

'Market' Classification and Political Campaigning: Some Strategic Implications

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Abstract

Although there is an argument for a flow of logic from market structure to marketing strategy and performance, the nature of the political 'market' and service product constraints, strongly dictate marketing strategy choices. Interactions between what, at this stage, we may call the consumer (elector) and the supplier (electee) in political campaigns could be likened to mental stimulus processing services (Lovell, 1996:31) or human services (Dickens, 1996). However, parties and candidates operate in peculiar poligopolistic markets competing for the authority to deliver government services using an exclusive right of franchise bidding process present in business-to-business markets. A structure-conduct-performance model is presented for political campaign organisations based on an analysis of political markets from consumer, industrial and services marketing perspectives, at what Blois (1974) has referred to as the 1st level of abstraction. The political 'market' is classified in order to provide strategic marketing insights. In essence, political marketing appears to be a hybrid sub-discipline of marketing incorporating characteristics from all three major marketing paradigms, but with services marketing theory holding particular promise for future theory development.

Introduction

The marketing discipline itself grew out of the study of economics with the first courses in the subject offered at the University of Michigan in 1902 (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000). In the century that has passed marketing has extended its reach from its beginnings in consumer goods marketing to a wide range of activities where human beings seek mutually beneficial exchanges. In the latter part of the twentieth century this extended to sectors where the object of exchange is not immediately obvious (e.g. charities, churches, politics).

In political markets the suggestion is that electors seek to exchange their votes for sound government representation although the nature of politics is such that there are potentially multifarious definitions of what such 'sound government' represents. With the recognition of a 'marketplace' it is only a short conceptual leap to the application of traditional marketing concepts. Recognisable marketing tactics have been evident in political campaigns in both the US (e.g. Eisenhower's use of direct mail in the early 1950s) and the UK (e.g. Thatcher's use of the Saatchi and Saatchi advertising agency (Scammell, 1994)). There is no doubt, however, that there has been a visible increase in the use of marketing techniques in political campaigns over the last few years (Smith and Saunders, 1990; Wring, 1999).

The dominant paradigm of political marketing to date has been to adapt consumer goods marketing ideas and frameworks (Baines and Egan, 2001), especially the marketing mix concept (see Niffenegger, 1989). Other frameworks, however, may provide a more fruitful basis for analysis. This paper seeks to analyse in greater depth the nature of the political market by seeking comparisons with product, service and industrial markets, at what Blois (1974) refers to as the 1st level of abstraction. Blois places this 1st level of abstraction between theories of buyer behaviour (2nd level of abstraction) and the marketplace. He suggested that consumer, industrial and services marketing techniques should be differentiated in order to meet buyers' needs in different market sectors. Ultimately, he argues, this leads to individual products in the marketplace. In this article, the spotlight is placed upon the services marketing paradigm developed by scholars dissatisfied with the traditional marketing mix paradigm (Booms and Bitner, 1981; Gronroos, 1987). The structure of the political 'market', and the

service-like characteristics of the political 'product' or offering, substantially influence political marketing strategies. A structure-conduct-performance model for strategy development is proposed based on this premise. We reflect upon the current definition of political marketing and suggest that the political product is intrinsically a service offering. We conclude by bringing together these three elements - definition, market structure and the political 'service-product' - to create a new framework for political marketing. The main purpose of such classification is to discover the characteristics of the service market for the purposes of providing strategic management insights (Hsieh and Chu, 1992).

The Political Marketplace

Political campaigning has become more 'market-orientated' in recent years. It is not immediately clear, however, which drivers were most important in this development. Was it a result of the general spread of marketing strategies to a wider range of applications (i.e. the 'marketingization' of the 1980s and 1990s) or did politics embrace marketing as part of a search for a new direction? The argument that these developments were a result of the extension of marketing's field of influence is compelling. The broadening scope of marketing was based upon the notion that marketing ideas and techniques could be utilised whenever value is seen to be exchanged. Such exchanges were seen to include sectors such as charities, churches and political parties (see Kotler and Levy, 1969) that were not initially conceived as pertinent. In the case of politics it has always remained, however, an imprecise fit and later writers have suggested that differences of form and content (Lock and Harris, 1996), and structure and process (Butler and Collins, 1999) existed, and that such value exchange was not so straightforward. Baines, Harris and Newman (1999) further acknowledge these commercial-political differences when suggesting that political campaigns usually operate with shorter - more intense - promotional campaigns, in poligopolistic markets, with polarised levels of voter loyalty, and differing potential for the degree of marketing orientation in different countries.

