



[Introduction by moderator and short MEDIA CONSULTA video]

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

Estimadas señoras, estimados señores,

Do you know what the connection is between Madonna and Hugo Chávez?

First I would like to introduce the key topic of my speech: ‘Political Communication as Brand Communication?’ Just five words and a question mark. In other words: can politics and politicians be sold using the same methods as brand articles? Is there a difference between advertising for Apple and their iPad or for Obama? Or to put it more blatantly: isn’t it much the same whether I foist a used car on a customer or secure a vote for a politician?

Pop stars like Madonna have already answered this question. They have established themselves in our global media society as brands with distinctive characteristics. Their appearances, both on stage and in the media, put their stamp on these brands. Whether the megastar hangs from a cross or adopts babies from Malawi,



everything is done to service the brand. The songs and their contents are subordinate to this aim.

Even politicians have taken this path – with a greater or lesser measure of success. One who has already perfected the art of self-marketing is at home here in South America. Hugo Chávez is a master of media staging and knows how to position himself as a brand. Here is one example:

[Chávez video]

Even when I think about his coup last October, I have to admit that Chávez is a master of this discipline: by seizing the Hilton Hotel on the island of Margarita, he again consolidated his brand essence as a revolutionary and an advocate of the common man.

Chávez's mentor and teacher was nearby, in Cuba. Fidel Castro was someone who did not see himself so much as a statesman, but rather as an eternal guerrilla fighting for the cause of justice. The myth surrounding him was also based on a carefully staged personality cult. He addressed his people in more than 350 speeches, many of which lasted several hours, and were



interrupted only by choreographed applause. Again and again he denounced the misdeeds of the 'imperialist enemy'. This public image was further strengthened by the fact that his private life always remained a closely guarded secret. It is said that he had four life partners; reportedly he had numerous love affairs. That, too, is part of the myth surrounding a living legend.

Here in Latin America, compared with other parts of the world, you have some politicians who have established themselves as brands, or who are well on the way to doing so, thanks to their charisma and stage-management abilities. Besides Chávez and Castro, I could name any number of others such as Juan Perón, Lula da Silva and Evo Morales. The President of Bolivia, too, is skilled at dealing with the media, whether wearing his traditional Andean shirt to an audience with the Pope, or building on prejudices in his tirades against Coca-Cola and fried chicken.

However, all of these have been upstaged by another newcomer, one from whom even a long-serving PR professional could learn. With great mastery, Barack Obama staged his appearances as mega-events during his election campaign, using the teleprompter with great effect for his solemn speeches! Without a doubt he is the

most powerful political media personality of the present day. In his campaign everything slotted neatly into place: the colour of his skin, the woman at his side and – I nearly forgot to mention this – the content of his speeches.

[Obama video]

Yes, in his case even the content fits, in contrast to the strict ‘representatives of the people’. Here I am totally conservative: I really believe that even in our modern media society the content of political messages plays the decisive role, because I still believe in voters’ common sense – or, at least, in that of most voters.

In this respect I contradict the theories of experts who see political communication today purely as a media spectacle. Here I am thinking of Marco Casanova of the Swiss Branding-Institute or of the renowned US American cultural journalist and social historian Neal Gabler. If they are right, I will have to retire from political communication today and apply for a job in the entertainment industry.



Why? Well, Casanova – what a lovely name! – asserts that in modern media society there is only room for symbolic politics. And Gabler thinks that the media nowadays only report on acts which politicians stage solely for the media. Politics ranks, right after journalism, as one of the first areas of life to adopt the tricks of show business. In brief, the politician is just another type of star, political processes simply represent another kind of show, and television is the ideal stage for this.

I admit that even entertainment has its place in political communication. But shows of a manipulative nature, such as those staged by Chávez or Castro, always upset me. Of course, symbols and stage management have a place in communicating political content. Yet they must not replace the content. I am also convinced that they are not able to do that. By the way, this applies to political communication as well as to brand communication. Brands have to be positioned on the basis of certain product characteristics which distinguish them from competing products. The product's quality and its content are crucial for this process. And political strategists must analyse the decisive political issues, provide convincing answers and base their USPs on them.

In developing a brand strategy for a product it is also extremely important to emphasise the advantages and added value being offered to the buyer. When introducing the product to the market it must be quite clear what needs the consumer has, both rationally and emotionally, openly and secretly. If my product is in a position to fulfil these needs, it must be positioned on precisely this basis.

At the end of the day, however, the decisive factors are not the best marketing and the best branding. In the final analysis, price, quality and sustainability tip the balance when the consumer is deciding what to buy. Yes, even sustainability. Recent studies show that when choosing products, more and more people are taking into account whether or not the production process is harmful to people or the environment.

Dear colleagues,

As we have seen, marketing alone is not sufficient, neither in brand communication nor in political communication. However, it is also true that nothing can be achieved without marketing. To be noticed in today's media society, politicians – like all political actors and institutions, governments, parliaments, parties and interest groups

– must position themselves on the market. Politicians are compelled to develop their political ideas into brands and to bind this brand to their own person. Politicians must present themselves to the voter in a unique and recognisable manner; their image must be credible in relation to their content. Ideally, they should radiate the content which they represent – they must be credible ambassadors of their individual brands.

