

# The Marketing of Political Candidates<sup>1</sup>

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A cursory comparison between marketing of goods and services, and marketing of political candidates would readily point out at least one common concept: promotion, viz., the apparent and quite extensive use of media by the seller and the candidate for the purposes of informing, reminding, attitude-affecting, and sales-facilitating activities focused on target groups of buyers and voters, respectively. Possibly, such a comparison would also indicate that both marketing of goods and services, and marketing of political candidates utilize similar tools such as market research, and various statistical and computer techniques in studying the market. Although these points are essentially correct, they denote only a few of the similarities between marketing and political marketing.

A more serious comparison, however, will indicate that many more concepts and tools are shared by marketing of goods and services, and marketing of political candidates. Consider, for example, some well-known concepts of marketing: sellers and buyers, consumer behavior, market segmentation, image, brand loyalty, product concept, and product positioning, etc. They are all concepts of political marketing. Consider also some of the familiar tools which are used in marketing: market research, media, advertising, multiple regression, factor analysis, discriminant analysis, conjoint measurement, and multidimensional scaling, etc. They are all tools utilized in the marketing of political candidates.

These similar concepts and tools are discussed at length by the author of this paper elsewhere. However, a summary of these common concepts and tools is

provided in Table 1. An examination of Table 1 shows the striking similarities between marketing as it has been traditionally conceived to refer to economic goods and services, and political marketing which relates mainly to marketing of political candidates. Indeed, these similarities are so striking that one might make two opposing arguments about them. One is that there are really little difference between marketing and political marketing and therefore the latter should be subsumed by the former. The other argument is that such similarities are inevitable due to the fact that most of the concepts and tools in question are common to all the applied behavioral sciences. Consequently, the basis for the said similarities is semantic, if not tautological. This second argument is quite powerful and not completely invalid. However, when the historical development of the concepts of marketing and political marketing in the twentieth century is traced, it becomes evident that the basis for the similarities between the two is sameness of basic processes and development, rather than semantic proximity. To support the point made above, this paper discusses the various stages in the development of political marketing and compares them with the three orientations in American business in the twentieth century.

TABLE 1  
Similarities Between Marketing And Political Marketing

<u>Marketing</u>	<u>Political Marketing</u>
Products . . . . .	Candidates
Product mix . . . . .	Candidate mix
Product image . . . . .	Candidate image
Product development . . . . .	Candidate development
Product concept . . . . .	Candidate concept
Product concept testing . . . . .	Candidate concept testing
Product positioning . . . . .	Candidate positioning
Product life cycle . . . . .	Candidate life cycle
Product promotion . . . . .	Candidate promotion
Personal selling . . . . .	Canvassing
Product manager . . . . .	Candidate manager
Brand loyalty . . . . .	Party loyalty
Brand manager . . . . .	Party manager
Consumers . . . . .	Voters
Consumer market segmentation . . . . .	Voter market segmentation
Consumer satisfaction . . . . .	Voter satisfaction
Consumer opinion leaders . . . . .	Political opinion leaders
Business social accountability . . . . .	Political social accountability
Consumerism . . . . .	Watergate Era
Consumer market share . . . . .	Voter market share
Consumer research . . . . .	Voter research
Marketing campaign . . . . .	Political campaign
Market planning . . . . .	Political planning

## STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL MARKETING

Political marketing is the process by which political candidates and ideas are directed at the voters in order to satisfy their political needs and thus gain their support for the candidate and ideas in question. It has passed through two stages of development and is rapidly approaching a third stage. These three stages are (1) candidate-orientation, (2) sales-management orientation, and (3) marketing orientation. In essence, these stages parallel the development in the orientation of American business as depicted by King. According to King (1965) American business has passed from (1) production orientation whose main concern was to produce large volumes of products, to (2) sales-management orientation whose main concern was to maximize sales through better coordination of production and mass promotion, and finally to (3) a marketing concept orientation whose main concern was to offer goods and services that satisfy consumer needs and wants.

