

# **The Impact of Photographs as a Public Relations Tool on Building Political Images; A Study Based on the Sri Lankan Presidential Election In 2019**

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From ancient times the rulers of a country use different strategies and tactics to protect their state power. The leader of a democratic social system can be seen to adopt very subtle public relations measures to maintain goodwill, trust and long-term relations with the public. The concepts of political communication and political marketing are commonly used here. Especially the candidates conduct their election campaign in a planned manner subject to those concepts. It uses a variety of public relations tools such as posters, cutouts, billboards and photographs, advertising on radio, television, newspapers, social media, public meetings, etc... Of these, a photograph has the ability to express a direct idea in a very short period in the communication process. The posture, environment, angle of the photo and position of the appearing person in the photograph are being given crucial support to building a candidate's image. Hence photographs occupy a special place among the public relations tools for building political image in political communication. That is why photograph has become an essential tool in modern social media platforms for the success of election campaigns. The problem of this research is how the photograph has been used as a public relations tool to build images of political candidates in Sri Lankan election campaigns. The objectives of this research are to study the importance and necessity of using photographs as a public relations tool in political communication and to study how the photograph has been used to build political images in social media campaigns in Sri Lanka. Research data collection and analysis were done through interviews and content analysis under a qualitative research methodology. The sample of the study was the Sri Lankan presidential election in 2019 and analyzed selected photographs used in the Facebook social media campaigns of two of its main presidential candidates, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna and Sajith Premadasa of the United National Party. The campaign leaders of advertising agencies, photographers, and political commentators who were involved in the 2019 election were interviewed. The research findings were highlighted that the use of photographs as a public relations tool in political communication to build political image successfully, to win public favor and belief, use a variety of photographic techniques subject to a particular theme, for electoral victories, etc. The research concludes that there are several ways in which photographs can be used as a public relations tool to build political images in Sri Lankan election campaigns; the widespread use of portraits photographs, the use of photographs under various themes related to Sri Lankan culture, and use attractive tag lines representing future governance policies with matching photographs are most outstanding of them.

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