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Political Marketing and Theories of Democracy

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- describe the differences between the sales-based, instrumental/managerial-based and relationship-based schools of thought in political marketing
- identify which of the three schools of political marketing thought is most common in your political system
- relate the three schools of political marketing to the *competitive elitist* and *deliberative* types of democracy
- discuss whether political marketing *should* be linked to specific theories of democracy.

Uneasy partners: political marketing and politics

Political marketing means many things to many people. In general, it is a term more often used in academia and practice in Europe than in the US (Scammell, 1999). The distinction between political marketing, political marketing management and political communication is not always clear and often obscured by overlapping interpretations. However, what is clear is that political marketing often evokes negative feelings and is assumed to be harmful for politics and democratic systems; while political scientists mostly focus on ethical aspects of political marketing management practice, that is, questioning the use of political marketing instruments during election campaigning, marketing theorists are more concerned with shortcomings in the theory of political marketing. Especially the lack of a clear and consistent position of political marketing regarding both political practice and democratic fundamentals are factors which hold back the research area of political marketing (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007).

In general, the merging of the two worlds of commercial marketing and political science makes academics anxious, especially political scientists who fear that politics will be transformed from what should rightly be a quest for a common vision of the just, noble and good into the private and often irrational whimsy of consumerism. Political marketing, it is argued, encourages voters to judge politicians in terms of the selfish rewards of consumer purchases (Bauman, 2005); equally it may undermine the courage necessary for political leadership (Klein, 2006). However, on the other hand, political marketing has been discussed in a more positive light, with Bannon (2005) arguing that a relationship-building approach of political marketing could well provide the basis for more meaningful interactions between voters and political institutions. Furthermore, political marketing should not be judged against ideal and impossible standards of a perfectly informed, knowledgeable and participating electorate, but rather against the real world of relatively low interest and knowledge in politics. This 'realist' strand of research claims that marketing of some sort may be valuable, even essential, for encouraging voter interest and involvement (Scammell, 2003).

However, as O'Shaughnessy (1990: 6) put it, 'The answer to the ethical question [regarding political marketing] depends on the views of democracy we hold.' Therefore, we argue that a critique of political marketing needs to be underpinned by a clear understanding of the conceptual complexity of the phenomenon in question as well as by a rigorous analysis of the yardstick that is employed. The vast majority of literature in political marketing and political science does not engage with the theoretical foundations of political marketing but remains concerned with specific applications and tools (Henneberg, 2008). This chapter is concerned with a discussion of different aspects of political marketing with regard to key concepts of democracy, with the aim of investigating the compatibility or incompatibility between them. Specifically, we are interested in whether the current 'dominant paradigm' of (political) marketing is commensurable with theories of democracy.

First, we briefly discuss the status of political marketing with regards to politics, and then analyse the characteristics of three distinct schools of political marketing that are derived from alternative theoretical vantage points. We then discuss two different normative concepts of democracy which will enable us to link political marketing with the democratic theories in a categorisation scheme. Finally, we synthesise our findings and their consequences and discuss implications for research in the area of political marketing.

The 'status' of political marketing in politics

Political marketing as an academic discipline 'works' on two levels: first, it consists of explanatory constructs for political marketing management activities as used by political actors in practice; second, it represents an

exchange or interaction-based research lens to explain the political sphere *per se* (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007). However, research in this area also ought to be concerned with the general 'fit' of the concepts of political marketing in relation to the research phenomenon in question (Lock and Harris, 1996). More specifically, political marketing research needs to be concerned with issues of democracy in general and its commensurability with political marketing management activities and underlying concepts, such as market orientation (Ormrod, 2007). This goes beyond more specific questions about the applicability of political marketing management activities in politics, such as whether it is ethical to focus only on 'floating voters' in a targeted election strategy (Baines et al., 2002).

The point of departure of this argument is the fundamental question regarding the integrity of political marketing (O'Shaughnessy, 2002). When posing the question in this way, there is somehow not enough clarity regarding the constructs concerned: what do we mean by 'democracy', and what exactly is 'political marketing' in this context? Thus, this question quickly disintegrates into more complex sub-questions once the two main components are examined. Political marketing and its theoretical and conceptual foundations, following commercial marketing theory, are not a monolithic bloc of unambiguous definitions, clear aims and aligned activities, but comprise many different 'schools' (Wilkie and Moore, 2003). Below, we focus on three distinct concepts of marketing in politics which span the space of possible options: 'selling-oriented', 'instrument-mix-oriented' and 'relationship-building' concepts of political marketing which are also informed by societal marketing considerations. Thus, the initial conceptual question about the relationship between political marketing and democracy needs to be related to each of these concepts of political marketing.

Moving to the second core component, that of democracy, it is equally clear that, conceptually, this too is a contested and fragmented construct (Cunningham, 2002). To judge the 'affinity' of political marketing against a democratic 'yardstick', one needs to consider which of the many expressions and principles of democracy are used; are we talking about the ideals of deliberative democracy or the norms of realist models? Again, for the purpose of our argument, we will focus on just two influential schools of democracy to illustrate our points: the 'competitive elitist' approach and the 'deliberative' concept of democracy.