### Candidate Orientation Stage

The early stage of modern political marketing covered the period of 1940-1960, with some faint beginnings as early as 1933 (Kelly, 1956). It is characterized by a transition from homespun political campaigning to a more business like model of campaigning. In the growing competition between candidates, there was a greater resort to the new media of radio and later television. Audio-visual media provided considerable leveraging possibilities for the candidate to reach growing numbers of voters. Politicians hired mass media specialists to help them in their campaigns. At first these specialists played a minor role in the campaign, such as designing radio announcements and filming television presentations. As time passed, the role of the mass media specialists grew from a minor to a major place in the campaign, in which they controlled the planning and execution of the mass media campaign. In most cases these specialists were advertising executives or advertising agencies such as Ted Bates and Co., and Barton, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn: or campaign managers such as Whitaker and Baxter or Murray Chotiner.

The main strategy behind the growing use of political campaign consultants and management firms in this stage was the strategy of product promotion. The candidate was viewed as a product needing mass exposure, resulting in increased public awareness which was assumed to be positively connected to voter preference. Therefore, number of exposures and length of exposures were taken as the key for victory in the campaign. Modifications were made in this concept in the early 50's, the most important of which were: (1) the

growing use of short political ads rather than long political speeches; and (2) the filming of the candidate in natural interaction with voters, rather than in a studio speaking directly to the voters. The basic approach of political marketing at this stage was a simple decision-making approach. A simple decision making approach is one whose goal is to maximize output (votes) in terms of a single input (mass exposure). Accordingly, this phase was concerned with the percentage of increased awareness of the candidate, latently assuming that increased awareness would increase voter preference. The inputs to the promotion campaign to achieve increased awareness were designed on the basis of guess and intuition. Little, if any, effort was made to design the candidate and his campaign based on a careful study of the voters and their political needs and wants. Thus, this stage of political marketing represents not only a limited approach but also shallowness of scope and depth to the problem of candidate marketing.

In many respects this stage of candidate marketing is similar to the production era of marketing. In both cases the main focus of the marketing process is the product itself (the candidate, in the case of political marketing). Similarly, in both cases the main key for making additional sales (gaining additional votes, in the case of candidate marketing), is through heavy promotion which was believed to change buyer perception of the product and increase sales.

One of the best examples of this candidate orientation is Eisenhower's presidential campaign of 1952. Since Eisenhower was primarily perceived as a military figure, his advisors resorted to large scale T.V. announcements, commercials, and speeches to show him as a suitable politician as well. The success of this and other campaigns increased the reputation of campaign consultants and advertisers and helped to lay the groundwork for increased use of such specialists on national, state, and local level campaigns. In response, the number of campaign agencies and specialists rapidly increased.

However, political marketing of the 1950's, although new and innovative, was nothing but promotion and distribution of candidates through increased exposure by mass media.

### **Sales Management Orientation Stage**

Gradually, the realization occurred that candidate marketing encompassed more than promotion and distribution activities. Beginning in the early 1960's, political campaigning was viewed and practiced as the *selling* of candidates. Indications of this change in orientation manifested themselves in the preoccupation with winning maximum votes, and the understanding that in order to maximize votes all campaign activities must be well planned and coordinated.

In essence, this approach to candidate marketing is equivalent to the sales management era of business during 1930-1950. Accordingly, the sales management approach to political marketing implies the following marketing activities: (1) study of the voters, (2) marketing segmentation, (3) promotion, and (4) a comprehensive campaign plan.

**Study of the Voters.** The candidate orientation stage simply called for buying more mass media exposure for the candidate and his views. He should be packaged attractively and given widespread distribution. The sales management stage, in contrast, called for first learning more about the buying process of voters and what they would favor in different candidates. A number of new studies shed light not only on voter demographics, but also on how voters felt about voting, how they gathered and processed information, and how they responded to various influence stimuli (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1957). Political consultants began to emphasize the desirability of systematically polling and measuring voter attitudes and desires, and shaping their candidate to appear to satisfy the voters' wishes. Instead of promoting the product as it stood, it would be modified in the direction of greater voter appeal. It was not a question, however, of actually finding candidates who best fitted the voters' desires, but rather remodeling existing candidates to appear more congruent with the voters' desires. The growing number and usage of political polls and pollsters in the 1960's testified to the growing popularity of the selling concept.