There is an alternative argument for marketing's more formal entry into political campaigning. This is that, due to structural changes in the political landscape, there is now a perceived need for adoption of marketing techniques. Voters latterly are seen to be less involved and less loyal than in the past (Ware, 1995). This would seem to be at least partly due to voter apathy, a recognisable trend in most western democracies. The reasons behind this growing apathy are outside of the scope of this paper, however, they may include a number of factors central to the 'need for marketing' argument. These may include the lack of actual or perceived product differentiation,¹ increasing numbers and frequency of electoral contests and/or referenda held, or simply because voters have more compelling distractions stimulated by increased wealth and leisure time. The result is that to cast one's vote is seen as less of a duty than was largely the case in the past. Such is the effect of absentee voters that it is largely they, rather than voters themselves, who are perceived, ultimately, to have the greatest influence on many electoral contests.

If politics and politicians are failing to stimulate the electorate then the political process itself may require the urgent intervention of marketing.. In this respect whether or not it is marketing that has subsumed political campaigning or vice versa is secondary to the reality that they now seem to be inseparable. Such is the perceived value of marketing that no

¹ This is considered as an important strategic concept considered under section Political Campaigning as Industrial Process.

political party and few individual candidates would challenge the role that marketing plays in the modern campaign process. In the next section, a structure-conduct-performance model is presented for political campaigns.

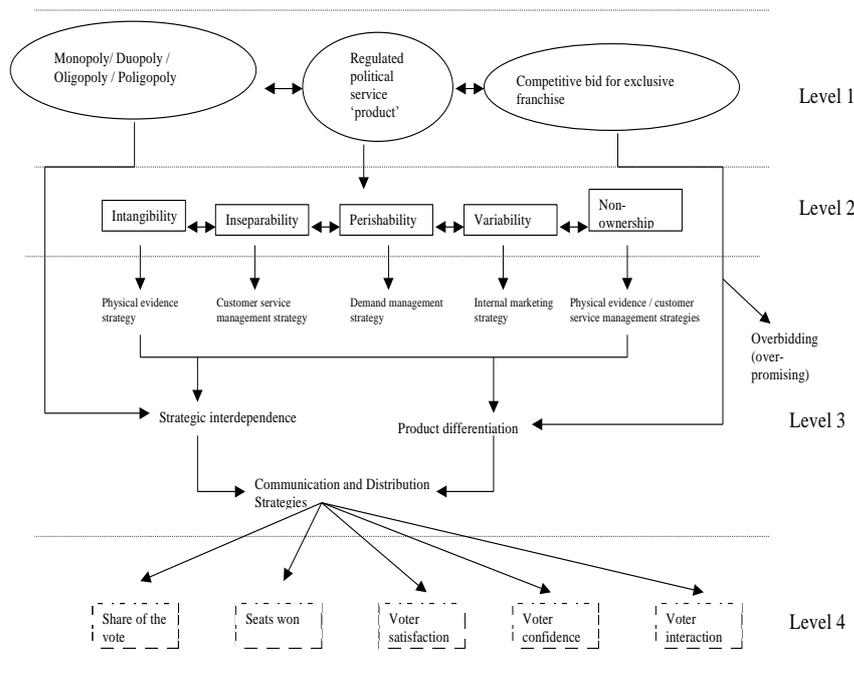
A Structure-conduct-performance Model for Political Campaigns

There is a substantial tradition in industrial economics that links the structure of markets to the strategies firms pursue and their economic performance. This is the basis for Porter's contention that industry structure analysis is of central importance to the determination of competitive strategy (Porter 1980), and is often termed the 'structure-conduct-performance paradigm'. Just as the structural conditions in a commercial market influence marketing strategy, so it is to be expected that the structural conditions of the political 'market' will affect political marketing decisions. Western political 'markets' show many of the characteristics of the oligopolistic and monopolistic consumer goods competition market models used in economic theory. The main problem with the adoption of the economic analogy is the ambiguity surrounding the nature of both the product and the price in a political 'market' and the implied redundancy of the 'marketing mix' approach.