Our analysis is therefore grounded in two parsimonious categorisation schemes (one of political marketing concepts, and one of theories of democracies) and their interrelations (Hunt, 1983). Such an analysis will allow us to provide a discussion of the concepts of political marketing and the activities of political marketing management. Furthermore, it also provides alternative benchmarks through the explicit use of a set of normative 'versions' of democracy (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007).

Concepts of political marketing

Political marketing (PM) provides a theoretical umbrella for different applications of marketing concepts within the political sphere. No singular approach to PM exists, in line with the multifaceted nature of commercial schools of marketing. Sheth et al. (1988) identified twelve different schools of marketing, many of which were inspired by social exchange theory, micro-economical theory or institutional political economy. However, since then several other conceptual schools of commercial marketing have come to the forefront of academic research or practical application: for example, the relationship and network marketing approaches to organisational interactions (Shaw and Jones, 2005). Although commercial marketing theory is dominated by the 'instrumental' or 'managerial' paradigm, it has been questioned if this instrumental/managerial school of marketing is in line with the richness of social exchange theory underlying marketing thought (Grönroos, 1994). Furthermore, it has been argued that this school is incommensurable with core marketing concepts such as customer orientation, that it is simplistic and that it is merely a pedagogic tool (Grönroos, 2006).

As in the case of marketing theory, a similar variety of approaches exist in political marketing. This is represented in the extant literature by analyses of communication-based campaigning approaches (Newman, 1994; Harris et al., 2005), by strategic positioning approaches (Henneberg, 2006), or by concepts based on the organisational attitudes and behaviours in their relationship with external and internal political stakeholders (Ormrod, 2007). However, only a few categorisation attempts exist which provide a comparison of alternative political marketing approaches.

In order to link political marketing and democratic theory we have to be precise about the characteristics of PM as represented by different, often incompatible, concepts. We select and define three distinct schools of PM that cover the spectrum and richness of marketing approaches to politics:

- sales-based school of PM
- instrumental/managerial (IM) school of PM
- relationship-based school of PM.

These three overarching schools have been chosen because 1) they provide examples of 'ideal types' of PM, 2) they are based on state-of-the-art research discussions, and 3) they constitute the dominating paradigms in PM research and practice.

The *sales-based school of PM* is most often equated with a traditional, ideology-oriented approach to politics (Henneberg, 2002). The political offering is derived from solid political convictions, often characterised by an alignment with certain interests within dominant or social cleavages, such as class, ethnicity and region (Lipset and Rokkan, 1966). A 'market-leading' perspective and a

predominantly tactical use of political marketing management instruments characterises this approach (Henneberg, 2006). Sales-based PM is often considered to be the 'first age' of political marketing, exemplified by the use of party political broadcasts, slogans, posters, and (in America) the thirty-second spot replacing the rally and the speaker meeting (O'Shaughnessy, 1990). It has been argued that this meant that political *marketing management* mattered more than political *marketing* (Wring, 2005). Examples of sales-based PM are now often found in primary-issue parties, typically Green parties or regional parties, such as the Welsh Plaid Cymru Party. The German Green Party campaigns offer an illustrative example, focusing on policies which are derived from a belief in environmental sustainability, while at the same time using selected management tools and concepts from PM (Blühdorn and Szarka, 2004).

The *IM school of PM* is generally accepted to be the 'normal paradigm' of current research in political marketing. Activities and strategies from the sphere of PM are used in a sophisticated way to convince voters of the value of the political offering, adapt the offering to target segment preferences and implement political marketing campaigns effectively and efficiently through the coordinated use of a multitude of tools and concepts from PM (Wring, 2005). This is in line with 'market-led' approaches of strategic marketing (Slater and Narver, 1998), or a 'following' mentality as a radical interpretation of a voter orientation (Henneberg, 2006). Tony Blair's first UK general election campaign represents an example of such 'focus group' driven campaigning (Wring, 2006). An instrumental approach can mean a focus on short-term expediency with emphasis on responding to tracking polls and public opinions. The *IM school of PM* describes an amalgam of techniques and a formulaic approach to the managerial implementation of the marketing concept (Johansen, 2005).

Recently, a *relationship-based approach to PM* has been advocated (Bannon, 2005). This is inspired by societal marketing considerations (Kang and James, 2007), which have also been advocated in the political sphere (Henneberg, 2002). The emphasis is on long-term interactions and exchanges that benefit all relevant actors as well as society, that is, direct as well as indirect stakeholder interests are considered (Laczniak and Murphy, 2006). Value considerations are linked to an acknowledgement of the (inter-)dependency of all involved interaction and exchange partners and are therefore grounded in mutual benefits as well as societal needs, based on delivering on promises and a voter- and citizen-inclusive approach to policy implementation (Johansen, 2005). To compare these three distinct schools we select some pivotal characteristics which are used to describe typical and therefore to some extent generic aspects of each school, and cover elements of the strategy on which each school of PM is based, the envisaged characteristics of the underlying political interactions of each school and the specific activity patterns associated with each school of PM (see Table 6.1). In the following discussion, we will focus particularly on the differences between these alternative schools of PM, rather than the similarities.