**Voter Segmentation.** At the same time, it was recognized that all voters did not agree on what they wanted in the way of a candidate and that careful voter segmentation studies should be prepared so that the candidate could determine to which groups he would make his maximum adaptation and appeal. Voter segmentation had always been done but on a fairly crude basis that recognized only a few variables, such as income and party affiliation. Starting in the late fifties, the Simulmatic Project advanced the state of the art by developing 480 voter segments, based on linking seven sociodemographic characteristics, those of the region, urban-rural, income, race, religion, sex, and political affiliation. One voter type, for example, was defined as "Eastern, metropolitan, lower-income, White, Catholic, female, Democratic" (de Sola Pool, 1961). Other efforts were made at voter segmentation, but in general, the level of voter segmentation study has not yet reached the refinements found in modern market segmentation theory. Still to emerge are political equivalents to psychographics, marketing factor, and benefit segmentation as found in the business marketing field.

**Promotion.** Synchronic with the realization that the voters were not homogeneous, there came the realization that different voters could be more effectively reached by different promotion appeals and media. In contrast to the simplistic promotion approach of the previous stage, the sales management orientation argued for a more sophisticated approach to candidate promotion. Consistent with this, studies were conducted concerning the effectiveness of different promotion appeals and media in reaching the voters. Such studies reported, for example, (1) that less involved voters were more effectively influenced by television advertising while politically more involved voters were more effectively influenced by printed material (Patterson and McClure, 1974); (2) that the canvasser's appearance may have a positive or a negative influence on the canvasee's voting intentions (Manheim, 1971; Nimmo, 1971); and (3) that higher voter turnout can sometimes be disfunctional for the candidate canvassing to increase turnout (Kramer, 1970-71; Katz and Eldersveld, 1961). Thus while the candidate orientation stage called only for additional exposures, the sales management approach called for a careful examination of the effectiveness of appeals and media.

**Comprehensive Campaign Plan.** The highlight of the sales management orientation to candidate marketing is the comprehensive campaign plan. Most activities at this stage are geared to help formulate and execute a successful political campaign—one which wins the maximum votes for the candidate. In most cases, such comprehensive campaign plan includes a well coordinated schedule of activities such as television commercials, radio announcements, fund-raising, canvassing, speech-making, etc., that is believed to increase the number of votes for the candidate. In no case, however, is such a plan concerned with voter attitudes and feelings about the candidate after the election. As a result, such plans do not consider the possibly negative effects of campaign activities on voters' attitudes and opinions after the election. Yet, compared to the previous stage of candidate marketing, the sales management stage is of broader approach and deeper scope. This is manifested by the conception of political marketing as a complex decision making process. A complex decision making process, in contrast to the simple decision making approach of the candidate orientation stage, is one whose goal is to maximize single output (votes) in terms of multiple-coordinated inputs (voters study, segmentation, promotion, and a comprehensive plan). As a result, candidate marketing becomes more effective when complex decision making approach is utilized. However, this approach is still short of being voter oriented throughout the candidate's political life.

The similarities between this stage of political marketing and the sales

management orientation of goods and services is striking. Firstly, both are concerned with the volume of sales (or votes) to be achieved. Secondly, both rely heavily on promotion to maximize sales or vote volume. Thirdly, both call for a well coordinated marketing plan based on studying potential consumers, segmenting them, and considering effective promotion appeals and media to reach them. And finally, compared to the production (or candidate) centered stage, both represent a more sophisticated marketing approach.

