

Political Marketing: Lessons for Political Science

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Introduction

What is political marketing? There is no single unambiguous answer from the field. There is a broad and rapidly expanding international literature connected by a focus on electioneering and political communications. However, as yet, there is no consensus about a definition of political marketing, nor even that it is the most appropriate label for the common focus of study. Various titles compete to describe the common object, sometimes 'political marketing' or 'political management',¹ 'packaged politics',² 'promotional politics'³ or more broadly 'modern political communications'.⁴ They reflect the diverse perspectives and youthfulness of the field. Less than 10 years ago, 'political marketing' was a phrase seldom found in academic journals outside the USA. Even there, the study of role of political consultants and political campaigning styles was in its infancy.⁵

However, the last few years have seen the emergence of a coherent subset of the broad field. A group of scholars, based in Britain, Germany and the USA, accepts the label 'political marketing' and is attempting to establish it as a distinctive subdiscipline, generating regular conferences and a specific literature.⁶ It is developing cross-disciplinary political/marketing/communication perspectives not simply to explain the promotional features of modern politics but as tools of analysis of party and voter behaviour. The main focus of this article will be precisely on the work of this political marketing subgroup.

¹ 'Political management' is the most common descriptive label in the US trade literature of political consultants. See R. Faucheux, (ed.), *The Road to Victory: the Complete Guide to Winning in Politics* (Washington DC, Campaigns and Elections, 1995).

² See B. Franklin, *Packaging Politics* (London, Edward Arnold, 1995).

³ See A. Wernick, *Promotional Culture* (London, Sage, 1991).

⁴ See P. Maarek, *Political Marketing and Communication* (London, John Libbey, 1995).

⁵ The 1980s were the significant years for the growth of the US academic study of political consultants and campaigns. See R. Agranoff (ed.), *The New Style in Election Campaigns* (Boston, Halbrook, 2nd ed., 1976); S. Blumethal, *The Permanent Campaign* (New York, Simon Schuster, 1982); K. H. Jamieson, *Packaging the Presidency* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984); F. Luntz, *Candidates, Consultants and Campaigns* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1988); L. Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants* (New York, Basic, 1981). Before then accounts were dominated by journalists and practitioners, with the exception of two seminal texts: S. Kelley, *Professional Public Relations and Political Power* (Baltimore, John Hopkins, 1956); and D. Nimmo, *The Political Persuaders: the Techniques of Modern Election Campaigns* (Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1970).

⁶ See *European Journal of Marketing* 30 10/11 (1996), 1–188; S. Henneberg and N. O'Shaughnessy (eds), *Readings in Political Marketing* (New Jersey, Praeger, forthcoming); B. Newman, *Handbook of Political Marketing* (Thousand Oaks CA, Sage, forthcoming).

Political marketing claims to offer new ways of understanding modern politics. It says that 'political marketing' is increasingly what democratic parties and candidates actually do to get elected and that this is different from earlier forms of political salesmanship. It claims that marketing is a specific form of economic rationality that offers insights into the strategic options and behaviour of parties. It shares with history a desire to investigate and explain the behaviour of leading political actors, and thus its focus extends from campaigning into the high politics of government and party management. It shares with political science a desire to understand underlying processes, and therefore to create explanatory models of party and voter behaviour. It shares with political communications the key continuing interest in persuasion. Above all, it claims that political marketing is important. The use of marketing changes relationships between leaders, parties and voters. It has consequences for democratic practice and citizen engagement. Its influence cannot be confined to the limits of the formal election campaign periods, nor can it be reduced to the details of appearance, packaging and spin doctoring, the common trivia of much media attention.

The bulk of this article then will address the strengths and weaknesses of those claims. It will concentrate on current directions in political marketing research, and its insights for political science. We examine in particular work with a British focus. Some of this is so recent that it is only now emerging in publications and in post-graduate research. First, however, it is helpful to situate the emerging self-conscious subdiscipline of political marketing in relation to the broader field. We will offer a brief summary of the various multi-disciplinary perspectives before moving to look at the origins of the study of political marketing.

Political Marketing: Research Perspectives

Campaign Studies and Political Marketing

Researchers from predominantly political science backgrounds generally locate marketing within 'campaign studies'.⁷ Harrop and Miller identified the study of campaigns, as opposed to elections,⁸ as a major gap in the political science literature, notwithstanding accounts of individual elections, exemplified by the Nuffield series and more recently the *Political Communications* series.⁹ Electioneering is the starting point and the central concern is with a particular type of modern campaigning, evident across much of the democratic world, which is 'largely ... a response to new technology and the importation of skills of professional communicators'.¹⁰ Campaign studies, as opposed to the study of

⁷ See S. Bowler and D. Farrell (eds), *Electoral Strategies and Political Marketing* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1–2.

⁸ M. Harrop and W. Miller, *Elections and Voters: a Comparative Introduction* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1987), p. 240.

⁹ D. Butler and D. Kavanagh have collaborated for the Nuffield series *The British General Election of ...* for every election from February 1974 onwards. Butler with various co-authors has written for the series since 1951 (published in each case by London/Basingstoke, Macmillan). The series *Political Communications: the General Election Campaign of ...* has been running since the first publication in 1982 under various editors, starting with R. Worcester and M. Harrop, then I. Crewe and M. Harrop and most recently I. Crewe, B. Gosschalk and J. Bartle, *Political Communications: Why Labour Won the General Election of 1997* (London, Frank Cass, 1998).

¹⁰ D. Kavanagh, *Election Campaigning: the New Marketing of Politics* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995), p. 1. See also D. Butler and A. Ranney (eds), *Electioneering* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992).

individual campaigns, originated in the USA where researchers traced the change in campaigns from a relatively amateur craft towards a profession.¹¹ Similar developments were observable in Europe. In the pre-television era, campaigns were characterized by great land armies of volunteers, canvassing, leafleting, organizing meetings, and cajoling the faithful to turn out at elections. They were labour-intensive, low technology affairs with decision-making centres dispersed across the network of full-time regional and constituency agents. By contrast the modern campaign is capital intensive, relying on a much smaller base of volunteers, much tighter central direction of campaign operations, increased reliance on non-party experts from media and marketing, far less face-to-face communication with voters and increased targeting of floating voters.¹² There is agreement that marketing is significant in modern campaigns, as evidenced by the increasing use of marketing and public relations consultants and agencies, but disagreement that marketing is adequate as a general theoretical framework within which to understand campaign processes. Bowler and Farrell, for example, agree that marketing lends vocabulary and a typology of actions to the study of campaigns. However, they criticize the marketing literature for being 'more an exercise in rationalising success or failure in hindsight' than in offering theoretical tools.¹³ 'Political marketing' here then, to the extent that it is used at all, is effectively reduced to a subset of campaign studies.

Political Communications and Political Marketing

The political communications literature also tends to treat political marketing as only one *aspect* of broader processes.¹⁴ Here too, political marketing is seen primarily as a response to developments in media and communication technologies. There are similar justifications also for the study of campaigning: the increasing importance of elections in the context of partisan dealignment, increasingly volatile electorates, and increasing importance of media, especially television, in setting the agenda for public debate and ultimately influencing voter choices. There are differences, though, in emphasis. While 'campaign studies' stress the increasing significance of campaigns for *election results*, political communications accent consequences for *citizen engagement* with the democratic process as a whole. The manner in which campaigns are conducted is considered as important as the result,¹⁵ with the capacity to silence or empower sections of society, foster support or alienate citizens from

¹¹ Nimmo (*The Political Persuaders*) is considered the first scholar to make this substantial point. Subsequent studies of US campaigning trace the rise of professional political consultants and the consequences for campaigning, selection of candidates and party organization. See K. Johnson-Cartee and G. Copeland, *Inside Political Campaigns* (1997); J. Trent and R. Friedenberg, *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices* (New Jersey, Praeger, 1995); J. Thurber and C. Nelson, *Campaigns and Elections American Style* (Boulder CO, Westview, 1995). See also footnote 5.

¹² For a typology of modern versus pre-modern campaigns see D. Farrell, 'Campaign Strategies and Tactics', in L. LeDuc, R. Niemi and P. Norris (eds), *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective* (Thousand Oaks CA, Sage, 1996).