Oligopoly and monopolistic competition theory predict that competitive players will use non-price competition as a primary weapon, seeking to differentiate their market offering from rival offerings. From the economic theory of franchising comes the idea of the strategic advantage of incumbency, and the associated notion of the winner's curse. Thus, industrial marketing techniques can be used in certain instances when marketing political parties. These ideas are aligned with prior research in services marketing that emphasises the importance of consumer expectations in satisfaction measurement (see Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985) although the contention that service quality should be conceptualised and measured as a gap between expectation and performance is very questionable (Levesque and McDougal, 1996). The aspiring opposition party should be aware that it suffers from an information disadvantage compared with the incumbent and that there are pressures to over-promise (overbid) in order to get elected. Over-promising, followed by under-delivering, is almost guaranteed to result in substantial consumer dissatisfaction, i.e. voter disillusionment (see Figure 1). The very structure of the political market creates the strong possibility of just such a sequence of events. Thus, sound, proactive expectations management in political marketing, commonly conducted in consumer services marketing, becomes of prime importance.

Figure 1 provides a model of how the structural characteristics of the political market relate to the marketing strategy choices available to political parties and candidates. The measurement of performance in areas such as share of the vote obtained, seats gained, voter satisfaction and confidence, and the degree of voter interaction allow political organisations to determine whether they are proceeding as expected, and dictated, by their marketing strategy choices in the marketplace.

Figure 1 – Structure-conduct-performance model for political parties and candidates



Key:

- Levels not to be confused with Blois' (1974) levels of abstraction
- Level 1: Structural characteristics of political markets
- Level 2: Characteristics of the political (service) product
- Level 3: Political marketing strategies
- Level 4: Political marketing performance

The marketing strategy choices available to the political marketer encompass 'tangibilising' the intangible (physical evidence management), effecting a more inclusive and satisfactory voter-party (candidate) interface (customer service management), and providing stakeholders with political information as and when it is necessary (demand management). It also suggests the need to ensure that the various actors throughout a political organisation, and within ancillary sub-contracted marketing services agencies, are interacting with the voter in a consistent manner (internal marketing strategy). These strategies stem from the nature of the political product. Thus, services marketing techniques are also appropriate methods to use in political campaigning. They can provide the political marketer with the means to differentiate their products from opponents, which is imperative in a poligopolistic market where a competitive bidding procedure for exclusive franchise is in operation. Once the political marketer has made his/her strategic choices, the distribution and communication of these products can begin.

Presently, political parties and candidates neglect to distinguish between the two processes (i.e. communication/distribution). However, if these information-based services are 'tangibilised' via the Internet, and digital and analogue media devices, the two processes can be considered, and operationalised, separately. This may lead to a more efficient, satisfactory and widespread distribution of the political product/service, particularly if the content is of a

more educational, than partisan, nature. In this case techniques associated with consumer marketing become particularly relevant in facilitating the marketing exchange relationship between voter and party.

In the next three sections, political marketing is investigated from consumer, industrial and services marketing perspectives in order to illustrate the peculiar hybrid nature of political markets outlined in Figure 1.

Political Campaigning: A Consumer Goods Perspective

The consumer goods perception of political marketing holds certain merit. There is some substance in the argument that the consumer goods marketing mix paradigm (McCarthy, 1978) can be applied to political campaigning (O'Leary and Iredale, 1976). The target market is, after all, capable of being segmented demographically (using age and sex details from electoral registration records) and by geo-partisan means (using regional canvass records in the UK, and primary party registration records in certain US states). In other respects a product orientation is more difficult to justify although many have sought to do so. The 'actual product', it has been suggested, has been seen to incorporate party policies, personality and principle (O'Shaughnessy, 1999). The 'augmented' products have been conceived as including party membership, regulatory information provided to companies on forthcoming policy, and party conferences (Baines, 2001). The problem with these descriptors is that, however it is described, the political product is highly intangible.

