Political Marketing
and Political Communication:
the relationship revisited

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Political Marketing: a definition

Harrop (1990) perceives political marketing as being not just about political advertising, party political broadcasts and electoral speeches but covering the whole area of party positioning in the electoral market. Kavanagh (1995, 1996) sees political marketing as electioneering, i.e. as a set of strategies and tools to trace and study public opinion before and during an election campaign, to develop campaign communications and to assess their impact. A similar view is expressed by Scammell (1995).

Maarek (1995) conceptualises political marketing as "a complex process, the outcome of a more global effort implicating all the factors of the politician's political communication" (p. 2) and emphasises that "'political marketing' is the general method of 'political communication', one of its means" (p.28). He considers the introduction of marketing in politics as an outcome of "the elaboration of a policy of political communication…a global strategy of design, rationalisation and conveyance of modern political communication" (p. 2).

As a visual aid for his use of terminology, Maarek (1995), provides figure 1 (p. 28):

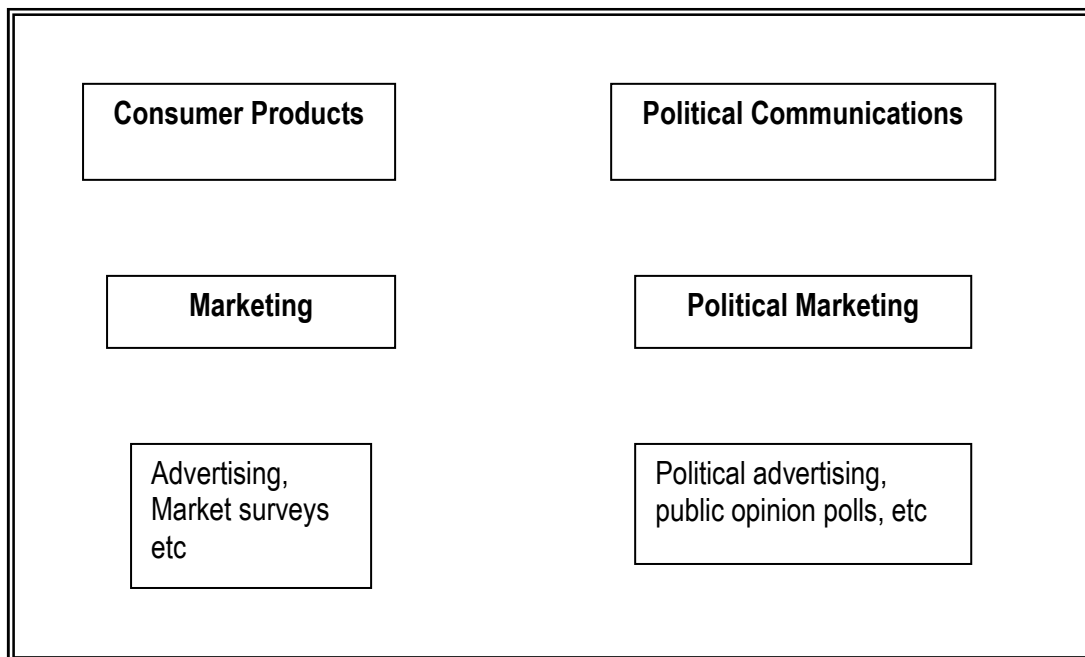| Consumer Products	Political Communications
Marketing	Political Marketing
Advertising, Market surveys etc	Political advertising, public opinion polls, etc

Figure 1. Commercial and political marketing: two parallel strategies (adapted from Maarek).

One terminological inconsistency should be noted though. In the aforementioned figure, Maarek appears to equate a company's consumer products with a political party's political communications. Such a parallel cannot be drawn, as a party's "product" consists not of its political communications but of: a) its ideological platform and its set of policy proposals, b) the party leader, the candidates and party officials and c) party members in general (for a more detailed analysis see Butler and Collins, 1994 and 1999).

In Maarek's view, political marketing has become an integral and vital component of political communication. In his words: "Political communication…encompasses the entire marketing process, from preliminary market study to testing and targeting" (p. 28). It should be noted that Maarek admits that the main areas of application of political marketing are image-making campaigns and election campaigns.

