectations, needs and ideas of the audience and followers and ensure effective communication. Brand strength, success, efficiency, and demand directly depend on the peculiarities of the followers' perception. In other words, at the stages of formation and promotion of a political brand, the skills of it proper and clear positioning become even more crucial. The need for a political brand, i.e. a corporate style and its elements originate from the necessity of the formation of a corresponding self-identification and, in fact, becomes a substitute for a political platform, i.e. program for the revolutionary forces. In this case brand becomes a condition for political communication and, in fact, a process of a political communication as well as a result of political communication in the formation of corresponding perceptions.

The key element of brand identity process is the process of naming and brand name selection. The name selected for revolutionary actions, besides being easy to utter, remember and creating specific mood and attitude, should also be recognizable as a revolution and match with such acts of political disturbances, at the same time, it should emphasize the specificity of that particular one.

That said, a name shall be selected for the revolution. If in the past revolutions remained in history by their geographical names or by the name of the month during which they had been implemented, today naming serves as a key message for the target audience. The revolution that took place in Armenia during the months of April and May was named as "velvet revolution" with semantic reference to the "velvet" revolutions that took place in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and other places back in 1989, which resulted in reforms in the political systems in those countries and in fact, in the collapse of the socialist camp thus putting an end to history, as defined by the Japanese-American political scientist Francis Fukuyama in 1992 (Fukuyama 1992).

The name itself allows to categorize the phenomenon classifying amongst other phenomena, and, in this case the concept "velvet" is derived from the meth-

odology of implementing revolutions according to G. Sharp (2005, 77), where the idea of tolerance is the basis, and the velvet itself brings together soft power and implementation of uprising of ardent nature. The "velvety" nature of the revolutions pointed out their difference from classical (or even class) revolutions, the scenario was bloodless, peaceful, non-violent. They were implemented through mass protests and peaceful acts of disobedience and, as in most domestic and foreign media references, "not even a piece of glass was broken".

The definition "velvet" contained a clear statement both for international and local communities, although avoiding the use of another proper name, at the same time distinguished the Armenian Revolution from the modern-day revolutions of other nature that followed the "velvet" revolutions in the new millennium and were classified as "colored" revolutions.

It is noteworthy that the participants of the revolutions who took into account almost every single detail in terms of branding and were acting under a unified concept did not come up with a special name for the civic disobedience. Most likely, it was conditioned by the fact that it was not desirable to create parallels with those of "colored" revolutions that took place in several post-Soviet countries, which were also aiming at changing the geopolitical vector, opposing the Russian influence (Orange Revolution, Ukraine, 2004, Revolution of Roses, Georgia, 2003, Revolution of Tulips, Kirgisia, 2005)

It is interesting that when the change of power had in fact taken place and the victory of the revolutionary forces was announced, the mass media made less than effective attempts to use various names for the revolution, such as "white" (on the one hand, pointing out that it was peaceful and non-violent, on the other hand, opposing to the "colored" qualification, as "white" in that case indicated absence of color). Based on a series of symbolic revolutionary actions and static image elements, they named it a revolution of "backpacks", a revolution of "open hands", as well as a revolution of "livestreams", because live broadcasting was the main form and platform of communication between leader of the revolution and his followers.

At turning points of the history, when people have the need for unifying symbols, the symbolic component of a political brand is significantly enhanced. Therefore, when forming these brands, it is important to use significant symbols for the audience, preserving their meaning, i.e. the semantics. New symbols are introduced only when needed, when it is no longer possible to express message important for the brand through already known symbols (Melkonyan 2007, 110). As Yu. Lotman stated: "A symbol never belongs only to one synchronic section of culture; it always cuts across that section vertically, coming from the past and passing on into the future" (Lotman 1987, 11).

The origination process of social interoperability is associated with the response to symbols. This context of symbol study combines both sides of the reality, namely

symbolic and social. It is a secondary sign and, at the same time, a catalyst for both social and political actions, which simultaneously carries such functions as social integration (unification) and identification.