German social scientist Knut Volkenand additionally names a series of secondary values which should be included in the positioning of a politician: strong leadership, credibility, sympathy, passion, justice. Moreover, a politician's brand should also radiate an attitude towards life which makes identification with it seem an attractive proposition. A perfect example of this is Obama's 'Yes, we can'. A strong political brand is always coupled with a promise – a promise of a better life, of problems being solved, of security.

It would be correct to say that even in today's world, which is so strongly dominated by the media, politics must understand the everyday problems people face and arouse their enthusiasm for its ideas. Thus, the rise of the Obama brand can be explained by the

fact that people felt they were being taken seriously and that he was able to raise their hopes. He also scored points on political **content** and was able to convince people with his **policies** – general health insurance, a new strategy on Iraq and greater independence of energy supply.

Obama's election campaign is the epitome of perfect brand management. The specialist journal *Advertising Age* awarded him the title of 'Marketer of the Year'. Like every successful brand, Obama has succeeded in building a relationship with his target group based on trust. According to the global Euro RSCG *Brand Momentum Study*, the US President has even overtaken the brand icons Google and iPhone.

The significance of content for a successful political brand strategy in modern media society was evidenced by recent election campaigns in Europe and the USA in which economic, social, health and education policies played a prominent role. Thus, Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign, a role model for all Americanised election campaigns and for modern political marketing, did not lack themes. In Tony Blair's successful campaign during the 1997 British General Election, the thematic

customisation was crucial in the final analysis. His advisers identified the potential in the centre-right and made use of the traditional themes of the Conservatives. In this way, 'New Labour' opened up new sectors of the market.

[Dramatic pause]

Joseph Joubert, the French moralist and essayist wrote, 200 years ago, 'Politics is the art of leading the masses – not where they want to go, but where they should go.' His insight is still valid today: not populism based on surveys, but winning majorities for one's own convictions, is what makes a successful politician.

Now, most politicians are not natural talents in communication. Only a few, and not even Obama, possess so much charisma that they are able to completely do without political stage management. I can only think of two who have managed that: Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. Other charismatic leaders, such as John F. Kennedy or Barack Obama, today need the support of stage management and the construction of a strong political brand.



Thank God, even these charismatic superheroes rely on our professional support, to say nothing of normal politicians, parties, governments and institutions. It is these in particular who provide us, as PR experts in political communication, with work and with our daily bread ...

[Dramatic pause]

... Well, I hope we might all get a bit more than that.

Dear colleagues,

As good communication experts and spin doctors know, political marketing can only be successful if it is stringent and credible. The most important messages must be carefully selected together with customers from the field of politics. These should then be constantly repeated – and not only during election campaigns. Nothing is more detrimental to a political brand than when basic statements are forgotten, altered or covered up by a series of other statements relating to other themes after the election.



The global MEDIA CONSULTA network utilises a large number of tools both in brand communication as well as in political communication. These must be coordinated with precision. To achieve long-term loyalty of the social target group, we realise political communication as integrated communication. We combine classic advertising (print adverts, outdoor advertising, TV sport, viral marketing), PR campaigns, forms of dialogue communication as well as events and the multimedia sector. By integrating different means of communication in this way, political aims can be conveyed in a more credible and sustainable manner.

We practice integrated communications in our international agency network, which is now present in 56 countries. The European Commission is among our client list. For its pan-European campaigns, the Commission trusts in us because the MC network agencies have long-standing campaign experience in their own countries. The network agencies foster contacts with national institutions, associations and media and can realise new strategic partnerships as required.

And in case that sounds too theoretical to you, I will now show you two examples drawn from our work for the European Commission.

The first example from the anti-smoking campaign, 'Feel free to say no' takes up the very current theme of football.

[Video]

Playing football makes men sweat, so the second example 'goes under the shower'. The video is called 'Sex up my shower!' I can assure you, the title does not promise too much.

[Video]

I hope you enjoyed the blue pill ...

[Dramatic pause]

Of course, we also use Web 2.0 which is gaining in importance, thanks to its specific capabilities in political communication. An example of this is the weekly vodcast by German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel. And even Down Under, the first politician, Peter Walsh of the National Party, has made use of this type of communication with the voter. For some years now, blogs have become a popular means of dialogue between politicians and



citizens. At the same time, social networks such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have gained in importance for politics.

With his flair for self-marketing, Hugo Chávez has also discovered this playing field. He has acquired a Twitter profile and now has over 120,000 'followers' after only two status messages. By the way, his twittered reaction to this onslaught was, 'It's become an unexpected explosion. Gracias. Thanks. With Evo in Barinas at the moment. Venceremos!'

Without a doubt, Chávez is an excellent propagandist for his own brand. As a model for political communication, however, he is of little use. Personally, I prefer Polish satirist Wieslaw Brudziński's words of wisdom, 'A good propagandist can convince even with the help of the truth.'

[Dramatic pause]

That is a good sentence on which to conclude my remarks. I would like to close with a quote from Alan Greenspan: 'If I turn out to be particularly clear, you've probably misunderstood what I've said.'



At any rate, I hope I have answered the opening question in a reasonably clear manner: the question mark is not appropriate, as political communication *is* brand communication.

Thank you.