

## MARKETING CONCEPTS WITHIN THE POLITICAL FIELD

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### **Abstract:**

*The present paper theoretically presents the application of marketing concepts and proposes appropriate designation to them in the political field. The concepts in question are marketing, advertising and public relations. As a research method, I used the theoretical research, by using secondary sources, while as the analysis method used I can mention the theoretical comparative method. The Romanian specialized literature needs this kind of conceptual clarification, and the present paper can lead to a better understanding and to an appropriate using of the marketing concepts within the political field. The proposed conceptual boundaries are important for both researchers and practitioners in the field especially since we are not only in the process of sedimentation of a discipline but also in the construction of a School of thought in politics- political marketing. The research hypothesis which assumes that conceptual boundaries in political marketing are not fully understood was confirmed by the presence of some opinions not very well structured in the specialised literature.*

**Key words:** Political marketing, electoral marketing, political advertising, electoral advertising, political marketing terminology

**JEL classification:** M30, M31

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article represents, according to the classical system of scientific research formation, a fundamental research, since it sheds light upon the theoretical field.

Political marketing research has made significant progress in recent years as evidenced by its own dedicated journal, special issues of international marketing journals, handbooks and edited volumes, special research interest groups of the academy, dedicated academic and practitioner conferences and articles in leading field journals. It has drawn together researchers, students, professional practitioners and involved observers from multiple back grounds, and has managed to build a literature of considerable scale and value. As a distinct sub-discipline it is increasingly identifiable. (Butler, Harris, 2009)

The importance of the two fields, the marketing and the politics, even in south-eastern Europe, is revealed by O' Cass's affirmation (2009): „Two activities – politics and marketing – often dominate the social psyche of many societies, having a major influence over individuals and the broader citizenry. The use of marketing by political parties has been a growing theme in academia, with attention being given by some authors to the social and democratic implications of using marketing in political campaigns and by others to marketing management issues in campaigns. The growing body of work on the application of marketing has developed into the sub-discipline of marketing that is now identifies as political marketing. Political marketing has achieved a significant position and gained widespread usage in most, if not all, western democracies, and it appears to be spreading with increasing use and sophistication to non-western countries. We now see major developments in political marketing in the USA, Australia, the UK, and even in Turkey, Greece, Russia and like”.

Specialized politics communication and political marketing notions date back from the second half of the 20th Century. Of course, it sometimes happens that political communication instruments are used involuntarily, but, in reality, political communication was pleased to make only publicity, that is, to use communication instruments in an unidirectional, unilateral manner, without following a genuine communication process.

## METHODOLOGY

As a research method, I used the theoretical research by using secondary sources, while as analysis method, I can mention the theoretical comparative analysis.

Since I have analysed usual terms within the current practical language as analysis sources, I have used both scientific articles and university guides, books of practice specialists destined to the general public, but also dictionaries, in order to verify the acceptance of terms.

## FROM MARKETING TO POLITICAL MARKETING

As an example, we render Kotler's reflections upon political marketing (Kotler, 2005): „Marketing is omnipresent and may serve to the selling of a wide range of things (products, services, experiences, ideas and information), but also of people: athletes, movie stars, etc. There have always been a marketing of political people. Politics people utter small phrases, they hug babies, shake hands with a countless number of people and call for advertisement agencies in order to shape their image.

Nowadays, candidates' marketing advisers tell them how to dress, how they should speak, what to say (or not say), in the company of whom must they appear, etc. Each public appearance of the candidate is carefully planned, almost as if one set each and every detail of a certain product's positioning or its position in the section. I don't see what could determine the disparity of these practices. In a pluralist democratic system, all parties do the same thing, and their initiatives are meant to cancel one another. Still, we can rightfully fear that the election will be won by the candidate whose marketing budget is the greatest, and not by the one with the best program.”

Political marketing consists of determining the expectations of electors or of a group of electors by means of surveys or of certain reflection groups composed of panels of target-electors, in order to build afterwards a politics which would satisfy their needs and would challenge them to vote for the chosen candidate.

Within the political marketing, each politician is a brand image that must be built in front of the public. Once the image is built, he would have to become himself the symbol product of the party and represent it. Thus, the politician is no longer the embodiment of his life ideas and projects, but he must represent the ideas of the majority of the population. His style becomes thus more important than his words.

According to Kotler (2006), among the 10 types of entities to which marketing applies, we can find six of them who reach the political: events, persons, places (partially), organisations, information and ideas.