Upon branding the "velvet" revolution, there were several important matters that should be considered in terms of use of symbols, such as:

1. Make the acts of disobedience recognizable as revolution, mainly through creating moods similar to actions in different countries.

2. Introduce the "velvet revolution" as a continuation of protests of various types taken place in the country during the recent years with the goal of unifying the entire country's protestant potential.

3. Unite around and target at a common idea people of different social backgrounds, sex, age, and different interests.

One of the main functions of the brand is identification, i.e. it is necessary that a product, service or phenomenon is not only unique and distinct but is also identifiable and recognized as such. The perception of essential features and elements of the phenomenon is essential for its understanding by the audience. Understanding the subject or phenomenon means to name it mentally, categorize, generalize, and define it amongst a particular class of phenomena. The perception of the phenomenon is accompanied by the empirical experience of a person or society. Political events taking place during the months of April and May could have been recognizable as a revolution solely by combining with a certain empirical experience of the society and by reproducing the elements of revolutions that had already taken place. Such elements may include as follows:

1. Modern revolutions usually take place after elections (Sitnova 2011, 145), when the discussion on the issue of legitimacy becomes a catalyst for social unification, i.e. mobilization. That's why such revolutions are called electoral. The revolution in Armenia also took place after the former President Serzh Sargsyan was elected as the Prime Minister by the National Assembly, despite the fact that it had been prepared much earlier. The issue of the legitimacy of the newly elected Prime Minister S. Sargsyan was raised by the opposition after 2008 and 2013 elections. It is important, that in all the countries where revolutions have been implemented, legitimacy, the main prerequisite of the government has been the targeted.

2. The non-violent nature of the revolution that took place in the Republic of Armenia was in agreement with such names as Revolution of love and solidarity given to it as the common identifiable element that united all the post-Soviet revolutions. The first such example was the revolutions that took place in Baltic countries in late 80s, which were only able to oppose the powerful USSR not through violence but with mass force.

3. Peaceful disobedience actions such as live chains of people holding hands seemingly spontaneous, consisting of mostly young people, that served as means of expressing unity, blocking roads and hindering traffic. Among many such actions,

one can refer to the live chain of 600 km in length organized in the summer of 1989 in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which was one of the first such experiments in the USSR territory as week as the white circle in Moscow in 2012, which, unlike the first precedent, had no results for various reasons.

4. Dominance of visual communications such as the use of caricatures, fictional demotivators, photos, posters, and various visual installations is also typical of recent visual revolutions, during which the Internet and modern media both local and international, are filled with a variety of visual images that create stable coexistence with those events and make them distinctive and recognizable. These visual posters were usually depicting on groups of people of different ages, sex, occupations who participated in disobedience activities. For example, one of the most memorable photos of these days was the blocking of a street with baby strollers by mothers or hindering the traffic by little children's toys, bicycles, and cars. The images of rallies or marches were being distributed, emphasizing the number of participants, the crowded square photos taken from above with drones and the tricolor flag floating over above the crowd were among the most impressive one.

5. The most important element of recognition was the involvement of youth in all processes, as in Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, and in Armenia. The Czechoslovak Revolution took place against the Communist Party's single-party rule involving both senior citizens and students. However, the student protest demonstration of November 17, 1989 authorized by the authorities, was a prelude to the Velvet Revolution. The demonstration ended with clashes with the police and mass arrests. On November 20, Czechoslovakian students announced a strike. In fact, the Armenian revolutionary actions also started with the active involvement of students. Students of YSU and a number of other institutes expressed their loyalty to N. Pashinyan's protest of April 13, 2018 who arrived in Yerevan from Gyumri, declared a strike and joined the disobedience.

