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RETORIKA NË KOMUNIKIMIN POLITIK: SHEMBULLI ALI AHMETI

**РЕТОРИКАТА ВО ПОЛИТИЧКАТА КОМУНИКАЦИЈА: ПРИМЕР
АЛИ АХМЕТИ**

**STORYTELLING ON POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: ALI AHMETI
CASE**

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Abstract

“Storytelling on Political Communication: Ali Ahmeti Case” research is aiming to explore the role and effects of storytelling in political communication. It seeks to understand how this phenomenon operates within the political atmosphere of North Macedonia. The study delves into specific political events and campaigns in North Macedonia to analyze the use of storytelling. The hypothesis is built upon the notion that storytelling in political communication can enhance the public's ability to emotionally connect with messages, thereby aiding in the more effective transmission and acceptance of political narratives. It examines how political parties in North Macedonia used storytelling after civil war in 2001 and how those storytelling strategies effect political discourse in North Macedonia. This research is focused in researching the electoral campaign of one of the biggest parties in North Macedonia “The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI)” (Bashkimi Demokratik për Integritet²), led by Ali Ahmeti elucidating how political leaders effectively employ storytelling strategies using nationalist rhetoric and symbols, and the political outcomes of these strategies. The findings could contribute to a better understanding of the role of storytelling in politics and inform the development of political communication strategies. By highlighting the effects and

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potential of storytelling in political communication, this research offers a new perspective on political communication, potentially paving the way for future research and policymaking endeavors.

Keywords: *political communication, storytelling, policymaking, nationalisem, Ali Ahmeti*

Introduction

To govern the masses, one must either give them hope or explain what kind of disaster you are protecting them from, so that they can see you as a leader and follow you. This is why tales from One Thousand and One Nights were told; stories were passed down from kings to peasants, and epics of heroes saving humanity from evil beings were narrated. Today, the storytelling tactic has adapted to the tools of the modern age. Instead of epics, podcasts are made; instead of fairy tales, motivational YouTube videos are shared. Yet the goal remains the same: to govern by giving hope to the audience, by presenting the truths we want them to see, and by getting them to believe. Storytelling has played a vital role throughout human history in transmitting knowledge, strengthening social bonds, and preserving cultural heritage. Even in the digital age, stories continue to shape human experiences and bring communities together.

Political communication has become the most important tool for managing the relationships between politics, media, and the public. In order to find the right audience and deliver the right message at the right time, we need effective political communication management. The importance of political communication is highlighted by its multifaceted impact on democratic participation and governance. It encompasses various theories such as agenda-setting and framing, which explore how information is filtered, presented to the public, and ultimately influences perceptions and behaviors.

In North Macedonia, storytelling has a significant impact on political communication, shaping political identity, voter engagement, and the overall political landscape of the country. Since gaining independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, North Macedonia has faced major challenges regarding national identity, particularly in the context of its disputes with Greece and Bulgaria. Additionally, the presence of diverse population groups within the country has increased the number of internal disagreements. This historical background has necessitated the use of storytelling as a tool for political actors to craft compelling narratives that resonate with voters, frame contemporary political issues, and mobilize emotions and collective memory to garner support and loyalty.

The first section of our research addresses the importance of political communication and storytelling. Political communication examines the forms

of interaction between political actors, the media, and the public. It plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, influencing political decisions, and maintaining the democratic order. Political communication informs citizens about government policies, campaign promises, and political agendas, thereby enabling individuals to make informed choices and enhancing the functioning of democratic processes. It also raises public awareness by encouraging individuals to participate in political processes. Through election campaigns, rallies, and media, individuals feel empowered to make their voices heard and become more actively involved.

Political communication is also a key tool in reputation management and crisis resolution. Political leaders and parties must conduct effective communication strategies during crises to maintain public trust and counter negative perceptions. This process also contributes to fostering social consensus. North Macedonia's geographical location, by bringing together members of different ethnicities and religions, has created a foundation for the coexistence of diverse ideologies—one of the most prominent being nationalism. Nationalism holds a central role in North Macedonia's political communication. Messages directed at voters often appeal to their ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds. In this context, nationalist discourse aims to evoke emotional responses from voters and steer them toward specific political goals. Leaders reinforce nationalist narratives by presenting themselves as national saviors. Our research employs a qualitative research method to analyze the role and effects of storytelling strategies in political communication, offering an in-depth examination of political events and campaigns in North Macedonia. Discourse analysis and content analysis are applied to the case studies. Content analysis is a scientific technique that enables the objective and systematic examination of texts and other materials around specific concepts and themes (Pazarbaşı & Akgül, 2021, p. 163).