¹³ Bowler and Farrell, *Electoral Strategies and Political Marketing*, p. 6.

¹⁴ See J. G. Blumler, D. Kavanagh and T. J. Nossiter 'Modern Communications versus Traditional Politics in Britain: Unstable Marriage of Convenience', in D. Swanson and P. Mancini (eds), *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy* (Westport CT, Praeger, 1996), pp. 49–72.

¹⁵ P. Mancini and D. Swanson 'Introduction', in D. Swanson and P. Mancini (eds), *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy* (Westport CT, Praeger, 1996), p. 1.

governments. Political communication scholars tend to see modern politics and media as inextricably entwined, the activities, intentions and processes of the one inevitably affecting the other.¹⁶ The core questions concern the quality of communications, and are set, often implicitly, within a framework of anxiety about the stability of democratic systems.

The most influential recent political communications work on elections is a comparative volume edited by Swanson and Mancini, *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy*. The editors, drawing on Giddens¹⁷ and Luhmann,¹⁸ develop the idea of 'modernization' as the most appropriate theoretical framework for understanding trends in electioneering practice. The most basic attribute of modernization is increasing social complexity, characterized by the development of 'specialized and competing subsystems', which undermine traditional structures of social inclusion and aggregation (church, political parties, trade unions and so on). The major consequences for political communications are twofold: first, the development of increasingly non-ideological 'catch-all' parties,¹⁹ and second, the transformation of media from essentially a channel of communication to an increasingly autonomous power centre and a major actor in the campaigning process. The significance of the first, is that parties become more open to and dependent on the techniques of campaigning and political persuasion to attain political office, and of the second, 'campaigning for office and governing are increasingly tailored to the needs and interests of the mass media'.²⁰ Swanson and Mancini's modernization thesis has become the touchstone for virtually all subsequent study of the globalization or 'Americanization' of campaigning.²¹

The current political communications agenda is driven by research in the USA, which reflects contemporary obsessions with voter apathy and the 'epidemic' of cynicism towards politics. Some of the most influential recent work locates the causes of apathy and cynicism in the specifics of political communication: the 'transmogrification' of political discourse into the rhetoric of advertising,²² the increasing fashion for negative political advertising,²³ political campaigning that is 'empty ritual',²⁴ styles of news reporting that

¹⁶ Political communications as a discrete and consciously cross-disciplinary field of study began to emerge in the late 1950s in the USA predominantly. See D. Swanson and D. Nimmo (eds), *New Directions in Political Communications* (Beverly Hills CA, Sage, 1990). It is premised on the belief in the prime importance of communication above all other fields of inquiry, and, following Aristotle, the natural affiliation of politics and communication.

¹⁷ A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, Polity, 1990).

¹⁸ N. Luhmann, *Macht* (Stuttgart, Enke, 1975).

¹⁹ O. Kirchheimer 'The Transformation of Western Party Systems', in J. La Palombara and M. Weiner (eds), *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University, 1966).

²⁰ Mancini and Swanson, 'Introduction', p. 11.

²¹ See D. Kavanagh 'New campaign communications: consequences for British parties', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 1 (1996), 60–76; R. Negrine and S. Papathanassopoulos, 'The Americanization of political communication: a critique', *Harvard Journal of Press/Politics*, 1 (1996), 45–62; M. Scammell 'The wisdom of the war room: US campaigning and Americanization' *Media, Culture and Society*, 20 (1998) 251–75.

²² K. Jamieson, *Dirty Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992).

²³ S. Ansolabehere and S. Iyengar, *Going Negative* (New York, Free, 1995).

²⁴ L. Bennett, *The Governing Crisis: Media, Money and Marketing in American Elections* (New York, St. Martins, 1992); T. Gitlin 'Bits and Blips: Chunk News, Savvy Talk and the Bifurcation of American Politics', in P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks (eds), *Communication and Citizenship* (London, Routledge, 1991).

reduce politicians to soundbites,²⁵ are increasingly cynical about politicians' motivations²⁶ and elevate political strategy, tactics, personality and performance above attention to substantive issues.²⁷ The combined effect of modern campaigning and reporting styles is succinctly summarized in the title of Cappella and Jamieson's book, *Spiral of Cynicism*.

The political communications approach occupies a pivotal position for virtually all campaign-related research. To a significant degree, it is leading the agenda. Typically, the political science response is to attempt to quantify and measure campaign and media effects: how is the media agenda set, how does the campaign in the media influence the knowledge, attitude and partisanship of voters.²⁸ Typically, the political marketing response is to address the normative issues raised through a discussion of marketing ethics.

Marketing Management and Politics

The third main research perspective on political marketing comes from management and marketing disciplines. The seminal author is Philip Kotler, who argues that election campaigning has an inherently marketing character and that the similarities of salesmanship in business and politics far outweigh the differences.²⁹ The thrust of much of Kotler's work has been to expand the practical applicability of marketing disciplines from profit-driven commercial enterprises to non-profit organizations.³⁰ The political market, as the commercial market, contains sellers and customers who exchange 'something of value': the parties/candidates offer representation to customers who in turn offer support (votes). Kotler and like-minded scholars from management disciplines³¹ sought not simply to apply marketing frameworks for analysis of campaigns but to proselytize its key concepts as a way of improving campaigning efficiency. As Kotler put it: 'Marketing strategy is at the heart of electoral success because it forces a campaign to put together, in a very short period of time, a winning relatively stable coalition of diverse and sometimes irreconcilable groups'.³²

²⁵ D. Hallin 'Sound bite news: television coverage of elections', *Journal of Communication*, 42(1992), 5–24.

²⁶ T. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

²⁷ J. Cappella and K. Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: the Press and the Public Good* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁸ Important recent studies of media/campaign effects include: M. Just, A. Criegler, D. Alger, M. Kern, W. Darrell and T. Cook, *Crosstalk: Citizens, Candidates and the Media in a Presidential Campaign* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996); W. Miller, *Media and Voters* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1991); P. Norris, J. Curtice, D. Sanders, M. Scammell and H. Semetko, *On Message* (London, Sage, 1999); S. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994).

²⁹ P. Kotler, 'Business marketing for political candidates', *Campaigns & Elections*, 2 (1981), 24–33.

³⁰ P. Kotler, *Marketing for Non-profit Organisations* (Prentice Hall, 2nd ed. 1982); P. Kotler and S. Levy, 'Broadening the concept of marketing', *Journal of Marketing*, 33 (1969), 10–15.

³¹ See, e.g. G. Mauser, *Political Marketing* (New York, Praeger, 1983); A. Shama 'The marketing of political candidates', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences*, 4 (1976), 764–77; A. Steinberg, *Political Campaign Management: a Systems Approach* (Lexington MA, D. C. Heath, 1976).

³² Kotler, 'Business marketing for political candidates', p. 25.

The emphasis on strategy is the prime distinctive contribution of the marketing literature, a point highlighted by Harrop in his early article on political marketing in Britain.³³ It shifts the focus from the techniques of promotion to the overall strategic objectives of the party/organization. Thus it 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. This is a key premise of the emerging sub-discipline of political marketing. The prime drivers of change in campaigning practice and communications are not the media, nor American influence (important as these are), but campaigners' strategic understanding of the political market.³⁴

The Study of Political Marketing

Stanley Kelley is credited with the first use of the term 'political marketing' in his pioneering study on the increasing influence of professional persuaders in politics.³⁵ As used by Kelley, 'marketing' essentially meant persuasion and was an updating of a familiar theme since World War I, that mass democracy required new instruments of social control. At first 'political marketing' was used more or less interchangeably with 'propaganda'. The purpose of the activity was the same, mass persuasion. The new 'marketing' label reflected partly a quest for a more neutral term, propaganda being discredited, and partly the historical observation that professionals from the commercial marketing industry, especially advertising, were increasingly involved in political persuasion.

Accounts of the evolution of political marketing typically start with the USA³⁶ and highlight landmark presidential campaigns.³⁷ There is the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon contest, in which Kennedy advised by public relations specialists, apparently won the candidates' debate on television and lost it on radio. Despite the absence of hard evidence of effects on voters, the 1960 debate,

³³ M. Harrop, 'Political marketing', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 43 (1990) 277–91.