The next issue of political brand-communications is to present the "velvet" revolution as a continuation of a variety of protests taking place in the country during the recent years, with the goal of unifying the entire country's protesting potential. This Armenian political disobedience that took place during the months of April and May has been presented as a protest against the problems accumulated over the last decade as a continuation and conclusion of previous unsuccessful movements uniting and mobilizing its participants. During rallies and demonstrations, such slogans as "We are the owners of our country", "The policemen are ours", etc. could be heard most of which were inherited from previous movements ("I'm against", "Electric Yerevan", movements of environmental nature).

This movement was initially different from all political actions and protests taken place during he recent years in Armenia. There were no promises nor programs, no numbers nor arguments, and not even political proposals. In essence, the common idea uniting all the activists of the previous movements and the citizens in general,

was one, i.e. the rebellion against the current authorities, their denial. This movement was organized with clear account of some successful and unsuccessful protestant movements of past years, however it was clear that people were coming out to the streets not for the sake but against. The slogan "Make a step, deny Serzh" became the main message that was perceived and welcomed by all the participants of the revolutionary actions.

The actualization of the mythical image of the "Anti-hero" (antagonist) is generally one of the basic technologies of image and brand communication, if one wants to emphasize the specific, different qualities of the offer, there has to be a comparison. In general, the image of the enemy is to some extent necessary for any society for its formation, self-identification, and unification of its identity. The myth of the struggle with the enemy is in the basis of national leadership from the beginning, as there is no victory without the renaissance of the country, society. The anti-hero or enemy can also be hidden, latent, anonymous. Enemies are, first and foremost, a socio-psychological constitution because as such they can act as individuals, political or other social groups, and countries. Enemies may even not exist in reality (Melkonyan 2007, 129).

Usually, the technique of building the enemy's image is somewhat different from the construction of the challenges set to be overcome by the hero-savior in a myth. During the Armenian "velvet revolution" these issues were not only noticed and pointed out, but they were fully grounded by the guiltiness of the current authorities at the time, moreover, they were individualized and personalized in the image of the third president of Armenia and the acting prime-minister Serzh Sargsyan during the protests. By denying him the whole failed system was being denied.

The myth of "Anti-hero" was skillfully combined with the myth of "Hero-Savior" in the symbolic field of revolutionary branding. The myth of "Hero" is especially important in times of extreme instability such as the existence of numerous socio-economic problems, the distrust towards the existing authorities and the government. Thus, the desire of a strong hero, i.e. a charismatic leader is developed. Such leader is attributed to all the positive changes in society as well as the capabilities and ways of implementing new ones. The myth of "Hero – Savior" attributes some of the crucial characters to specific characters; the hero must be gifted with excellent talent of a commander, with high morals, and other qualities. In the context of the "velvet revolution" the following values became actual: truth, justice, freedom from the dictator, tolerance, which consequently became the main symbols of the "velvet" revolution.

According to this series of symbols, the symbolic persona was certainly Nikol Pashinyan, the leader of the revolution, who was an important part of the revolution brand along with his image strategy. The leader's image was opposed to the image of the authorities, creating a socio-psychological effect of a contrast as well as

similarities with the symbols of revolution and struggle, for example, comparing Pashinyan with Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Ernesto Che Guevara.

Based on its chronology, the movement began earlier than the civil disobedience. On March 31, Pashinyan started "My Step"" campaign at Vardanants Square in Gyumri. After walking through different cities in Armenia, he reached Yerevan without a suit, wearing a soldier's uniform and carrying a backpack. He left an impression of someone who is tired of injustice, who had gone through a long way both directly and indirectly, had been in different situations, faced difficulties, and the applied symbolism was accessible and understandable to masses.