This research is focused on one of the key actors, which has played significant role in the political life of North Macedonia: Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and its leader Ali Ahmeti. Additionally, the storytelling strategies employed by these actors, their discourses on social media, and the public's reactions to these strategies are examined. The sample materials of the study consist of the content published on the official Facebook pages of this political party during the election period under review. Under the leadership of Ali Ahmeti, DUI has addressed its Albanian ethnic base electoral through nationalism and have been an influential party in the political arena of North Macedonia.

The research applies a thematic and discourse-oriented content analysis method to analyze the storytelling strategies, focusing on the content published during the leadership periods of Ali Ahmeti. This research has certain limitations in terms of its subject and sample. Since Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in North Macedonia, our research focuses on the official

Facebook pages of political party and its leader. The sample is limited to DUI or more specifically to Ali Ahmeti, in order to maintain focus and avoid topic dispersion. Additionally, the study is restricted to the political posts and speeches made during the general election campaign in 2024 when The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), led by Ali Ahmeti leading the European Front coalition, secured 137,690 votes, accounting for 14.06% of the total vote share. This result translated into 18 seats in the 120-member Assembly.³

The Role of Political Communication and Storytelling

Political communication is a dynamic and interdisciplinary field that explores how political actors, institutions, media, and the public engage in the dissemination and interpretation of political messages. The field has evolved significantly with the rise of digital technologies, social media, and changing patterns of political engagement. Traditionally rooted in political science and communication studies, political communication has expanded to incorporate insights from psychology, sociology, and digital media studies (Esser & Strömbäck, 2022).

The role of political communication extends beyond the mere transmission of information; it is also about persuasion, agenda-setting, and identity construction. It influences public opinion, voter behavior, and policy-making processes, making it a critical element of democratic governance and political strategy (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018).

Political communication can be broadly defined as “the exchange of messages and meanings concerning the allocation and exercise of political power” (McNair, 2021, p. 5). It encompasses interactions between political institutions, media organizations, and citizens, mediated through various communication channels. Norris and Inglehart (2019) further emphasize the role of political narratives, arguing that political communication is not only about transmitting information but also about constructing persuasive discourses that shape public perceptions.

The scope of political communication is multifaceted, involving:

- Political actors (e.g., governments, political parties, candidates, advocacy groups)
- Media institutions (e.g., legacy media, digital platforms, social media influencers)
- Public discourse (e.g., citizen engagement, protest movements, online discussions)

This complexity has increased with the advent of hybrid media systems, where traditional media and digital platforms coexist and interact in shaping political discourse (Chadwick, 2017).

³ <https://rezultati.sec.mk/mk/parl/r>

Several theoretical approaches help explain how political messages are produced, disseminated, and interpreted:

The Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) suggests that the media play a significant role in determining what political issues receive public attention. Recent studies indicate that social media algorithms have altered agenda-setting dynamics, allowing non-traditional actors to influence political discussions (Tufekci, 2018).

The Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) explains how media and political actors shape the perception of political issues by emphasizing specific aspects of a story. Politicians and media organizations strategically use framing to control narratives, often employing emotional appeals and strategic metaphors to influence public opinion (Iyengar, 2022).

Political Storytelling and Persuasion: Recent research highlights the importance of political storytelling in shaping public attitudes. Salmon (2010) argues that storytelling is an essential tool for political persuasion, as narratives provide coherence and emotional connection to political issues. Political campaigns increasingly rely on narrative persuasion strategies, leveraging personal stories to create resonance with voters (Lahlou, 2021).

The Mediatization of Politics: Strömbäck (2008) introduced the concept of mediatization, which describes how media logic increasingly shapes political processes. In the digital era, this has intensified, as social media influencers, viral content, and online echo chambers redefine political discourse (Ekström & Westlund, 2019). The 2020 U.S. election, for example, illustrated how Twitter and TikTok played crucial roles in shaping political narratives (Enli, 2022).

