

Research on the Perception of political Billboards in Bratislava self-governing region's electoral Campaign in Slovakia

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Political marketing currently plays an increasingly important role in significant political periods, including parliamentary and presidential elections. Its application can also be observed in municipal and regional elections.

This research study reports on the partial political marketing research on candidates who ran for the presidency of Bratislava self-governing region in the 2013 electoral campaign. The aim of the research was to map Slovak voters' perception of billboards, which are one of the most frequent forms of outdoor advertisement used in political marketing

1. Introduction

Theorists and experts who deal with marketing in the field of politics assume that there is an exchange relationship between political parties and their voters and that the candidates in these political struggles are simply an item of trade.

What played a significant role in creating the definition of political marketing was the work of P. Niffenegger (1989, p. 45-51) relying on traditional marketing model 4 developed by McCarty, who emphasized the role of environmental analyses and research in political campaigns. A. Shama (1975, p. 766-767) defined political marketing as "the process by which political candidates and their ideas are submitted to voters in order to meet the potential needs and thus provide support for those candidates." In 1985, the American Marketing Association, extended the definition of marketing with a political dimension by adding keywords to the idea: "Marketing is the process of managing, planning, cognition, evaluating, promotion and dissemination of ideas, goods and services, which results in meeting the needs of an individual and goals of an organization." (Wring, 2002, p. 172).

Newman (1999) considers political marketing to be "the application of marketing principles and procedures in the political campaigns of individuals." Antónia Štensová (2003, p. 7) defines the marketing of a political party "as a process focused on creating, maintaining or changing attitudes and behaviour of the target audience (public, voter) towards it." D. Lesáková (2003, p. 29) points out that political marketing has many common features with marketing in the business world. "In corporate marketing the entrepreneur offers products, services, advertising message and so on,

and in return it receives funds (by buying customers), information (by customer research) and customers' loyalty." Based on the above definition we can state that political marketing has become an integral part of the practice of current politics.

Its most dominant instrument is currently political advertising, which several authors (L. Coman, 2013, P. Baines et al, 2014) conceive as exploitation of the media by political candidates, used to increase their exposure in public. As reported by L. O. N. Edegoh et al. (2013, p. 377): "Political advertising is one of the types of advertising that over the years has been used by politicians and their well wishers to convince people to cast vote for them". Marketing, advertising and other promotional mix elements have tremendous roles to play in political campaigns.

2. The Election Campaign

The main effort of political campaigns is to influence the process and outcomes of governance. As reported by Schmitt-Beck and Farrell (2002, p. 3), political campaigns "are organized communication efforts, including the function of one or more agencies that seek to influence the outcome of the decision-making process by affecting public opinion". In the context of political campaigns, the cited authors include four basic types of political campaign: electoral campaigns, referenda, information campaigns, and image campaigns, and we will now consider electoral campaigns.

Jan Spousta (2001, p. 58) sees election campaigns as "organized efforts of campaigning individuals to persuade voters and ensure sufficient support for the candidates". According to David Denver and Gordon Hands (2001, p. 70 - 72) election campaigns have four objectives: to inform voters, to convince voters, to enhance the current support (reinforcing), and to mobilize voters.

3. Research objective

The primary objective of the research study was to gain more insight into the use of political marketing in elections in the autonomous regions in 2013, since the attention of experts is more focused on parliamentary or presidential elections. Within the election campaign, we have focused on the perception of billboards, as one of the most common forms of outdoor advertising in elections to higher self-governing region positions. We have focused on perception preferences of the target group of potential voters in the Bratislava region, which reflected the reality of how billboards of the major second round candidates (A. Monika Flašíková Beňová and B. Pavol Frešo) are perceived in this semantic space.

4. Research material

The selection of the research material was done on several levels. Firstly, we focused on the political campaign in the elections in the governing regions in 2013. The first round of council elections for autonomous regions and elections of the heads (governors) of autonomous regions were, upon the decision of the head of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, held on Saturday, November 9, 2013 and the second

round was scheduled for Saturday, November 23, 2013. Elections were held in accordance with Act. no. 303/2001 on elections to governing regions and on amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure, as amended by Act no. 335/2007 Coll. Further, we carried out research on outdoor advertising within the election campaign, which, according to subparagraph 1, § 27 of Act no. 335/2007 Coll. began 17 days and ended 48 hours before the start of voting.¹

We focused on the election campaign in the Bratislava region, and we focused on the outdoor advertising of candidates for the head (governor) of the self-governing authority, which was present in the second round of elections. Since political candidates used different types of outdoor advertising in different forms and intensity, we focused on billboards, as they were a common part of the political campaign of each candidate for the governor of Bratislava region.