³⁴ A fourth key perspective on political marketing comes from the 'inside' accounts of practitioners, politicians and journalists. These are valuable resources for students of political campaigning. There is no space here to list more than a few of most significant works. For the USA: R. Faucheux, *The Road to Victory*; M. Matalin and J. Carville, *All's Fair* (New York, Random House, 1994); J. McGuinness, *The Selling of the President* (New York, Trident, 1969); D. Morris, *Behind the Oval Office* (New York, Random House, 1997); J. Napolitan and M. Fitzwater, *Call the Briefing*; T. White, *The Making of the President 1960* (London, Jonathon Cape, 1962). For Britain: B. Bruce, *Images of Power* (London, Kogan Page, 1992); M. Cockerell, *Live from Number 10* (London, Faber and Faber, 1988); P. Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*; J. Haines, *The Politics of Power* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977); C. Hughes and P. Wintour, *Labour Rebuilt: The New Model Party* (London, Fourth Estate, 1990); S. Hogg and J. Hill, *Too Close to Call: Power and Politics – John Major in No. 10* (London, Little, Brown, 1995); M. Hollingsworth, *The Ultimate Spin Doctor: the Life and Fast Times of Tim Bell* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1997); N. Jones, *Soundbites and Spin Doctors* (London, Casell, 1995); N. Jones, *Campaign 1997* (London, Indigo, 1997); R. Tyler, *Campaign!* (London, Grafton, 1987); D. Wilson, *Battle for Power* (London, Sphere, 1987); Lord Windlesham, *Communication and Political Power* (London, Jonathon Cape, 1966).

³⁵ S. Kelley, *Professional Public Relations and Political Power*.

³⁶ It is generally considered that marketing, as a distinctive practice in politics, originated in the state of California, around the time of World War I. See L. Bogart 'Opinion research and marketing', *Public Opinion Quarterly* XXI (1957), 129–40.

³⁷ See Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants*.

chronicled by journalist Theodore White,³⁸ entered campaigning mythology as proof of the impact of television and the power of image over substance.³⁹ Nixon's 1968 triumph with the aid of Madison Avenue advertisers, including Roger Ailes, marked the beginning of the 'real influence of marketing' in presidential politics, according to other accounts.⁴⁰ The increased reliance on commercial advertisers is the key characteristic in most accounts that defines whether marketing is influential in politics. As Harrop says of Britain: 'The 1980s were pivotal years in the development of political marketing in Britain. When the Conservative Party hired Saatchi's in 1978, it was headline news. By the end of the 1980s it would have been just as big news if a major party had chosen not to use professional marketing expertise.'⁴¹

The initial interest then in 'political marketing' was in the possibility that it offered an increasingly scientific armoury of persuasive weapons to political leaders. This was encouraged by the claims of some marketers themselves. Mauser, for example, introduced his book on political marketing with the claim that it was the 'science of influencing mass behaviour in competitive situations'.⁴² This strand of attention to persuasion fits smoothly in the line of scholars studying the engineering of consent opinion this century.⁴³

However, since the early 1980s there began to develop two other influential strands of investigation into political marketing. One comes from marketing scholars, their debate over the marketing concept and its applicability to non-commercial organizations. The other, influenced by propaganda studies, asked whether marketing brought something genuinely new to politics or whether it was simply a version of age-old propaganda activities allied to modern technology?⁴⁴ Did the term 'political marketing' denote any unique properties or contain any analytic value, or was it simply a convenient shorthand description of modern persuasive techniques? In a nutshell 'why all the fuss about political marketing'? Both strands looked to the development of marketing theory for answers.

Keith⁴⁵ described the three-stage development of modern business practice as: production-sales-marketing. Although criticized in detail,⁴⁶ it is generally accepted that business practice has moved from a production and sales-dominated approach to a customer-oriented or marketing focus. Marketing began to dominate commercial thinking from the 1960s onwards, gradually eclipsing the product and sales-oriented approaches, in which a business would manufacture its products and then rely upon aggressive sales to find and persuade customers. Marketing, rather than production or sales, became the cornerstone of business philosophy because of what the Chartered Institute of

³⁸ T. White, *The Making of the President*.

³⁹ See Maarek, *Political Marketing and Communication*, pp. 11–21.

⁴⁰ B. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy* (Thousand Oaks CA, Sage, 1994), p. 2.

⁴¹ Harrop, *Political Marketing*.

⁴² Mauser, *Political Marketing*, p. 5.

⁴³ W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, Macmillan, 1922); H. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York, Knopf, 1927).

⁴⁴ See N. O'Shaughnessy, *The Phenomenon of Political Marketing* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1990); M. Scammell, *Designer Politics* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1995), pp. 5–23.

⁴⁵ R. Keith 'The marketing revolution', *Journal of Marketing*, 24 (1960), 35–8.

⁴⁶ See, e.g. R. Fullerton, 'How modern is modern marketing?', *Journal of Marketing*, 52 (1988), 108–25.

Marketing described as a 'shift in market power from the seller to the buyer'.⁴⁷ The marketing literature offers numerous definitions of marketing. At the heart of them all, though, is the common core: the marketing concept and the notion of exchange. The marketing concept insists on a consumer-oriented approach that 'puts the customer at the beginning rather than the end of the production-consumption cycle'.⁴⁸ It is broadly a philosophy of business which says that companies can best achieve their objectives through customer satisfaction, and that customer satisfaction is best achieved by attending to customer wants and needs at the start, as well as the end, of the production process.⁴⁹

However, there was considerable dispute that the marketing concept was appropriate beyond the profit-seeking business sector. The difficulties lay partly in the concept itself as an abstract principle and partly with the way it had been developed as a model for analysis and practical application.⁵⁰ The marketing concept as a principle was clearly problematic for non-profit organizations. Either by constitution or accepted practice, members and activists expect to have some say in the setting of priorities of non-profit organizations, and often in the election of the governing body. Clearly, this opens up opportunities for much greater conflict about goals and priorities than exists in normal commercial companies where power devolves from ownership. The marketing concept itself is likely to be contested, and may be seen as a threat to the fundamental objectives or ideology of the organization. Where members are in conflict the likely result will be split, compromise and ambiguous objectives, unless the organization has a sufficiently strong leadership to impose clear solutions. Not surprisingly, non-profit organizations are commonly said by marketing scholars to engage in 'partial marketing', using the tools of promotion but failing to incorporate the marketing concept into product development.⁵¹

Nonetheless, at the level of theory the tide has been going with those who sought to broaden the scope of marketing into the service and non-profit sectors. The American Marketing Association officially sanctioned the broad view with its 1985 landmark redefinition of marketing, adding 'ideas' to the list of products suitable for marketing. Its new definition now 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'.⁵² The battle of principle largely won, the task then became one of adapting paradigms for the specifics of each market. General recognition that the consumer model was a 'poor fit' in politics,⁵³ has

⁴⁷ Quoted in D. Gilbert and N. Bailey, 'The development of marketing – a compendium of historical approaches', *Quarterly Review of Marketing*, 15 (1990), 6–13.

⁴⁸ M. Baker, 'One More Time – What is Marketing?' in M. Baker (ed.), *The Marketing Book* (Oxford, Chartered Institute of Marketing/Butterworth-Heinemann, 1991), pp. 3–9.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of 'needs' and 'wants' in the marketing context, see P. Kotler, *Principles of Marketing* (Prentice Hall, 3rd ed. 1986).

⁵⁰ The 'Four Ps', product, price, place (distribution of the product) and promotion became the dominant marketing mix paradigm in consumer goods but were less self-evidently appropriate for service sectors and need considerable stretching to make much sense in politics.

⁵¹ K. Blois, 'Non-profit Organisations and Marketing', in M. Baker (ed.), *The Marketing Book*.

⁵² Quoted in S. Fine (ed.), *Marketing the Public Sector: Promoting the Causes of Public and Non-profit Agencies* (New Brunswick, Transaction, 1992), p. 1.

⁵³ D. Baer 'Contemporary Strategy and Agenda Setting', in J. Thurber and C. Nelson (eds), *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, p. 50.

driven research to find a specifically political marketing framework adapted from core marketing literature.⁵⁴ The most fruitful paradigm is that of 'relationship marketing', which developed from research of service sectors in Scandinavia.⁵⁵ The current trend in political marketing research then is, not to compare the selling of politics with cornflakes, to use the old cliché, but with the selling of long-term services in mature markets.