Table 6.1 Schools of political marketing

Strategy Dimensions	Rationale of PM	Sales-based PM	IM-based PM	Relationship-based PM
	Target voter segment(s)	Aligned voters	Floating voters and/or swing seats	Needs and wants of society
	Targeting strategy	Undifferentiated	Differentiated	Core and periphery voters
	Importance of PM for party/candidates	Peripheral, tactical activity management	Central, tactical/strategic activity management	Differentiated/Micro Central; strategic policy development/implementation; strategic/tactical activity management
Interaction Dimensions	Communication Value construct	One-way Conviction-based promises	Mediated one-way Needs-based promises	Dialogue Mediated needs-based promises
	Temporal orientation	Short-term	Short-term, electoral	Long-term, electoral and governmental
Activity Dimensions	Main PM activities	Communication	Communication, offering development, activity co-ordination, intelligence management	Policy and value strategy development, promises implementation, micro-activity management, relationship management
	Main PM instruments	Push marketing instruments	Push and pull marketing instruments	Relationship building instruments
	Campaign orientation	Election	Election, resource-generation	Election, government, resource generation, implementation

With regard to the *strategic dimensions*, the rationale for the three schools of PM differ: whilst the sales-based school is focused on ideology, the IM school is focused on a deep understanding of primary stakeholders, specifically the needs and wants of target voters. The relationship-based school enhances this perspective in line with a wider societal orientation which also incorporates the interests of stakeholders that are not direct electoral interaction partners, and assesses the trade-offs between short-term and long-term effects of the party's offering. Whilst this implies that the relationship-based school adopts a differentiated targeting approach covering core and periphery actors, the IM-based school focuses pragmatically on those decisive voter segments which need to be convinced in order to achieve the organisational aims, the 'floating or indecisive voters' or 'swing seats'. An undifferentiated targeting of voters who are aligned with the core offering is to be expected for those parties adopting the sales-based approach to PM. Consequently, these parties only use PM in a limited fashion as a tactical tool for achieving party aims, whilst PM is central to the IM-based and relationship-based approaches, especially the latter which perceives PM strategy to be the guiding principle of offering creation, stakeholder interaction and service delivery in politics (Henneberg, 2006).

The *interaction dimensions* of PM are concerned with the nature of the interactions between the party and its key interaction partners. Here we consider the nature of communication between the party and the key interaction partners, on which aspects value considerations are based and what time perspective underpins the three schools of PM. The sales-based school of PM is characterised by a uni-directional and episodic communication, focusing on election campaigns. This is in line with the conviction-based nature of the political offering. The IM school of PM shows some similarities to the sales-based school, although the underlying value concept derives its content from the current needs of specific groups of voters or the prevailing public opinion. On the other hand, the relationship-based school of PM emphasises the long-term perspective. A dialogue with changing agenda-setting functions between different interaction partners is envisaged, with a societally mediated value concept as its foundation (Scammell, 1999).

The relationship-based PM is based on the comprehensive and 'permanent' use of marketing activities, including policy development, communication and implementation, and long-term relationship and stakeholder management. This contrasts with the more limited *activity dimension* set of the other two approaches: whilst the IM-based school focuses specifically on communication, intelligence gathering and market-based policy development, the sales-based school of PM predominantly uses communication activities, specifically deployed in a push-marketing setting for election campaigns (Bannon, 2005).

Concepts of democracy

The previous discussion has outlined the differences between the three schools of PM. In the following section we are concerned with how these

schools of PM intersect theoretically with democracy. 'Democracy', in practice and theory, does not exist as a single universally agreed model (Lijphart, 1984). Held's (1996) influential categorisation identified six broad groups of democracy: Direct, Republican, Elitist, New Left, Participatory and New Right. These concepts of democracy differ with respect to the emphasis placed on the core ideas of participation, liberty, equality, leadership and the democratic process. In order to provide a clear and parsimonious discussion, we focus on **competitive elitism** (Schumpeter, 1942) and **deliberative democracy** (Habermas, 1996). This will enable us to shed conceptual light on the relative importance of political marketing to these concepts of democracy and to assess how the demands of democracy are met or threatened by the three schools of political marketing outlined above.

Deliberative democracy and competitive elitism cover widely different normative beliefs about the essence of democracy and how democracy ought to function. Each arises out of particular intellectual traditions and spawns its own set of internal arguments (Held, 1996). The prime reasons for our selection of these two conceptions are that they represent the broad spectrum of contemporary debate in democratic theory. Competitive elitism, by common consent, has been an extraordinarily influential model in Western democratic theory (Scammell, 2000). Its insistent realism (critics would say pessimism) has provided the touchstone for arguments about the nature of democracy for more than fifty years. Modern theories of participatory democracy emerged in part as a reaction against competitive elitism; of the various types of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy is the most influential in political communication research. Habermas's idea of the public sphere, a core concept of deliberative democracy, 'ballooned into the new God-term' of critical analysis over the course of the 1990s (Gitlin, 1998: 168).