Social Media and Political Polarization: The rise of platform-based political communication has transformed how political messages are disseminated. Research suggests that social media algorithms contribute to political polarization by reinforcing ideological biases and creating filter bubbles (Sunstein, 2018). This shift challenges the traditional gatekeeping role of legacy media, giving rise to alternative political influencers and misinformation campaigns (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

Disinformation and Political Manipulation: A growing body of research examines the impact of fake news, deepfakes, and computational propaganda in shaping political opinions (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Governments and political actors increasingly use bot armies and AI-generated content to manipulate public discourse, raising ethical concerns about the integrity of democratic elections (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018).

Content Analyze

Based on the fact that the Democratic Union for Integration is a right-wing Albanian nationalist party, in the 2024 elections it chose to run its candidacy as part of a coalition with parties representing other nationalities

living in North Macedonia, as well as with smaller Albanian parties. This coalition, titled the "European Front," alludes to a campaign aimed at advancing the country's European integration processes and protecting the nation from the threat of Russian influence (implicitly referring to the other Macedonian nationalist bloc as a collaborator of Russian influence). However, if we analyze the pre-election campaign of the Democratic Union for Integration, we will notice that very little attention was given to addressing citizens issues or offering solutions that would support the country's integration into the European Union. Instead, the main focus of the campaign was to evoke patriotic feelings among the Albanian electorate through nationalist rhetoric and the revival of historical Albanian moments and Albanian-Macedonian conflicts in North Macedonia. If we analyze the official page of this party during the election campaign, we will notice that since the beginning of the electoral campaign for parliamentary elections, the Democratic Union for Integration has shared almost every day at least one message which evokes feelings of nationalism among the Albanian electorate. Worth mentioning that in the 2024 North Macedonian elections, the official campaign periods were as follows:

- **Presidential Election Campaign:** The campaign commenced on April 4, 2024, and concluded on April 22, 2024, ahead of the first round of the presidential election held on April 24, 2024.

- **Parliamentary Election Campaign:** The campaign period began on April 18, 2024, and ended on May 6, 2024, two days before the parliamentary elections on May 8, 2024.

During our content analyses for Parliamentary Election, we have observed that DUI displayed a more pro-European campaign during the period when the presidential election campaign was also taking place in parallel. However, after the end of the presidential race—in which the Democratic Union for Integration's candidate, Bujar Osmani, was defeated in the first round by the Macedonian candidate Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova—DUI increased the number of posts and intensified the volume of nationalist rhetoric. If we analyze DUI's posts on a daily basis, we will notice that:

On **April 18, 2024**, DUI launched its election campaign by placing the focus on the importance of breaking the barrier between parties of different nationalities, uniting them in a coalition aimed at the country's integration into the European Union.

On **April 19, 2024**, DUI initiated its first attacks against the Macedonian nationalist party VMRO-DPMNE, accusing it of forming a union with pro-Russian and anti-Albanian parties.

On **April 20, 2024**, DUI continued its accusations against the leader of VMRO-DPMNE, Hristijan Mickoski, claiming that he seeks to return the country to the pre-2001⁴ conflict era and a North Macedonia without Albanians.

⁴ In **2001**, North Macedonia faced a brief armed conflict between the **ethnic Albanian National**

On **April 21, 2024**, DUI published an emotional video titled “The Year 2001: The Farewell Letter of a Albanian National Liberation Army Soldier to His Daughters”⁵. Also on this date, DUI publish a post with a quote from its leader Ali Ahmeti in Skopje where he warns Hristijan Mickoski to be careful with his words, because trouble begins by words and reminds him of his own military past.

During the period from **April 22 to April 25, 2024**, due to the pre-election silence and the presidential elections, DUI’s posts were more informational in nature rather than propagandistic.

On **April 26, 2024**, Ali Ahmeti re-launched the campaign commemorating the 34th anniversary of the death of the Albanian patriot Fadil Vata

On **April 27, 2024**, DUI published a propaganda video highlighting the threat of Russian influence in North Macedonia⁶.

On **April 28 and 29, 2024**, DUI continued its campaign in an organized manner by presenting its program, with a particular emphasis on European integration.

On **April 30, 2024**, Ali Ahmeti once again emphasized that their only opponent in these elections is the Macedonian nationalist party VMRO-DPMNE

On **May 1, 2024**, Ali Ahmeti once again emphasized that their platform is a European integrative platform.

On **May 2, 2024**, DUI members participated in the traditional event marking the 23rd anniversary of the declaration of the Karadak region as a liberated zone by the Albanian National Liberation Army (UÇK)⁷.

