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A Theoretical Approach to Political Marketing

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In this study, the outline of political marketing has been given and its segments has been discussed as well as taking into account the criticism about the field. This study analysis traditional marketing tactics a political marketer uses and discusses the position of marketing in politics thoroughly. The most common model of marketing, Three-Stage Model, has been used to explain the stages of political marketing to give an insight about the field.

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A Theoretical Approach to Political Marketing

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I. INTRODUCTION

Marketing can be defined as the state of identifying and meeting human and social needs. This also includes being profitable. In this sense, marketing is “meeting needs profitably” (Kotler and Keller, 2006). The concept of marketing is no longer restricted to the domain of exchange of goods and services but also the distribution of ideas (Donovan, 2012:1).

Political marketing research has made significant progress in recent years. It has drawn together researchers, students, professional practitioners and involved observers from multiple backgrounds, and has managed to build a literature of considerable scale and value. As a distinct sub-discipline, it is increasingly identifiable (Butler, Harris, 2009).

It is commonly believed that political marketing has notable significance in politics and it is extremely important for politics: elections, referenda, governing, lobbying, public services management, etc., they all represent the marketing triumph of an approach that first originated in business and then transformed the nature of modern politics (Newman, 1999).

a) Rationale For Research

O' Cass's (2009) describes the importance of the marketing and the politics asserting that since politics and marketing often dominate the social psyche of many societies, they have a major influence over individuals and the broader citizenry. The use of

marketing by political parties has been a growing theme in academia, while some authors emphasis on the social and democratic implications of using marketing in political campaigns, the others emphasis on marketing management issues in campaigns. Political marketing has achieved a significant position and gained widespread usage in most democracies, and it appears to be spreading with increasing use and sophistication to the other countries. There are now major developments in political marketing in the USA, Australia, the UK, and even in Turkey, Greece, Russia and like (Ovidiu, 2013).

b) Overall Aim of the Study

The overall aim of this study is to explain what the political marketing is and how it is used by politics as well as giving the segments of political marketing and explain the most common model to be used in political marketing.

c) Structure of the Research

The rest of this research is divided into four chapters.

Chapter 2 presents the background to the study. It discusses what political marketing is and the criticism about it.

Chapter 3 presents the segments of political marketing as explaining the political product, the organization and the market.

Chapter 4 presents the most common model of political marketing which is Three-Stage Model, and then explains the omission of the media in political marketing and communication distribution in it.

Chapter 5 is a general discussion about the topic and the findings.

II. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The main objective of this chapter is to give an outline of the general principles of political marketing, what it is and how it is used as well as giving the explanation about what concepts it involves

a) The Concept Of Political Marketing

Political marketing is built on the application of marketing management theory to the practice and theory of politics. It is built on the assumption that political activity could be seen analogous to traditional marketing conditions (Kaskeala, 2010:15). As Kotler (1999) stated, out of the 10 types of entities in which marketing applies, six of them can be found in the political marketing, which are events, persons, places (partially), organizations, information and ideas.

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Political marketing refers to certain forms of political communications within electoral campaigns (Harris et al., 2002). It was first used by Kelley in (1956), but the idea of political marketing originated with the broadening “debate” of marketing in the 1970’s by Kotler (1999). Nowadays, more sophisticated techniques have been adopted such as the media supplying the political information that voters base their decisions on. Problems are identified in the society and this serves as medium for deliberation. Therefore, citizens have more chance to get involved with the political affairs than ever. On the conceptual level, political marketing is yet to be universally accepted among political scientists, though there is a group of political scientists who believe that it brings “distinctive strengths lacking in orthodox political science treatments” (O’Shaughnessy, 2001). According to Lees-Marshment (2002), political marketing can be defined as “a potentially fruitful marriage between political studies and marketing”.

Although it is obvious that there is no such definite definition for the term “political marketing”, the political marketing literature accepts the analogy of parties as business engaged in a competitive relationship aiming to secure an “exchange” with consumers. From this perspective, it should be noted that political actors can be marketed in the same manner as any other commercial good (Kaskeala, 2010:15).

Political marketing has been expanding its area from just taking place in election campaigns to becoming a way of governance. The idea of a permanent campaign means that political marketing takes place consistently throughout the every part of it, not just through the election campaign (Butler and Collins, 1996). To do this, the political organization must adopt the principles of relationship marketing to make the communication with the public continuously (Kaskeala, 2010:16).