Competitive elitism

The conception of democratic competitive elitism is based on elite theory which has a long heritage in political thought, from Plato's *The Republic* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*, through to early-twentieth-century 'Italian school' descendants, notably Mosca, Pareto and Michels (Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2001). Its most durable claim is the inevitable stratification of society between rulers and the ruled. Elite theory is often disliked because of its profound pessimism about democratic possibilities, and rejection of the grander liberal and socialist ideals of freedom, equality, popular sovereignty and the realisation of human potential. The elitists' answer relies on 'realism': history and social science demonstrate the presence of a ruling class in all political organisms (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987). Furthermore, recognition of this unavoidable fact is essential for the establishment of the normatively desirable, namely that governing *should* be in the hands of those most fit to rule. Schumpeter's (1942) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* remains the most influential account of *democratic*

elitism. Schumpeter begins from a rejection of what he calls the 'classical doctrine of democracy', in which elected representatives realise the common good by carrying out the will of the people. His chief criticisms centre on 'the will of the people' and the 'common good': he argued that the classics had overestimated the possibilities of both. There was no such thing as the common good to which all people could agree by force of rational argument. Questions of principle were irreconcilable 'because ultimate values – our conceptions of what life and society should be – are beyond the range of mere logic' (Schumpeter, 1942: 251). He also disparaged the very idea of the will of the people: if it was to command respect, it required a level of knowledge and rational ability in individual human beings that simply did not exist among the masses. In reality the will of the people was little more than '...an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions' (Schumpeter, 1942: 253).

Schumpeter (1942) reverses the order of classical liberal theory in which the people elect representatives who then give effect to the will of the people. The role of the people is to produce a government that takes it upon itself to establish the common good. Democracy becomes an arrangement for arriving at political decisions, in which leaders acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people's votes. Democracy, in short, is reduced to a method for the periodic and peaceful transfer of government between two or more groups of leaders. The most that can be expected of democracy is that it may choose the most competent leaders and provide mechanisms for controlling their excesses. According to Schumpeter (1942) this greatly improves the theory of the democratic process, emphasising the importance of leadership, which was neglected in classic theory. It states also that the method of competition for leadership is crucial to democracy: the process must be generally accepted as fair, if not perfect. Schumpeter's durability resides primarily in two factors: first, the considerable body of evidence which continues to show that despite apparent improvements in education, large minorities of the population (about one third in the USA) have little interest in or knowledge of politics (Bennett, 1988). Second, he compels attention to the quality of the electoral systems and processes. As Shapiro (2002) notes, theorists are often discomfited by the competitive elitist tendency to reduce democracy to procedures, yet these are vital for structuring power relations and limiting interference with individual and/or group pursuit of their versions of the good life. Norris's (2004) study of some three dozen parliamentary and presidential elections concurs: the detail of 'electoral systems may appear unduly technical and dry' but matter significantly for 'basic issues of political representation and accountability, for patterns of participation and party competition, and for the effective health of democratic institutions around the world' (Norris, 2004: 264).

Deliberative democracy

Contrasting with this view, deliberative democracy emerged as a distinctive strand of the New Left backlash against Schumpeter's (1942) pessimistic portrait of democratic possibilities. Led by Pateman's (1970) seminal work, the New Left argued that the Schumpeter-influenced 'contemporary model' of liberal democracy was excessively afraid of the dangers of popular active participation. Whilst expressing some concern with voter apathy, they offered no account for it, and instead located the major threat to modern democracy in 'mediocrity and the danger that it might destroy its own leaders' (Pateman, 1970: 10–11). Pateman argued that the Schumpeterian legacy had abandoned a central democratic tenet: the insistence on participation. For the New Left, the concept of participation is clearly differentiated from the far more limited pluralist concerns to increase voter engagement with politics. Pateman argues that the pluralists' concern is essentially with stability: that is, participation is necessary only to the extent that it is sufficient to ensure the legitimacy and stability of the democratic system as a whole. For participationists, however, participation is itself a goal. Democratic politics, properly conceived, is about the self-development of citizens, fostering concern for collective problems and enabling the development of an active and knowledgeable citizenry. Participationists dispute the 'realist' assumptions of elite theory; they accept that the actual levels of knowledge and participation are low, but dispute that they must always be low and that such low levels are compatible with genuine democracy.

The stress on participation as deliberative communication or dialogue is the main contribution of deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy 'represents an exciting development in political theory' (Bohman and Rehg, 1997: ix): it reclaims the classic idea that democratic government should embody the will of the people. In essence, deliberative democracy holds that legitimate lawmaking results from the public deliberation of citizens. It rejects Schumpeter's (1942) view that there is no such thing as a common will, and that the public is not capable of rationality. On the contrary, deliberative theorists argue that democratic legitimacy depends precisely on a rational consensus of public opinion (see Table 6.2).

Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy, inspired by Rousseau's republicanism, is the best known of these theories (Calhoun, 1992). For Habermas, citizen status should mean more than the protection of private rights and periodical voting opportunities. It demands a commitment to democratic processes that ensures that the people are the authors of the laws that govern them: in short, a healthy public sphere with a 'guarantee of an inclusive opinion and will-formation in which free and equal citizens reach an understanding on which goals and norms lie in the equal interest of all' (Habermas, 1996: 22).

Table 6.2 Schools of theories of democracy

	<i>Competitive Elitism Democracy</i>	<i>Deliberative/Participatory Democracy</i>
<i>Starting point</i>	Structure of a stratified society Political preference incompatibility	Changeable structure Unified will of people exists/can exist
<i>Context</i>	Limited voter knowledge/interest in politics Political instability	Voter rationality/knowledge can be created
<i>Focus</i>	Process/method focus to produce government and imbue legitimacy	'Gestalt' perspective on political discourse framework Sovereignty of the people realised through deliberation in the public sphere
<i>Main instruments</i>	Political leadership by elite	Communication and dialogue by public (healthy public sphere)
<i>Outcomes</i>	Competent leadership Legitimate/fair process Stability	Political participation by citizens Knowledgeable citizenry

Habermas's (1996) version of deliberative democracy, that the public is in continuous, rational, deliberation about its own governance, has had a huge impact on political communication scholarship (Scammell, 2000). This is not surprising because, unusually for democratic theory, it places communication (via Habermas's, 1996, conception of the public sphere) at its core. Its power stems both from its critique of the failures of existing democratic practice, characterised by declining participation and increasing public dissatisfaction with the formal institutions of politics, and from its sheer optimism that given conducive conditions, a genuine mass participatory democracy is possible. Barber's (2003) *Strong Democracy*, with its menu of initiatives to encourage public debate, is arguably the most important practically oriented intervention in favour of deliberative democracy. Barber contrasts his model of strong democracy to what he calls the 'thin' democracy of Schumpeter-influenced liberalism, which actively encourages little or no participation from citizens between formal elections.

Relationships between PM and democracy

It now remains to be seen how the three distinct schools of political marketing relate to the two selected theories of democracy. The following provides a juxtaposition of them (progressing from a discussion of the **sales-based school of PM**, followed by the IM-based and relationship-based schools) to

facilitate an assessment of their relationship with regard to each other, with specific focus on the current 'normal paradigm' of political marketing, the IM-based school.

Political marketing and competitive elitism

Schumpeter is often considered the theoretical forerunner of political marketing, although as often as not he is cited without any acknowledgement of the elitist underpinnings of his ideas (O'Shaughnessy, 1990). His attraction for political marketing scholars is that he is among the first and most important political theorists to argue that elections were analogous to sales in commercial markets (Street, 2003). The need for political salesmanship stemmed both from the logic of competition and from the passive and largely uninterested state of the electorate which needed mobilizing into voting. The economic logic of markets demands that producers compete to sell their wares; the reality of uninterested voters demands that politicians find ways to attract attention and mobilise support. Thus, famously for Schumpeter, what he called the 'psycho-technics' of electioneering (advertising, slogans, rallies, stirring music and suchlike) were not corruptions of democratic politics but were essential if the process was to work at all.

Conceptually, Schumpeter's approach fits closely to the sales-based school of political marketing. In both approaches, the party offering is essentially top-down, designed according to 'producer' convictions and then 'sold' through the tactical use of marketing instruments. Schumpeter's view reflected the mid-war period of ideologically polarised political choice, class and social bloc-based politics and limited affluence and consumer choice. The sales-based approach to PM was effectively the only one available for mass markets (Henneberg, 2002).

However, it is clear that competitive elitism must be less comfortable with the tenets of the IM-based school of political marketing. It is precisely a concern of modern competitive elite theorists that populist demands of mass-mediated democracy have potentially destructive effects upon political leadership (Scammell, 2000). While a voter-oriented 'follower' mentality may be hailed as bringing in more consultative democratic aspects (Lilleker, 2005), pressures of media and the proliferating opinion polls on virtually all aspects of our lives effectively squeeze the discretionary power of leaders to set the political agenda. Gergen, a White House adviser to Nixon, Ford, Reagan and Clinton, notes the escalation of poll-led politics:

All modern presidents have polled heavily – Haldeman [for Nixon] put three different pollsters in the field at a time and secretly paid for a fourth to keep an eye on the others – but no one before Clinton has taken a poll to determine whether he should tell the truth publicly (the Lewinsky case) or to use American ground troops [Kosovo]. (2000: 331)

According to Gergen (2000), Clinton spent nearly ten times as much on polling in his first year in office as his predecessor spent in two years.