In general, the external imaging in the symbol is associated with its internal ideological content, the image may be insignificant, schematic, etc., but it must definitely be substantial and constantly emphasize that the appearance is the inner essence (Melkonyan 2012, 37). From this point of view symbols implemented in Pashinyan's external image were very clear and readable, they were explicitly interpreted, explained by the audience, and generated a corresponding response. Pashinyan's visual image should emphasize the complex past, maturity, and experience. His beard solved these issues by adding age and masculinity and meanwhile reminding the heroes of the Karabakh Movement. The military shirt is the symbol of the army, safety, the beard is associated with fedayi image, which later made a clear reference to the nation's most beloved and admired hero Monte. It is peculiar that Monte's image as a symbol was reviewed and interpreted; he was perceived not as a hero-symbol of the Artsakh war but of struggle and self-sacrifice.

In the myth of "Hero" often the magic tools help him in his mission, in this case, during the civil rebellion, for Pashinyan such an attribute was his backpack that has been with him (until now) during the most important events, such as the failed negotiations with S. Sargsyan, marches, public speeches, etc. Even on Facebook social network, Pashinyan's backpack has a page which today has gathered thousands of followers. Such a phenomenon is not new in political branding and image making, it can be called a static attribute of the image, which itself becomes so recognizable that only the visual representation of that attribute is enough for the connection based on territorial affiliation combination to emerge and become actual (eg. Churchill's cigar, M. Thatcher's purse, J. Saltan's pipe, etc.). A role of such attribute played the cap with "Dukhov" writing on it (which was immediately popularized) [1], which Pashinyan was wearing on the triumphant day after his 24-hour imprisonment.

Along with opposing the myths about the "Hero" and the "Antihero" for the purpose of bringing together the protestant potential for revolutionary actions

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[1] The author of the brand writing "Dukhov" is the art director of Bet Construct, Ara Aslanyan, who mentioned that "Dukhov" was the advertising conceptual basis for the Footbal World Cup, however in the very beginning of the movement it was decided to grant "Dukhov" to the revolution.

the dichotomy of "We – They" was also emphasized, which in essence is the basis of managing of all modern colored revolutions. "We" are the representatives of the national rebellion, "They" are the rest. In the case of the Armenian Revolution, "They" included not only the representatives of the current authorities, but also everyone who was not in the Republic square and were not openly supporting the revolutionaries. The psychological analysis of the behavior of people in the center of revolution allows to conclude that they had developed the psychological phenomena called confluence. Confluence is a type of distortion of reality perception that qualifies the perception of the absence of existing borders between the individual and the surroundings, and by the individual's perception himself and the outer world become as one. Such unification takes place during rituals, and upon the complete unification within a group the individual surprisingly feels the way he or she is. It is the perception of the absence of borders that explains the existence of exalted emotions and deep feelings. An individual in a confluence state demands similarities and does not tolerate any differences, and if he or she notices them, the response is agression.

The Armenian "velvet" revolution was accompanied by quite active digital revolutionary actions on social networks, first of all on Facebook. On this Internet platform, the idea of an illusionary majority was created, visual and verbal calls were made, revolutionary slogans and posters were posted, which were changing in line with the rapidly changing events.

Any other point of view became imperceptible and ignored, for which there were several reasons: conformism, the psychological security of the majority, which has been mentioned by S. Asch, E. Noelle-Neumann (1991), and others. Alternative thinking was being mocked on causing aggression, and perceived as betrayal. The perception of the world, as it often happens in transition and crisis stages, has resulted in dichotomic perceptions, i.e. conflict between black and white, evil and good. The myth "We – They" was modernized and started to spread awakening and activating a number of myths within political communications, through which an attempt was made to solve the third most important issue in terms of applying symbolism in political branding: unification and consolidation of people of different social backgrounds, gender, age, and having different interests around a unified idea.

In the context of the "velvet" revolution, the myth of the unification, i.e. "Unity", also became cruicial which is a type of a myth about identification. From the moment that the social-economic crisis challenges the stability of the identification system an individual immediately starts looking for support in identifying himself with a group or an ethnos. Very often it is about unification with a referent group. One of such examples is the Ukraininan crisis the solution of which the Ukraininsians found in membership at the European Union. As for the Armenian velvet revolution, the myth of the unification worked in favor of the internal unification under "We".