The conceptualisation of price is also problematic. Is price the cost associated with specific proposals on voter livelihood such as tax and social implications? (Egan, 1999). Is price a voter's psychological involvement with a party or candidate measured through gains and losses in public trust and confidence? Both these suggestions appear unsatisfactory because voting is no guarantee that your candidate will win, or that if they do win, that they will fulfil their promises. In this respect voting is closer in conception to gambling. The price paid is your stake in a process where the outcome can see you win or lose. This concept is particularly applicable to companies who may financially support a party that does not enter power. Ironically, in the UK, this has included Stuart Wheeler, the boss of spread betting company, IG Index, who donated £5m to the Conservative Party prior to the 2001 British General Election.

The promotional and distribution elements of the mix also appear cumbersome and have generally been bundled together in their operationalisation by UK and US political parties and candidates. When communication and distribution are interrelated providing physical evidence of a service, training and recruiting the right people and engendering efficient consumer interaction processes become imperative (see Goncalves, 1998: 6). In the UK, paid-for political communications (i.e. partisan advertising) are restricted and other outputs (e.g. press conferences) subject to questioning and distortion. Overall, there are problems (with a free press) with controlling the messages that are disseminated.

Models of market structure, originally developed with consumer goods in mind, can be applied to political markets. In political markets there are comparatively few suppliers, with sharply asymmetric market shares. These suppliers vie with each other for the 'effective demand' of many consumers. So far, this is very much like the market for many consumer goods. However, the analogy between the political market and the consumer goods market should not be pushed too far. There are important differences that affect the legitimacy of this

particular comparison. In fmeg markets transactions can be treated as a continuous variable and are supported by a clear contractual framework. Price is a clearly defined concept, and the product that is bought and sold is relatively unambiguous. Market theories from this discipline focus on the achievement of market equilibrium specified in terms of the quantity of good bought and sold and the price level. In the political marketplace, by contrast, the key form of transaction is the election itself, which occurs infrequently, and does not constitute a legal contract between the 'buyer' and the 'seller'. The most tangible product is the electoral manifesto, but UK and US voters have yet to sue their elected representatives for failing to deliver on manifesto promises, hence the contractual basis for the transaction is less clearcut².

Political Campaigning as Consumer Service

The fit with product marketing would appear, therefore, to be a tenuous one. In contrast the political market does appear to have more in common with service industries (Newman 1988; Harrop, 1990; Baines and Egan 2001). Services marketing acknowledges those problems associated with similarity in the 'offering'. In addition the intangible, performance dependent, nature of service offerings, together with the service ethic which stresses customer focus, leads to the notion that service of the sort suggested in politics exists only in the customer's mind (Johns, 1999). Political campaigning can be likened to other highly intangible services directed at those same minds (Lovelock, 1996:29) such as, for example, religious services, education, broadcasting and gambling. Alternatively, marketing's strategic contribution may be in packaging the whole rather than in manipulating the component parts of a campaign. As Grönroos (1996, 2000) notes consumers do not look only for (tangible) goods and (intangible) services but demand a more holistic offering.

At this stage it may be opportune to step back and look again at the political marketplace. In theory, the development of political marketing should reflect the market's structural characteristics. However, the lack of a generally accepted definition of political marketing suggests that these characteristics are probably not yet fully recognised. Conceptualisation of this phenomenon is further hampered by the fact that there is also a strong degree of semantic confusion related to the definition of a service (Johns, 1999). Nevertheless, a number of authors have proposed definitions of political marketing. Shama (1975) originally defined political marketing as "the process by which political candidates and their ideas are directed at voters in order to satisfy their potential needs and thus gain their support for the candidate and ideas in question". Later definitions transform the meaning to incorporate: the process of lobbying (Lock and Harris, 1996); a long-term societal objective (Henneberg, 1997); a focus on competition, opinion research and environmental analysis (Wring, 1997) and an international and organisational perspective (Baines, 2001).

One problem with all of these definitions is that, although they may describe the process of marketing, they describe less well the need for a marketing orientation in the political organisation. They also tend to under-emphasise the part played by 'front-line' (usually local) marketers in the campaign process. It may, therefore, be more beneficial to look at a multi-part definition that incorporates both process and orientation. It is suggested, therefore, that a more comprehensive definition of political marketing may be that it is the means by which a campaigning organisation³:

² Although in the UK this has led to a judicial review.

³ Defined as an organisation involved in influencing or developing legislative and governmental policies and programmes.

