

## Political Marketing and Its Impact on Democracy

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### ABSTRACT

In a modern political competition that is open and transparent, contestants need a method that can facilitate the distribution of political products, such as new ideas, issues, party ideology, programs and leadership characteristics to the public. In order to win the election, they should be able to apply new political communication strategies that are more oriented to voters, and understand how this can be applied by implementing marketing strategies to promote the candidate and their political values. However, the use of political marketing has an influence on the health of democracy. Some scholars believe that it brings about benefits to the democracy system. In spite of these positive impacts the use of political marketing has drawbacks as well.

**Keywords:** *Political Marketing, Political Campaign, Democracy*

### INTRODUCTION

The modern democratic era has brought major changes to the political world, especially in the practices of political communication. In election campaigns, a great change has occurred in the ways how politicians manage and design the strategy of political campaigns in order to win the political support of the public. Therefore, in a modern political competition that is open and transparent, contestants need a method that can facilitate the distribution of political products, such as new ideas, issues, party ideology, programs and leadership characteristics to the public. In order to win the election, they should be able to apply new political communication strategies that are more oriented to voters, and understand how this can be applied by implementing marketing strategies to promote the candidate and their political values. In this context, science or marketing approaches are useful for political institutions.

For this reason, political marketing was introduced and widely used by many political actors, such as the government, parties and politicians, and also interest groups in their political campaigning. Some scholars have claimed that it is an obvious sign of a 'contemporary political communication' phenomenon.

However, the widespread use of political marketing and its implications on democracy remain as a problem particularly for developing countries. Therefore, it has become a subject for recent debates, whether it helps or hurts democracy. This article will examine, firstly, how political marketing is used in practice. Secondly, how mass media contributes to the political development and spread of the practice of political marketing. Thirdly, how it influences democracy.

### DISCUSSION

#### The Use of Political Marketing

Political marketing which examines the use of marketing techniques in the political process is a relatively new field of study within the discipline of political science and communication. However, it has attracted the attention not only of many scholars (from management, communication and political science) but also politicians, bureaucrats and professionals who are involved in politics.

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

The influence of professional marketing has affected the working style of political parties. Parties have become more market oriented and have begun to frame their programs and policies in tune with polls and market surveys. The information revolution and globalization have played a vital role in changing the pattern and content of traditional political campaigning into one of the most professional and sophisticated marketing tactics. It is argued that if a political party implements the marketing philosophy, it will seek to meet voters needs and wants, thus producing voter satisfaction, and in doing so gain electoral support to meet its own goals. (Marshment, 2006)

Prior to that, the use of political marketing is considered to have a special function in effecting the purpose of political activities, through strategic planning, preparing, designing and packaging political issues, which is the distribution of the political information based on the segmentation of public. The final goal is to create a mutually satisfying and harmonious state among both the political parties and voters.

Marrek (1995:2) defines political marketing as ‘a complex process, the outcome of a more global effort implicating all the factors of politician’s political communication’ and point out that ‘political marketing’ is the general method of ‘political communication’. In his view, political marketing has become an integral and vital component of political communication.

Furthermore, O’Cass (1996:48) explains that the application of marketing in political campaign “offers political parties the ability to address voters concerns and needs through marketing analysis, planning, implementation and control of political and electoral campaign”. That is, the central purpose of political marketing is to enable political parties and voters to make the most appropriate and satisfactory decisions.

Many studies have been completed focusing on the increased professionalization of political marketing campaigns. These include the rise of the class of political consultants, pollsters, advertising executives, and the consequence of this process of strategic communications by political parties and interest groups (Norris, 2004:1)

Also, the practice of political marketing can be marked by six characteristics. Firstly, political campaigns today are mainly based on single issues and candidate centeredness. Secondly, the importance of money, especially in the pre-nomination presidential campaigns, is increasing because of media advertising. Thirdly, there is an increase in the number of professional communicators, who use effective, new communication technology. Today, during the campaigning, the strategies are conducted by public relation experts, fundraisers and opinion pollsters. Fourthly, the role of the mass media has increased since it is a very effective tool for candidates to be recognized and to evaluate the campaign performance of their parties. Fifthly, the connection between citizens and political parties is weakened. Finally, there is a growing concern about the influence and activities of the consultants. (Ugur, 2012:2)