The development of appropriate political marketing models is one of the prime areas of current research. However, the fundamental question remains, not about the specifics of descriptive or theoretical models but of the influence within politics of the marketing concept. Have parties and candidates adopted a customer-focus, putting voters at the beginning rather than the end of the policy-production process? To what extent is this possible in strong party systems with traditions of active memberships? The 'marketing concept' is the key to understanding political marketing. Without it, we are still talking about essentially a modern form of propaganda. With it, we are dealing with a transformation of political organizations and fundamental relationships between leaders, parties, members and voters.

There is room for debate about how genuinely new the marketing concept is to politics. One can find evidence of it in Britain at various times throughout this century,⁵⁶ notably in Labour's 1964 victory which Rose called the first 'rational' campaign.⁵⁷ It is neither surprise nor new that parties interested in maximizing votes should shift policies in search of support. However, the general pattern of change over this century, as described for business, may be valuable also for politics: from production (propaganda) to sales (media/advertising) to marketing (customer focus).⁵⁸ The drivers of change are similar in both politics and business, intensity of competition. Kirchheimer describes precisely as a 'competitive phenomenon' the process of conversion of European parties into 'catch-all'⁵⁹ parties. Parties in secular, welfare states were decreasingly able to rely on appeals to class, religion and ideology and increasingly forced to broaden their bases of support among diverse interest groups. In marketing terms, this general trend of weakening party allegiances represents a shift in market power from producers to consumers, precisely the change that transformed business philosophy from production to marketing. Marketing models, political marketing scholars argue, may prove to be more precise and useful analytical tools than Kirchheimer's 'catch-all party' (see below).

Current Directions in Political Marketing Research

Political marketing shares with the Downsian tradition in political science an economic perspective on politics.⁶⁰ It is clearly no innovation of political

⁵⁴ O'Cass, 'Political Marketing and Marketing Concept', p. 57.

⁵⁵ C. Gronroos, 'From marketing mix to relationship marketing', *Management Decision*, 32 (1994), 4–20.

⁵⁶ See Scammell, *Designer Politics*; and D. Wring, 'Political marketing and party development in Britain: a 'secret' history', *European Journal of Marketing*, 30, (1996), 100–111.

⁵⁷ R. Rose, *Influencing Voters* (London, Faber and Faber, 1967).

⁵⁸ See G. Smith and J. Saunders, 'The application of marketing to British politics', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 5 (1990).

⁵⁹ O. Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of Western European Party Systems', pp. 177–200.

⁶⁰ A. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, Harper and Row, 1957).

marketing to treat parties as companies and voters as consumers. However, it looks to marketing literature for refinements of the economic model. The political market is far from perfect competition and the process of exchange one that shows substantial differences with consumer purchase. Lock and Harris⁶¹ list seven clear differences of which the most important concern the product, the price and the nature of the choice. The political product, to take just one example, is complex, intangible and not easily unbundled by voters. This is a clear contrast with consumer markets where, despite preferences, consumers have remarkably homogeneous perceptions of product characteristics.⁶² Additionally, the political 'producers' themselves may dispute product characteristics, in public and right up to the point of 'sale'. One may think immediately of the Conservatives at the 1997 general election, in open conflict over European policy. It is hard to imagine a parallel in business, of company directors publicly squabbling about their product as the goods are being dispatched to the shelves.

The difficulties of precise fit between consumer and political marketing models are generally accepted in the political marketing literature. There have been two main responses from researchers. First, to classify the characteristics of the political market in an attempt to create a new industry-specific model; and second, to emphasize the significance of the marketing concept, and seek evidence of its use in campaigning and party organization practice.

1. Characteristics of the Political Market

Researchers increasingly look to service-industry 'relationship marketing' theory to develop models for politics.⁶³ Political exchange dynamics have echoes in service marketing, where the product is often also intangible, complex and not fully understood by its customers. Examples might be legal, financial, insurance and medical/health services. Marketing theory recognizes that intangible services are far more difficult to sell than physical products. Among other factors, the decision to purchase a service is likely to be a slower more thoughtful process. Private health, legal and financial services, for example, are frequently expensive purchases with long-term personal consequences. The buyer cannot physically see the product ahead of purchase, which in marketing terms means a relatively high uncertainty factor. Therefore s/he is heavily dependent on information, and depending on the cost/significance of the purchase, likely to seek out trusted information sources such as consumer watchdog media and personal recommendations from friends and colleagues. Successful marketing in these types of service sectors has found to be associated with strategies that treat sales, not as one-off purchases, but as

⁶¹ A. Lock and P. Harris, 'Political marketing – vive la différence!', *European Journal of Marketing*, 30 (1996), 21–31.

⁶² M. Holbrook, *Consumer Research: Introspective Essays on the Study of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks CA, Sage, 1995).

⁶³ N. Collins and P. Butler, 'Positioning political parties: a market analysis', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 1 (1996), 63–77; Harris and Lock, 'Political marketing – vive la différence!'; Henneberg, 'Voting Behaviour as a Special Case of Consumer Behaviour'; S. Henneberg 'Research in Political Marketing – an Overview', in S. Henneberg and N. O'Shaughnessy (eds), *Readings in Political Marketing* (Praeger, forthcoming).

'exchange relationships' where the customer invests trust (as well as money) and the producer fulfils his promises.⁶⁴

A key purpose of marketing here is to reduce uncertainty for potential purchasers through confidence-building strategies.⁶⁵ Reputation is especially important to service-suppliers because, as Bauer *et al.* put it, 'it is the only thing of substance' which they are able to promote to buyers in advance of sale.⁶⁶ The basic ways to establish confidence prior to sale are through information policy, through an externally authenticated record of achievement, and through commitments and promises that seem credible to potential purchasers. Equally, after purchase the supplier must continue to nurse its reputation if it seeks to be a long-lasting player in the market. Reputation can be relatively easily destroyed if promises are not fulfilled and the costs of re-building considerable.

There are clear similarities between long-lasting service industries and political markets, such that this is the new consensus in the study of political marketing. Political marketing students draw from the service analogy a number of key lessons for political science. The most important concerns the significance of reputation, or public image. In the service model this is not an intervening variable that colours consumers' assessments of the product. It is the prime one, the one that determines whether or not the product will be considered seriously at all.

Image has long been recognized as an important factor in politics.⁶⁷ Heath *et al.* concluded their analysis of the 1983 British election with the admission that it is 'not the small print of the manifesto but the overall perception of the party's character that counts'.⁶⁸ Recent research also is rekindling interest in leadership evaluations⁶⁹ and there is a virtual consensus that the extraordinary result of the British 1997 election stemmed in large part from the damage to the Conservatives' reputation caused by Britain's ejection from the European Monetary system in September 1992.⁷⁰ Curiously, however, political science voting models seem reluctant to build in image/reputation as a major element. The standard voting model continues to rely on party identification, issue perceptions and to a lesser extent leader evaluations. The party reputation factor, so vital to explanations of 1997, is included not as a separate and essential part of the model, but as a 'political shock', an event capable of disrupting the equilibrium of the stability of the overall model.⁷¹ Perhaps, like Popkin's drunkard, political science continues to search, not where the lost keys are most likely to be, but under the street lamps where it is easiest to see. Image is a soft variable tangled up with emotional attachments. It is less easily modelled than policy and issue perceptions or party identification. Service

⁶⁴ B. Axelsson and G. Easton (eds), *Industrial Networks: a New View of Reality* (London, Routledge, 1992).

⁶⁵ See H. Bauer, F. Huber and A. Herrmann 'Political marketing: an information-economic analysis', *European Journal of Marketing*, 30 (1996), 159–72. The authors write specifically of party strategies to increase membership, rather than voting, but the general confidence-building strategy would appear to be similar.

⁶⁶ Bauer *et al.*, 'Political marketing: an information-economic analysis', p. 170.

⁶⁷ G. Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London, 1910).

⁶⁸ A. Heath, R. Jowell, and J. Curtice, *How Britain Votes* (Oxford, Pergamon, 1985), p. 107.

⁶⁹ See H. Clarke and M. Stewart, 'Economic evaluations: prime ministerial approval and governing party support: rival models considered', *British Journal of Political Science*, 25 (1995).

