

## Chapter 8

# The Political Marketing Strategy of Dealing With the COVID–19 Pandemic: A Case Study for the Countries of the Balkan and the Black Sea Regions

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### ABSTRACT

*The present work seeks to construct a framework for analyzing political marketing strategies and tools in crises. The case study focuses on the marketing strategy and communication management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the cases of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Kosovo, Romania, Republic of Serbia, and Turkey. The first section attempts a bibliographic review of the basic concepts of political marketing, the concept of crisis, and the evidence of the basic model on which the analysis is based. Then, the cases are presented in detail in the light of political marketing, strategies, and tactics used. The chapter jointly analyzes the marketing strategies of the countries in dealing with the pandemic through assessing their stance in terms of 1) threat, 2) opportunity, or 3) ignoring the urgency of the situation. The results and comparative analysis between the countries are presented in the discussion section.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The proposed chapter seeks to build and use a framework for analysis of strategies and marketing tools of political crises. The whole approach is based on the notion that political marketing is not targeted exclusively on the crisis, but instead is the broader political marketing strategy of a political organization in the context of elections and political competition. The proposed approach contributes to revisiting the role of political marketing in the state and the public sector in the view of a post-pandemic era.

The research is a case study for the countries in the Balkan region and the wider area of the Black Sea focusing on their marketing strategy and communication management of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research aims to record and describe the various strategies as implemented by different countries, in terms of how they communicated (or not) the crisis of the pandemic and what political marketing strategy they chose to follow to communicate the urgency of the situation, the measures and the results of the crisis to their audience, the citizens.

### **Setting the Scene: Crisis as a Political Phenomenon**

The concept of crisis consists of three basic components: the minimum time for action or reaction, the lack or ambiguity of information and the existence of a threat to resources in the natural, social, or economic-political environment (Heath, 1998). Crisis management itself has three main points, which constitute potential obstacles or dangers for the immediate response to it: the transmission of the “crisis” signal, its recognition, and its transformation into action.

Each crisis follows a certain process of development, which is briefly described with a three-step model: the manifestation of a phenomenon, its treatment, and the appearance of the consequences. The adopted action on the steps concern on the one hand the phenomenon itself but on the other hand probably its (medium or long term) effects. A crisis, which starts from the point where the warning signs for its coming (if any) gradually appear, changes at the turning point, where it manifests and proceeds through its evolution and temporal power to reach its final weakening.

The process of development of a crisis follows four phases: the warning or precursor phase of the crisis, the phase of its genesis, the active phase, and the phase of recession (Heath, 1998). According to Heath, the first phase consists of two, in essence, categories of indications: the first category includes the warning indications of the cause of the phenomenon, while the second category includes the warning indications of the consequences of the phenomenon which also act as indicators for the magnitude of the possible crisis. The importance of the existence and recognition of the warning phase of a crisis is great, because from the moment the first signs appear, the process of dealing with the crisis begins. With the manifestation of the operative cause of a crisis, its possible adverse effects also take place.

The next phase, i.e., the genesis of the crisis begins from the beginning of the manifestation of the phenomenon and ends with its end, as it manifests itself. However, it is possible for a crisis to be affected and reinforced by secondary phenomena that cause secondary crises. These secondary phenomena arise directly from the consequences of the catalyst effect. The phase of the genesis of a crisis is usually the shortest in time of all the other phases, but it is the most serious and indicative for the treatment and the projection of the first consequences, as then the characteristics of the phenomenon that causes it are formed. During this phase, emergencies may arise, as then the phenomenon displays its most extreme values and thus becomes the most difficult to handle phase, since managers do not fully consider its characteristics.

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