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POLITICAL MARKETING

VOLUME II

The Political Marketing Mix: Strategy and Implementation

Edited by

Paul R. Baines

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The Application of Marketing to British Politics

Gareth Smith and John Saunders

Introduction: The Development of Political Marketing

The role that marketing plays in politics has only been highlighted recently. Saatchi and Saatchi's high profile involvement with the Conservatives in 1979 and subsequent elections is the main reason for this. Marketing's application in this area predates 1979 by quite some time, however. Indeed, it is possible to view marketing's development within politics as parallelling marketing's historical development in the commercial sector.

The Unsophisticated Selling Era

This is normally associated with the period after the production era in the late 19th and early 20th century when markets became more saturated and achieving volume sales became more difficult. In political terms, the extension of the franchise produced this mass market via the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867. Politicians responded with the selling of parties and policies based upon class lines: land versus commerce and town versus country. The market was unsophisticatedly split between clearly identifiable supporter and opponent stereotypes. The promotion to the electorate was further constrained by the available media. The press and posters played their part but the personally addressed rally and grass root activism still held sway.

Source: *Journal of Marketing Management,* 5(3) (1990): 295–306.

The Selling Era

This era came of age with the advent of new media with mass coverage in the first half of this century. The first signs were apparent in the United States where Franklin D. Roosevelt turned his radio "fireside chats" into a powerful communication medium. This trend was significantly reinforced by the advent of television and the Political Party/Political Election Broadcast. During this period however, there was little research into the views and voting intentions of different segments of the electorate with which to direct this mass communication. The research that did exist was still simplistic and largely reliant on feedback from local parties and agents. Even when information was available, politicians still exhibited a product orientation by choosing to sell what they thought were good products. Thus in 1964 Sir Alec Douglas-Home continued to focus on the defence issue, despite it having been identified as of "low electoral salience" (Kavannagh 1982).

The Sophisticated Selling Era/The Nascent Marketing Era?

This era came into being largely on the back of a new research development, namely the private poll. This differs from the "vox pop" public poll by its focus on developing campaign strategy and influencing voters' behaviour. Mark Abrahams, of Research Services Limited, introduced such research for Labour in 1956. Since then its power and influence has increased significantly. Kavannagh (1982) identifies five significant improvements to the political information system derived from private polling. They are:

1. Image Building

In 1966 the private polls showed that the Conservatives were viewed as old-fashioned – a finding which led to a greater concentration on their new policies and up and coming ministers. In the 1987 election, Saatchi and Saatchi's sponsored research revealed Thatcher as a potential liability. Past strengths were now seen as weaknesses. She was increasingly perceived as being bossy, fussy and not forward looking (Butler and Kavannagh 1988), a finding which almost lost Saatchis the account.

2. Tracking Issues

Both major parties are now made fully aware of "our" and "their" issues. These are issues where a given party has greatest popularity. This increasingly affects strategy. Whichever party is able to set the agenda around their strong policies and force the opposition on to the defensive, is likely to win the day. The 1988 US Presidential election is a case in point. In the UK, Labour tried desperately to set its own "strong issues" agenda in 1987 by touring the country and ignoring the London based media establishment. Eventually, on the issue of defence, it was forced on to the "defensive" and never regained the early campaign momentum.

3. Target Voters

The old, unsophisticated sales era idea of a "mass" market has been well and truly debunked. The post war period has been notable for the weakening of partisan allegiance brought on by the changing nature of the classes themselves. A new animal, the pragmatic, floating voter created a new emphasis on the middle ground of politics. More recently, this segmentation of the market has increased in sophistication. Political scientists now use a host of demographic variables with which to gauge and track longitudinal partisan allegiance and change.

A practical example of the application of this increased sophistication is the private poll findings that the 50 plus seats, which Labour had to win in 1987 to obtain power, contained above average numbers of home owners and white collar workers. The party eventually targeted weak Liberal/SDP supporters (mainly women aged 25–45), pensioners, first time voters and white collar trade unionists.

4. Election Timing

In every election since 1974, private and public polling has been used to decide when to go to the nation. In 1978 Callaghan deferred an election because of poor marginal seat survey results, while in 1987 the polls, plus good local election results, were influential in fixing the 11th June as election day.

