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## **Political Marketing: A Conceptual framework**

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- The article presents a broad overview of the concept of political marketing and its significance in the contemporary era of information revolution and democratic resurgence.
- The article provides meaning, definition and various dimensions of political marketing as a concept and method and differentiates it from mainstream marketing practices. The article also attempts to analyze the origin and development of the concept in different political and social contexts and its usage as a powerful instrument in election campaigning and policy making.
- The article explains the eight main functions of political marketing including product function, distribution function, cost function, communication function, new management function, fund raising function, parallel campaign management function and internal cohesion management function.
- The article also explains how the functions of political marketing are effectively applied on the electoral market and government markets.
- The article finally examines the success and failure of political marketing in creating public opinion in favor of the party. Here examples are taken from different countries including both democratic and non-democratic countries.

## **Political Marketing: A Conceptual framework**

**Dr. Sudha Menon**

Political marketing is a relatively new terminology in mainstream political science literature. Political marketing implies the usage of marketing tools, techniques and methods in political process. In other words, political marketing is the outcome of the marriage between marketing and politics. As an activity and method, it reflects the penetration of the political space by marketing. Political advertising, Celebrity endorsements, involvement of professional consultants and campaign managers, online campaigning, mobile phone canvassing, segmentation, micro targeting etc are some of the methods extensively used in political marketing.

Though political marketing is increasingly used in democratic political systems in which mass support is significantly important to sustain power; military rulers also use marketing strategy to build their branded image. The influence of professional marketing has affected the working style of political parties. Parties became more market oriented and began to frame their programs and policies in tune with opinion polls and market surveys. Information revolution and globalization have played a vital role in changing the pattern and content of traditional political campaigning into one of the most professional and sophisticated marketing tactics. It is argued that if a political party implements the marketing philosophy, it will seek to meet voters needs and wants, thus producing voter satisfaction, and in doing so gain electoral support to meet its own goals.[Marshment:2006]

Against this context the article presents a broad overview of the concept of political marketing and its significance in the contemporary era of information revolution and democratic resurgence. The article provides meaning, definition and various dimensions of political marketing as a concept and method and differentiates it from mainstream marketing practices. The article also attempts to analyze the origin and development of the concept in different political and social contexts and its usage as a powerful instrument in election campaigns and policy making. The article explains the eight main functions of political marketing including product function, distribution function, cost function, communication function, new management function, fund raising function, parallel campaign management function and internal cohesion management function. The article also explains how the functions of political marketing are effectively applied on the electoral market and government markets. The article finally examines the success and failure of political marketing in creating public opinion in favor of the party. Here examples are taken from different countries including both democratic and non-democratic countries.

### **Political Marketing: Concept and Implications**

It has often been argued that the application of 'marketing' tools and instruments in politics is nothing new. This may or may not be the case, but what certainly has changed in the last 25 years is not just the magnitude of political marketing management but the belief that political actors and these include not only political parties and politicians but also governments, single issue groups, lobbying organizations, etc. not only act out but also 'think' in marketing terms; they believe that they *do* marketing management, and they try to integrate their use of marketing instruments in a coherent marketing strategy[Henneberg:2004]. Political marketing applications have changed from a communication instrument to a coherent way of managing politics, whether it policy making, election canvassing or executing decisions.

However, most political actors are far from having an integrated and sophisticated understanding of marketing applications for their political exchange situations. Political marketing management in politics has caused some 'leading' parties and candidates to adopt a simplistic and populist 'follower'-mentality, contributing to the disenchantment of the electorate and a resulting cynicism regarding politics in general.

Political marketing manifests itself in such diverse activities as focusing a campaign on the salient political issues of swing voters, through the application of sophisticated segmentation techniques a consequent voter-'customer' orientation, the application of celebrity endorsement strategies as part of an integrated marketing communication or the institution of powerful Directors of Communication[Henneberg:2004].