The great concern of modern elitists is that IM-based political marketing encourages a shift in criteria for selecting candidates for office, away from intra-organisational success and competence towards the media-focused qualities of personality, likeability and attractiveness. IM-based PM may be seen as an understandable response to increasing media power, but nonetheless it ratchets up the threats to leadership as image comes to dominate, competent but media-awkward candidates are sidelined in favour of media-friendly candidates, and the political offering is increasingly cautious and determined by the results of polls and focus groups. The shoehorning of politicians into poll-driven strategic moulds has been a recurring complaint of commentators who witness politicians turning into on-message robots day after day. Klein (2006) denounces political marketing consultants precisely for draining the authentic, human qualities out of the politicians they serve: 'They've put democracy in a Styrofoam cage. And the politicians – who tend to see caution as an aphrodisiac – have gone along' (Klein, 2006: 240).

Thus, IM-based political marketing may ultimately harm democracy by fostering weak and follower-type leaders, or, just as damagingly, a politics devoid of the idea of common interest altogether. Leaders, in the classic Schumpeterian formulation, should take it upon themselves to determine the common interest. Yet an IM-based approach to political marketing segments electorates and concentrates resources on the targets and niches required for victory (Smith and Hirst, 2001). This may lead, as in the hands of a strategic marketer as effective as Karl Rove, George W. Bush's infamous architect, to a politics of national polarisation. Worse still, IM-based PM revives traditional fears about the depth of attachment to democratic ideals among ordinary citizens and their vulnerability to skilful manipulation. The people's choice might well be for 'the politics of demagogic xenophobia, as witnessed by popular support for radical right-wing movements in contemporary Europe' (Blaug and Schwartzmantel, 2001: 261).

With regard to relationship-based PM, competitive elitism also shows some concerns. These are derived from the involvement of citizens not so much in the process of democracy but also in the content of the offering creation and delivery, that is, the fundamentals of policy development and implementation. Modern competitive elitists are not convinced that deliberation produces 'better' democracy, in the sense of fostering consensus on fundamental conceptions of the common good. As Shapiro (2002) argues, 'there is no obvious reason to think that deliberation will bring people together' (Shapiro, 2002: 238). Moreover, even if deliberative consensus were achievable, it is not necessarily desirable and may lead to the suppression of difference: '...the competition of ideas – argument rather than deliberation' is the vital ingredient of democratic liberty (Shapiro, 2002: 239). Thus, to the extent that relationships and interdependencies preclude competition they will not foster liberty.

It is arguable that the relationship-based school of political marketing is inherently problematic for a democratic orientation focusing on the need for meritocratic leaders to derive clear and decisive actions out of incompatible preferences. Furthermore, the theory of political elitism is sceptical that meaningful relationships with citizens based on political interactions are realistic. Even by increasing the numbers of citizens who are interested and informed, and therefore interested in political relationships, the majority, or certainly a large minority, will (want to) stay ignorant and potentially easily manipulated. Democratic elitism's main concern is therefore with the role of leadership (specifically that it must be protected and safeguarded) as well as the political competitive process (it must be fair, open and designed to produce the best leaders). Neither aspect is self-evidently a main concern of the relationship-based school of political marketing.

Political marketing and deliberative democracy

Authentic public deliberation requires spaces protected from manipulation and self-interested promotion in which citizens may engage as equals in the discussion of matters of common concern. It is not so much that political salesmanship should not exist; rather, that it should not displace or dominate the discussion of private individuals coming together to form the public. However, it is arguable whether such an unmanipulated ideal public sphere ever has or ever could exist (Schudson, 1995). Nonetheless, it is the driving concern of deliberative democrats to increase protected spaces for citizen-to-citizen communication through, for example, neighbourhood assemblies, televised town hall meetings and mediated civic communications initiatives (Barber, 2003).

It would seem clear that the sales-based school of political marketing, as a vehicle for one-sided, uni-directional rhetoric, may be a threat to deliberative ideals; it offers at best competitive debate, which, while essential for electoral politics, is corrupting if it dominates the public sphere. After all, the ideal public sphere is precisely the place where private citizens create public opinion and hold critical authority over their governments and would-be leaders.

Proponents of deliberative democracy must also be deeply suspicious of the dominant current practice exemplified by the IM-based school of political marketing. Their concerns are the mirror image of the competitive elitists' anxiety. Where the prime fear of the competitive elitist is for weak leadership, the prime fear of the deliberative democrat is for a populist democracy that effectively bypasses public deliberation altogether. Polls and focus groups express opinion of sorts, but that opinion may be anything: a reflex, a prejudice, even a totally invented view. Polls do not necessarily correspond to thoughtful, considered opinion (Frankovich, 2005). The danger of politics that follows polls, focus groups and casually expressed voter opinions is that it may in the context of a deliberative democracy compound prejudice, elevate

it to policy and neglect the fora of truly public deliberated opinion. The clever and unprincipled power-seeker may ride to office on waves of prejudice, and as such they will not be the meritocratic leader that competitive elitism seeks, but neither are they necessarily weak, and all the worse for democracy if strong.