- ◆ communicates messages to its supporters and other electors and influencers, often through the mass media (but not always) in order to encourage support for their organisation or discourage support for a competing organisation.
- ◆ interacts with and responds to supporters, influencers, legislators, competitors, and the general public in the development and adaptation of policies and strategies.
- ◆ delivers to all stakeholders, by means of diverse media, the level of information, advice and leadership expected.
- ◆ develops credibility and trust with supporters, other electors and other external sources enabling them to raise finances and to develop, and maintain, local and national organisational structures.
- ◆ provides training, information resources and campaign material for candidates, agents, marketers and/or other party activists.

This latter definition is less sympathetic with product-led concepts as it includes less tangible, and largely unrecognised, factors such as credibility and influence. In addition it embraces a central tenet of services orientated relationship marketing in that organisations are seen to cooperate with customers (voters) and other stakeholders ‘so that the objectives of all parties involved are met... by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises’ (Grönroos, 1994).

Even if further observation suggests that politics is closer to consumer services than consumer goods the ‘check-list’ or ‘tool-box’ (Grönroos, 1994) approach of the services marketing mix may be too sterile for the nuances associated with political marketing. Research has indicated that the traditional marketing mix approach can prove very restrictive (e.g. Gummesson, 1987) particularly, as it appears unsuited to a dynamic environment (O’Malley and Patterson, 1998) such as the political marketplace. This is not to demean the importance of people, processes or physical evidence (Boom and Bitner, 1981) which are integral to any campaign. Rather that these ingredients only operate effectively in the knowledge of the market characteristics. In this respect their value is a ‘given’. We may derive more understanding from the characteristics of service markets than the standardised and rigid approach embodied in the marketing mix paradigm.

Service industries are generally seen to have a number of characteristics (i.e. intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability) which differentiate them from physical goods industries and which may have resonance in politics. Newman (1988) has previously applied some of these characteristics to political markets to good effect. Palmer (1998) suggests that non-ownership should also be added to those generally discussed. The relation of each of these characteristics to political campaigning is explored below:

Intangibility – Political representation is a highly intangible service. Thus, there are few physical cues for the consumer to judge the product by (e.g. party manifestos). However, there are times when the representation is imperfect (i.e. pledges/promises are not kept). This is usually because:

- the candidate(s)/parties renege on or reinterpret promises once elected to government⁴
- the candidate(s) once elected do(es) not have the power to keep promises or,
- the candidate(s) lose(s) the election.

An important strategic implication of intangibility is the need for political organisations to recognise the importance of the interface with the voter. Investment in an attempt to “tangibilise the intangible” (Levitt, 1981) is seen as an imperative, perhaps by reproducing

⁴ See section Political Campaigning as Industrial Process for discussion on the related notion of over-promising.

policy information on CD-ROM, on party websites, and by email/SMS⁵.

Inseparability –The processes of production (or co-production), communication and consumption of the political service product are usually inseparable (Baines, 2001). In a service context, marketing becomes a means of facilitating complex producer-consumer interactions, rather than functioning merely as an exchange medium. Allegiance to a political candidate is often fleeting and there may be more loyalty to the ‘brand’ (party) than to a specific politician (particularly in the UK). The strategic implications that arise as a consequence of inseparability include the need for a more inclusive approach to campaigning. In some political markets this is achieved through the use of referenda, citizens’ panels and focus groups, and email/SMS.

Variability - There are two dimensions of variability. These are the amount the production varies from the norm and the extent to which it needs to be varied to suit the individual customer (voter). As the customer is usually involved in the production process for a service at the same time as it is consumed (co-production) it can be difficult to carry out monitoring and control of the production to ensure consistent standards. In national party campaigns in the UK, and US presidential campaigns, the issue of variability becomes of potential strategic importance. This is evidenced by the extent to which local parties and/or candidates have ‘local agendas’ or stray ‘off message’ and the degree of co-ordination sometimes imposed by national party organisations. Another aspect is whether or not different audiences require different messages or at least a different emphasis from the electorate as a whole. The growing strength of lobby groups (pensioners, disabled, environmentalist, etc.) would indicate that this may develop further in the future.

