

## **APPLYING THEORIES AND PRACTICES OF POLITICAL MARKETING TO POLITICAL COMMUNICATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The present article is an attempt to explore the debates surrounding the extent and nature of political marketing, and discuss the benefits and limitations of applying theories and practices of political marketing to political communication, furthermore, will value the theories of political marketing in terms of their potential impact on political communication practices.*

**Keywords:** *politics, marketing, communication, political marketing, political communication*

With development of communication studies and political studies, media increasingly applied to politics and became a part of currency political campaigns. (Seymour-Ure, 2001). In recent years, with the use of political communication among political parties in Britain, marketing theories gradually applied to political communication practices. From the point of view of politicians and political parties, some scholars indicate that political marketing strategies may play an important role in political campaigns, particularly are related to greater electoral success (Newman, 1994; Lees-Marshment, 2000). However, other researcher made some critical remarks; they argue that these practices do not enhance democracy, because a virtual democracy blueprint is constructed by the use of political marketing (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). This article will explore the debates surrounding the extent and nature of political marketing, and discuss the benefits and limitations of applying theories and practices of political marketing to political communication, furthermore, will value the theories of political marketing in terms of their potential impact on political communication practices.

As the United States was the first country to research and apply modern political communication methods, there was rapidly development of political marketing in the US (Maarek, 2011). According to Maarek (2011), there are three main stages in the development of political marketing. The first stage is early stage of development of political marketing from 1952-1960. Maarek(2011) point out that ‘the 1952 presidential election in the US marks the start of modern political marketing’, because the two main political parties in the US first compiled budget for political communication. During that presidential election, the Republicans employed a marketing consultant, Thomas Rosser Reeves Jr. (Maarek, 2011). According to his request, Republicans candidate Eisenhower shows himself to the public as a product. He also required Eisenhower do not change the sort of arguments in front of the mass media. This method was called ‘Unique Selling Proposition’. The second stage was from 1964-1976. Maarek (2011) called this period ‘Adolescence of political

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marketing'. At this stage, techniques of political marketing had tremendous development, but also had limitations. The important televised debates were backed into presidential election campaigns, and continued from 1976. Furthermore, the limitations on political marketing advertising were withdrawn. The last stage is current stage of political marketing from 1980s up to the present, which is called 'Adulthood of modern political communication and campaigning' by Maarek (2011). There are some outstanding features in current stage of political marketing. First, the 'Unique Selling Proposition' principle is still in a prominent position on political communication campaigns. Second, the principal part of costs is still on television. Third, new media, particularly the Internet, has been extensively used by political marketing practices. For instance, in the Barack Obama's 2008 campaign, he created account on famous social network, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and consequently got quite a lot of following. The fourth characteristic of current stage of political marketing is that modern political marketing campaign appears personalization features, for example, also in the Barack Obama's 2008 campaign, he integrated his personal life into the history of the US, thus his foreign parentage could be seen as negative influence was successfully transformed into image of America (Maarek, 2011).

According to Menon (2008), political marketing indicates the marketing tools, techniques and methods are applied to political communication process. In other words, political marketing is the consequence of the combination and interpenetration of marketing and politics (Lees-Marshment, 2001), such as using communication consultants to develop political party advertising, to manage party or politician images, and to interact with and attempt to manage the news. Political marketing is progressively used in democratic political systems. Political parties increasingly try to promote themselves as the promotion of commercial products. Voters are regarded as 'consumer' to whom political messages can be 'sold'. Ultimately, parties try to meet voter's needs, and to produce voter fulfilment, and to meet its own aims by gaining electoral support (Lees-Marshment, 2001). Moreover, there are some other explanations regard political marketing as a completely different approach to political processes. According to (Menon, 2008), political marketing is not just about political advertising, party political broadcasts and electoral speeches, but about the way parties are organised and managed. In the other words, political marketing is a suite of strategies and tools to influence public opinion before and during an election campaign. Maarek (2011) emphasises that 'political marketing includes evaluation and re-design of policy and electoral strategy in the light of studies of the electorate's concerns.

