

A Study on the Use of Photography as a Public Relations Tool in the 2019 Presidential Election in Sri Lanka

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This research study examines the manner in which the three main candidates of the Sri Lankan presidential election held on 16th November 2019 have used photography as a tool in their election campaigns. In ancient tribal societies, the leader was selected based on one's physical strength and prowess. When societies began to gradually civilise and social creatures were increasingly enriching themselves with knowledge, mere physical strength was deemed inept to obtain state power. With the intervention and participation of the individual in the political mechanism, leaders began to recognise his/her importance and commenced the practice of more soft and diplomatic approaches to acquiring and maintaining state power, that eventually led to the origin of the political concept termed democracy. As it is a statutory requirement of democratic societies in the present-day to involve the participation of the general public, different processes and tools are increasingly being used to conduct public relations. Thus, public relations processes have become indispensable factors in the functioning of the current political arena. This can be identified as the reason for the inclusion of the new discipline of political public relations in academia. As a result of global digitalization and the advancement of technology, visual methods have become formidable forces that create change in human perception and consciousness than ever before. Accordingly, photography holds significant value as a tool in political public relations. In this study, data was gathered through interviews and via a content analysis of the photographs that were shared by each candidate on their official Facebook pages during the time period extending from the date of submission of nominations to the date on which election results were officially declared. Hence, by the analysis of such data via a qualitative research design, conclusions were derived pertaining to the means across which photography has been used as a public relations tool in the field of politics with reference to the 2019 Sri Lankan presidential election.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, Politics, Public relations, Photography, Presidential election