Lock and Harris (1996) point out that "political marketing is concerned with communicating with party members, media and prospective sources of funding as well as the electorate" (p. 21) while Wring (1997) defines political marketing as "the party or candidate's use of opinion research and environmental analysis to produce and promote a competitive offering which will help realise organisational aims and satisfy groups of electors in exchange for their votes" (p. 653).

O' Cass (1996) argues that the use of marketing "offers political parties the ability to address diverse voter concerns and needs through marketing analyses, planning, implementation and control of political and electoral campaigns" (p. 48). Taking this one step forward he argues that "the central purpose of political marketing is to enable political parties and voters to make the most appropriate and satisfactory decisions" (p. 59-60).

O' Cass (1996) uses an exchange model to define political marketing. According to him, when voters cast their votes, a transaction takes place. In return for their votes, the party/candidate offers better government and policies after election. This way, O' Cass argues, marketing can be applied to political processes as it is specifically interested in how these transactions are created, stimulated and valued. Lock and Harris (1996), commenting on the exchange model, argue that it has "a great deal to offer as a working definition of political marketing" (p. 28). They note though that, as it is, the exchange definition of political marketing is

broad enough to include "everything that is conventionally regarded as political science" (p. 28).

Scammell (1999) notes that, due to the rapid expansion and the diversity of this field of science, there is still no consensus on the definition of political marketing. In her view, political marketing shares with history the desire to explain political leaders' behaviour, shares with political science the desire to understand the political processes and shares with political communication an interest in the art of persuasion.

Mainstream marketing and political marketing

The American Marketing Association "adopted" the concept of political marketing by incorporating the crucial word "ideas" in its redefinition of marketing in 1985. Thus, the AMA definition of marketing read:

"Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational objectives" (cited in Wring, 1997: 652).

Harrop (1990) finds similarities between political marketing and services marketing; a view which is also shared by Scammell (1995).

For Lees-Marshment (2001b) political marketing is the outcome of the marriage between marketing and politics and, empirically, "it represents the permeation of the political arena by marketing" (p. 693). In her view this combination provides a more complete picture of the behaviour of political parties.

Lock and Harris (1996) identify seven main differences between mainstream and political marketing:
1. unlike every other purchasing decision, all voters make their choice on the same day. Moreover, although there are similarities between opinion polls and brand shares' tracking methods, the latter are based on actual purchasing decisions while the former are based on hypothetical questions

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2. voting choice, unlike any other purchasing decision, has no direct or indirect individual costs attached to it.

3. voters have to live with the collective choice even though it may not have been their preference

4. in elections winner takes all, especially in countries such as the UK where the electoral system is "first past the post".

5. political parties and candidates are complex intangible products which the voters cannot unbundle and thus they have to decide on the totality of the package

6. in many countries (this applies to the UK as well) it is very difficult to form a new and successful party

7. in most mainstream marketing situations, brand leaders tend to stay in front

Kotler and Kotler (1999) also add that the political arena, unlike the commercial world, is highly charged with ideas, emotions, conflict and partisanship. Moreover, O' Shaughnessy (1999) points out that the use of negative advertising does not apply to mainstream marketing.

Lock and Harris (1996) conclude that political marketing is at a "craft" stage and they find the assumption that there is direct transferability of mainstream marketing theory to political marketing "questionable" (p. 23). They claim that political marketing has to develop its own frameworks by adapting the core marketing literature and develop its own predictive and prescriptive models.

As Kotler and Kotler (1999) point out, "conscious marketing only promises to maximize the candidate's potential…[A]pplying standard marketing techniques to political campaigning will at least ensure that the campaign's planning is systematic, efficient, and voter oriented. Marketing can promote the most effective use of scarce resources, generate valuable information for both the candidate and the voters, and promote greater responsiveness in the political process" (p. 17-18).

The usefulness of political marketing

Lock and Harris (1996) note that political scientists perceive political marketing "in the context of political communications in the immediate pre-election period" (p. 27). Similarly, Butler and Collins (1996), argue that political scientists have defined political marketing too narrowly.