Still, political marketing is not really a subject that people talk about, a fact which is also emphasized by Manceau and Triquecoste (2007): „In France, marketing's academic community talks very little about the subject, while, on their side, some political analysts emphasize just how much marketing methods influence candidates, militants and electors”.

According to Bobin, commercial marketing and political marketing have the same nature: „the implementation of the means destined to favorably influence the attitude and behavior of audiences to which the product is destined. The radical difference lies in one of the elements of the marketing mix: the product. In a first case, we talk about an object, while in the second one, about a man and his ideas”. Bobin „tries” to define political marketing which „interferes in order to target the receptors and qualify the message, depending on the chosen transmission channel. What differentiates political marketing from the commercial one is that, in the latter we talk about a scrolling strategy, while for political marketing, this is a meeting strategy. The product doesn't need to be sold daily, but in a single specific day, that of elections”.

A famous definition in the specialized literature is the one given by Denis Lindon (1976), according to which political marketing would be: „an assembly of theories and methods which political organizations and public powers can use, both for defining their objectives and programs and for influencing the behavior of citizens”.

More recently (2009 apud. 2006), Hughes and Dann have defined political marketing as „a set of activities, processes or political institutions used by political organizations, candidates and individuals to create, communicate, deliver and exchange promises of value with voter consumers, political party stakeholders and society at large”.

Political marketing does not represent a simple transposition of commercial marketing. „It will be difficult to adopt the assembly commercial marketing of instruments and procedures as such, since political marketing lacks the ordinary choice and extrapolation criteria of its homologous: the evolution of sells curves, market sizes, buying possibilities, etc, will be inoperable” (Maarek, 2007). „Marketing has established and accepted a role and responsibility in the political process, and the time has come to recognize that after three decades of contemporary academic research, the question is one of the role that is being played, and not if a role is to be played in politics at all.” (Hughes, Dann, 2009).

## POLITICAL OR ELECTORAL MARKETING?

Within the field of electoral campaigns, the ones interested in that, frequently confront themselves with the question: *electoral marketing or about political marketing?* The answer is essential for certain categories of specialities, especially political advisors and researchrs; unfortunately though, the issue is rarely put in such a manner.

The first difference between political marketing and electoral marketing is made by Denis Lindon: „We must not mistake electoral marketing in a more strict sense with the political marketing in a larger sense. Political marketing is an ensemble of theories and methods, which political organisations and public powers may dispose of, both for defining their objectives and programs, as well as for the influence of citizen behaviour. (...) Electoral marketing, in the strict sense is nothing else but a part of the political marketing and has a more limited objective: to help political parties and candidates conceive and implement an effective electoral campaign” (Lindon, 1976).

Political marketing is the continuous communication with the market, comprising all actions, while political marketing represents the communication and punctual actions performed throughout the electoral campaign, provided by the Electoral Law. The electoral campaign is a very well determined period of time, which is why we can say that electoral marketing is, in terms of marketing a promotion of a candidate or of a political party. This challenge is similar to the sell promotions in the classic marketing. „In most of the cases, political options before starting the electoral campaign are the basis for the vote’s final decision, and the campaign does not determine any change in the options and act of the vote, but it strengthens the decisions already made” ([www.infomina.ro](http://www.infomina.ro), 2008).

A newer definition of political marketing is offered by O’Cass (2009) as being: political marketing has been described as the analysis, planning, implementation and control of political and electoral programs designed to create, build and maintain beneficial exchange relationships between a party and its voters, a government and its citizens, and between government and third-party interest groups including lobby groups, industry association, companies and the like”.

A campaign strategy should be responsible for the precision with which the main targets are defined. As for the electorate, the temperament, its motivations, the image it has upon the parties and political people predispose it, almost surely, to vote for a certain candidate. Let’s observe the results of two studies made in 1984 and 1985, below (Saussez, 1985):

- The closed elector votes at a rate of 91% according to his initial position. His temperament, his motivations, the image that he has upon parties and political people predispose him, almost surely to vote for a certain candidate.
- The distant elector is a part of a hostile group. The same studies approximate to 3% the probability of him voting for the candidate;
- The fragile elector wants to vote for a certain candidate, but he’s not decided yet. There is a 50% chance that he might vote the initial candidate;

➤ The potential elector has a pronounced disposition of voting for another, but the chances of „conquer” him are of 23%.