Because of these occurrences of marketing practice in politics, the use of marketing theory as a means of explaining these phenomena seems obvious. While political science or other related disciplines have little to say about topics such as segmentation, brand management, or strategic capability management they fit easily into an explanatory scheme that is based explicitly on

management and marketing theory. As such, political marketing is a necessary if not sufficient way of getting to grips with some modern developments of Western democratic life. It allows us to describe certain political phenomena in a way that political science would not be able to. Furthermore, as part of the established tradition of marketing theory political marketing theory can integrate a descriptive understanding of political marketing management with a prescriptive theory, i.e. one that can help political actors to apply political marketing management techniques effectively and efficiently.

## **Definitions**

According to Harrop political marketing is not just about political advertising, party political broadcasts and electoral speeches but it covers the whole area of party positioning in the electoral market. In the words of Kavanagh, political marketing is 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.

Maarek conceptualizes political marketing as “a complex process, the outcome of a more global effort implicating all the factors of the politician’s political communication” and emphasizes that “‘political marketing’ is the general method of ‘political communication’, one of its means”. 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, rationalization and conveyance of modern political communication. 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. 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”. 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”. 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 realize organizational aims and satisfy groups of electors in exchange for their votes”[Harris and Kolovos:2004]

O’ Cass (1996) argues that the use of marketing “offers political parties the ability to address diverse voter concerns and needs through marketing analyzes, planning, implementation and control of political and electoral campaigns” Harris and Kolovos: 2004]. He further argues that “the central purpose of political marketing is to enable political parties and voters to make the most appropriate and satisfactory decisions”. O’ Cass 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.

According to Scammell, 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' behavior, shares with political science the desire to understand the political processes and shares with political communication an interest in the art of persuasion[Harris and Kolovos:2004].

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 organizational objectives" (Wring, 1997: 652).

Harrop finds similarities between political marketing and services marketing; a view which is also shared by Scammell (1995). For Lees-Marshment (2001) 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 behavior of political parties

Political marketing is identical with the use of persuasive techniques in campaigns to promote both politicians and their policies. The borrowing of professional communication tools, such as advertising and public relations is believed to epitomize the concept of political marketing, as underlined by Kavanagh (1994:8) in his observation, "...parties are like businesses seeking to promote their products: one seeks votes, the other sales". However, Maarek gives a broader aspect. He emphasizes that political marketing includes evaluation and re-design of policy and electoral strategy in the light of studies of the electorate's concerns. Thus political marketing of whom they are addressed to. It encompasses the entire marketing process, from preliminary market study to testing and targeting.

### **Origin & Development of political marketing**

Kelley (1956) is generally credited with the first use of the term political marketing. The US literature identifies John Beckley, a member of the campaign team around Thomas Jefferson as one of the first political consultants, though similar roles can no doubt be identified much earlier in other societies. The rise of political marketing in the recent past has been attributed to the development of an investigative press, declining party loyalty, and changes in the political and electoral systems. In particular, scholars have identified the expansion of the media, particularly television as having had a significant impact. There is evidence to suggest that political marketing has contributed to improved communication between the politicians and voters. Especially apparent in the popular and academic literature on both political

marketing and political communication is the occupation with image and how much or little it affects the voter. Often the phenomenon of image in politics is said to have risen because of television. However, image has almost as many meanings as the number of people who use it combined concepts from consumer behavior and political science to create a model of voting behavior in political marketing terms. So far it has only been tested in a primary election in the USA, so its applicability outside such settings has yet to be shown. Most of the literature is concerned with what marketers would view as tactical issues, though Butler and Collins (1996) show the impact of strategy and its importance in governing the direction of the campaign. Most of the electoral markets of the West are mature, the players are established and the positions are set [Harris:2006].

### **Political marketing and mainstream marketing**

Marketing itself is a form of management or approach used primarily by business organizations. It has evolved to include the design and promotion of a product to ensure that the goals of the organization, the prime one being to make profit in the case of a business, are met. Marketing is not just about selling, or, in political terms, campaigning [Henneberg: 2004]. The difference between marketing and selling is more than semantic. Selling focuses on the needs of the seller, marketing on the needs of the buyer. Selling is preoccupied with the seller's need to convert his product into cash; marketing with the idea of satisfying the needs of the customer by means of the product and the whole cluster of things associated with creating, delivering, and finally consuming it." The current marketing-philosophy focuses on how firms can satisfy customers - and adopts what is called a market-orientation - as this is deemed the most effective way to meet the firms' goals (see Drucker 1954: 37). If the firm offers what customers want, customers are most likely to buy the product and so the firm makes profit.