Scammell (1999) points out that from the perspective of political scientists, political marketing is located in the field of campaign studies and, although it offers a useful vocabulary and typology, they disagree that it provides an adequate theoretical framework for understanding the campaign process. On the other hand, Harrop (1990) argues that "a marketing perspective offers a fresh slant on understanding electoral change and that marketing techniques have…improved the quality of political communication in British elections" (p. 277). In his view, political marketing can be useful in assessing the role of party images in electoral choices. This aspect has been overlooked by political science which is usually preoccupied with policies and ideologies. Political science, by placing emphasis on conflicting interests, also overlooks political marketing's concern with parties' and voters' shared and mutual interests.

O' Shaughnessy (2001) notes that some political scientists have been completely negative towards the concept of political marketing. But, a small group of them have embraced it by pointing out its distinctive strengths which are not accessible through political science theory. On a similar note, Lees-Marshment (2001a) argues that political marketing analysis could help explain party behaviour and predict its consequences. Thus, it has the potential to advance the understanding of political behaviour.

Moreover, as Butler and Collins (1999) emphasise, political science focuses on institutional relationships and the policy-making process, and thus, political marketing can be useful by focusing on campaign strategy and management. The already existing body of marketing knowledge and technical expertise can also broaden the understanding of political motivation and behaviour.

A new role for political marketing: the permanent campaign

Scammell (1995) argues that the blurring of boundaries between governing and permanent campaigning could lead to the engineering of consent. She also notes the worrying fact of political consultants' participation "into the inner sanctum of government" (p. 14). Still, she counterargues that the application of the marketing concept in politics may result in politics becoming more democratic. Political marketing can improve the quantity and quality of information flows from the electorate to parties and candidates, thus making them more sensitive and responsive to voters' needs. At the same time, it improves the channels of communication from politicians to the electorate and even more to every specific segment of voters. Thus, Scammell (1995) concludes that "'political marketing' provides a rational way for parties or candidates to behave in conditions of competitive mass democracy" (p. 18-19).

O' Shaughnessy (2001) argues that through the concept of the permanent campaign, political marketing has become "the organising principle round which policy was constructed" (p. 1048). For Smith and Hirst (2001) this development signals that political marketing has moved to the era of strategic marketing and, thus, it is not just a short-term tactical device mainly for gathering information in the run-up to elections, but a longer-term permanent process which aims to ensure continued governance.

Similarly, Lees-Marshment (2001a) puts forward a broader theoretical concept: that of comprehensive political marketing. She argues that this new concept views political marketing as applicable to the whole behaviour of a political organisation. In her words, it is about "not simply how [parties] campaign, or how individual candidates organise, but how parties design their "product". Analysis is made of behaviour at the beginning through to end of an electoral cycle (not just the election campaign) and includes the leadership, MPs (and candidates), membership, staff, symbols, constitution, activities such as party conferences and policies" (p. 1075).

Political Communication: a definition

In an overview of the field of political communication in the UK, Franklin (1995) points out the broadness of character, the range and the lack of clarity of what falls into the concept of political communication. Franklin, in an effort, to operationalise this vast field, provides the following, very comprehensive and detailed, definition:

"The field of political communication studies the interactions between media and political systems, locally, nationally, and internationally" (p. 225). Franklin argues that political communication focuses on the analysis of:
   a) the political content of the media
   b) the actors and agencies involved in the production of that content
   c) the impact of political media content on the audience and/or on policy development
   d) the impact of the political system on the media system
   e) the impact of the media system on the political system

Commenting on that definition, Franklin (1995) emphasises that it "will need to accommodate even further diversity, expressing the varied analytical approaches, assumptions, and disciplinary backgrounds of communication scholars" (p. 226). These backgrounds range from political science to history, from cultural theory to sociology and to social psychology.

Political Marketing and Political Communication

Scammell (1999) notes that "the political communications literature…tends to treat political marketing as only one aspect of broader processes" (p. 720). According to her, political communicators perceive political marketing as "a response to developments in media and communication technologies" (p. 720) and tend to view modern politics as intertwined with the media. The emergence of non-ideological "catch-all" parties and the role of the media as an autonomous major actor in the political process trouble political communication scholars who emphasise the potential consequences for civic engagement with politics and voice concerns over the quality of communication output and its influence on the democratic system as a whole.