There are features of electoral marketing and features belonging only to political marketing compared to commercial marketing, services marketing and non-profit marketing. Electoral marketing's objectives are also different from those of commercial marketing promotions: the first has as object convincing electors to vote for a candidate or a party, while the promotions aim at inciting consumers in buying a product or a service. Promotions marketing are „interested in the individuals' wallet”, electoral marketing „is interested in their voting papers”. (Lindon, 1976).

This distinction is also made by Bobin, indirectly (1988): „ (...) of also proving the fact that political marketing must be practiced permanently and not just with the occasion of certain electoral maturity date”. This phrase also sustains the researcher's next point of view, strengthening also the motivation of having chosen the subject of research.

Another difference from the objective and action point of view is, in time, the electoral marketing approach, at tactical level and of the political marketing at strategic level.

Electoral marketing has a short-term vision, while political marketing has a long-term vision. This is why, in the electoral marketing, people make promises that would never be kept in a mandate. This whole situation can attract votes, but has a negative effect upon marketing, on the long run.

We can here quote Thierry Saussez who, at Marseille, dealt with Maurice Grenoyer's communication, a local industrialist, an independent candidate for the legislative elections. Everything was done by the book: posters, movie spots, positioning, but the result was considered „an interesting experiment, which shows the limits of political communication”. It is true that there are marketing limits/boundaries, but they are the electoral marketing's limits. Especially in politics, „clients” must have trust, and for that to happen, one must build brands; because the time is a necessary condition in the process of brand construction (Ghiuță, 2011). Saussez has managed to transform client in a local political label (evolution of notoriety: from 10% to 60%, but the result obtained: 3,5% of the votes).

Even (1988) say: „When a product is good, the intervention of marketing sometimes needs several years in order for the sales to increase significantly”, or „ certain studies made in the United States and Great Britain have showed that, generally, electoral campaigns change the vote intention only to a very small extent of the electorate”.

Also, for the authors of *The People's choice* (Lazarsfeld et al., 2004) who performed surveys on large samples in the United States in 1940, the effects of the campaign and of the media means appear as very limited.

Just like in marketing, we also have the concept of political marketing for this field, a concept which in Henneberg, Scammelle and O'Shaughnessy's vision, may be:

- Sell-oriented;
- Instrumentally oriented (normal paradigm), a mix of techniques and formula kind of approach of the marketing concept;
- The relational approach which bases itself on the implementing of certain structured, continuous marketing activities, in order to create a long-term relationship with the electorate (Henneberg et al., 2009).

## **ELECTORAL ADVERTISING. TO WHOM DOES POLITICAL ADVERTISING ADDRESS?**

Among political marketing's communication means, advertising has a special importance, a fact which is revealed by Achache's affirmation (2005): „Advertising has always had a privileged role within political marketing means. This privilege granted to advertising allows the understanding of the way in which political marketing aims at the political communication's recipient”.

We must draw a very strong line between electoral advertising, political marketing and electoral marketing. This „confusion” has its roots in the confusion between marketing and advertising. Advertising is just a part of marketing, but to the general public, it is the most famous part.

Firstly, let's see the definition of advertising. Here we can quote:

1. Petit Larousse: „An assembly of means used in order to make an industrial or commercial enterprise famous, to praise a product, etc.” This definition reduces the advertising to the act of making the seller known, and makes no distinction between advertising and other communication means: public relations, promotion of the sales.
2. Petit Robert: „The fact, the art of exercising a psychological action upon the public for commercial purposes”. Advertising always has a commercial finality, and this definition consider only commercial vision.
3. Armstrong and Kotler (2007): „Any form paid by a presentation which is not individualized by ideas, goods and services within the media”.
4. „A communication technique which objective is to change the attitude and/or behavior of consumers towards a product” (Lehu, 2004). It is a simpler definition of advertising.
5. „Advertising is composed of all means destined to inform a target and convince it to buy a product or service” (Helfer, Orsoni, 2005).

We can find in Maarek's work (2007) the net differentiating between political and electoral advertising terms: „(...) talking only about political advertising actually refers to the using of a inadequate designation, not to mention overtaken by events. **Performing political communication** does not mean conceiving and making posters with an indifferent message towards the recipient anymore: **it means the performing of a complete undertaking**, from the investigation which precedes the definition of the concept, until the testing of the scenario, passing through the segmenting/targeting stage”.

We cannot forget the unfavourable connotation of advertising, also observed by the editors of the famous Mercator: „advertising is a chosen information, frequently truncated, thus, tendentious...” (Lendrevie, Denis, Lindon, 2006).