⁷⁰ P. Norris, 'Anatomy of a Labour landslide', in P. Norris and N. Gavin (eds), *Britain Votes 1997* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 1–24.

⁷¹ P. Whitely, 'The Conservative Campaign', in Norris and Gavin *Britain Votes 1997*, pp. 34–46.

marketing research offers avenues out of this, by emphasizing reputation. Reputation is not so soft, is directly related to perceptions of results and perceptions of competence and credibility to deliver what is promised. As Bartle and Griffiths rightly claim, alone of all the major approaches to voting behaviour, political marketing puts image at the centre of explanations.⁷²

Harrop was the first British political scientist to pursue this lesson from service marketing.⁷³ Policy, issue and even ideological voting models suggest that voters seek parties with ideologies and policy profiles closest to their own preferences. However, they are confronted with paradox that many people may vote for one party while preferring the policies or fundamental ideology of another.⁷⁴ Thus, for example, even while voting for Thatcher's Conservatives, the British public had not converted to Thatcherite free market ideology and on key issues Labour's policies were preferred.⁷⁵ Harrop's point looked stronger still after the experience of 1997 which defied policy, issue or pocket-book models:

'Instead of attempting to reduce electoral change to sociological, economic or even policy variables, we should recognize the primacy of general political factors, specifically ratings of unity and overall governing competence of the parties. Such variables simply overwhelmed whatever benefit the Conservatives expected from an improving economy. Political professionals have always realized that perceived governing capacity is the crucial variable; it is time political science caught up.'⁷⁶

Parties/candidates, then, *must* attend to political image if they want to be serious players in the political market. This is not an optional extra, nor a simple response to media power nor an effect of American influence; it is a strategic imperative of the political market. Reputation, based on record and credible promises, is the *only thing of substance* that a party can promote to potential voters. Thus, the marketing perspective not only explains the apparent political obsession with image, it more clearly locates the significance of the media. In this view the tactics of promotion and image-building do and must respond to the specifics of media systems and reporting styles. The media are a more pervasive and active presence in politics than in any other service market, are clearly the most important channels of political information and crucial for political image. The media are significant players who complicate the exchange dynamics of the political arena,⁷⁷ compared with other markets. They do not, however, determine the dynamics. The primary exchange remains that of party/candidate-voters.

There are lessons here for research into media effects. Political science has conducted a largely frustrating attempt to show *direct* media effects on voting behaviour,⁷⁸ concluding time and again that media influence is at most

⁷² J. Bartle and D. Griffiths, 'Social-Psychological, Economic and Marketing Models of Voting Behaviour Compared', in Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, *Readings in Political Marketing*.

⁷³ Harrop, 'Political marketing'.

⁷⁴ Dunleavy and Husbands, *British Democracy at the Crossroads* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1985).

⁷⁵ J. Curtice, 'Interim Report: Party Politics', in R. Jowell, S. Witherspoon and L. Brook (eds), *British Social Attitudes: the 1987 Report* (Aldershot, Gower, 1987).

⁷⁶ M. Harrop, 'The pendulum swings: the British election of 1997', *Government and Opposition*, 32 (1997), 305–19.

⁷⁷ Henneberg, 'Voting Behaviour as a Special Case of Consumer Behaviour', pp. 71–4.

⁷⁸ For recent summaries of media effects on voting see L. Bartels, 'Messages received: the political impact of media exposure', *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), 267–86; Norris *et al. On Message*.

significant but modest. This counter-intuitive finding has encouraged research to broaden out, to seek direct influence over longer time frames, and increasingly to seek *indirect* effects. However, even here the focus has been on issue and policy agendas of the news and the indirect influence of media on political reputation is still largely neglected, despite abundant evidence of 'character assassination' in the press.⁷⁹ Clearly, the difficulties of establishing reputation are multiplied in the teeth of a consistently hostile press. Perhaps, Blair's post-1997 election note to the *Sun's* editor, thanking him for support 'which really did make the difference', was less wide of the mark than it might seem from a simple reading of voter and newspaper partisan preferences.⁸⁰ The importance of the press in the establishment of political image is highlighted in Just *et al.*'s recent research that concluded that character and issue information are inextricably entwined in voters' assessments of US presidential candidates.⁸¹

A second key insight of political marketing concerns party's long-term strategic behaviour. Political science typically links the marketing of politics to the decline of ideological cleavages, and the rise of Kirchheimer's famous 'catch-all' parties. The less clear the ideological divide, the more parties will have to rely on the techniques of marketing to manufacture difference; the party's role becoming 'analogous to that of a major brand in the marketing of a universally needed and highly standardized article of mass consumption'.⁸² Some internationally comparative research into campaigning supports the catch-all thesis.⁸³ However, students of political marketing are more reserved. Partly, this is due to the observation that the use of marketing has been pioneered by the most ideologically-committed parties, the New Right in the USA and Thatcher's Conservatives in Britain.⁸⁴ The tendency to marketing, then, is not a simple effect of the 'end of ideology'. More important, however, 'catch-all' is too blunt a description of the political market in general. Kirchheimer, in fact, accepted its limitations. 'Catch-all' did not literally mean that parties could appeal equally to all sectors of society. There were limits set by social stratification. Moreover, he accepted that catch-all was not appropriate for smaller parties, nor so evident in smaller countries.⁸⁵ Catch-all, therefore, cannot provide an adequate explanation of the entire political market. Political marketing instead looks to theories of competitive marketing strategy and market segmentation theory for alternative explanations.

Collins and Butler provide the most influential analysis here.⁸⁶ They draw upon one classic marketing typology of competitive positioning – market

⁷⁹ See C. Seymour-Ure, 'Characters and assassinations: portrayals of John Major and Neil Kinnock in *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sun*', in I. Crewe and B. Gosschalk (eds), *Political Communications: the General Election Campaign of 1992* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸⁰ See M. Scammell and M. Harrop, 'The Press' in Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, pp. 183–4.

⁸¹ Just *et al.*, *Crosstalk: Citizens Candidates and the Media in a Presidential Campaign*.

⁸² Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of Western European Party Systems', p. 192.

⁸³ Bowler and Farrell, *Electoral Strategies and Political Marketing*, p. 233–4.

⁸⁴ D. Kavanagh, 'New campaign communications: consequences for British political parties' *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 1 (1996), 60–76; O'Shaughnessy, *The Phenomenon of Political Marketing*, pp. 43–5; Scammell, *Designer Politics*.

⁸⁵ Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of Western European Party Systems', pp. 184–8.

⁸⁶ Collins and Butler, 'Positioning political parties: a market analysis'. There are various marketing models to draw from. The authors chose this because it is especially apt for relatively small, closed markets.

leader, challenger, follower and nicher – and apply it to the electoral competition in European countries. The model claims that the position each company (party) holds in the market is associated with particular strategic options. The market leader, for example, can attempt to increase its total share, either by expanding the total market (creating more voters) or expanding its share of the market (by attacking smaller and vulnerable rivals) or it can choose simply to defend its market share. Most often, Collins and Butler suggest, parties choose the defensive reinforcement strategy, as the least inherently risky.

The challenger's defining characteristic is that it attempts to depose the market leader. It may not have the second largest market share and there may be several challengers at any one time. Since it is actively attempting to become market leader it must adopt an aggressive approach. It can choose to attack the leader directly or other challengers or small and regional competitors. The chosen strategy reflects, among other things, the market structure (the electoral system) and the perceived strength of the market leader, if indeed there is clearly one. The stronger and more popular the market leader seems, the more likely the challenger to reduce product differences (for example, the British Labour Party from 1987) or to target smaller parties (Spain's Partido Popular or Ireland's Labour Party).

Nichers target a specialized segment of the market. Political examples are the green parties of France and Britain, the various language-based parties of Belgium, or regional-based parties. Mature competitive commercial markets typically show a tendency to product standardization, which in turn creates openings for niche marketing. The rising tide of the latter is associated precisely with mature markets. There are clear analogies here with developments in political markets over the last 30 years with the dramatic increase in single issue groups.⁸⁷

The attraction of marketing typologies for Collins and Butler is that they 'cut through the thicket'⁸⁸ of ideology-based political analysis. Parties, regardless of name or ideology, face similar strategic decisions depending upon their market position. Not all parties can or wish to become 'catch-all' players, and even if they want to become market leaders there may be, depending on the state of competition, alternatives to the catch-all product standardization. Moreover, the framework is fluid. Parties may rapidly move position from leader to challenger, from nicher or follower to challenger, and vice versa.