Perishability - Services cannot be stored. In the field of politics this may be paralleled with the failure of a supporter to vote at the appropriate time or to the party/candidate missing a media opportunity with which to make political capital. For instance, on this last point, the Conservative Party are reported to have campaigned on the wrong issues (e.g. Europe, Asylum) when other issues were regarded by the electorate as more important (e.g. Health, Education). Thus, political policies are perishable in the sense that they have a shelf-life and parties have a ‘strategic window’ in which to communicate them. These are, however, rather strained comparisons. In the commercial world price, part-time employees and peak-time efficiency routines (demand management methods) are often used to level out demand and minimise the ‘loss’ (or rather failure to gain) that occurs through perishability. In political campaigning, voters are more likely to be attentive to political messages just prior to the election and, thus, taxes, and economies, are manipulated by ruling parties as elections draw near.

Non-ownership - The inability to own a service relates to the characteristics of intangibility and perishability. Where a service is performed no ownership is transferred from the buyer to the seller. This relates directly to political marketing in connection with the vast majority of voters. Supporting a particular candidate gives no ‘rights’ over that candidate or their promises, except in corrupt political systems. However, lobbyists have enjoyed increasing influence over the political agenda in both the US and the UK. For instance, Bernie Ecclestone (the Formula One supremo) probably ensured that a four year stay was obtained on tobacco sponsorship of sports events through a £1m donation to Labour Party funds after

⁵ Short Message Service through mobile phones or ‘text messages’ as they are most commonly referred to.

European Union representatives tried to ban it in 1999. Political parties and candidates should place more emphasis on the process of political representation (i.e. interaction) and ensure that any promises made are capable of being realised and are open to parliamentary and media scrutiny.

Political Campaigning as Industrial Process

Competitive market models from the realm of industrial economics may offer further limited insights. Oligopoly theory focuses on strategic interdependence where each player needs to take account of the strategic behaviour of its rivals (Brown, 1996) and monopolistic competition focuses on product differentiation, where players strive to create monopoly power for themselves by differentiating their market offering from those of their rivals (Trigg, 1996). Although strategic interdependence and product differentiation may be seen to be features of political competition the charge is often made by the electorate is that both/all parties are much the same. This would appear to be particularly prevalent amongst those who frequently fail ultimately to vote. There is some truth in this charge. Arguably the Republican and Democrat parties in the US and the Conservative and New Labour parties in the UK agree upon much more than they disagree upon (e.g. that the State exists to serve the people, the rule of law is imperative and public money should be spent efficiently). There are (relatively small) differences between them on the appropriate overall extent and nature of state intervention in public affairs.

Another analogy between the structural models of commercial and political markets lies in the process of awarding a temporary exclusive franchise to a successful bidder through a competitive bidding process. Such bidding processes are common in industrial markets, and have seen considerable use in both the UK and the USA as a means of introducing competition to the provision of public sector services (Vickers and Yarrow, 1988). Vigorous competition between the rivals for the franchise combined with a tightly specified contract can, in principle, mean that the adverse effects of monopoly are entirely avoided (Domberger, 1986). In essence, the election process could be seen as a periodic bidding process, where the bidders (parties) present their alternative bids (manifestos / campaign platform), and the customers (voters) select their most preferred supplier for the next period of government. From a services marketing perspective this viewpoint may require amendment. Service heterogeneity means that tailoring the service to meet the needs of the client is only possible if that client 'opens up' concerning his or her problems and goals (Czepiel, 1990). Rather than alternative bids offered to passive customers, one could imply from inference of the service concept of 'co-production' of value, that the electorate (or proxy electorate's) effectively co-produce the policy through focus groups, opinion polls, media response, referenda, etc.. This notion is consistent with services marketing theory where it has been suggested that production and consumption are inseparable (Lovelock, 1996: 28). A more correct view is to consider both parties in a relationship as involved in the co-production of value. The support for any one party on election day effectively confirms that this value is recognised whilst simultaneously rejecting the 'value' jointly created with others.

Concepts from the theory of competitive franchising and co-production ring true in the political context. Domberger (1986: 280) notes that: "the history of franchising is not short of cases of unrealistic bidding designed to 'get a foot in the door' in the knowledge that once the contract is secured, more favourable terms can then be negotiated and the base-period pricing structure adjusted towards monopoly levels". Correspondingly, political parties are prone to readjust their taxation and spending plans after gaining office, or of failing to keep

pledges/promises. In services markets actual performance cannot be sampled. It might be expected, however, that customers would reject the manipulator at the next possible opportunity. In practice, however:

- electors appear to have short memories (a week is a long time in politics!)
- electors suppose all politicians act in a similar way
- election rhetoric is not often the major influence on voter decision making (Newman and Sheth, 1987).