5. Policy Formulation

Last, but by no means least, is marketing's influence on the manifesto. That is, marketing's influence, not only on how things are said to whom, but what is said in the first place. Formally, "the policy-making exercise in both parties is separate from the publicity one, and polls are used for the presentation and emphasis, not formulation, of policy" (Kavannagh 1982). However, private polls in the 1970s heavily influenced the Tories promotion of council house sales to tenants, altering levels on pensions and accepting the reality of comprehensive education. The low profile of nationalisation in Labour manifestos of 1964 and 1966 are an example of private polls influencing policies of the left.

The Strategic Marketing Era

It is in this area of marketing's influence on policy formulation that the development of the next era of political marketing will have to emerge. The Integrated Marketing Era, if it ever develops, will take a stage further the identification of target markets' wants and the concomitant policy decision making to satisfy these wants more effectively than any competing political party. It does, however, pose more ethical problems than the preceding stages of development, and its efficacy needs further analysis and confirmation.

New Era Marketing and the Democratic Process – An Ethical Dilemma?

Ethics is the study of the rights and wrongs of human behaviour. Some may well see marketing and its trappings as a "*new necromancy*", as did Barbara Castle. In reality, however, marketing is just doing more sophisticatedly what politicians have been seeking to do for generations. It is not intrinsically anti-democratic to identify the views of customers/the electorate and then use this information to convey the congruence of party policy with these views. This is the raison d'etre of pressure groups around the world. Fears become more justifiable, however, when marketing is seen to influence policy – that is, act as the master of the policy process and not its servant. It is possible to fuel this fear by developing a scenario where politicians increasingly focus on narrow, short term issues because they are popular, whilst leaving the more critical longer term, strategic planning to become a hostage to fortune. Pandering to the prejudices of the majority might herald a tyranny of the ill-informed. Capital punishment, forced repatriation and other lowest common denominator issues could become important if marketing research showed a short-term benefit in courting them.

This scenario runs counter to the very core of the existing parliamentary system which sees elected politicians as representatives, not delegates. It is their task *not* to respond to public outcry (e.g. internment in Northern Ireland), but to make informed decisions: to fulfill Edmund Burke's remit: "I am here to represent your interests, not your desires".

An adjunct of marketing's increasing influence on policy making must also be seen as its potential threat to the idealism and ideology which underpins the three main political traditions, namely conservatism, liberalism and socialism. Politics would be increasingly tempted to follow public opinion as opposed to leading it. This could signal an increasing convergence amongst the opposing parties as they try to jockey for position around popular issues similar to the Butskellism of the 60s. As a pluralist society, minority views need to have expression. The experience of little or no real choice between mainstream political parties has been a factor in the development of extra parliamentary movements in France, Germany and Japan since the Second World War.

A further concern surrounding an integrated marketing era in British politics is that it would become prey to undemocratic forces which can exert a disproportionately heavy influence on the views and behaviour of the majority. In a modern state this refers to the controllers of the mass media. The heavy concentration of power in both the television and newspaper media would become a much more critical issue. Research by the Glasgow University Media Group (1976, 1980) in the 70s has cast serious doubt over the neutrality of news coverage of such issues as industrial disputes and the causes of inflation. Such a bias would have an increasing likelihood of influencing policy in this new marketing driven era.

Whilst posing a number of possible threats to the current system, marketing reassuringly promises to provide a number of safeguards against crass excesses for short term gain. To this end, it is useful to look at elements of buying/voting behaviour, branding and product positioning.

The idea of a short term populism as previously outlined is in fact rooted in the selling era. The marketing era differs in that it seeks to "sell products which don't come back to customers who do". That is, builds brand loyalty and hence repeat business through products which satisfy a customers' needs better than anyone else. To achieve this, the political party (or brand) must have an enduring ideology (or image); it must be consistent and have credibility. The selling approach of switching between popular issues will, over time, create a confused image. Such an image would detract from the basic principles on which party loyalty has been built and with which voters can associate and return to at election time. It will be inconsistent by offering mis-matches within the portfolio where the inconsistencies of any given majority are exposed; where, for example, desires for reduced taxation and increased public spending collide and "voodoo economics" takes over. The lack of consistent principles will blur the parties' image and lead to a lack of credibility in the quality of the product and subsequent lack of partisan allegiance.