These insights of marketing – the significance of reputation and market position – apply to general strategic questions. They are valid without any need to mention the specifics of campaigning, the influx of media specialists, political consultants, spin doctors and all the general paraphernalia that usually come under the umbrella of the term 'political marketing'. Marketing scholars complain, with justification, that the strategic value of marketing approaches is almost entirely ignored by the general political science/political communications literature.

⁸⁷ J. Richardson, 'The market for political activism: interest groups as a challenge to political parties', *Western European Politics*, 18 (1995).

⁸⁸ Butler and Collins, 'Strategic analysis in political markets', p. 42.

2. Political Campaigning and the Marketing Concept

The second strand of political marketing research focuses on party organization and campaigns and seeks evidence of marketing in party behaviour. It attempts, as expressed by O'Shaughnessy, to determine 'the extent to which modern campaigns are infused with a marketing awareness, articulated with marketing tools'.⁸⁹ 'Marketing awareness' means the extent to which parties have adopted the core idea of the marketing concept, the 'customer focus', in fashioning their overall strategies. The marketed party, as opposed to the merely media-conscious party, *begins* with research and intelligence about the state of the market. 'This is something more than merely mapping out what customers say about themselves and acting accordingly'.⁹⁰ It is about *interpretation* of the customer, the uncovering of latent wants and underlying desires. It seeks to differentiate the customer base into segments in order to locate more precisely marketing opportunities. Its understanding of the customer base underpins its strategic thinking, both in positioning the party in the marketplace and in development of the policy product offering.

The strategic uses of research single out the marketed party from the simply media-conscious ones. The latter confine market research to their communication strategies, essentially to develop attractive propaganda for election campaigns. This may involve the use of more or less sophisticated marketing *tools*, of research, advertising, news management and so on, but it falls well short of the marketing concept. It is not yet the consumer-oriented marketing *approach*.

There is accumulating evidence that the adoption of the marketing concept is precisely what has been happening in US politics and to a lesser extent in Britain and elsewhere.⁹¹ A major thrust of US research now is not simply the marketing of campaigns, but marketing in governance, Reagan and Clinton providing the clearest examples.⁹² Clinton's 'third way' strategy, for which his notorious adviser Dick Morris claims credit,⁹³ is cited as an example of 'an advanced political marketing philosophy' in action.⁹⁴ Until now at least, the evidence of marketing influence of British governments is far less direct. Downing Street has not offered the equivalent of Reagan or Clinton's White House, where pollsters and professional campaign strategists are retained as the presidents' closest advisers. Nonetheless, Thatcher's Conservative Party pioneered the use of political marketing in British politics. The 'marketing of Maggie' provoked considerable media comment during her first two terms in power,⁹⁵ with much attention focused on the personal details of appearance and image, and the new

⁸⁹ O'Shaughnessy, *The Phenomenon of Political Marketing*, p. 4.

⁹⁰ N. O'Shaughnessy, 'Social propaganda and social marketing: a critical difference?', *European Journal of Marketing*, 30 (1996), p. 66.

⁹¹ Newman, *The Marketing of the President*; O'Shaughnessy, *The Phenomenon of Political Marketing*; M. Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning in Britain Since 1945* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997); Scammell, *Designer Politics*; D. Wring, 'Political Marketing and Power in the Labour Party', Paper presented to Political Studies Association, EPOP Conference, September 1995.

⁹² For the use of marketing in the Reagan presidency see Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants*; L. Bennett, *The Governing Crisis*. For Clinton, see B. Newman (ed.), *The Handbook of Political Marketing* (Thousand Oaks CA, Sage, forthcoming).

⁹³ Morris, *Behind the Oval Office*, pp. 79–88.

⁹⁴ Henneberg, 'Voter Behaviour as a Special Case of Consumer Behaviour', p. 119.

⁹⁵ See, e.g. Cockerell, *Live from Number 10*.

professionalism of party communications. Yet, the strategic influence of the marketing approach was largely missed. Commentators were struck by the gulf between Thatcher's uncompromising right-wing rhetoric and the relatively restrained manifestos of 1979 and 1983. They sought explanations in the tension between pragmatism and ideological conviction.⁹⁶ Political marketing offers an alternative account, because in all three of her elections both electoral strategy and the tenor of the manifesto matched closely the conclusions of the party's market research. It would go too far to suggest that Conservative policies were poll-driven, but no exaggeration to say that the parameters for policy and electoral strategy were developed from market research. The main significance of Saatchi and Saatchi was less their celebrated advertising and more their success in pushing the frontiers of marketing strategy into politics.⁹⁷ They effectively transformed the role of marketing specialists in British politics from technicians to strategists.

The transformation of the Labour Party, from 1987 onwards, provides the clearest evidence thus far of marketing in British politics. The difference between their much-praised 1987 campaign and the post-1987 modernization process offers a neat demonstration of the difference between the use of marketing *tools* and the adoption of the marketing *approach*. The 1987 campaign 'used media creatively' but was not driven by the marketing concept; 'otherwise the party would have attended more to the popularity of the product, that is, its policies as well as communications'.⁹⁸ Labour's 1987 campaign would be understood in the commercial sphere as 'bolt-on' marketing, 'whereby a specialized customer-conscious media department is asked to remedy the lack of attention to consumer wants in the product itself'.⁹⁹ However, Labour's post-1987 modernization might be characterized as precisely an attempt to establish a customer focus. Its considerable intra-party modernization debate was exactly what one might expect in a non-profit organization contesting the value and consequences of the marketing concept. The leadership response, to centralize power and decrease opportunities for activists' influence over policy and candidate selection,¹⁰⁰ fits exactly with what one would predict from a marketing analysis. 'New Labour' is the focus of most studies of British political marketing now emerging,¹⁰¹ unsurprisingly, given the acclaimed impact of 'Mandelsonization'.¹⁰² Wring's account¹⁰³ sketches the historical development of Labour's political communications as a three-stage process analogous to the production-sales-marketing evolution in the commercial world. He identifies

⁹⁶ D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1979* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1980), p. 64; H. Young, *One of Us* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1989).

⁹⁷ Scammell, *Designer Politics*

⁹⁸ O'Shaughnessy, *The Phenomenon of Political Marketing*, p. 2.

⁹⁹ Scammell, *Designer Politics*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ See E. Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979: Crisis and Transformation* (London, Routledge, 1994).

¹⁰¹ A. Sackman, 'The learning curve towards New Labour', *European Journal of Marketing*, 30 (1996), 147–58; A. Sackman 'Political Marketing and the Labour Party: The Development of Campaign Strategy 1983–92' PhD thesis, University of Manchester (1998); Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979*; D. Wring, *Marketing the Labour Party* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, forthcoming); Wring, 'Political marketing and party development in Britain'.

¹⁰² Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997), p. 243.

¹⁰³ Wring, *Marketing the Labour Party*.

the inter-war period as the age of mass propaganda; the rise of media campaigning under Harold Wilson and the mass availability of television; and the transition to a political marketing approach under Neil Kinnock, influenced by the example of Thatcher. A key focus for Wring is the redistribution of power within the party necessitated by the marketing approach. New Labour has brought about a 'new order' of centralized power. This is the main difference between isolated historical examples of marketing rationality in campaigns, and the modern trend for parties to transform into marketing organizations.

Sackman¹⁰⁴ develops the model of the 'political marketing organization' as a refinement of Kirchheimer's 'catch-all party' and Panebianco's¹⁰⁵ 'electoral professional' party. While research into Labour's transformation acknowledges a debt to Panebianco,¹⁰⁶ both Sackman and Shaw argue that the latter is insufficiently sensitive to the *type* of expertise introduced by the new professionals who displace the old party bosses and technocrats.¹⁰⁷ The thinking and language of the new professionals demonstrate the central role of marketing management, market research and advertising. As Shaw notes in his seminal analysis of the transformation of Labour: 'Holders of other types of expertise – for example, broadcasters, print journalists and academic specialists in communication studies, sociology and political science – were, for the most part, ignored'.¹⁰⁸ Shaw's key contribution was to stress the importance of campaigning strategy to the overall transformation of Labour. He defines the elements of Labour's 'new strategic thinking' in ways that are entirely consistent with political marketing: the conception of policy development in terms of 'positioning' the party, a model of voting behaviour that emphasized image, trust and reputation and the location of communications and promotional concerns at the heart of overall strategic thinking. However, he offers no explicit discussion of political marketing in driving these changes, preferring instead the more typical political science explanations of crises of ideology and electoral defeat. For Sackman, the new Labour Party is not just an 'electoral professional party', it is not simply an example of the 'new strategic paradigm': it is specifically a 'political marketing organization'.