On **May 3, 2024**, during Ali Ahmeti’s speech to the citizens of Gostivar, a group of activists wearing t-shirts with the UÇK (Albanian National Liberation Army) logo appeared in the background.

On **May 4, 2024**, DUI organized a panel discussion titled “Nationalism: Exclusionary in Multiethnic States,” targeting the Macedonian nationalism of VMRO-DPMNE.

On **May 5, 2024**, DUI published a video highlighting the national achievements of Albanians in North Macedonia.

On **May 6, 2024**, DUI concluded its campaign with the commemoration of UÇK commander Tahir Sinani.

Liberation Army (Official name: Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare – UÇK) and Macedonian security forces. UÇK demanded more rights for Albanians, including language equality and fair representation. The conflict lasted several months and ended with the **Ohrid Framework Agreement**, which granted greater rights to minorities and helped prevent civil war.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/12Lg8a6JF98/>

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1AKQTkKRFj/>

⁷ In 2001, during the armed conflict in North Macedonia, the Albanian National Liberation Army (UÇK) declared the **Karakak region** a “**liberated zone**”, claiming control over it and rejecting Macedonian state authority there. This move aimed to pressure the government for greater rights for ethnic Albanians. The region, near the Kosovo border, was strategically important. The conflict ended later that year with the **Ohrid Framework Agreement**, which granted more rights to Albanians and ended the UÇK’s military actions.

Suggested Visual Evidence

Date	Post	Message Type	Evidence
April 18, 2024	Launch of campaign - Focus on interethnic cooperation	Integrative/European	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI · 18 Apr 2024 · 0 Ali Ahmeti nga Fronti Europian: U thyen barrierat e fundit, vendi të ecë përpara BDI.mk Ali Ahmeti nga Fronti Europian: U thyen barrierat e fundit, vendi të ecë përpara - Bashkimi Demokratik Për Integrim
April 19, 2024	First attack on VMRO DPMNE	Nationalist	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI · 19 Apr 2024 · 0 BDI: Mickovski kërkon rikthimin e vendit para 2001-shit, një Maqedoni pa shqiptar BDI.mk BDI: Mickovski kërkon rikthimin e vendit para 2001-shit, një Maqedoni pa shqiptar - Bashkimi Demokratik Për In...
April 20, 2024	Continues attacking VMRO DPMNE	Nationalist	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI · 20 Apr 2024 · 0 Ali Ahmeti nga Shkupi: Mati fjalët Mickovski, se fjalë mbas fjalë nis belaja BDI.mk Ali Ahmeti nga Shkupi: Mati fjalët Mickovski, se fjalë mbas fjalë nis belaja - Bashkimi Demokratik Për Integrim
April 21, 2024	Farewell Letter of an UÇK Soldier	Emotional/Nationalist	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI · 21 Apr 2024 · 0 Viti 2001, letra lamtumirëse e ushtarit të Ushtrisë Çlirimtare Kombëtare vajzave të tij. Fronti është amaneti! VOTO · 21 Apr 2024 · 0 #fronti · #bashkia · #JO_Rusisë · #PO_Europës! BDI.mk Viti 2001: Letra e UÇK-së në letërkopje
April 22-25, 2024	Presidential Elections	Informational	
April 26, 2024	Commemoration of Fadil Vata	Nationalist/Historical	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI · 26 Apr 2024 · 0 Ahmeti kujton Fadil Vatën, në 34 vjetorin e vdekjes së tij BDI.mk Ahmeti kujton Fadil Vatën, në 34 vjetorin e vdekjes së tij - Bashkimi Demokratik Për Integrim

April 27, 2024	Propaganda video warning against Russian influence	Nationalism	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI · 27 Apr 2024 · 🌐 Rusia nuk ka vend në shtëpitë tona, në lagjet tona, në vendbanimet tona, në vendin tonë, por as edhe në rajonin dhe kontinentin tonë. Kemi nevojë për Front të fuqishëm evropian për ti bërë ballë instalimeve të politikave proruse në vendin tonë dhe për ta siguruar përkrahësin tonë euroamerikanë. VOTO 🗳️ 🇷🇺 JO Rusisë, PO Europës! 🇹🇲 Një Kryeministër për të gjithë 🇹🇲 Marrëveshje Komitete Ekonomike #FrontiEuroplan 🇪🇺 🇹🇲 🇹🇲 #bashkë 
April 28-29, 2024	Program Presentation	Information	
April 30, 2024	Attacking VMRO DPMNE	Nationalism	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI · 30 Apr 2024 · 🌐 Ali Ahmeti në Çair: Ne kundërshtar e kemi VMRO-në, votuesit e opozitës shqiptare të votojnë Frontin Evropian  bdi.mk Ali Ahmeti në Çair: Ne kundërshtar e kemi VMRO-në, votuesit e opozitës shqiptare të votojnë Frontin Evropian...
May 1, 2024	Program Presentation	Informational	
May 2, 2024	Ceremony of anniversary marking Karadak as a liberated zone by UÇK	Nationalism	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI · 2 May 2024 · 🌐 Video pamje nga manifestimi tradicional për shënimin e 23 vjetorit të shpalljes së Karadakut zonë e lirë nga Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare. 