5. Research method and research group

As part of the analysis of billboards of candidates in the second round for the head (governor) of the Autonomous Region in 2013 the semantic differential method was used for data collection. It was designed by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (Džupina, Fandelová, Marková & Tirpáková, 2013). This method was originally developed for measuring the connotative meaning of terms; its use was later expanded to human and social sciences in examining social perception, mental and social representations. Currently, this method has also found a place in the area of marketing research; being used in market research, public opinion surveys. Its modified applications for measuring attitudes and frequent use of rating scales in marketing research have been enhanced as well.

Using the semantic differential method as part of the present research, we assessed the perception of billboards of two candidates, – Pavol Frešo and Monika Flašíková-Beňová, in the second round of elections for the self-governing regions in 2013. We used the semantic differential, which consisted of 24 seven-point scales. Individual scales were formed by bipolar pairs of adjectives that were focused on three key dimensions of semantic differential, also known as the EPA – assessment (evaluation), potency (potency) and activity (activity).

The aim of this analysis was to find out how potential voters in the Bratislava region perceive the billboards of central candidates in the second round of elections for the offices of the self-governing region 2013. In evaluating semantic differential data, we used comparative statistics using the SPSS software.

¹ The President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic in his decision no. 191/2013 Coll. from July 3, 2013, announced the elections to municipal councils and elections of the heads (governors) of self-governing regions. The day of the election was scheduled for Saturday November 9, 2013. The head of the National Council of the Slovak Republic in his decision no. 359/2013 Coll. From November 11, 2013, announced a second round of elections of the heads (governors) of self-governing regions. The day for the second round of elections was set for Saturday, November 23 2013.

6. The research results

We present the research findings visualized in tables and figures that reflect the individual steps of statistical analysis, as it was performed with data obtained through the semantic differential, for the two observed billboards as perceived by the research group as a whole.

The research findings showed (Table 1) that in the semantic space of potential voters from the Bratislava region the billboard of Pavol Frešo was, to a high degree, perceived negatively. The research group perceived it as having negative connotations such as being stereotypical, serious, passive, uninteresting, slow, static, weak, shallow, wrong, or for all. Positive connotations for the monitored billboard included adjectives such as: moderate, modest, or smooth. The billboard for Monika Flašíková-Beňová was perceived as acceptable. The target group of potential voters, which formed our research group saw it as having positive connotations such as: smooth, cultural, peaceful, nice, friendly, liberal, dynamic, active, honest, good, and strong. Negative connotations were linked with the adjectives: such as stereotypical, shallow, serious, and artificial.

Table 1: Average profiles of perception of Pavol Frešo and Monika Flašíková-Beňová billboards

Semantic differential					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Eye-catching-uninteresting_Frešo	5,18	91	1,761	,185
	Eye-catching-uninteresting_Beňová	3,55	91	1,753	,184
Pair 2	Dynamic-static_Frešo	5,11	91	1,676	,176
	Dynamic-static_Beňová	3,38	91	1,604	,168
Pair 3	For young people - for all the people_Frešo	4,69	91	1,481	,155
	For young people - for all the people_Beňová	3,98	91	1,838	,193
Pair 4	Active-passive_Frešo	5,27	91	1,506	,158
	Active-passive_Beňová	3,42	91	1,620	,170
Pair 5	Moderate-wild_Frešo	2,97	91	1,616	,169
	Moderate-wild_Beňová	3,25	91	1,338	,140
Pair 6	Honest-dishonest_Frešo	4,13	91	1,681	,176
	Honest-dishonest_Beňová	3,45	91	1,607	,168
Pair 7	Deep-shallow_Frešo	4,99	91	1,464	,154
	Deep-shallow_Beňová	4,08	91	1,635	,171
Pair 8	Strong-weak_Frešo	5,11	91	1,748	,183
	Strong-weak_Beňová	3,78	91	1,718	,180