The value of the marketing approach is that it helps reconcile the difficulties thrown up by ideological explanations of change. Left-wing critics of New Labour are often unsure whether 'modernization' is a de-ideologizing project, effectively the substitution of principle with electoral opportunism,¹⁰⁹ or an authentic right-wing project, effectively returning the party to the left-of-centre territory it occupied in the 1960s.¹¹⁰ This confusion was evident also among Conservative leaders, who were unclear whether to attack New Labour as still 'red' behind the mask, or unprincipled power-seekers or pale Tory clones.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Sackman, 'Political Marketing and the Labour Party: The Development of Campaign Strategy 1983–92'.

¹⁰⁵ A. Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organisation and Power* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g. Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979*, p. 215; P. Webb, 'Britain: the 1987 Campaign', in Bowler and Farrell, *Electoral Strategies and Political Marketing*, pp. 43–62.

¹⁰⁷ Sackman, 'Political Marketing and the Labour Party', p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ Shaw, *The Labour Party Since 1979*, p. 215.

¹⁰⁹ P. Anderson and N. Mann, *Safety First: the Making of New Labour* (London, Granta, 1997).

¹¹⁰ R. Heffernan and M. Marqusee, *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: Inside Kinnock's Labour Party* (London, Verso, 1992).

¹¹¹ Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, pp. 34–35.

From a marketing perspective there is no contradiction: Labour was responding rationally to changing voter concerns, and attempting to do so in a way that allowed it a distinctive competitive advantage in the electoral marketplace.¹¹²

The difference between the post-1992 options, 'one more heave' (associated with John Smith's consolidatory leadership) and the 'modernizers' 'New Labour' contrasts the sales and marketing approaches.¹¹³ The former assumed that the product was in essentially good shape and did not need further change. The party simply needed to consolidate and concentrate energy on attacking the government and would thereby reap the rewards of voter disenchantment with the Conservatives.¹¹⁴ The modernizers, however, were driven by external market research which, in their interpretation, demonstrated that voters were not convinced that Labour had really transformed and continued to distrust Labour's economic competence and links with the unions.¹¹⁵ They concluded that 'unless Labour changed radically it would win an election only in exceptional circumstances'.¹¹⁶ A marketing perspective, therefore, explains why Blair should adopt the course of accelerated transformation, despite the danger of intra-party turmoil and trade union discontent. New Labour was not the 'safety first' option of Anderson and Mann's characterization.¹¹⁷ It was a rational calculation that the electorate would not believe in Labour's change unless it was prepared to take precisely the risk that 'one more heave' was calculated to avoid: the re-opening of party wounds through public debate of Labour's identity.

Political Marketing: Weaknesses and Criticisms

Political marketing as practised has a considerable array of critics and as a study, a number of self-admitted weaknesses. These fall into five main categories: problems with agreed definitions; inadequacies of marketing explanations of electoral success; difficulties of testing marketing models; ambiguity of evidence of deliberate marketing consciousness in campaigns; and finally, normative concerns at marketing's consequences for democratic practice.

Difficulties of Definition

Virtually all the political marketing subdiscipline researchers would readily admit that there is not yet a consensus on definition. There is general agreement on the central importance of the marketing concept, but there is wide dispute about the nature of 'exchange'. Some scholars especially from marketing backgrounds object to the tendency of political scientists to view political marketing as poll-driven politics.¹¹⁸ They complain that the latter is a crude 'follower' definition that misunderstands the significance of exchange. Parties

¹¹² Sackman, 'Political Marketing and the Labour Party', pp. 284–5.

¹¹³ McVeigh, 'Political marketing and the Labour Party: 1992–97'.

¹¹⁴ A. Davies, *To Build a New Jerusalem* (Abacus, 1996), pp. 428–34.

¹¹⁵ P. Gould's post 1992 election report, cited in Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*, pp. 47–8.

¹¹⁶ D. Kavanagh, 'The Labour Campaign', in Norris and Gavin *Britain Votes 1997*, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ Anderson and Mann, *Safety First: The Making of New Labour*.

¹¹⁸ See especially, Lock and Harris, 'Political marketing: viva la difference'; and Henneberg, 'Voter Behaviour as a Special Case of Consumer Behaviour'.

do not approach their potential customers with an open slate. Normally there will be internally-negotiated limits to what they can and are prepared to offer. Political marketing, then, is more of a matching exercise; matching voter wants with the internal wants and goals of the party.¹¹⁹ Equally, however, researchers from political science backgrounds react suspiciously to what are often seen as the proselytising claims of the marketers. The notion of 'exchange' suggests an equality of interest and satisfaction that simply is not there. As Sackman puts it, 'Marketing is . . . built upon a paradox: it starts with the customer, is directed at the customer, but is fundamentally concerned with the satisfaction of the producer's own interests'.¹²⁰ At root, this is a fundamental difference of approach. Marketing as a discipline tends of its nature towards prescription. It often assumes that, ethically practised, marketing automatically brings benefits to producer and consumer alike. At its most grandiose, Henneberg argues that political marketing seeks 'a profit for society' through the establishment and maintenance of long-term party-voter relationships.¹²¹ Consumer marketers are often disgusted at the misrepresentation and attacks contained in political advertising.¹²² They frequently dismiss the much-criticized features of negative campaigning as 'unethical' or marketing misapplied. Political science students of political marketing are far less willing to brush out of definitions the more manipulative and exploitative elements. Perhaps, as Lock and Harris suggest, this represents something of a failure of marketers to understand the precise nature of the political market.¹²³

This leads into a related difficulty of transfer of marketing models to politics. There is a continuing problem of definition of the political product. It is described variously as a package of policies, an offer of representation, a style of leadership and an embodiment of political values. There is as yet no systematic investigation into what the political product is and this remains a weakness which political marketing research is only just starting to address.¹²⁴

Inadequate Explanations of Electoral Success

A marketing perspective can identify which party/candidate waged the more rational campaign. It can test campaigns against the various dimensions of marketing, from product development, positioning, market segmentation, targeting and promotion. It is possible also, through analysis of surveys and media content, to make some assessment of campaign success in achieving targets.¹²⁵ However, this falls short of causal explanations. This is generally recognized by political science scholars in the field, less so by marketing scholars who sometimes claim that marketing made the difference¹²⁶ and still less by

¹¹⁹ See Henneberg, 'Voter Behaviour as a Special Case of Consumer Behaviour', pp. 65–8 for a useful discussion of the difficulties of sustaining competitive advantage with a 'follow-the-polls' orientation.

¹²⁰ Sackman, 'Political Marketing and the Labour Party', p. 120.

¹²¹ Henneberg, 'Voter Behaviour as a Special Case of Consumer Behaviour', p. 65.

¹²² Lock and Harris, 'Political marketing: viva la difference', p. 29.

¹²³ Lock and Harris, 'Political marketing: viva la difference', p. 28.

¹²⁴ See D. Reid, 'Marketing the political product', *European Journal of Marketing*, 22 (1988), 34–47.

¹²⁵ See Norris *et al.*, *On Message*; Scammell, *Designer Politics*; Wring, *Marketing the Labour Party*.

¹²⁶ See, e.g. Newman *The Marketing of the President*.

campaign practitioners who insist that marketing 'drives the ratings'.¹²⁷ The difficulty of proving marketing and campaigning success is primarily methodological. Even where poll numbers move significantly or there is general consensus that one party's promotion was clearly more professional than its rival's, it is still almost impossible to prove cause. The business world may marvel at the brand image transformation of New Labour.¹²⁸ However, conventional political science continues to be sceptical, preferring 'the government lost it' explanations.¹²⁹ An important contribution, though, of the political marketing approach is that it focuses on the long as well as short-term campaign and on indirect as well as direct media effects.