In Scammell's (1995, 1999) view, marketing's unique contribution is the introduction of strategic concern regarding the electorate's wants and needs. The incorporation of strategy in election campaigning influences goals, priorities, policies and party behaviour. At the same time, this "strategy" element is a very serious threat to democratic processes. Scammell (1995) notes though that political marketing should be discerned from propaganda as the former involves reciprocity which the latter lacks.

Emphasis on strategy introduces a new focus, which shifts away from the use of promotional techniques and deals with the overall strategic objectives of parties and candidates. According to Scammell (1999), this new focus "effectively reverses the perspective offered by campaign studies/political communications approaches. Political marketing is no longer a subset of broader processes: political communications becomes a subset of political marketing, tools of promotion within the overall marketing mix" (p. 723).

Lees-Marshment (2001b) argues that political communication focuses on the role of long-term communication while political marketing is more comprehensive binding together campaigning, political communication, market intelligence, product design and product promotion.

Butler and Collins (1994, p. 21) present the structural characteristics of political marketing as follows (figure 2):

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                  Structural characteristics                  │
│                                                              │
│                                                              │
│   The product:                                               │
│                        ❑   person/party/ideology             │
│                        ❑   loyalty                           │
│                        ❑   mutability                        │
│                                                              │
│   The organisation:                                          │
│                        ❑   amateurism                        │
│                        ❑   negative perception of marketing  │
│                        ❑   dependence on volunteers          │
│                                                              │
│   The market:                                                │
│                        ❑   ideologically charged             │
│                        ❑   social affirmation                │
│                        ❑   the counter-consumer              │
│                                                              │
│   Process characteristics:                                   │
│                        ❑   style versus substance            │
│                        ❑   advertising and communications standards │
│                        ❑   news and media attention          │
│                        ❑   political polls                   │
│                        ❑   tactical voting                   │
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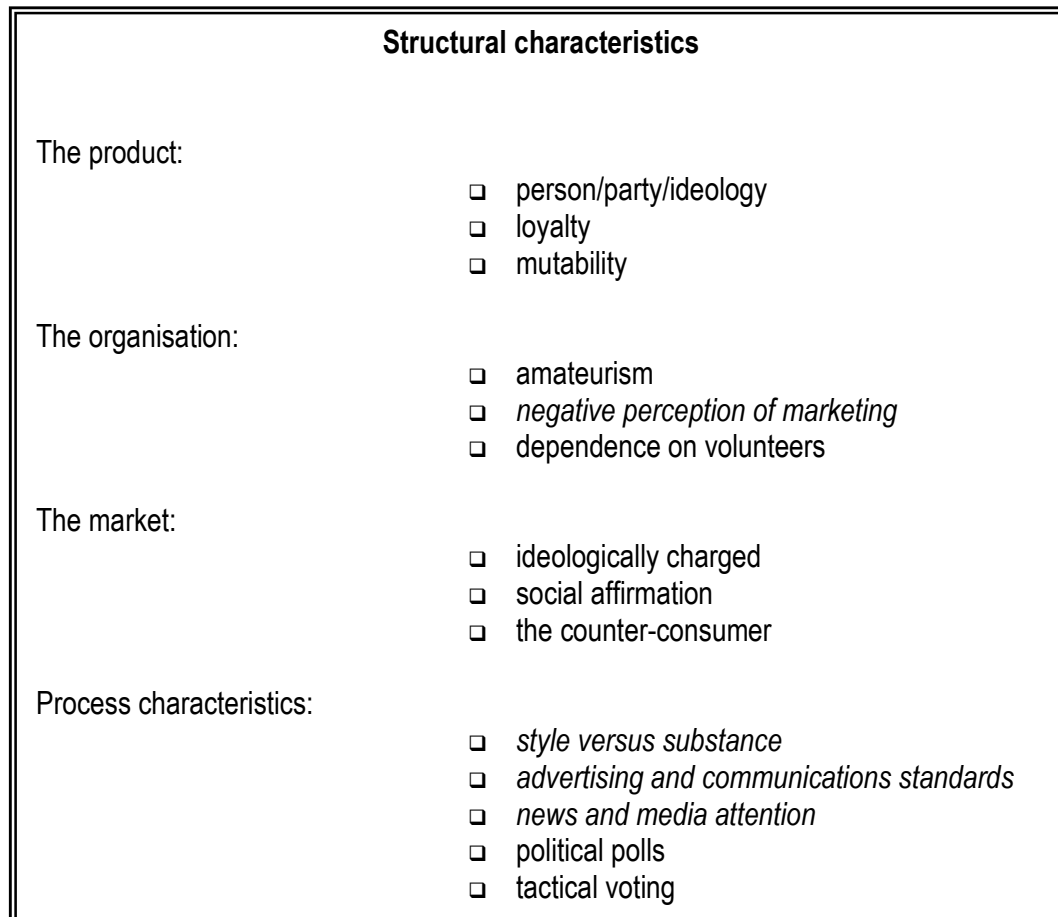
Figure 2. The structural characteristics of political marketing