Semantic differential					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 9	True-false_Frešo	4,51	91	1,804	,189
	True-false_Beňová	3,49	91	1,722	,180
Pair 10	Modest-challenging_Frešo	2,47	88	1,597	,170
	Modest-challenging_Beňová	3,30	88	1,599	,170
Pair 11	Smooth-rough_Frešo	3,60	91	1,625	,170
	Smooth-rough_Beňová	2,59	91	1,135	,119
Pair 12	Original-stereotypical_Frešo	5,58	91	1,674	,175
	Original-stereotypical_Beňová	4,02	91	1,938	,203
Pair 13	Good-bad_Frešo	4,81	91	1,807	,189
	Good-bad_Beňová	3,56	91	1,753	,184
Pair 14	Pleasant-unpleasant_Frešo	4,41	91	1,700	,178
	Pleasant-unpleasant_Beňová	2,90	91	1,647	,173
Pair 15	Beautiful-ugly_Frešo	4,69	91	1,617	,170
	Beautiful-ugly_Beňová	2,89	91	1,670	,175
Pair 16	Spontaneous-artificial_Frešo	5,07	91	1,526	,160
	Spontaneous-artificial_Beňová	4,10	91	1,732	,182
Pair 17	Humorous-serious_Frešo	5,45	91	1,478	,155
	Humorous-serious_Beňová	4,07	91	1,436	,151
Pair 18	Honest-insincere_Frešo	4,57	91	1,694	,178
	Honest-insincere_Beňová	3,76	91	1,753	,184
Pair 19	Introvert-extrovert_Frešo	3,82	91	1,379	,145
	Introvert-extrovert_Beňová	4,15	91	1,366	,143
Pair 20	Fast-slow_Frešo	5,01	91	1,394	,146
	Fast-slow_Beňová	3,76	91	1,432	,150
Pair 21	Natural-stylized_Frešo	4,97	91	1,735	,182
	Natural-stylized_Beňová	3,68	91	1,960	,205
Pair 22	Calm-aggressive_Frešo	3,45	91	1,772	,186
	Calm-aggressive_Beňový	2,78	91	1,263	,132
Pair 23	Cultural-barbarian_Frešo	3,56	91	1,648	,173
	Cultural-barbarian_Beňová	2,70	91	1,260	,132
Pair 24	Liberal-authoritative_Frešo	3,95	91	1,753	,184
	liberal-authoritative_Beňová	3,14	91	1,346	,141

Table 2: Semantic differential comparison according to the perception of billboards used for Pavol Frešo and Monika Flašíková-Beňová and obtained statistical differences