In the light of these, it should be noted that political marketing is not only deals with the process of getting elected, but also as the means of governing. It is believed that in order to be successful in political marketing, political organization or candidate should remain responsive to their voters. In this sense, the advocates of political marketing believe that this consistent communication with voters and responsiveness to their demands can make democracy even better (Kaskeala, 2010:17).

b) Criticism of Political Marketing

There is some criticism about the ethic of the area. Political marketing is sometimes viewed as to be under an obligation to justify itself ad to defend itself against those criticism with regard to its usage of marketing concepts and instruments in the political sphere. Therefore, the research about the field is limited.

One of the most common criticisms of the use of political marketing instruments in the political fields is the accusation that democratic elections can now be bought. The reason behind this can be as follows: today’s elections are won by the candidate/party that establishes the agenda through political adverts and media manipulation, planting of sound bites in the news media, etc. This means that the one who has the slickest and most professionally run campaign management dominates the market (Henneberg, 2004:225). However, this professionalism comes at a price (Franklin, 1994). Consequently, the party/candidate that wins the electoral competition is the one who is with more resources or better fundraising capabilities regardless of the political argument (Wray, 1999).

Despite the fact that electoral campaigns have become increasingly more expensive and it is estimated that, for example, political candidates running for the US presidency spend more than half of their time fundraising, but the direct relationship between campaigns spend and campaign success is certainly moderate. For instance, in the run-up to the 2001 general elections in the UK, the Tories spent £12,751,813 in comparison with Labour’s £10,945,119, and suffered a second humiliating and crushing defeat at the polls (31.7 per cent of the national vote compared with Labour’s 40.9 per cent). This shows that more campaign budget does not correlate well with the success (Henneberg, 2004:228).

The other most common criticism of political marketing is packaging without content. Political marketing management is constantly accused of avoiding political communications, as well as party politics, of any direct relationship with political issues and deeply held political convictions that are expressed in coherent political and topical offers. This means that substance has been replaced by image (Henneberg, 2004:229). Instead, political marketing has introduced packaged messages. Political arguments are replaced by pre-packaged messages in an impressive shell delivered in an impressive shell for a two minute news slot, solely relating to ‘image’. Therefore, it is argued that politicians should become brand managers and governments should govern the nation as a brand (Henneberg, 2004:230).

There is also some concern about populism and no leadership factors in political marketing. Parties and politicians run after the political opinion and adapt to small changes especially to perceived opinion shifts in important segments of the electorate such as opinion leaders, swinging voters or electoral areas. Political market researchs are used to determine policy that always running after the whims of the electorate which is being driven by the market. This means that the concept of customer-orientation oftenly used in political marketing (Henneberg, 2004:231).

III. SEGMENTS OF POLITICAL MARKETING

In this chapter, the segments of political marketing which are political product, political organization and political market are discussed.

a) Political Product

A political party, person/candidate or an ideology can be seen as a political product in political marketing. The success of the product mostly depends on the personal image, the candidate's past life or the party itself. On account of multi-dimensional nature of the political product, it might be said that a "political

concept" may be used instead of a "political product" in political marketing (Butler, Patrich, Harris, & Phil, 2009:28). However, since the same marketing techniques are applied to the marketing of the political product as in the marketing of a traditional product, generally the term political product is used in the literature.

According to Butler and Collins (1994), the political product constitutes three different dimensions as the product's multi-component nature, the importance of customer or voter loyalty, and its adaptability that are shown in the figure below.

Political Product	Political Organization	Political Market
1) Multicomponent nature	1) Amateur-like nature	1) Counter-consumption
2) Importance of voter loyalty	2) Traditionally negative perception of marketing	2) Social affirmation
3) Adaptability	3) Dependency on volunteer workers	3) Ideological charge

Figure 1 : The three dimensions of a political product. Adapted from Butler and Collins (1994)

A political product is a complex product that the voter cannot just pick certain attributes that interest him/her, rather; he/she is obliged to take the whole package as a whole. This is important as the voter may support a certain candidate while be against the general ideology of the political party. In a marketing perspective, this is one of the most significant characteristics of the political product considering that the voter can be exposed to contradicting feelings towards the product and cannot choose the part of a product unless choosing the other parts of it. As a result of these, the voter is expected to face with a difficult question that he/she has to take into account the alternative costs of each component against the value that he/she will benefit from (Kaskeala, 2010:17).