Senator John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign of 1960 is an example of the sales management approach to political marketing. Senator Kennedy's campaign was based on a very sophisticated voter study that made market segmentation, promotion appeals and media selection quite effective in reaching the voters and influencing their preferences. Since then, many candidates running for office have adopted and improved this approach. Lately, however, political candidates, party leaders, and political consultants seem to realize that the sales management approach to political marketing is becoming less and less adequate. Although the interest in vote volume is still very strong due to the nature of the political market, the focus is shifting more and more to satisfaction of voter wants and needs by offering candidates representing qualities and issues that satisfy these voter needs and wants. That is, the sales management orientation seems to be changing into a marketing orientation.

### **Marketing Orientation Stage**

Presently, political marketing is experiencing a transition from sales management orientation to marketing orientation. Clearly, Watergate is a turning point, and the post Watergate era utilizes the marketing concept philosophy. Accordingly, the marketing of political candidates is becoming more: (1) voter oriented—candidates are selected for their potential to fully satisfy the voters' opinions, needs and expectancies; (2) integrated—the various marketing activities are orchestrated for maximum impact, and (3) long run profit oriented—the effort is to win the election and serve the voter well, and thus build up long-run voter preference for the party and the candidate.

**Voter Orientation.** Voter orientation of candidate marketing stems from the fact that it is the voter who decides which candidate—that is, which “parcel” of personality, issues, party, etc.—to “buy” with his vote. This consumer orientation is even stronger than the one which exists in product marketing as each voter “buys” only one candidate for each office (absence of “heavy buying”) and his choice represents “all or nothing” solution (absence of “small scale trial”). Consequently, a thorough study of the voter market is

imperative to voter-oriented marketing. Such a study is concerned with researching generic behavioral processes which are related to voter behavior, e.g.: political attitude formation, processes of image formation, and needs for political involvement, efficacy, etc., as well as conducting periodic polls to find out voters' opinions on issues and candidate performance. In addition, in order to gain first hand understanding about their fellow voters, candidates are encouraged to spend some time conducting their lives in a similar manner to their target voters so as to absorb its approach and attitudes toward political issues. As one campaign consultant expressed this point recently: "I want a candidate who has spent three months out hustling among voters, one who is soaked in their value system, who communicates well one-on-one in the field." And another candidate has addressed the voters in the following manner: "It's really helpful when you open up and express your feelings. . . . Because I am a fellow who may end up representing you. . . , it's important to me what you think and how you arrived at your feelings" (Congressional Quarterly, 1974, p. 1106).

It is important to note here that such an approach to studying the voters is different from that called for by the sales management orientation. While the sales management approach simply called to investigate voters' opinions so as to make it possible for the candidate to manage effective appeals to the voters, the marketing concept calls for research that goes far deeper than this. The new marketing concept is interested in the basic political needs and wants of the voters with the intention of offering them candidates who are capable of satisfying these needs and wants or changing existing candidates to meet these needs and wants. One indication for this sharp difference between the two orientations to political marketing manifests itself by the fact that the sales management orientation studies the voters mainly before the election, while the marketing orientation stage studies the voters constantly so as to fully understand the dynamics of their behavior. Another indication of the broader and deeper interest in the voters and their political needs is the highly interdisciplinary approach to the study of the voters. Such interdisciplinary study helps not only the deep understanding of voters' needs and the dynamics of voting behavior, but also the development, design, and modification of product concept which satisfies the voters. However, as is the case in product marketing, candidates who have been in the market for a longer period are harder to redesign or modify since the images that voters have about them are more stable and central relative to their images of new candidates. Yet it is always possible to produce gradual and marginal changes in the candidate so that the total sum of them becomes a major change after a longer period. This last point only amplifies the basic notion of voter oriented political marketing,



i.e.: to offer candidates who are responsive to voters' needs and wants and thus to premarket the candidates.