The idea of product positioning also warns against the "flight to the middle ground". This will make differentiation around Unique Selling Propositions difficult to achieve. A more market orientated approach would be to use the perceptual mapping techniques as exemplified by Johnson (1971) to identify "gaps" in the product offerings which, within the constraints of ideology/image, could become new or emphasised current policies (products). Such a "model" of voting behaviour is entirely consistent with the more recent theories developed by political scientists to explain how Britain votes. The direction which such theories provide to any marketing analysis of the political arena is developed next.

Voters: Supermarket Shoppers or Class Fodder?

Having accepted that it is ethical to use marketing in politics, the question now is what form its intervention should take. This is largely determined in practice by the theory of voting behaviour that you subscribe to. There are three distinct theories of voting behaviour identified by psephologists. The oldest is that propounded by Butler and Stokes (1971) in their seminal work based on longitudinal analysis of voting behaviour. Their theory, backed up by impressive empirical research, is that demographic factors such as social class, the family, age, stage in the political life cycle are the primary determinants of voting behaviour. This is known as the expressive theory of voting behaviour. Using Popper's (1972) concept of a "good" theory, a lot of time has been spent in explaining away working class Tory voting as "deviant" (McKenzie 1968) and not a falsification of the expressive theory. Crewe's (1974) critical appraisal of this theory is more damaging in that it elegantly shows its failure to explain the results of the 1970 and 1974 elections. The so called instrumental theory of voting subsequently filled the vacuum which was created.

The expressive theory holds that voters have a poor grasp of policy details but make up their minds on the basis of generalised class based conceptions. The instrumental theory assumes the opposite. Voting is not seen as a social act but an individual one based on a rational calculation (not necessarily very sophisticated) of self interest. A derivative of this theory is very similar to buying behaviour and is referred to as Consumer Theory. This proposes that "the act of voting is analogous to the purchase of a consumer good. Parties are treated as competing products; voters are assumed to be discriminating consumers who weigh up their likes and dislikes about the alternative parties and choose accordingly. Emotional ties such as party identification or class loyalty do not come into it" (Heath *et al.* 1985).

The most recent addition to the debate suggests that the reality of voting behaviour is in fact both a combination and development of the two previous theories. The "interactionist theory" suggests that class is important but that parties can appeal to self interest as well. The voter seeks to fit his/her general values with the general ideologies of a party. Thus the behaviour is not rational economic but does allow for change in allegiance as either personal conditions or policy/image alters.

It is beyond the remit of this paper to assess the relative merits of these theories. It is possible to conclude, however, that the more traditional expressive approach is no longer enough to explain behaviour and new approaches, which consider the influences operating at the level of the individual, need consideration as well.

Voting Behaviour and the Selection of Segmentation Criteria

For practical reasons it is of course not possible to analyse political dynamics by concentrating on the level of the individual voter. There is a need to aggregate them together so as to be able to assess their importance and influence of coherent groups on the body politic. Green, Tull and Albaum (1988) suggest

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Table 1: Segment forming in marketing and politics

Segmentation method	Marketing		Politics	
	Methodology	*Example*	*Methodology*	*Example*
Geographic	*Post hoc/ A Priori*	Acorn (Chisnall 1985)	*A Priori*	North-South Divide (Heath, Jowell and Curtice 1985)
Demographic	*A Priori*	Social Class (Frank Massey and Wind 1972)	*A Priori*	Social Class (Butler and Stokes, 1971)
Behaviouristic	*A Priori*	Usage Rate (Twedt 1964)	*A Priori*	Economic Theory of Democracy (Downs 1957)
	Post Hoc	Benefits sought (Haley 1968)		
Psychographic	*A Priori*	Commercial use of V.A.L.S. (S.R.I., 1984)	Limited *A Priori*	1987 General Election (Young and Rubicam, 1988)
	Post Hoc	Toothpaste Medicines (Haley 1968; Ziff 1971)	Limited *Post Hoc*	US Politics (Mauser 1983)

two basic methods for forming such groups or segments; *a priori* and *post hoc. A priori* segmentation involves the researcher choosing some cluster defining descriptor (for example, partisan loyalty) in advance of the research itself. It is implicitly directed by subscription to one of three theories previously outlined. Thus expressive theorists will focus heavily on social class.

However, some of the newer segmentation bases use *post hoc* segmentation. There is no pre-judgement by choosing the bases at the outset. Instead, respondents are placed into groups according to their similarity with those in the same group, and dissimilarity with those in other groups. This is done, not subjectively, but using statistical techniques. Table 1 is a review of current methods and bases used in segmentation studies of both political and business marketplaces.