Another special attributes of the political product is the extent of loyalty that it creates. In spite of the fact that it is easy for customers to switch their ideas about a product easily in marketing, it is rare to be seen the same in political marketing. This means that since the electorate's loyalty is almost guaranteed, the political organization has a lot more scope with their political offer. However, this characteristic might also restrict entry to the political market as the voters normally stick with their decision on the old candidate or parties (Kaskeala, 2010:18).

Political product's adaptable nature is its third characteristic that should be noted. Unlike in the traditional marketing of a product, the product could still be changed completely once the exchange has taken place. A typical example for this would be a political

party that forms a political liaison with another party after being elected. In addition, the political party may change its promises to its voters for some completely different reasons and there are no guarantees beforehand for this. However, if this becomes a routine behavior, the credibility of the political product may lessen and the whole political organization may be under a threat of losing its position (Kaskeala, 2010:19).

b) Political Organization

A political organization is any entity that is in the political process. It is engaged in political activities that aimed at achieving clearly defined political goals that develops political system. The efforts in a political organization are to win a position in the public through public elections (Butler & Collins, 1996). Hence, it could be said that a political organization may be a party or a support group behind a candidate. Butler and Collins (1994) have revealed three important characteristics of a political organization, which are the amateur-like nature of the organization, its traditionally negative perception of marketing, and its dependency on volunteer workers that can be seen in the figure above.

Unlike the traditionally organizations, a political organization is usually made up of amateurs that have no formal training or education regarding their jobs. As a matter of fact, any expert help coming from the outside of the organization has traditionally been seen as negative and changes have been opposed and expert help has been considered at best as a supporting function, not as any basis to change current customs (Kaskeala, 2010:19).

In the light of these, it is obvious that there is a negative approach towards marketing in political marketing as it consists mostly of amateurs and volunteers. Marketing has always been seen as unethical and superficial to be used in politics. In addition to this, it is believed that adapting marketing theories to politics, the real substance of politics would suffer under the candidates' need to concentrate on only simplified and popular topics (Smith & Saunders, 1990).

Apart from these, Butler and Collins (1994) identified political organization's composition of volunteer workers. A large part of the organization consists of volunteering and this is important to note when it comes to reshaping the organization. More and more political organizations are investing in marketing and hiring experts to help them to face with the new tasks. However, they may lose their motivation by doing so. Organizing political conventions and meetings can tackle with this problem as this can make the volunteers feel more part of the organization.

c) *Political Market*

It is important to know the political markets and the positions of the parties to understand the perception of the voters and their attitudes toward the parties. In political marketing, target is the voters. They may have their own perceptions of a specific political party regardless of the party's position. Hence, the voter uses his/her own perception in voting and this makes it more valid and countable information than the party's self-declared positioning.

There are plenty of different elements that shape political structures including ideologies, values, economics, cultures and traditions. However, the power of these elements may vary in different countries. For instance, according to Polat and Kulter (2008:116) religion factor is more effective in certain countries such as in Turkey, Israel and India than the others. They assert that it creates a strong bond between the voters and the parties.

Kotler and Levy (1969:12) define a market as made up of people and organizations that possess some kind of resources and an objective to trade them. This means that a political market consists of voters that have the potential to trade their votes in return for some value, and the political organizations and candidates who in return are offering their products and services for the voters. In a functioning market, there is the competition that also needs to be taken into consideration and this is made up of the competing political parties and their candidates in the political market.

According to Gemmeson (1987:15) the political market differs from the traditional market place where an exchange is considered as a separate one-time event. Compared to the traditional one, an exchange in political

market happens over a long period of time in which the political organization or candidate finally keep the promise that has been made to the voters in exchange for the votes during the election. There are three attributes that are especially typical for the political market. These are shown in the figure above, which are the counter-consumption, social affirmation, and the ideological charge of the market.

Contradicting to all commercial markets, the political market is ideologically charged. Since voting is seen as the symbol of a democratic society, the exchange event has already a significant importance to the consumer. In some cases, the exchange event can be of a greater importance to the consumer than the actual outcome (Butler & Collins, 1994).

Voting also shows social affirmation. This means that voter's voting preferences show the extent of their belongings to a certain social group. For instance, voters in Ireland are quite divided between their religious views whereas in Belgium the language and the culture issues are given more priority (Kaskeala, 2010:21). This is important as social issues of such scale hugely restrict the market and the possibility for political organizations to bring up new issues.

In most Western democracies, the political markets are mature that the competition between the political groups has become settled into its patterns and the transactions in the market place are completed without too much of a fight. On account of the nature of the political market, the competition is always at its fiercest just before the elections (Kaskeala, 2010:22).