Difficulties of Testing Marketing Models

Marketing models of voting behaviour are fundamentally a sub-category of cognitive psychology consumer models,¹³⁰ with added refinements specific to service and political markets.¹³¹ However, they have tended to be designed less for *post hoc* explanations of voting behaviour, more for practical use by candidates and parties in the development of party strategy. Newman has used them to examine candidate campaigning in the USA,¹³² but there has been no post-election testing of marketing models against more conventional political science models of voting behaviour. The testing of models, then, is a weakness in political marketing study.

Ambiguity of Evidence of Deliberate Marketing

Investigations into party use of marketing rely primarily on historical standards of evidence, drawing from a broad range of documentary and interview sources, supplemented in recent years by surveys of campaigners¹³³ and content analyses of trade literature.¹³⁴ They point overwhelmingly to the appeal of business methods and technologies in political management. The language of marketing is now the common vocabulary of US and British campaigners: 'brand image', 're-launches', 'targeting' and so on. However, the survey material, in particular, has found little direct evidence of engagement with marketing theory and less knowledge of the 'marketing concept' even where its general philosophy is

¹²⁷ See C. Arterton, 'The Persuasive Art in Politics: the Role of Paid Advertising in Presidential Campaigns', in M. McCubbins (ed.), *Under the Watchful Eye: Managing Presidential Campaigns in the Television Era* (Washington DC, Congressional Quarterly Press, 1992).

¹²⁸ See *Director Special Supplement to the 1998 Annual Convention of the Institute of Directors* (1998), p. 32.

¹²⁹ See Whitely, 'The Conservative Campaign', in Norris and Gavin, *Britain Votes 1997*.

¹³⁰ H. Himmelweit, P. Humphries, and M. Jaeger, *How Voters Decide* (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1985).

¹³¹ Henneberg, 'Voter Behaviour as a Special Case of Consumer Behaviour,' B. Newman and J. Sheth, *A Theory of Political Choice Behaviour* (New York, Praeger, 1987); D. Reid 'Marketing the political product', *European Journal of Marketing*, 22 (1988), 34–47.

¹³² Newman, *The Marketing of the President*.

¹³³ See Luntz, *Candidates, Consultants, Campaigns*; A. O'Cass, 'Political marketing and the marketing concept', *European Journal of Marketing*, 30 (1996), 45–61; F. Plasser, C. Scheucher and C. Senft, 'Is there a European style of Political Marketing? A survey of political managers and consultants', in B. Newman, *The Handbook of Political Marketing*.

¹³⁴ Scammell, 'The wisdom of the war room'.

practised.¹³⁵ I have argued elsewhere that campaigning knowledge evolves as a kind of political folk wisdom, based on experience, observation and the elite actors' preferred explanations of results.¹³⁶ Within this, there is a noticeable reluctance of practitioners to accept that marketing is entirely appropriate to the specific conditions of an electoral campaign. Much US campaigning practice, for example, is not completely explicable in conventional marketing terms and some aspects make more sense within the practitioners' preferred analogy of warfare. This may indicate that political marketing still has much to do in terms of developing an industry-specific model. Ironically, it may also mean that marketing is less suited to its main focus of study, campaigns, than it is for the longer-term analysis of party positioning strategy. Moreover, contemporary British historical accounts tend to agree with Kavanagh that the use of marketing, while on a generally upwards curve, is contingent rather than constant, more likely to appeal to parties in opposition than in government.¹³⁷ There remain, as Rose noted in 1967, considerable 'obstacles to rationality' in politics.¹³⁸

Marketing and Democratic Practice

The political communications literature tends to be overwhelmingly suspicious of, if not hostile to, marketing in politics.¹³⁹ Franklin's account of 'packaged politics' presents the most scathing assessment of marketing influence in British politics,¹⁴⁰ with citizens transformed into armchair consumers of politics. The 'golden age' myth is the most easily dismissed. Historical accounts demonstrate time and again that campaigning has not descended from rational argument to emotional puffery. Rather as Butler and Kavanagh¹⁴¹ suggest campaigns are rarely great educational experiences, or as Schudson asks, 'was there ever a public sphere?'.¹⁴² Street makes a strong case that politics has 'always depended upon popular culture and that this relationship does not automatically diminish the quality of political discourse'.¹⁴³ Others have suggested that marketing may actually democratise politics by making parties more responsive to voters' wishes and by contributing to the design of more voter-friendly communications.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the citizen/consumer contrast is too often made as a crude distinction, with the former, active, rational and engaged, the latter passive and vulnerable to emotional manipulation. It takes little account of research into active audiences; nor of the marketing literature which increasingly emphasizes sophistication of consumers and the correlation between corporate ethics and the establishment of reputation.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁵ See especially, O'Cass, 'Political marketing and the marketing concept'.

¹³⁶ Scammell, 'The wisdom of the war room'.

¹³⁷ Kavanagh, *Election Campaigning*, p. 141.

¹³⁸ Rose, *Influencing Voters*, p. 195.

¹³⁹ Gitlin, for example, provides a typical assessment: American politics has always been characterized by raucous, giddy, shallow sloganeering, but now it is getting worse. Gitlin, 'Bites and Blips', p. 129.

¹⁴⁰ Franklin, *Packaging Politics*.

¹⁴¹ Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*.

¹⁴² M. Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁴³ J. Street, *Politics and Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Polity, 1997).

¹⁴⁴ Scammell, *Designer Politics*, p. 298; Harrop, 'Political marketing'.

¹⁴⁵ R. Leeper, 'Moral objectivity: Jurgen Habermas's discourse ethics and public relations', *Public Relations Review*, 22 (1996), 133–51.

However, concern at the consequences of marketing in politics is persistent and serious. Widely accepted effects of marketing, even by those broadly sympathetic, include the deliberate narrowing of the political agenda, an emphasis on message discipline, repetition of messages rather than engagement in argument and an increasing reliance on negative campaigning. Some of these, especially negative campaigning, may prove to be temporary fashions rather than effects of marketing *per se*. However, regardless of the ethics of its application, marketing necessarily transforms relationships between parties and voters and leaders and party members. Marketing may make for 'lack of political courage'¹⁴⁶ if leaders adopt a servile attitude towards public opinion. The effect of political marketing on the quality of leadership is a recurring theme of the critical literature.¹⁴⁷ More recently researchers have turned their attention to marketing effects on the leader-membership relations. As Sackman and others have noted with respect to the Labour Party, marketing may effectively dis-empower individual members as active campaigners.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

This article has cast a sympathetic eye over the emerging subdiscipline of political marketing. Those who are relatively unfamiliar with its work may be surprised at the focus of these pages. We have not dealt in any detail with the unusual suspects of press interest in marketing: media manipulation, spin doctoring, political advertising and soon. This is not because these subjects are not worthy of investigation. The ways in which marketing techniques change communication with voters, affect the public sphere and citizen engagement *are* important questions, regardless of electoral outcomes. These, of course, are prime concerns for political communications research.

However, the lessons of the political marketing subdiscipline are less well-known and arguably more fundamental. Marketing offers a rational economic theoretical basis for explaining party and voter behaviour that is more broad and inclusive than either the conventional political science campaign studies or political communications approaches. Its tools of strategic analysis offer generic explanations of party behaviour, which are sensitive to but not restricted by the specifics of particular campaigns, political systems, media systems, or left-right ideological typologies. It offers a systematic way of arranging and explaining the various key features of modern campaigning highlighted by the other research perspectives. Thus, the techniques of promotion, advertising, news management and image development all have a logical and clear place within the marketing model. However, the use of promotional instruments *follows* the establishment of party/candidate objectives and strategy development. It does not lead the way. Marketing therefore disputes accounts of political change that attempt to explain modern campaigning largely as a response to media developments. The 'packaging of politics', is of course, increasingly obvious and well-documented. However, to focus overwhelmingly on the packaging is effectively to do what critics claim to despise in modern politics: to elevate style over substance.

¹⁴⁶ O'Shaughnessy, *The Phenomenon of Political Marketing*, p. 247.

¹⁴⁷ See, e.g. T. Qualter; Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants*.

¹⁴⁸ Sackman, 'Political Marketing and the Labour Party', p. 308.