Of the three schools of political marketing discussed here it would seem that only the relationship-based school of political marketing with a societal orientation has any potential for compatibility with the ideal construct of a deliberative democracy. This derives from the relationship-based school's insistence on the maintenance of relationships with real people, rather than a purely poll-driven assessment of preferences (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Relationship marketing inherently invites dialogue, even if not necessarily the ideal deliberation of the public sphere. It emphasises the need to pay attention to the core (supporters and members) as well the periphery of target floating voters and other societal stakeholders, and thus provides incentives to develop political interest and engagement on an enduring basis. A truly deliberative democrat (but also a convinced political relationship marketer) must look with scepticism at the proliferating claims of parties to be 'listening'. The 'Big Conversation', which British Prime Minister Tony Blair launched in 2003, was claimed to be the biggest consultation exercise ever with voters but was quickly dismissed as a gimmick and is now largely forgotten. However, the political drive for increased connection with voters does present opportunities for mechanisms of relationship-building. Trippi's (2004) heralded open-source campaign for Howard Dean in 2004 (the 'Blog for America' campaign enabled citizens to place any message without censorship, and enlist to volunteer or to donate, with 40,000 people per day visiting this site) was high-risk and ultimately short-lived, but remains a high-profile and influential model of reciprocity between a candidate and supporters (Trayner, 2006). A polity constructed as part of ongoing relationship-building, for example, using regular referenda, citizens' juries or internet-based interactions, could bring forth a genre of political marketing which focuses on the goals of information, persuasion and reciprocity, rather than attack and defence. The positive aspects of dis-intermediarisation which are attributed to such internet-based PM would overlap with requirements of a deliberative democratic setting (Collins and Butler, 2003).

It is likely that the proponents of deliberative democracy have not fully grasped how flexible political marketing can be and how effective it can become when used as a tool to counteract elitist hegemony. Political marketing is not just confined to party campaigns. Marketing techniques, concepts and methodologies are being increasingly adopted by pressure groups such as the 'Stop the War Coalition' in the United Kingdom. Whilst the first big demonstration to be held against the Iraq War in 2003 was a mass of discordant images, an anarchy of amateur poster designs with the total effect of confusion, the more recent demonstrations have become almost corporate in tone. This is exemplified by hordes of individual demonstrators carrying the

posters designed by David Gentleman with a unitary, cohesive anti-war brand symbolism (spots of bright red ink on a white background with the black slogan 'Stop the War'). If a complete critique is to be developed of the three schools of PM, it must be recognised that it is no longer the exclusive monopoly of elite groups such as parties, and that in the age of the internet even the powerless can turn to marketing.

However, it may be that competitive elitism is the more useful of the two democratic theories to political marketing theory. Its emphasis on the competitive nature of the struggle of votes regards marketing as essential to the democratic process and not an alien import. Its concern with process directs attention to the need for incentives and disincentives to practise a democratically more wholesome political marketing. It tells us that the rules matter. Commercial marketing has been persuaded to take societal issues seriously, through a mixture of enlightened self-interest and externally imposed regulation. Political marketing theory and practice should follow suit.

Summary, conclusions and implications

The relationship between PM and democracy encompasses the important issue of how to ensure that in liberal democracies the 'political competition' is enacted appropriately when measured against some normative ideals. As our argument has outlined, this relationship is multifaceted and ambiguous. Different conceptual implementations of political marketing can be 'tested' against different theories of democracy. Our comparison of democratic theory and alternative schools of PM has shown that whilst the sales-based school of political marketing is to some extent compatible with a Schumpeterian approach of competitive elitism, the ideal of a deliberative democracy shows more affinity with the relationship-based school of political marketing. What becomes clear is that the IM-based school of political marketing, the political marketing approach most clearly associated with the current normal paradigm of marketing theory (Wilkie and Moore, 2003), shows the least overlap with the conceptual demands of either theory of democracy. This has considerable implications for the development of political marketing theory and underlines the need for alternative and critical concept and method development in political marketing (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007).

A clear implication of our analysis is that political marketing needs to engage with theories of democracy in order to provide itself with legitimacy. Whilst political marketing may arguably be 'conceptually neutral', its application and practice is not and needs to include a normative aim. For example, political relationship marketing, if pursued by politicians and political parties, could succeed in moving politics further towards the forms of deliberative democracy. The concepts, techniques and technologies inherent in the idea of political marketing that are based on societal marketing considerations could

be used to foster a true relationship between party, politician and their publics, reinventing traditional methods of political communication such as direct mail, to inform as well as persuade, to listen as well as consult (Johansen, 2005). There are of course some good examples of exactly this, such as the 3000 constituents engaged in an internet dialogue with the British Liberal Democrat MP Stephen Webb (*Sunday Times*, 13 March 2005) or the Proposition Movement in California, a phenomenon that dates from the progressive era of a century ago.

In fact, the rise of such phenomena as bloggers, the idea of 'net roots' and the cacophony of democratic noise emanating from the internet has persuaded some at least that we are on the edge of a new era of deliberative or consultative democracy (Collins and Butler, 2003). The resulting change in the balance of power between policy producer (political parties and politicians as well as the media) and policy consumer (citizens), together with the empowerment of self-authorship, has some potential impact on the future possibilities for a deliberative democracy which can be channelled via relational marketing practices.