IV. CURRENT MODEL OF POLITICAL MARKETING

In this chapter the most common model of political marketing which is Three-Stage Model is discussed and then omission of the media in political marketing and communication distribution in it explained.

a) *Stage Model of Political Marketing*

The most popular theory for political marketing is the Three-Stage Model that has been widely accepted and discussed in academic literature. In this model, there are three different stages that are followings:

Step 1: Identify consumer demand, feed this back into the product and messaging and refine it accordingly.

Step Two: Inform the consumers of the changes to the product due to their demands and needs.

Step Three: Delivery of the refined product which will satisfy the consumer demand better, thus producing incrementally greater profit for the company.

The Three-Stage Model assumes that "parties are able to establish what voters want using methods that include sophisticated polling methodology and feedback from focus groups. Conceptually, the

suggestion is that parties/candidates listen to (targeted) public opinion, and provide the electorate with a 'product' that they want, in order to achieve electoral victory." (Savigny, 2010, p. 1052)

This model for political marketing is made up of three distinct steps for the candidate to follow, with providing a template to achieve a market orientation and eventual electoral success (Savigny, 2010, p. 1050). The model allows political organizations to listen to their targeted demographics for public opinion, thus providing the electorate with a "product" that they seek, eventually granting the candidate electoral victory (Donovan, 2012:7).

Even though the Three-Stage model enables the basic route for successful political marketing, it leaves out one important aspect of the communication chain among the political candidate, the voting public, and vice versa, the biased and agenda-ridden media. The media is now acting as an uncontrolled additional source of influence, even beyond the message the candidates are trying to convey. This action must be taken into consideration in any model that seeks to influence the voter's behavior (Donovan, 2012:7).

b) *Media in Political Marketing*

Political marketing is made up of marketing management theories. Nevertheless, the academic literature is ignoring a fundamental aspect of political marketing by not taking into consideration the role of media (Donovan, 2012:8). Savigny (2010:1050) explains this as "Marketing theory does acknowledge the existence of the media, and affords it a role as a conduit through which politicians communicate to the electorate -- in essence, the media are effectively assumed to be tools at the disposal of politicians. However, this assumption negates the active role that the media themselves play in shaping the political message delivered to the electorate. As such, this analysis will concentrate on what is arguably the major weakness in the political marketing approaches".

By using the Three-Stage model of business organizations and implementing the aspects of the media, political marketing could be improved, providing the electoral candidates a proper plan to follow for electoral success. "The 'inside job' played by political reporters and commentators in interpreting, changing, and challenging the message of the political marketers is clearly vital in any marketing campaign, as are the interests of media organizations themselves" (Savigny, 2010, p. 1049).

c) *Communication Distribution in Political Marketing*

In traditional marketing, the role of the media is the distribution; the channel by which the message is conveyed, to whom, and how often, the media is paid for simply reproducing the messages given by the advertiser. In the political arena, the media is an active participant, differs from the traditional distribution

technique, in the critique of potential candidates. "The media are also, with the arguable exception of some public service broadcasters, commercial entities beholden to other commercial organizations for their revenue. The media, including public service broadcasters, are political actors in their own right: they function to protect their own interests in addition to their theoretical role as defenders of democracy" (Savigny, 2010, p. 1055).

A range of media entities play a crucial role in the distribution of the messages of the candidates. The perceptions of politics for the voting mostly derived through the filters of the media (Donovan, 2012). "The media do not, in any political system, confine themselves to a 'neutral transmission functions' (Kuhn, 2007, p. 212). "To reiterate, a fundamental weakness of these models is a failure fully to appreciate that the conduit of messages is not neutral as it is in the presentation of marketing messages." (Savigny, 2010, p. 1055).

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the results that have been collected through reviewing the relevant literature. In this chapter, the literature that has been reviewed are discussed and summarized to make the conclusion.

a) *Findings and Commendations*

In this study, the political marketing is examined. The definition of political marketing is given as well as its criticism about its position in the market. It has been great development in the area as it is now seen as a specific subject that differs from the traditional marketing. Thus, it is obvious that the area will be expanding in the near future.

The segments of political marketing are given by explaining the political product, the organization and the market specifically. While the basis of these segments comes from traditional marketing, there are some differences which have been explained in political marketing.

Three-Stage Model, which is the most common model of political marketing, has been used to show the stages of political marketing. By doing so, the way of using marketing in politics effectively has been shown. The position of media in it also has been showed as there is no marketing without media nowadays.

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