May 3, 2024	Speech in Gostivar with UÇK logo in background	Nationalism	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI was live. 3 May 2024 · (Drejtëpërdrejt) nga takimi me qytetar në komunën e Gostivarit 
May 4, 2024	Panel discussion about nationalism	Political	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI was live. 4 May 2024 · (Drejtëpërdrejt) nga panel diskutimi me temë i organizuar nga Fronti Europian "Nacionalizmi, përjashtues në shtetet multietnike" 
May 5, 2024	Video with national achievements of Albanians in North Macedonia	Nationalism	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI 5 May 2024 · Të gjitha të arriturat i bëjmë bashkë sepse vetëm të bashkuar jemi më të fortë. Sot në shkollë ligjerohet për UÇK-në, Kryeministrin e parë shqiptar, gjuhën shqipe, Rrëtimin kombëtar, kryeparlamentarin e parë shqiptar, korridorin B, universitetet, administratoret, institucionet, antitaresimi në NATO, e shumë e shumë arritje të mëdha që i bëjmë bashkë në dy dekadat e fundit. Por kemi akoma punë për të bërë deri në integrim Europian, të bashkohemi edhe rreth këtyr synimeve fisnik dhe bashkë t'i dalim. VOTO JO Rusisë, PO Europës! Në Kryeministri për të gjithë Marrëveshje Korriçë Ekonomike #FrontiEuropian #Bashkia 
May 6, 2024	Conclusion of campaign with tribute to Tahir Sinani	Nationalism	Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim - BDI 6 May 2024 · Nuk harrohet për jetë të jetëve Tahir Sinani! Video pamje nga shpallja e shtatores së tij në Bajram Curr të Tropojës që do të ruajë të paprekshëm kujtimin për heroizmin e tij brez pas brezi. 

If we take under consideration the public posts of DUI in its official page in Facebook during parliamentary elections, we can consider that DUI's campaign in the 2024 parliamentary elections was overwhelmingly dominated by nationalist rhetoric, utilizing historical symbols, events tied to the Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA), and direct attacks on VMRO-DPMNE. Despite the pro-European slogans and the coalition name "European Front," the published content clearly prioritized emotionally mobilizing the Albanian electorate through nationalism rather than focusing on EU integration or citizen-centered issues.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that storytelling remains a powerful and strategic tool in political communication, particularly in complex multiethnic societies like North Macedonia. Through the case study of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and its leader Ali Ahmeti, it became evident that nationalist narratives and emotionally charged symbols are systematically employed to reinforce collective memory, shape political identity, and mobilize electoral support.

The content analysis of the 2024 election campaign reveals a deliberate shift in rhetorical strategies - from European integration discourse to emotionally evocative nationalist messaging - especially after the presidential election phase. This transition underscores how storytelling is not static but responsive to political needs, audience sentiment, and electoral calculations. By invoking past conflicts, heroic figures, and national pride, DUI effectively constructed a narrative of ethnic solidarity and political legitimacy aimed at maintaining its influence among the Albanian electorate.

Ultimately, this study highlights the dual role of storytelling in political contexts: as both a communicative method for persuasion and a mechanism for shaping political reality. While it can serve as a unifying and motivational force, it also carries the risk of deepening ethnic divisions if not accompanied by inclusive and forward-looking messaging. For political actors and communication strategists, understanding and ethically employing storytelling can enhance civic engagement, strengthen democratic participation, and foster more meaningful connections between leaders and constituents.

Future research could expand on this work by incorporating voter perception analysis, exploring alternative political narratives, and comparing storytelling strategies across different parties and ethnic groups within North Macedonia.

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