Therefore, not surprisingly, the presence of marketing in politics has an increasingly large role which is based on the fact that political actors today (and not only political parties and politicians but also governments, single issue groups, lobbying organizations, etc.) not only act according to the principles of marketing, but also ‘think’ in marketing terms in their political activities. (Henneberg, 2004:4). For example, the use of the name of the candidate pair which consists of two syllables is intended to be more easily recognized and popular in the public memory, as well as the management of the image and popularity of politicians as a way of marketing similar to the development of marketing a business product.

Political marketing applications have changed from a communication instrument to a coherent way of managing politics, whether it policy making, election canvassing or executing decisions. However, most political actors are far from having an integrated and sophisticated understanding of marketing applications for their political exchange situations. Political

marketing management in politics has caused some 'leading' parties and candidates to adopt a simplistic and populist 'follower' mentality, contributing to the disenchantment of the electorate and a resulting cynicism regarding politics in general.

Furthermore, political communication today is not essentially about transmitting the political messages or political values to the public, but rather to build the political image of political institutions or politicians. Simons (2006) argues that "contemporary democratic politics are often characterized as 'image politics', in which style matters more than substance, and personalities more than policies. Citizens and electorates are said to be in the thrall of political image"

Thus, the political image has become more significant in political campaigns particularly during the elections. Newman (1999:88) also states, that one of the most powerful marketing tools a politician can use to drive public opinion is his or her image. Related to the political image, Craig argues that :

"The personal image of political leaders is a focus of contemporary political communication, but the looks, style and character of politicians is only the most prominent product of a process in which a broad range of personal deploy their sophisticated skills to produce political texts and images, control the flow of information within and across organisations, and manage relations with the mass media and the public" (Craig, 2004:130)

### **The role of media in political communication**

The media plays a strategic role in facilitating and developing new techniques of political communication such as political advertising. This is because advertising is the most effective ways in building and creating an image. Furthermore, it is powerful because of the format which allows political actors to impart their messages directly to the public, without mediation by journalist. Political advertising is used across a range of media, including television, radio, press, billboards and the cinema. (Craig, 2004:131)

Additionally, the contribution of the media to politics, and to political communication in general, is a constitutive feature of politics: democracy is founded on discussion and the communicative actions of politicians, and all citizens define and assign value to the themselves, others and the community. (Craig, 2004:28) Furthermore, media can play many roles in an ideal democratic society, such as providing information, educating the citizens, acting as a platform for public political discourse, offering publicity to government as watchdog of the society and serving as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoints. (Mc Nair, 2003:21)

### **The Impact of political marketing**

The use of political marketing has an influence on the health of democracy. Some scholars believe that it brings about benefits to the democracy system. Firstly, political marketing increases the number of information source and also the amount of information which is available to voters. Secondly, it helps in building the relationship between candidates and constituents. This is because political marketing uses an exchange model among politicians and public, similar to producers and consumers. Thirdly, the practice of this political communication technique is definitely voter oriented, and therefore the public has many choices and enough information from which to select.

In spite of these positive impacts the use of political marketing has drawbacks as well. Firstly, political marketing drives tend to be commercialized, reducing political values and political substantives. Secondly, as the media and consultants become more important, it will replaced the role of the parties in the future. Thirdly, the use of money politics is an obvious impact of political marketing. This is because the high level of competition and democracy means free market as well. Fourthly, political marketing, which usually uses advertising as medium to promote the candidate, tends to manipulate the public the public and therefore is not good for democracy.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as mass media plays a very important role, they can gain a centrality in the political communication systems. Moreover, technological developments change the interaction between people, and 'visibility' become more important for politicians. The more visible politicians are on television, the more dominant they are. Therefore, these changes force political institutions to change their political discourse and new communication techniques emerge with "catch all" politicians. Furthermore, the impact of political marketing on democracy would be dependent on the public itself in participating and responding to this kind of political communication.

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