POLITICAL MARKETING: AN EMERGING THEORY

Suman Si[*]

ABSTRACT

Marketing as it said to be one of the competent and most important factors for the growth of any entity, be it a brand, a product, a person etc. The same applies to the political world that we deal with at present .The ever increasing competition amongst the political parties have left them with no option but to promote them in a way in which they can justify themselves to be the best amongst all. There has been an increased application of marketing techniques by the political parties these days which popularly has evolved and has become to be known as Political marketing. Over the years the implicit ties between marketing and political process have become inevitable and more prominent. Major changes have taken place in the political marketplace in the past three to four decades in terms of influx of social and mass media as information dissemination tools .There has been rapid escalation of campaign costs with respect political marketing. Both business marketers and political marketers have started using media outlets to inform, remind, and alter the attitudes and behaviours of potential clients and voters (respectively), and they both try to employ similar tools when structuring campaigns, such as market research and statistical analysis.

In this particular study we will throw some light on the increasing role of marketing as a communication medium for politics and political parties. Despite the presence of 24-hour news stations and 24X7 online news coverage, the general public most of the times remains under-informed on political issues and news which is supposed to be covered using political marketing and hence day by day this concept is gaining momentum as it helps in understanding the voter behavior. The purpose of this paper is to understand and show the applicability of marketing as an important weapon in the area of political marketing in general .

Key words*: Political Marketing, Marketing Communication, Political Advertising*

---

[*] Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Shri Ram College of Commerce, University of Delhi, Delhi, Email: si_suman@yahoo.in

INTRODUCTION

Political parties and candidates generally promote themselves and their platforms to voters through masterly-crafted communications aimed at gaining public support which is popularly known as political marketing. While the entities being marketed is different, in business marketing and political marketing, there are many parallels between political marketing and the marketing of goods and services. As a business marketer, one may think that political marketing techniques and strategies don't apply to marketing in general but things are quite similar as both aim at marketing communication. The primary and most important difference between business marketing and political marketing is that the latter is used to raise awareness and inform members of the public about critical issues and leadership choices within their community, state, and country. It is always assumed that our voting decisions are based purely on how well the platforms of each of the candidates aligns with our own individual set of beliefs and values, but it is far more likely that our ballots are cast based on the outcomes of carefully targeted and optimized political marketing campaigns. John F. Kennedy once said that "The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all".

Marketing thus has become the very essence of Politics which is everywhere in political campaigning as it makes the communication process even faster if directed towards the right direction. Political Marketing is growing at a rapid pace and they need to adopt new techniques quickly for wooing their voters as voters for political parties are like what customers are meant for business marketers. The modern political marketing landscape provides myriad opportunities to connect with potential voters and shape public opinion, including cold calls, email campaigns, direct mail leaflets, radio spots, social media outreach, and television news and talk show appearances. In a nutshell, the importance of political marketing is how effective it is at spreading messaging and informing the public. Campaign messages and ideas are very easily and quickly consumed and shared, and this facilitates a better more organic way of raising awareness and generating a call them to action, whether that action is to join a campaign, lobby for a bill, or cast a vote at the poll.

The role of information and communications technologies in political market-ing requires a critical understanding and promises an important and exciting stream of research of real advantage to political marketing theory and practice. Historically, newspapers, film, radio and television have all been utilized strategic-ally as new technologies of their eras. The advent of the World Wide Web and the subsequent deployment of websites, emails, blogs and social networking technologies have brought exceptional change to the communications arena. Political communication has never been as important as it is today due to the ever increasing competition .Conflicts in the middle east and the economic crisis around the globe has also forced the ruling parties to justify their actions for which political communication is widely used which they also use constructively for setting their citizens . International conflict and a global economic crisis have left governments seeking to justify their actions and calm the fears of their citizens. This paper offers an account of an exploratory study into the process of political communication. Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, it identifies models that require modernisation and amalgamates them into a broader model that reflects the political communications experience of the respondents. It concludes with some consideration of the implications for not only the field of political marketing communications but for marketing communications as a whole.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While one can see evidence of political marketing from the earliest days of political activity, the origins of it as field of study, albeit highly practice-related, are to be found in work of early authors such as Kelley (1956) who first defined the term to refer to this domain of activity. The subject's development was strongly aided by Rothschild's (1978) work on political advertising effectiveness and segmentation and also his later work extending this to social policy and political policy making. These early foundations of political marketing research were strengthened by the growing professionalism of campaign management, particularly in the west.