Table 1 is useful in that it highlights the greater use of *post hoc* research in marketing. Political scientists on the other hand concentrate heavily on *a priori* analysis. There is little or no psychographic or *post hoc* analysis. Given the previous discussion which showed an increased appreciation of the role of the individual's attitudes, perceptions and so on in voting, this can only be seen as a gap. It is this gap which the rest of the article seeks to, if not fill, then at least address.

Post Hoc Psychographic Segmentation of the British Voting Public

The attitudinal data base which underpins this research is the British Social Attitudes 1987 Survey. It was chosen because of its proclaimed aim "to measure and where possible explain stability or change in Britain public attitudes, values and beliefs" (Jowell *et al.* 1987). In so doing the survey covers many

Table 2: The British social attitudes database, 1987 report

Features	
– Longitudinal Survey	
– Annual	
– 1,550 Respondents	
– 17 Demographic Questions	
Sex	Housing
Age	Education
Income	Religion
Occupation	Marital status
Social class	
– 76 Attitudinal Questions	
Defence	Social class
Politics and trust	Race and prejudice
Economic issues	Poverty
and policies	Industry and jobs
Welfare State	Countryside issues
Health Service	

areas which have proved influential in past elections such as defence, the N.H.S., education, industrial performance and so on. A more complete outline of the B.S.A. survey is provided in Table 2.

Research Methodology

Firstly, all useful, interval scaled questions were chosen from the survey. Then, recording and extraction of missing value respondents was carried out within S.P.S.S. Factor Analysis using Varimax Rotation achieved the necessary data reduction. The twenty factor solution which this generated was then subjected to Cluster Analysis using the iterative partitioning method. Using a screen plot and analysing the fusion co-efficients suggested a six cluster solution. These six clusters were then cross tabulated with the original variables to highlight the following:

(i) The partisan allegiances within each cluster.
(ii) The important attitudinal issues for each cluster.
(iii) The demographic profile of each cluster.

The results of this methodology are presented in Table 3.

Observations

Table 3 identifies the six cluster solution which can now be compared and contrasted by their psychographic and demographic profiles. Moreover, the segments “owned” by one party and those which are unaligned can be clearly discerned.

Table 3: Political segments

Segment	*I*	*II*	*III*	*IV*	*V*	*VI*
Name	Radical socialists	Educated mainstreamers	Caring Well-to-Dos	Hardcore Conservative traditionalists	Old order nationalists	Poor outsiders
Share of populace	16%	16%	19%	15%	18%	16%
Party share of segments						
Conservative	11	26	32	57	36	23
Labour	64	37	38	25	41	43
Alliance	19	22	25	10	11	19
Other, don't know	6	15	5	8	11	14
Attitudes						
Local control by govt.	Too much	–	Too much	Too little	–	–
Nuclear arms	Threat	Threat	Threat	Keep peace	Keep peace	Threat
Europe or US links	–	Europe	Europe	US & Europe	US & Europe	Europe
Troops out of N. Ireland	Yes	No	–	No	–	Yes
Social injustice	High	Some	Some	Little	Some	–
The NHS	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	–	–	–
Private health care	Anti	–	Pro	Pro	–	
Private education	Anti	Pro	Pro	Pro	–	–
Racial prejudice	High	High	–	High, less help	Stable	High and increasing
Political cynicism	No	Yes	–	No	Yes	Yes
Social class	–	–	–	–	Important	Important
British management	Weak	Weak	Good in parts	–	Good	Weak
Benefit fraud	Limited	High	High	High	–	–
Unemployment v inflation	Unemployment	–	Unemployment	Inflation	Unemployment	–
State ownership	Same or more	–	Less	Less	–	–
Countryside	Concerned	–	–	–	Unconcerned	–
Demographic profiles						
Income	High (+ £10K)	Average	High	High (£20K +)	Low (– £7K)	Low
Education	Highest	High	–	High private ed.	Low ed.	Low ed.
SEG/occupation	I, II Public sector	High self employed	Private manufacture	White collar private sector	II, IV manual	III, IV manual
Region	–	–	South England	SE & Midlands	–	–
Age	Younger	–	–	Older	–	–