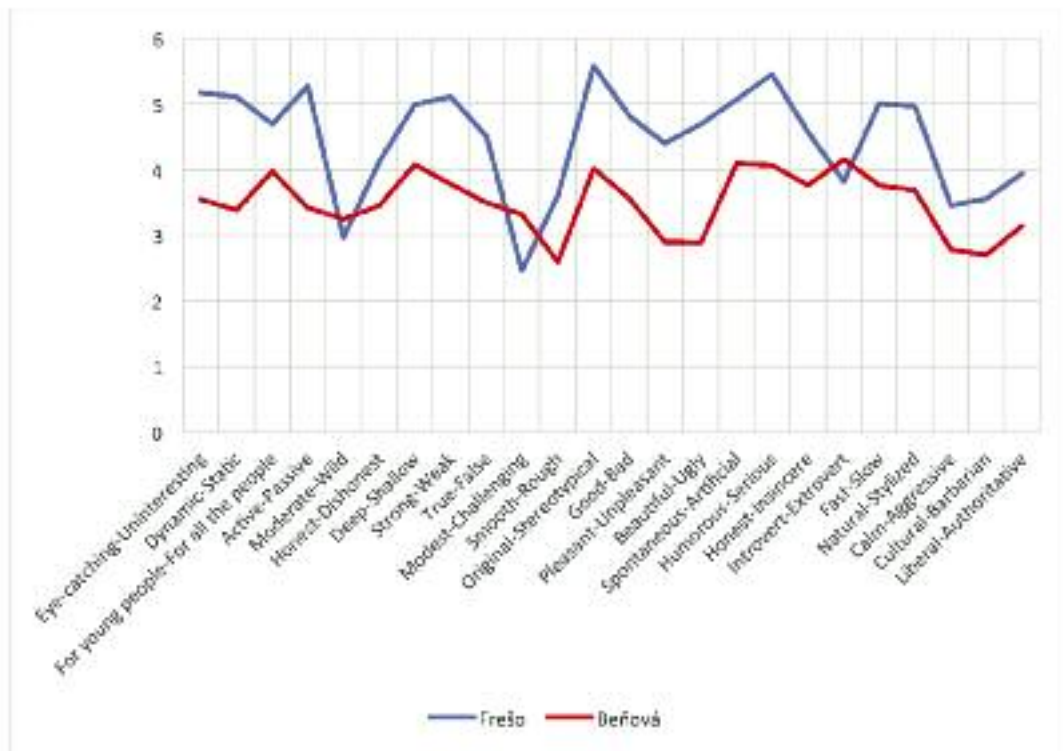
Semantic differential									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Eye-catching-uninteresting_Frešo - Eye-catching-uninteresting_Beňová	1,626	2,555	,268	1,094	2,158	6,073	90	,000***
Pair 2	Dynamic-static_Frešo - Dynamic-static_Beňová	1,725	2,381	,250	1,229	2,221	6,913	90	,000***
Pair 3	For young people - for all the people_Frešo For young people - for all the people_Beňová	,714	2,072	,217	,283	1,146	3,288	90	,001*
Pair 4	Active-passive_Frešo - Active-passive_Beňová	1,857	2,397	,251	1,358	2,356	7,391	90	,000***
Pair 5	Moderate-wild_Frešo -Moderate-wild_Beňová	-,286	2,002	,210	-,703	,131	-1,362	90	,177
Pair 6	Honest-dishonest_Frešo - Honest-dishonest_Beňová	,681	2,683	,281	,123	1,240	2,423	90	,017
Pair 7	Deep-shallow_Frešo - Deep-shallow_Beňová	,912	2,379	,249	,417	1,408	3,658	90	,000***
Pair 8	Strong-weak_Frešo - Strong-weak_Beňová	1,330	2,716	,285	,764	1,895	4,669	90	,000***
Pair 9	True-false_Frešo - True-false_Beňová	1,011	2,865	,300	,414	1,608	3,366	90	,001*
Pair 10	Modest-challenging_Frešo - Modest-challenging_Beňová	-,830	2,330	,248	-1,323	-,336	-3,339	87	,001*
Pair 11	Smooth-rough_Frešo - Smooth-rough_Beňová	1,011	1,997	,209	,595	1,427	4,829	90	,000***
Pair 12	Original-stereotypical_Frešo - Original-stereotypical_Beňová	1,560	2,464	,258	1,047	2,074	6,041	90	,000***
Pair 13	Good-bad_Frešo - Good-bad_Beňová	1,253	2,862	,300	,657	1,849	4,176	90	,000***
Pair 14	Pleasant-unpleasant_Frešo - Pleasant-unpleasant_Beňová	1,505	2,697	,283	,944	2,067	5,325	90	,000***
Pair 15	Beautiful-ugly_Frešo - Beautiful-ugly_Beňová	1,802	2,495	,262	1,283	2,322	6,889	90	,000***

Semantic differential									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 16	Spontaneous-artificial_Frešo - Spontaneous-artificial_Beňová	,967	2,479	,260	,451	1,483	3,722	90	,000***
Pair 17	Humorous-serious_Frešo - Humorous-serious_Beňová	1,385	2,064	,216	,955	1,815	6,398	90	,000***
Pair 18	Honest-insincere_Frešo - Honest-insincere_Beňová	,813	2,879	,302	,214	1,413	2,695	90	,008
Pair 19	Introvert-extrovert_Frešo - Introvert-extrovert_Beňová	-,330	1,844	,193	-,714	,054	-1,705	90	,092
Pair 20	Fast-slow_Frešo - Fast-slow_Beňová	1,253	1,992	,209	,838	1,668	5,999	90	,000***
Pair 21	Natural-stylized_Frešo - Natural-stylized_Beňová	1,286	2,822	,296	,698	1,873	4,347	90	,000***
Pair 22	Calm-aggressive_Frešo - Calm-aggressive_Beňová	,670	2,517	,264	,146	1,194	2,541	90	,013*
Pair 23	Cultural-barbarian_Frešo - Cultural-barbarian_Beňová	,857	2,224	,233	,394	1,320	3,677	90	,000***
Pair 24	Liberal-authoritative_Frešo - Liberal-authoritative_Beňová	,802	2,486	,261	,284	1,320	3,078	90	,003*

Key to chart: Statistically significant differences are indicated as follows: * significance level = 0.05, ** significance level = 0.01, *** significance level = 0.001.

When confronting the statistical data reported in the Table 1 and Table 2, the results indicated a significant rate of different perception of the Pavol Frešo and Monika Flašíková-Beňová billboard with statistical significance for all adjectives except the following bipolar pairs: moderate-wild ($p = 0.177$), honest - insincere ($p = 0.08$) and introvert - extrovert ($p = 0.92$).