Political marketing research has made significant progress in recent years as evidenced by its own dedicated issues of international marketing journals, handbooks etc. Special

research interest groups of the academy, dedicated academic and practitioner conferences and articles in leading field journals have also justified the growth of political marketing as an area of study . It has drawn together and researchers, students, professional practitioners and involved observers from multiple backgrounds have managed to build a literature of considerable scale and value. As a distinct sub-discipline it is increasingly identifiable. Nonetheless, theory development in the field remains replete with problems of context, understanding and approach (Butler and Collins, 1999; Henneberg, 2002; Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007; Lock and Harris, 1996).

From previous studies it has been found that political advertising and political marketing as an overall concept has a strong direct effect on voting behaviours in certain situations. Quelch and Jocz (2007) argue that good marketing makes for better democracy and that the social value created by marketers deserves more credit. This issue of marketing theory contributes to the development of political marketing.

Elections are a cornerstone of civil society, and so their conduct would reasonably be expected to reflect the weight of legal requirements, state institutions and the democratic mandate. The contribution of political marketing becomes more important as the hoopla associated with elections still remains a paradox across the globe. Political marketing still seems to feel obliged to defend and justify itself to critics (Henneberg, 2004), although this is not necessarily unjust as every new entrant demands validation and acceptance. The Association of National Advertisers in the USA selected Obama as the Advertising Age Marketer of the Year in November 2008. One observer, Al Ries, who is regarded as a founder of the strategic application of market positioning, notes that three aspects of the 'Change' theme underpinned Obama's victory: simplicity, consistency and relevance (Ries, 2008).This was observed as a new age political marketing across the globe which not only help Obama win but also justified the intelligent use of marketing in politics.

So far a generation of consumers are clear in their understanding that business is actively trying to get them to buy their wares, they are prepared to engage with those advertisers who are more honest or authentic in their communications (Brown, 2003), the same applies to voters who are the prime targets for the political parties. Indeed, they are

interested in, and intellectually engaged with, certain marketing campaigns and acutely aware of the strategic machinations of the likes of Apple, Starbucks, Harley Davidson and Nike. The same pattern may be true for politics. One signal of public interest in political marketing and political campaigns is the increasing recognition of major political marketing figures. In the USA, political advisors and consultants like Karl Rove and James Carville became far better known than senior politicians in Congress. This might happen in cases where the political marketing becomes so strong that it hits the target audience(target voters). The extension of marketing models to social and political contexts increases their contribution to societal welfare. One distinctive characteristic of politics is the periodic nature of market activity.

The nature, scale and importance of any particular election will determine voter and candidate behaviour. Elections reveal highly distinctive market relations issues, including forgiveness for broken promises and punishment for past transgressions, real or imagined (Butler and Collins, 1999). The broader conceptualization of political marketing goes far beyond election campaigns. Placing the formal campaign as the central issue is akin to focusing only on the sale negotiation as the core of marketing. For political activists and observers, the permanent campaign is the hard political reality; governing with public approval requires a continual political campaign (Blumenthal, 1980; Klein, 2005). An overemphasis on the campaign diminishes the opportunities of theorizing the field. Political marketing is broader and deeper than the campaign, though the 'formal' or agreed boundaries of study, notwithstanding the continuing efforts of researchers, have yet to be set. Research progress in political marketing must recognize the parallel change in the base disciplines of marketing and political science.

Theoretical progress is also unremitting. The assignment of codifying political marketing could take the discussion back to Aristotle's writings on Politics and Rhetoric, in which the importance of language and persuasion to human progress are central. However, in the marketing school, the 'broadening' of marketing from the 1970s (Kotler and Levy, 1969; Kotler and Zaltman, 1971) empowered scholars to research marketing beyond commercial boundaries; Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy (2007) develop a political marketing review.

Described in Laswell's (1935) classic terms, politics is the study of 'who gets what, when and how'. It involves several distinct sub-fields including political theory, public policy and comparative politics. Methodologically, it is highly diverse. Marketers will recognize the ideas drawn from economics that inform the ideas of public choice theorists such as Downs (1957). Political structures and processes are in constant flux, thereby driving new theoretical modelling. Even the theory of democracy is not available to us as a single universally agreed model (Henneberg et al., this issue). Political parties in most democracies are experiencing declining party identification and membership (Mair,1997; Mair and van Biezen, 2001). Indeed, that erosion of voter loyalty and the reduction of political organization strength have motivated the professionalization of political parties, and consequently the strategies and explicit practices of political marketing (Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Plasser et al., 1999; Stromback, 2007).