From the point of view of mythical perception of the world, the myth of the "People's Power" was also actualized, which also witnessed on what people know and what they have been thinking an dreaming about. This resembles the cases when the king in fairy tales decides to pay a visit to ordinary people, find out what they want and then fight for those desires. The myth of the "People's Will" contains the secret of truthfulness which should be sought for and revealed. Thus, Pashinyan almost in all of his speeches addressed to people directly, using such expressions as "as people will decide, as people will say". This can be viewed both as an attempt to share the responsibility of the "velvet" revolution with the people, and the completion of the image of the People's Leader, that would later on become the image of the prime minister elected by people.

The creation of the image of People's Leader by itself implies such appeals, by which he justifies his further steps, showing that he fulfills the expectations of the people, understands its concerns, and shares the problems. By the way, Mandela, Gandhi, and others have used the successful experience of addressing people in the past. By referring to the people, he shows that he is ready to listen to and to consider each and everyone's opinion.

Within the activation process of the said myths a quite effective targeting was being implemented, i.e. segmentation of various participating audiences. The symbolism used during the revolutionary actions was clearly addressed to different target audiences. In a geographical sense, the whole duration of the revolution resembled a great journey in harmony with this slogan "Make a Step"; it was not localized by any place, moreover, the revolution was walking through Armenia, in its different regions, in the communities, streets of the country's capital city Yerevan and in a way was making the participation of those living there inevitable.

On the other hand, the symbolic actions, slogans, chanting, rituals borrowed both from the Armenian political history and revolutionary cultures of other countries were clearly directed to the representatives of different groups of the society by getting them involved and unified.

One of the examples it the football symbolism used during the revolution. The sounds of clapping and chanting "Hú" of Iceland football fans, the noise of the vuvuzelas brought up the spirit and were mostly directed to the youth. The target audience of the "Honk if you're against Serzh" slogan was mainly aimed at male drivers and for example, the audience of the nighttime noise made by saucepans and scoops were women. Targeting was more vividly expressed through the songs that became the symbolic tunes of the revolutionary branding, such as the Rock Anthem of the revolution "My Step", composed by Hayk Stver for Pashinyan's lyrics, Tata Simonyan's "Hello Armenia!", Arame's "With Armenians", Hrag's "Dukhov" were intended for different audiences and social groups.

Communication between political subjects is considered successful if the recipient perceives the information transmitted by the sender in the sense that was meant by the sender. This communication takes place within a particular political context, i.e. in certain interconnected symbols and their systems that are endowed with a meaning. And in this regard, during the implementation of political brand communication, we can clearly observe the complete dynamics of the revolutionary brand, brand symbolism, and its stages, as follows: 1) realizing the full picture of the revolution; 2) categorization, naming (nomination); 3) naming and categorization of different symbols and individuals, i.e. structural elements; 4) interpretation (Asriyan 2017, 149).

First, certain political processes started that later were perceived as revolution or revolutionary, since certain elements existing in revolutions of empirical experience were identified, later it was named revolution as a recognized phenomenon, and at the third stage those that implemented the revolution were recognized as leaders with N. Pashinyan being perceived as prime minister by the society. Moreover, the phenomena and actions unrelated to each other were unified under the same context, that of the revolution, and any new political or civil action was being labeled under "realities are changed in the country". This was the fourth, i.e. the interpretation stage of perception of the phenomenon. At this last stage, people and experts have been searching for this or that event and their interpretation of conscious actions perceived as revolution. The interpretation stage is a matter of current interest and continues to date.

Thus, we can conclude that the success and desire of a velvet revolution as a brand was conditioned by the following: 1) considering the psychological peculiarities of perception of a person; 2) presenting the revolution as the only opportunity for addressing the political problems in the country and pointing out succeeded key messages; 3) conformity with the target audience's desires, social needs, expectations, and ideas about future; 4) effective and balanced communication mechanisms with the target audience.

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