The Labour party enjoys high support from the Radical Socialists and the Poor Outsiders. However, they differ quite significantly both in attitudes and demographics. The Radical Socialist group has very definite ideas about political and social issues and displays views typically associated with the left wing of the party e.g. troops out of Northern Ireland, anti-nuclear weapons etc. The Poor Outsiders however are much less committed to such issues as a group and instead exhibit a high degree of political cynicism. They are traditional Labour voters by being employed in poor paying semi and unskilled manual jobs. This contrasts markedly with the Radical Socialists who form something of an intelligentsia, as well as being comfortably off. An obvious interpretation from this analysis is that the one group is intellectually committed to socialism and the radical changes to society that is promised therein. The other is linked to Labour by virtue of it being the party which traditionally looks after the working classes best. However, this latter group of Labour supporters is not highly committed to a number of "strong" socialist issues such as improvements to the N.H.S. and greater local government power. Their high level of political cynicism also casts some doubt on the strength of their loyalty to Labour – they believe that politicians only care about their votes and are not really concerned about their needs. They may not vote for another party but they are potentially a low turnout segment at election time.

This poses something of a dilemma to the Labour Party. On the one hand the "intellectual" segment want to see more radical policies but these are of less salience to the traditional Labour segment. The latter are to some extent "outsiders" or losers in the system and as such cynical. They are perhaps more in need of a political crusade to rekindle their affiliation to Labour and its policies: to convince them once again that they are important and that they will be listened to and provided for. The question of how to provide these two rather distinct messages when you have only the one product (party) to sell suggests a difficult positioning problem.

At the other end of the political spectrum the Hardcore Conservative Traditionalists, and to a lesser extent the Old Order Nationalists, reflect the current Government's line. On issues like defence (both US and UK nuclear arms are needed to deter aggressors), private health care and education (needed to improve choice and reduce pressure on the public provision) and inflation (must take priority over unemployment), the Hardcore Conservative Traditionalists loyally mirror the Thatcherite line.

The Alliance Party as was, still shows the traditional weakness of the third party in British Politics. Despite obtaining significant support in a number of segments it does not lead in any. It comes second in the Radical Socialists segments but a long way behind Labour. It is well represented in the Educated Mainstreamers but is still in third place. Its strongest segment is the Caring Well to Dos, which is not surprising given the attitudes displayed therein. Traditional liberal issues such as dislike of centralised control and nuclear weapons are clearly expressed. This is developed by the freedom of choice to participate in private health and education as long as it does not distract from the level of public provision. The difficulty in this segment as in others is that the Alliance does not "own" any issues. Both Labour and Conservative segments exist which exhibit similar views and as such prevent the Alliance from developing a significantly different segment which they can focus on as their own.

Conclusions

The psychographic/demographic profiles which have been developed here provide a new way of viewing the electorate. The Labour Party is seen as having a problem in terms of communicating distinct messages to two important but disparate segments. The Alliance exhibits its traditional difficulties in differentiating itself from the other parties. The Conservatives exhibit one very strong segment which is closely aligned with government policy and as such dependable at an election. The fact that its support is overall lower than Labour's is explained largely by the fact that at the time of this survey the Tories were indeed behind in the popularity polls.

An important caveat to this research is thus provided by the General Election which followed a year after the survey data used herein. Whereas Labour continued to be more popular on most of the social issues which the electorate deemed important in determining their voting decision, the Conservatives held a significant advantage in one area not well covered by any of the large scale attitudinal surveys. Whilst people think disproportionately of public problems when answering a survey, they think of family fortunes when entering the polling booth. "Prosperity is not an issue or a problem but a blessing, and by a decisive majority, 55%–27%, the public regarded the Conservatives as likely to bestow it" (Crewe 1987).

Clearly then this is not the final word as far as the analysis of voting behaviour is concerned. It is however a useful way of adding to our knowledge of the electorate. As far as political parties are concerned it adds a lot of detail to the traditional methods of identifying potential support. It could easily follow the commercial application of such methods and be used to develop the targeting and messages contained in party political and general election broadcasts. At its most influential, such segmentation could also be used to reposition parties in line with their supporters or towards floating voters.

Before it reaches this elevated position, more empirical research is needed. Issues to be considered for further research include: (i) the establishment of a comprehensive attitudinal survey for gathering pertinent information, (ii) better demographic indices for later profiling, (iii) the ability to split partisan allegiance further to differentiate the brand loyal from the floating voters, (iv) analysis of the impact of attitudes towards party leaders as an influencer of voting intentions. The list is long and the potential for deploying marketing techniques in the science of psephology is great.

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