For its critics, the idea of 'political marketing' will be perennially suspect in relation to 'democracy', similar to the concept of marketing in the public sector in general (Collins and Butler, 2003). Partly this is because of the negative resonances of the label 'political marketing' which would appear to merge a significant activity, namely politics, with a seemingly trivial and inherently insignificant one, namely marketing. The inference is that political marketing represents the ideology of consumerism applied to politics, and thus connects to broader fears about consumerism and consumer culture. Whilst we do not want to be apologists of political marketing, that is, we see our argument as an 'ordering attempt', not as an 'order' (Tadajewski, 2006), we argue that the critics' view takes into account neither the subtleties of different interpretations of political marketing nor of different ideals of liberal democracy. Whilst some of the concerns against political marketing can be dismissed as amounting to mere prejudice (Henneberg, 2004), others are credible, for example the costs inherent in a marketing conceptualisation of politics mean that politicians and parties, particularly in America, are mortgaged to powerful vested interests (Harris and Lock, 2005). This would be a potential vindication of the Schumpeterian case; the gratification of sectarian interest is then seen as inherent in the practice of political marketing. Cost is a mighty factor in campaigning, and this raises fears of public opinion becoming a commodity to be manufactured, bought or sold, the commoditisation of opinion which becomes dysfunctional to the collective interest.

If political marketing is defined to embrace the isolated use of sophisticated instruments, such as the generation of public imagery of George Bush on the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln and aspects of the so-called permanent campaign (Nimmo, 1999), then the critique that political marketing is enhancing an illusion of participation becomes more credible. However, we argue that there are other definitions of political marketing and that we cannot

choose between the desirability or appropriateness of these alternatives without explicating the democratic yardstick we use. What emerges clearly out of our exploration is that types of marketing have implications, conducive and corrupting, for ideal types. We have examined only two models of democracy; but for both of these we find that the IM-based school of political marketing which dominates current political marketing theory is the least appropriate in terms of conceptual overlap with the theories of democracy.

Thus, we are left with two alternative narratives, which represent different assessments of the present and different ideas about future possibilities. The one, based on rhetoric of technology-driven empowerment, meaningful relationships, a societal orientation and inspired by ideals of deliberative democracy, would portray a benign future constituted by a more inclusive democracy and enhanced by the application of relational political marketing tools, technologies and concepts. The alternative is to argue for the acceptance of the elitist model, either from the perspective that it represents a genuinely more workable model of democracy or from the cynical resignation of the disillusioned idealist. It may therefore be that political marketing emerges almost naturally out of political competition, and is shaped by the structure of this competition. This would mean a preference for the sales-based school of political marketing, including a strategic posture of leading the electorate (Henneberg, 2006). In either case, the status accorded to political marketing is critical to the description of future scenarios of a desired democracy. Furthermore, for any of these two narratives to happen, the dominant paradigm in political marketing needs to change.

Further research on this issue is necessary. In fact, the development of a critical theory of political marketing, which takes an exchange perspective seriously and adapts it to the political sphere, is an important stepping-stone for further concept development in this area. This would include an understanding of the contingencies of the interplay of different aspects of political marketing and normative theories of democracy, and therefore constitute a 'marketing systems' approach (Shaw and Jones, 2005). As Dann et al. (2007) have pointed out, the current agenda is in need of comparative research about both the *effectiveness* and the *relevance* of political marketing. Whilst we were only able to focus on two interpretations of the democratic ideal, it is necessary to relate political marketing theory as well as practice to the contemporary discussions in political science and democratic theory. This includes discussions (and empirical analyses) of the ethical dimensions of the interplay of political marketing and theories of democracy, aspects which we have only 'framed' through our argument but not extensively touched upon (Laczniak and Murphy, 2006). Teleological (outcome-related) and deontological (means or duty-related) considerations are possible foundations for such political marketing ethics (Crane and Desmond, 2002). Furthermore, political marketing research needs to take the concerns of political scientists seriously and develop alternative approaches to political marketing which are complementary to the dominant IM-based school of political marketing.

Discussion questions

- Which of the three schools of political marketing do the parties in your system follow? Which of the two forms of democracy is your political system?
- When thinking about the type (school) of political marketing that each party adopts, how does each party 'fit' with the type of democracy?
- What is the relationship between the political marketing carried out by political actors on the one hand and theories of democracy on the other?

Key Terms

Competitive elitism
 Deliberative democracy
 Sales-based school of political marketing
 Instrumental/

managerial-based school of political marketing
 Relationship-based school of political marketing

Further reading

Collins and Butler (2003): The article criticises the assumption that market research into public opinion naturally produces the optimal basis for policy decisions in representative democracies. It concludes by stating that political discourse and citizen engagement in the political process is superior to a simple responsiveness to voters when considering the implications of policy for society as a whole.

Henneberg et al. (2009): This article forms the basis of this chapter.

Scammell (1999): This article was one of the first to discuss the unique contribution that political marketing – as distinct from political communication or campaign studies – could provide to understanding the strategic behaviour of political parties. The article was especially influential as it was written by a leading British political scientist and was published in a political science journal.

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