Fig. 1: Average profiles of perception of the Pavol Frešo and Monika Flašíková-Beňová billboards and their statistical confrontation



Note: (1. eye-catching - uninteresting, 2. dynamic - static, 3. for young people - for all the people, 4. active - passive, 5. moderate – wild, 6. honest - dishonest, 7. deep - shallow, 8. strong - weak, 9. true - false, 10. modest - challenging, 11. smooth – rough, 12. original - stereotypical, 13. good - bad, 14. pleasant - unpleasant, 15. beautiful - ugly, 16. spontaneous - artificial, 17. humorous - serious, 18. honest - insincere, 19. introvert - extrovert, 20. fast - slow, 21. natural - stylized, 22. calm - aggressive, 23. cultural - barbarian, 24. liberal - authoritative.)

An interesting finding, given the facts gained from research carried out, is the fact that despite the positive perception of Monika Flašíková-Beňová's billboard by the target group of potential voters who formed our research group, she did not become the head (governor) of the Bratislava Self-Governing Region. The billboard, which was seen by a group of respondents in the negative polarity pertained to Pavol Frešo, who won the election for the Self-Governing Region of Bratislava. We think that this discrepancy can be explained mainly by these statistical, political scientific, sociological, psychological and marketing reasons:

First we must state, that we accomplished the evaluation of Monika Flašíková-Beňová's and Pavol Frešo's billboards on the basis of the statements of 91 surveyed individuals, whereas 100,829 voters actually decided who would the Governor of the Bratislava Self-Governing Region be in the 2nd round. Even this representative opinion poll does not offer one hundred percent validity of the research with real election re-

sults, and it is processed by research companies with dozens of researchers and according to testimonies of 1,000 respondents. Our task was not to achieve a statistical quantity, but the quality of scientific research.

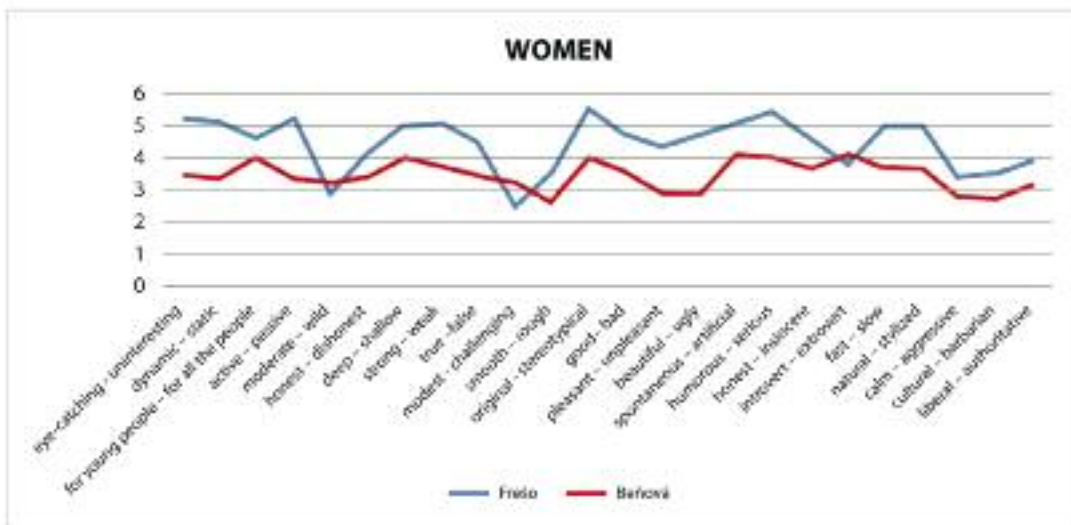
One of the factors contributing to the more positive assessment of the Monika Flašíková-Beňová billboard could have been gender preference due to the fact that the questionnaire was completed more by men (52) than women (39).

Another factor leading to the more positive assessment of the Monika Flašíková-Beňová billboard (45) could have been the demographics of the respondents. In fact, she is one year older than Pavol Frešo (44), but visually looks younger, which might have been more congenial for younger respondents, since the average age of all respondents in the survey was 36 years.

Finally, we believe that despite the positive perception of the Monika Flašíková-Beňová billboard, the result of the election for this self-governing region could also have been affected by party allegiance, since the candidate represented political party SMER-SD, which is not preferred in the Bratislava region. It should also be noted, that we conducted the perception of political billboards by Slovak voters in the election campaign for the self-governing region through questionnaires that surveyed individuals completed for us online. It is possible, that this method of communication is preferred more by voters of the political party SMER-Social Democracy, than voters of SDKÚ- Democratic Party.