If we consider just the political decentralizing trend in many western settings (the USA and the European Union for example), the shift in government power from the centre is attributable by Nye (2002) to globalization, marketization and the information revolution.

Also the debate on the boundaries of political lobbying continues (Harris and Lock, 1996), but the growing literature on pressure groups, interest groups and policy networks (Thomas and Hrebenar, 2008) offers useful insights. Harris et al. (1999) find a direct linkage between political marketing and interest lobbying; they claim that the need to run expensive modern political marketing campaigns forces political parties to develop close links with business. This area is still largely under-researched, but would appeal to marketing and politics alike.

The thrust of E-Government and E-Democracy movements highlights new forces and new agendas in politics and political markets (Collins and Butler, 2002; Kamarck and Nye Jr,2002; Tapscott and Williams, 2006; West, 2005; Wilhelm, 2000).Ultimately, structural change at the macro level causes adaptive behaviour at the micro level of parties, candidates and media (Schafferer, 2006).

Famous examples of political marketing

Political Marketing has emerged as a new age way of campaigning for the political parties so as to make themselves known and popularize in the public domain. Off late it has also been observed that as marketers are becoming digital in way of their marketing, similar is the case in the area of politics. When Barack Obama realized that he would not have the support of the great businessmen to win the elections in 2008, he decided to change and become the first politician 2.0. The 2008 Obama Campaign has been hailed as the first to make effective use of the internet. There are few more such instances where we can find out such impact.

i. 100,000 pieces of content in the campaign of Trump

In the early days of Trump's political marketing campaign, his digital strategist, Brad Parscale, received a small budget with the aim of expanding the database. The strategist made a decision and invested all the money on Facebook ads. To the beginning, it included the names, email addresses and phone numbers of some of Trump followers on the platform. Then, he chose to use the customized audiences to unite these people with their Facebook profiles. Also, with Facebook's "audience segmentation options" tool, ads could take one course or another based on user activity, ethnic affinity, or demographics such as location, age, gender, or interests. Next, the strategist extended his "radar" using the "similar audience," a potent tool that allows finding people on Facebook with common qualities. It means, in this case, possible followers of Trump. Besides, Par-scale also implemented software to optimize the design and delivery of the Facebook ads generated for him. The campaign generated so many ads that 100,000 different landing pages were created. Each one directed to different segments. As a result, more than 100,000 pieces of content were created.

ii. Trump's Twitter strategy

During the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA), citizens from all over the world witnessed how world leaders expressed their ideas. But Trump's communication during this period is one of the most structured and organized examples of political

marketing via Twitter. No lousy step is taken. Donald Trump had two official accounts, @realDonaldTrump, with 48.6M followers and @POTUS, with 22.4. Both statements are active and reflect a very different communication behavior. The topics covered in each account are very different. And they are not chosen at random like Natural disasters, Commemorative days, National controversies ,Medical attendance etc.

iii. SMS Marketing in the Obama campaign

Another of the most prominent examples of political marketing is Obama, who has also given a lot to talk about. The former president of the United States has given several lessons on how to use digital spaces to create strategies. For example, he taught that:

1. High-performance websites led the user to convert.

2. A/B tests were a base when choosing content and designing different calls to action on your website.

3. He also incorporated his proposals into the thank-you pages, where the public was most receptive.

4. Using email marketing to build user loyalty.

5. Both the social networks and the blog were fully integrated into each step of their digital strategy.

6. All campaigns were segmented.

But there´s more. Obama´s marketing team knew how to apply SMS to publicize different contents. The website "*YouObama*" was created referring to YouTube to share videos of its political actions and was one of the first political candidates to take advantage on the functions of social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Even so, currently, their profiles are considered absolute success stories.

EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL MARKETING

Political Marketing ways back to few decades but it has evolved tremendously and holds a great future in terms of growth. This has been justified by various political researchers and academicians in their study. In "Political advertising and the demonstration of market orientation", Claire Robinson explores the relationship between market orientation of politics and the achievement of electoral objectives during taking the example of New Zealand elections. Robinson uses an analysis of advertising content to observe the impact of political marketing over the voters and also tries to figure out whether the electoral objectives of political parties are fulfilled or not. In the last two decades political marketing has moved from being the obscure concern of a small group of academic marketers who interested in politics, to a significant area of international research in contemporary marketing. Academicians and practitioners have contributed to both contemporary as well as political marketing. It has also gained the acknowledgement from political scientists that political marketing has something to offer beyond the black arts of propaganda. Political Marketing has also been influenced by cross cultural impacts and voting systems across the globe. The fragmentation of traditional media and the growth of new ones are also impacting this phenomena. While political marketing's most visible influence has been in communications during electoral campaigns, it has become increasingly important in the development of long term political strategies and positioning for parties. Marketers' understanding of consumer behaviour has provided particularly valuable insights into voter behaviour which is an important strand in the success of political marketing. As a theory, it has come a long way and holds a key position in the coming times.

CONCLUSION

In the past political marketing has been quite relevant in policy development, service delivery and the engagement and targeting of the citizen and voters in politics. The rise in political marketing activity and its wider applications has been accompanied by an increase in significant quality research beginning with Newman and Sheth (1985) on one side of and 'O'Shaughnessys (1990) pivotal work , "*Phenomenon of Political*

Marketing" which stimulated a lot of interest in the area. Newman's *Handbook of Political Marketing* (Newman, 1999), Harris and Lock's review of political lobbying in the UK (Harris and Lock, 2002), Henneberg's (2004) overview with its challenges to the discipline and Butler and Harris' (2009) review of political marketing theory have all contributed to shaping the current form of the discipline in some way or the other. It can also be observed that political marketing is here to stay and has a long way to go as it it proving to be one of the most important too in bridging the gap between political parties, leaders and the prospective voters. Past studies and experiences have also shown a general link between electoral systems, party campaigning and voter turnout and individuals are more likey to turn out under better PR systems which can only be achieved by active political marketing.

Thus as an academic sub-discipline seeking to establish itself, political marketing must inspire the efforts of researchers from both the marketing and politics traditions as Political marketing management is the art and science of managing the political exchange process (Henneberg, 2004).Recognition of these changing patterns and frameworks in both fields certainly will make for a comprehensive engagement that will also offer real theoretical reward.

REFERENCES

Kotler, P. (1974), *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations. Englewood Cliffs*: Prentice-Hall, forthcoming.

Lane, R. (1965) *Political Life: Why and How People Get Involved in Politics*. New York: The Free Press.

Laswell, H. (1935) *Politics: Who Get What, How, When*. London: McGraw Hill.

Lazersfeld, P., Berelson, B., and Godet, H. (1948) *The People's Choice New York*: 2nd Ed., Columbia University Press.

Levy, S., and Kotler, P. (1969) "Broadening the Concept of Marketing," *Journal of Marketing.*

Lipset, S.M. and Rokkan, S. (1967) (eds) *Party Systems and Voter Alignment: Cross-national Perspectives.* New York: The Free Press.

Lock, A. and Harris, P. (1996) 'Political Marketing – Vive la Difference', *European Journal of Marketing* 30(10): 21–31.

Lusch, R.F. (2007) 'Marketing's Evolving Identity: Defining Our Future' *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Fall.

McGinnies, J. The Selling of the President, 1968. New York: Pocket Books, 1970.

Merton, R. -Social Theory and Social Structure. New York: The Free Press, 1957, pp. 5-6.

Milbrath, L. Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get involved in Politics. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company-,79-65, p. 88.

Newman BI, Sheth JN (1985) A model of primary voter behaviour. J Consum Res 12:178–187

Scammell M (1999) Political marketing: lessons for political science. Polit Stud 47(4):718–739

Schiffman LG, Kanuk LL (2000) *Consumer behaviour*, 7th edn. Prentice-Hall Inc.

Shama, A. "A Generic Model of Image Formation," unpublished paper, Baruch College, CUNY, 1974.

Ward, S. and Robertson, T. "Consumer Behavior Research: Promise and Prospects," in S. Ward and T. Robertson (Eds.), Consumer Bebavior: Theoretical Sources. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973, pp. 20-22.

White, T. The Making of the President 1960. New York: Atheneum Publishers, -1961.

White, T. The Making of the President 1964. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1965.

White, T. 1he Making of the President 1968. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1973.

Zaltman, G., Pinson, C., and Angelmar, R. Metatheory and Consumer Research. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1973, p. 37