The supporters of political marketing believe that political marketing approach could enhance politicians and political parties' credibility. (Newman, 1994; Maarek, 1995; Lees-Marshment, 2000). Opponents have argued against that political marketing approach tend to establish image before substance. Compare with the issues and policies of parties could be ignored, candidate personality

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and qualities would be paid more attention. This means that political marketing could destabilise democratic principles founded on the notion of informed voting public making decisions about candidate support grounded on the policies that candidates represent (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Mayhew, 1997). In the process of political marketing, electorates are considered as political consumers. Consequently, voters' opinions represent great 'money' taken into 'account' by political strategists in political communication campaign (O'Shaughnessy, 1999, cited in Gunter, B., Saltzis K., & Campbell, V., 2006).

From the point of view of advertising, it could be effective to communicate by advertising in politics. It is essential to the success that it cultivates a brand image for the promoted product that target markets will find engaging (Gunter, B., Saltzis K., & Campbell, V., 2006).

Advertising is an important form of Marketing (Kitchen, 1999, cited in Gunter, B., Saltzis K., & Campbell, V., 2006). Rossiter & Percy (1987) pointed out that the production of advertising is informed by target market. Understanding the target market does not just mean knowing who target consumers are, but also being clear about the needs and wants of target consumers. Extending this conception to political marketing, it is essential to recognise what inspires voters and what kinds of message will make them choose one candidate or party over another (Lees-Marshment, 2001).

The new media has not only changed people's daily lives, but also has impact on the politics. With the growth of new media, particularly Internet, the new media are applied political marketing by political elite. Obama's success is a good example. The Internet played a decisive role in 2008 US presidential election. First, based on the Internet, the Obama's team relied on a large number of Internet users to gain a lot of political donations. Secondly, Obama built personal brand with the power of the Internet. He created account on Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. Obama's website on MySpace and Facebook gathered a millions of his supporters, and these people who are the most active groups among the US Internet users are increasingly active at different Internet communities. Therefore, the public opinion of the US Internet community was greatly influenced by these followings.

However, there are some problems and limitations of political marketing, which mainly include practical problems (Lees-Marshment, 2001) and aspect of democratic practice (Scammell, 1999). Specifically, from perspective of political marketing practices, the first problem is in the Local political markets. Lees-Marshment (2011) considers that Marketing-Oriented Parties tend to design centralised strategies targeted on the national electorate, which might undermine the capacity and effectiveness of local political communication campaigns. The second limitation on aspect of political marketing practices is internal party organisation. That is strong power of party membership can limit endeavours to apply marketing intelligence to party policy and strategy, but application of marketing intelligence to policy and strategy could alienate party membership

and core support. In addition to local political markets and internal party organisation, disengagement and apathy are a limitation as well. That is the marketing approach is premised on responding directly to electors' needs and wants, and the marketing approach has been used more extensively in recent years than before, however, turnout in recent elections has been in decline. And another aspect of limitation on political marketing is about democratic practice. Scammell(1999) emphasis that political communication always depends on popular culture, and the relationship between politics and popular culture could not reduce the quality of political discourse. Moreover, the contract between citizens and consumers is often simple; because there is no fully aware of sophistication of consumers and issues of active audiences, or voter-driven policy and communication. Moreover, the effects of marketing include deliberate narrowing the political agenda (Scammell, 1999), the repetition of message rather than increasing reliance on negative campaigns. Additionally, Scammell (1999) argued that political communication becomes about repetition of slogans and 'soundbites', as a result engaged debate and argument being destabilised, even disappearing. Furthermore, it is easier to attack opponents' than positively present policy. He also asserted that leadership becomes dominant to the point of excluding members' viewpoints.

### **Conclusion**

This essay examined political marketing theory, including the growth and definition of political marketing. The relationship between political communication and marketing techniques are becoming more and more closely integrated in methods (Wring, 2005). And then the article discussed the benefits and limitations of applying theories and practices of political marketing to political communication. There is no doubt that marketing approach applied to political communication is benefit for political campaigns. On the one hand, as a kind of form of political communication, political marketing is of course, an effective way to connect political parties or politicians and their 'consumers'. On the other hand, with the widespread use of the Internet in democracy countries, political communication, especially election campaigning might still rely on political marketing. In addition, the increasing needs and wants of electorates inevitably arise problems and limitations. First of all, political marketing strategies aimed at the national electorate might limit from local political market. Secondly, political marketing is one of tools that political parties or candidates seek political goals, thus communications styles focus on candidate personality and qualities rather than on democratic issues and policies (Gunter, B., Saltzis K., & Campbell, V., 2006).

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