Figure 2 shows significant results slightly different than the perceived billboard female Frešo Paul and Monika Flašíková Beňová with statistical significance for all pairs of bipolar adjectives except : moderate - wild ($p = 0.392$), deep - shallow ($p = 0.152$), low - demanding ($p = 0.217$), sincere - insincere ($p = 0.222$), introverted - extroverted ($p = 0.143$), and liberal - authoritarian ($p = 0.504$).

Fig. 2: Average profiles of women the perceived billboards Frešo Paul and Monika Flašíková Beňová and statistical confrontation



Note: (1. eye-catching - uninteresting, 2. dynamic - static, 3. for young people - for all the people, 4. active - passive, 5. moderate – wild, 6. honest - dishonest, 7. deep - shallow, 8. strong - weak, 9. true - false, 10. modest - challenging, 11. smooth – rough, 12. original - stereotypical, 13. good - bad, 14. pleasant - unpleasant, 15. beautiful - ugly, 16. spontaneous - artificial, 17. humorous - serious, 18. honest - insincere, 19. introvert - extrovert, 20. fast - slow, 21. natural - stylized, 22. calm - aggressive, 23. cultural - barbarian, 24. liberal - authoritative.)

Based on the above-mentioned findings, it can be said that within the research set of men (N=55) and the research set of women (N=36), Monika Flašíková-Beňová's billboard was perceived more positively than Pavol Frešo's. Nevertheless, Figures 1 and 2 reflect the fact that women's research group looking at the Monika Flašíková - Beňová billboard with a more reserved aspect fixated positive connotations than it was for men. The results indicate that the perception of a research group (N = 91) are different in view of the differentiation of the gender of the target group.

7. Conclusion

Based on the given research results, which are a part of a wider-ranging scientific study focused on political marketing, we can conclude that the perception of the billboards of the central candidates of the second round of elections for the offices of the self-governing region in 2013 is significantly marked by the differing perceptions of the research group of potential voters in the Bratislava region.

One of the factors influencing the positive evaluation of Monika Flašíková-Beňová's billboard could have been gender-based, given the fact that there were more men (52) than women (39) among research participants. Another factor that needs to be taken into account when considering the positive evaluation of Monika Flašíková-Beňová's (45) billboard could have been the demography of respondents. In reality, Ms Flašíková-Beňová is only one year older than Pavol Frešo (44), however, she looks younger, which could have been perceived more positively by younger respondents, as the average age of all research participants was 36 years. Last but not least, it can be suggested that, despite the positive perception of Monika Flašíková-Beňová's billboard, the result of the self-governing region's elections could have been influenced by party affiliation, as Ms Flašíková-Beňová represented SMER-SD, which is not a popular party in Bratislava self-governing region.

From the above it is not possible to state any correlation between the effects of the billboards as part of the political marketing and the results in the political campaign. Monika Flašíková – Beňová's billboards, indeed, were perceived positively by voters, but, in the end, this did not actually influence the decisions of voters in the elections. These results partially support the contrary opinions of experts who argue that billboards have a lower effectiveness, as the importance generally ascribed to them. Our results, however, do not claim representativeness, but can serve as inspiration for further research studies.

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- Rozhodnutie predsedu NR SR č. 191/2013 Z. z. zo dňa 3. júla 2013 o konaní volieb do zas-

tupitelstiev samosprávnych krajov a voľby predsedov samosprávnych krajov.

[Head of the Government's decision no. 191/2013 Coll. of July 3, 2013 on holding elections for municipal councils and Heads (Governors) of self-governing regions.]

Rozhodnutie predsedu NR SR č. 359/2013 Z. z. zo dňa 11. novembra 2013 o konaní druhého kola volieb do zastupiteľstiev samosprávnych krajov a voľby predsedov samosprávnych krajov. [Head of the Government's decision no. 359/2013 Coll. on November 11, 2013 on the second round of elections for municipal councils and Heads (Governors) of self-governing regions.]

Zákon č. 303/2001 o voľbách do orgánov samosprávnych krajov a o doplnení občianskeho súdneho poriadku v znení zákona č. 335/2007 Z. z.

[Act no. 303/2001 on elections for offices in self-governing regions and on amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure, as amended by Act no. 335/2007 Coll.]