**Integrated Marketing.** Integrated political marketing is a total system of action designed to satisfy voters and elect a given candidate. Therefore, it involves the simultaneous study, analysis, and segmentation of voters; candidate positioning, and candidate development; promotion and use of media so as to reach an integrated marketing plan that satisfies the voters and elects the candidate. Such an orchestration of marketing activities is more likely to produce a fuller impact on voters and increase the chances of the candidate to get elected, than the last two stages of political marketing, i.e.: candidate-oriented and sales volume oriented. This is because the above marketing activities take a policymaking approach to marketing rather than the simple or complex decision making approach employed by the candidate oriented and sales management oriented stages, respectively. A policymaking approach to political marketing is one which focuses on maximizing collective outputs of collective inputs. Collective inputs are simply defined as the sum of human skills and monetary resources available to the candidate. These inputs are utilized in a total marketing plan which is consumer satisfying and results in voters support of the candidate (by voting and otherwise). Such a marketing plan, for example, may be concerned with satisfying a few select voter segments, party leadership, interest groups, contributors, and mass media. And the multiple output desired from each of these targets may be viewed in terms of Lavidge's and Steiner's (1961) advertising model calling for increased (1) awareness of the candidate existence in the political market → (2) knowledge of the candidate's personal and political background, the office for which he is running, his personality traits and the issues he stands for → (3) liking the candidate on the basis of available information about him and possibly on the basis of additionally sought information → (4) preference of the candidate over other candidates running for the same office → (5) a conviction that the candidate is the best available one → (6) support of the candidate by contributions and/or volunteer work and voting.

Obviously, a policymaking approach to political marketing is far more complicated than decision making approaches. It requires a systems approach to the business of marketing political candidates. However, it is also an approach that maximizes the candidate's chances to get elected while simultaneously satisfying his target groups.

**Long Run Profit.** The developing marketing orientation in the area of political marketing is one which stresses long-run profit for the candidate and his

party, rather than short run profit. Therefore, the campaign efforts are not only targeted at winning the present election, but rather at winning the election and serving the voters in a satisfying manner. One consequence of such a mutually profiting approach is the build-up of long run voter preference for the party and the candidate. Another, is that the candidate and his party can depend on a large market share, and thus stay in office for a long-run period. On the other hand, long-run profit orientation may also mean short-run losses, e.g.: a candidate who decides not to run for an office due to lack of voter satisfaction, or a candidate who runs to test his product concept and gain some public exposure. In such cases, the loss is viewed as the cost of developing a profitable product in the long run.

Figure 1 summarizes the three orientations of political marketing in terms of their inputs and outputs. Thus, the candidate orientation stage of political marketing—the equivalent of production orientation in business—utilizes a simple promotion approach whose main interests are the number and length of exposures which are assumed to be positively connected to voter awareness and voting behavior. A more advanced approach to candidate marketing is taken by the sales management orientation which focuses on increasing the number of votes for the candidate as a function of market research, market segmentation, promotion and comprehensive campaign planning. In contrast to the above two orientations the evolving marketing orientation seems to be far more sophisticated and complex. Firstly, it calls for more voter oriented, integrated and long-run profit oriented approaches than the candidate and sales management orientations. Secondly, it utilizes complex inputs which are targeted at multiple social and political forces, i.e.: voters, party, interest groups, contributors and mass media. Finally, the marketing orientation is concerned with multiple outputs which are expected from the above social forces. Such outputs are the increased awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and votes of the social forces at which the marketing activities are targeted.

To further compare and summarize the three orientations of political marketing, Table 2 depicts the activities and the degree of depth associated with them for each orientation. Thus, the candidate orientation conducts a limited study of the voters; but relies heavily on promotion, usage of mass media, grass roots politics, and takes a simple decision-making approach to candidate marketing. The more advanced stage of sales management orientation conducts some voter study and analysis, deals to a limited degree with product positioning, and product development, segments the market along socioeconomic variables, relies heavily on promotion, mass media and grass roots politics, and takes the view that candidate marketing is a complex process of deci-