Through the prism of the aforementioned arguments it can be claimed that political communication can offer guidance to political marketing on how to improve its negative perception, on how to make its outcomes more substantial to voters, on how to improve its standards and on how to attract media attention.

The aforementioned analysis shows quite clearly the "shift" in the focus and range of the concept of political marketing, which has taken place in the past decade. From being a set of theoretical and practical tools for the successful conduct of election campaigns, political marketing has expanded to a permanent strategic element of governance. Thus, from being a subset of a party's electoral communication, it has now grown so much that it has "annexed" political communication as one of its components.

Of course that is how political marketers perceive it. Political communication scholars clearly have a much different perception of the field. According to them, political communication is much wider in scope, focusing on the totality of

communications and interactions taking place within the political process and is not just interested in voter behaviour and campaign studies.

The "Americanisation" fear

Butler and Collins (1996) note the predominance of the Anglo-American experience in the political marketing literature while Plasser et al (1999) point out the fundamental differences in the institutional contexts of political marketing between Europe and the US. More specifically they note the following six domains of difference:

1) the electoral system
2) the system of party competition
3) the legal regulations of election campaigns
4) the media system
5) the national political culture, and
6) the degree of modernisation in society

Plasser et al (1999) argue that, although the institutional context of political competition is different between Europe and the US, there are structural trends which show that their political marketing processes are becoming similar. Though their research they found that the majority of European political consultants "regarded political marketing practice in the United States as a role model" (p. 96). Moreover, they believed that "if there is a European style of political marketing, then its core is a modification of the American model" (p. 96).

Commenting on their findings, Plasser et al (1999) emphasise that the diffusion of US political marketing techniques in Europe is not a linear process leading to a uniformity of European election campaigning. Apparently, political consultants in Europe use certain US techniques after modifying them in order to meet the requirements of their respective national context.

Wring (1996) explains this transformation and professionalisation of campaigning as part of a process of strategic change from the part of political parties. The phases of this development are "propaganda", "media marketing" and "political marketing". Moreover, he emphasises that "the adoption of marketing strategies does not necessarily mean the dilution of party ideology" (Wring, 1997: 660). Baines et al (2001) consider the "americanisation" of political campaigning in

Europe as a potential future occurrence if US political consultants operating in Europe export methods without customising them to the local European environment and context.

It is interesting to note that similar fears of "Americanisation" have been expressed for the field of political communication as well. Mancini (1999) has argued that the recent technological developments in telecommunications may "homogenise" voter-manipulating political communication practices. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) do not reject such views but claim that the increasing participation of the media in the political process may not necessarily result to a "corruption" of political institutions and to their replacement by the media. Moreover, other scholars such as Gibson and Rommele (2001) claim that the modernisation of electoral campaign strategies is a necessary and proactive effort for the future survival and relevance of political parties and reflects their responsiveness to their changing external environments.

Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) argued that the adoption of US-style campaign practices and tools by European parties does not lead to an "Americanisation" of European politics as these practices are shaped in relation to the cultural, social and institutional environment of each country [what Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (1996) call a "transmutation" of practices].

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