In effect, the 'value creation' often goes unrecognised and the co-production is limited.

Another characteristic of competitive franchising is the information advantage conferred by incumbency. This advantage is used ruthlessly in political marketing - the candidate in power emphasises the administrative inexperience of rival candidates, and can judge its economic policies better given inside knowledge of the government's financial position. Incumbency can lead to the concept of the 'winner's curse'. In order to win a contract (or election) the outsider has to out-bid the incumbent. Therefore, the outsider, on winning the contract (election) is likely to find that they have over-promised, and that the contract cannot be delivered at the agreed price. In business, the result is a supplier losing profit on a contract. In politics it can lead to policy u-turns. In both cases, trust between the parties to the 'transaction' may be adversely affected. From a services perspective incumbency may represent an existing relationship that may, but likely may not, exist with the challenger particularly if the challenger has not recently or ever held office. As service quality from a new provider is hard to gauge the intangibility makes it difficult to examine the new service for evidence of suitability (Czepiel, 1990). In short it is frequently seen that 'risk averse' voter's support goes to 'the devil they know' rather than 'the devil they don't'.

Conclusion

The conventional approach to marketing is the 'marketing mix paradigm'. It is now widely accepted that this is an inadequate intellectual framework to be deemed a 'general theory of marketing'. Alternative intellectual frameworks have been developed in, for example, services marketing and industrial marketing (Hakansson, 1982). In this article, political campaigning has been analysed from Blois' (1974) 1st level of abstraction. It seems that the nature of the product is an important contingent variable in determining the appropriate marketing framework to adopt. Since the political product shares more in common with a service than with a physical good, it is to be expected that a services marketing framework will serve better than a framework designed for consumer goods marketing. However, the political 'product' is particularly complex, and the straightforward application of an extended marketing mix approach (such as the 7Ps) cannot deal with its peculiarities. First, there is a substantial amount of co-production in the political process; second, in representative democratic systems where a ruling party is elected for several years, voters only get occasional opportunities to expend their vote. The structure of the political market in such systems resembles market competition between the few, under conditions of periodic exclusive franchising. The strategic marketing process is designed to bring about desired voter outcomes (actual votes or associated variables) through product differentiation and market communications strategies, while recognising the underlying service characteristics of the product, and the unusual competitive conditions of the market. The political 'market' is peculiar in that the exchange between voter and party can be facilitated by techniques associated with all three sectors of Blois' (1974) 1st level of abstraction, although consumer services marketing techniques seem

most applicable.

Managerial implications

There can be no doubt that the practice of political marketing has, thus far, concentrated on the adoption of marketing research and marketing communications from the marketing tool-chest. Implicit in much of the practice of political marketing is the notion of ‘selling politicians like soap powder’ (sic). Such an approach is inconsistent with our contention that the political product has more in common with a service than a product, and that it is, even then, a rather peculiar service. If we are right, then a strategic marketing process developed with an explicit understanding of the product and of the production/distribution and competitive processes would be more effective than a marketing strategy that is simply transplanted from the consumer goods field.

Research implications

Our structure-conduct-performance model (Figure 1) proposes that there is a link from the structure of the political market to the conduct (strategy) of political competitors and from there to the outcomes of the political process. While we have formulated this as a conceptual framework, it would be quite straightforward to develop testable hypotheses from the model. For example, the model suggests that political marketing strategy (‘conduct’) will vary considerably from constituency to constituency, within a single national election campaign, depending upon local competitive conditions. Many British electoral constituencies are *de facto* political monopolies whilst, in others, as many as four parties may have a substantial share of the vote. A research design that identified and controlled for other variables (e.g. the affluence and average educational attainment of the voters) could be used to analyse the association between competitive conditions and political marketing strategy. This would enhance our understanding of which sectoral marketing techniques are most applicable under which circumstances to facilitate the political marketing exchange relationship between elector and electee.

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