If the distinction between political marketing and electoral marketing is clear, political advertising remains in question. Political advertising does not exist, since advertising is regulated by means of law and can only take place within the electoral campaign. This observation has at least a theoretical value, since a candidate's brand may be built by advertising before the electoral campaign (in which case neither the party's logo nor any other thing which refers to the vote, is being used). Still, such cases are not numerous. The derived explanation of the advertising and commercial marketing decrease, in the consumer's behaviour, and the second, of the slower increase of consumers within the electoral advertising.

Publicity has also significantly influenced the 2008 United States electoral campaign. Obama's campaign slogan is not an original creation of his campaign team. The main message „Yes, you can!” has been taken from an advertisement image of United States, used by the American Administration during the Second World War (fig. no. 1 and fig.no. 2).



Figure 1. American poster from the Second World War (first stage)

On Westinghouse's poster, created by J. Howard Miller for the War Production Co-ordinating Committee, the woman who decisively contributes to the war (she is the one making economy work), utters, on a sure tone: „We Can Do It!” The slogan has been excellent, its results have been visible and Obama used, in a more or less conscious way, his country's and the war's fundamental myth. We can easily talk here about positioning within the political chain (fig. no.3).

We observe here the indirect using of the mythology of a country's founding. „It is extremely important for a person to know a country's fundamental myths. Knowing these myths may offer advantages in the strategic positioning or in the electoral campaign, since the people find themselves in it and eagerly believe in these myths.” (Ghiuță, 2006).



**Figure 2. American poster from the Second World War (second stage)**

Teyssier (2004) talks about the fact that advertising within the political field is performed in the advantage of a brand or of a civic attitude.



**Figure 3. Adaptation of Obama's image to the poster created by Miller (unofficial image)**

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS WITHIN POLITICS**

Firstly, we will explain the concept of public relations within marketing. Public relations are a sub-field of marketing and are a part of communication.

According to Kotler (2006), public relations „are an ensemble of programs applied by an enterprise or organization in order for it to establish or improve its own image or the products' image, in the perception of various audiences, which, within and outside the institution, condition its development”.

In the same register, we find Marc Lehu's explanation (2004): „Institutional communication vector which reunites the ensemble of the means used and of the operations performed by an institution in order to make itself known and in order to create and maintain a favourable image of itself, in the perception of various audiences (consumers, distributors, syndicates, employees, teachers, students, press...)

Public relations are not specific only to the enterprise, but, as Kotler said, to an organization (that is, to a party or a candidate, or in some cases, to an institution). In politics, there are political people who run public institutions: city halls, county councils, the presidential institution. Throughout their mandates, they -deliberately or not- establish public relations with the general public, with the employees, with the press.

Public relations are extremely important when it comes to politics. Their importance derives not only from the field's features, but also from the role that these play in the commercial communication, in general.

The latter case is also a very discussed subject at the moment. Specialists often talk about public relations development, along with the advertising decrease in importance. Here we can give as an example „The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR”, the Al and Laura Ries book. This book, which is entitled *The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR* explains the ascension of public relations based on the advertisement's credibility flaw and of the large number of TV channels. The relationship between the number of TV channels and the advertisement effectiveness is inversely proportional. Why? Because people change/switch the TV channel especially during advertisements, a phenomenon which is also known as „zapping”. Another big problem of the advertisement is big costs, especially when it comes to television. The real issue remains credibility, always present as a purpose to be accomplished.

This credibility is always present in the particular purpose of the field. It is known that politicians suffer from lack of credibility for electorate. In politics, credibility is the hardest attribute to be won and the easiest one to lose. Public relations are used in any electoral campaign, both local and general or presidential.

Jean-Paul Charme has suggested a definition for political public relations (1978): „Public relations consist in creating a favourable climate between the product (political party or candidate) and the various internal audiences (leaders, elected, militants) or external (leaders of opinion, general public), a climate which would significantly contribute to the final success of the respective «product»”.

## CONCLUSIONS

The proposed conceptual boundaries are important for both researchers and practitioners in the field especially since we are not only in the process of sedimentation of a discipline but also in the construction of a School of thought in politics- political marketing.

This article proposes the landmarks of a discipline and studies the differences and similarities between the classical marketing and the political one.

The research hypothesis which assumes that conceptual boundaries in political marketing are not fully understood was confirmed by the presence of some opinions not very well structured in the specialised literature.

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