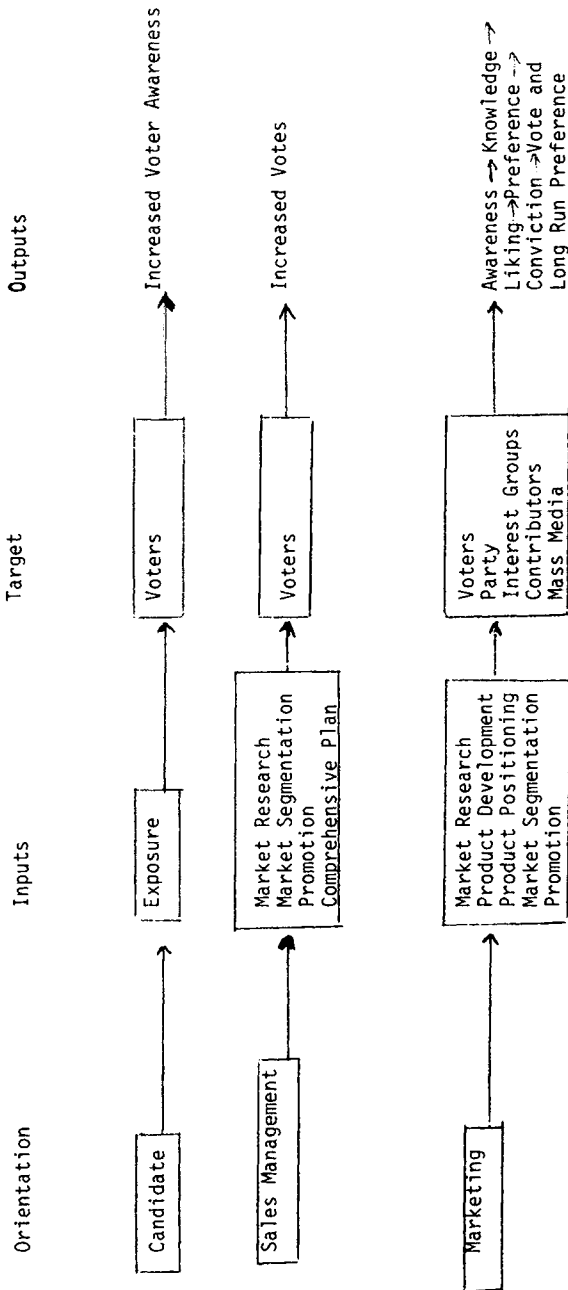


FIGURE 1: Political Marketing Orientations

TABLE 2: ACTIVITIES AND DEPTH OF CANDIDATE MARKETING ORIENTATIONS

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Candidate Orientation</u>	<u>Sales-Management Orientation</u>	<u>Marketing Orientation</u>
Voters' Study	Very limited	Some	Much
Voters' Analysis	None	Some	Much
Voters' Segmentation	Limited	Socioeconomic	Socioeconomic & Personality
Promotion and Advertising	Heavy	Heavy	Planned
Product Positioning	None	Some	Sophisticated
Product Development	None	Some	Sophisticated
Grass roots politics (barn storming, coffee klatches, canvassing, buttons, stickers, etc.)	Heavy	Heavy	Planned
Use of Mass Media	Heavy	Heavy	Planned
Approach	Simple Decision- making	Complex Decision- making	Policymaking

sion making. On the other hand, the marketing orientation approaches the problem from a policymaking point of view, and thus relies on much voter study and analysis, on sophisticated product development and positioning techniques, and segments the market along socioeconomic as well as personality variables. Consequently, the degree to which it utilizes promotion, mass media and grass roots politics is well planned.

### CONCLUSION

This article has shown that modern political marketing has developed along the same lines as the development of American business: from candidate orientation, to sales-management orientation, to the present marketing orientation. In addition, a summary of basic concepts and tools shared by marketing and political marketing was also presented. Therefore, because marketing and

political marketing share similar concepts and have a similar history, it seems logical that political marketing be included within the boundaries of existing marketing theory. This conclusion, however, does not mean that differences between marketing and political marketing are not worth investigating, nor does it mean that the contributions of the study of political marketing to marketing theory is not worth pursuing. Indeed such investigations are being pursued by the author of this article. Rather, the above conclusion means that political marketing should be treated as an integral part of marketing.

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