There certain differences between political marketing and mainstream marketing practices which include:

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.
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 it is very difficult to form a new and successful party with the help of marketing alone
7. In most mainstream marketing situations, brand leaders tend to stay in front.
8. Political arena, unlike the commercial world, is highly charged with ideas, emotions, conflict and partisanship.
9. The use of negative advertising does not apply to mainstream marketing.

### **Functions of Political marketing**

Functions of political marketing are pre-requisites for successful political marketing management. According to political marketing theorist, there are 8 generic functions of a successful political marketing which include the following:

1. **Product Function:** In political marketing practice, there should be an exchange between political parties and electorate in the electoral market. Like mainstream marketing each political party has to offer some product which they wanted to sell in the market. Here party wants to market its *product* which is the promise of a good government. In some cases, the product may be image of the candidate, an ideology or certain specific foreign policies. Hence the entire marketing process is designed to market the product. In USA, the main product function of Democratic party was to sell *Obama Brand* and a good governance based on change.
2. **Distribution Function:** The distribution function refers to the conditions regarding the availability of exchange offer to the exchange partner. The function has two aspects- campaign delivery and offering delivery. The campaign delivery function provides the primary exchange partner- the electorate- with access to all relevant information about the political product. This includes the dissemination of information regarding crucial party policies and programs, placing the candidates in right channels, making sure that medium of distribution fits the ideology of the party etc.
3. **Cost Function:** One of the main functions of mainstream marketing is to sell a product which is cost effective compared to other products in the market so that customer gets greater monetary satisfaction. In political marketing, cost function refers to the management of attitudinal and behavioral barriers of voters through calculated campaign strategies. The voter should receive all the information regarding the product without spending money for it.
4. **Communication Function:** Communication involves the function of informing the primary exchange partner of the offer and its availability. It is often seen as the heart of political marketing. For a political party, it implies, providing political content, political

ideas and future programs but also aiding the interpretation and sense making of a complex political world. Often the communication function involves simplification of political messages, concise political stand etc. The communication function interacts with the campaign delivery aspects of the distribution function-the latter provides the medium while the former defines the content. The communication function prescribes a dialogue with the exchange partners – a multidirectional flow of information and shared agenda setting.

5. **News Management Function:** This function is closely linked to communication function. But news management function is targeted to secondary exchange partners or intermediaries of which media is an important part. In other words it is the management of publicity of the candidate and party. Public relation activities, media management, online advertising campaign management etc are news management functions. In the era of communication revolution news management plays a vital role in success of political marketing.
6. **Fund Raising Function:** In mainstream marketing fund raising is not an issue. But political marketing management cannot survive without fund raising. In fact the success of other functions largely depends on fund raising function. In order to provide the political actor with appropriate resources, a distinct fund raising function needs to be addressed. A political party depends to a varying extent on membership fee, donations, etc.
7. **Parallel Campaign Management Function:** This function describes the requirement of co-coordinating the campaign management activities of a political party with those of parallel organizations. Coordinated and synergic use of managerial activities allows for a more efficient deployment of campaign resources. Furthermore, the use of parallel campaigns and the endorsements by other organizations can increase the trustworthiness of the political messages.
8. **Internal Cohesion Management Functions:** Besides the external management aspects, internal structure and functions of the political party also needs to be managed professionally. The function is concerned with relationship with party members and activists as well as the spoke persons. The internal marketing functions play a critical role in creating internal stability and therefore the credibility of the party regarding its outside image.

### **Political Marketing: An Appraisal**

Though political marketing management is an integral part of elections campaigns in democracy, scholars question the increasing use of professionalism in democratic process

which in turn lead to de-politicization of democracy itself. They argue that political marketing is at a “craft” stage and the direct transferability of mainstream marketing theory to political marketing is questionable. 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..applying 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”. However it is not easy to win in election only with marketing. For the party needs a consistent ideology and action plan which is convincing to the electoral market.

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