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Stakeholders in the political marketing context

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Stakeholders influence the ability of organisations to achieve their aims, but little work has been carried out into understanding the stakeholder concept as applied to political actors. This paper first discusses the contextual nature of stakeholders using normative and strategic, and broad and narrow dimensions, integrating these 2 dimensions with power asymmetries and reciprocity. This paper then argues that a broad stakeholder concept for the political marketing context reconciles strategic and normative issues, as whilst successful interactions with specific stakeholders are necessary to achieve completed political exchanges of value, all stakeholders that exist in democratic societies have some form of moral claim to representation. As each political exchange of value consists of 3 consecutive interactions, the direct stakeholders in 1 interaction become indirect stakeholders in subsequent interactions. As each interaction occurs within a "marketplace" context, interactions in previous marketplace(s) together with expectations of the impact on future marketplace(s) influence current decision-making. Finally, it is proposed that in the political marketing context, the stakeholder concept can be defined as "context-specific agents that directly or indirectly influence or are influenced by the political actor."

1 | INTRODUCTION

Various groups impact on the ability of political actors (e.g., parties, elected politicians, and candidates) to compete successfully in political marketplaces (Henneberg & Ormrod, 2013). These groups can be voters (e.g., Henneberg, 2002; Hughes & Dann, 2009), the mass media (e.g., Quinn, 2012; Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013), competitors (e.g., Bowler & Farrell, 1992; Cwalina & Falkowski, 2015), lobby/interest groups (e.g., Andrews, 1996; Gilens & Page, 2014; Harris & McGrath, 2012), public sector workers (Dean & Croft, 2001; Hughes & Dann, 2009), and even terrorist groups (Baines & O'Shaughnessy, 2014). Collectively, these groups can be labelled as stakeholders, but what does the term "stakeholder" mean in the political marketing context?

The aim of this paper is to develop a better understanding of the stakeholder concept in the political marketing context, as few organisations can affect society as political actors do (Ormrod & Savigny, 2012). This aim is motivated by a need to expand recent work into the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of political marketing (Ormrod, Henneberg, & O'Shaughnessy, 2013). In this paper, the term "political actor" will be used as a label for the focal organisation or individual, whilst the term "stakeholder" will be used as a label for the individuals and organisations with which the political actor has a relationship with. This paper begins with a discussion of the nature of the stakeholder concept, after which the stakeholder concept is

applied to the political marketing context. Subsequently, a definition of the stakeholder concept for the political marketing context is proposed.

2 | WHAT—OR WHO—IS A STAKEHOLDER?

Which stakeholders are relevant to an organisation depends on how the concept of a "stakeholder" is defined (Friedman & Miles, 2006). Whilst there have been many alternative definitions of the stakeholder concept, research has tended to coalesce around Freeman's (1984) influential definition of a stakeholder and accompanying conceptual model, principally due to the conceptual model's visual nature, widespread managerial adoption (Fassin, 2009; Friedman & Miles, 2006), and that it "...can still be seen as a good approximation to reality" (Fassin, 2008: 886).

Freeman (1984, 2004) qualifies his understanding of the stakeholder concept by specifying a priori stakeholders in his model. However, the stakeholders that are included may not be suitable for all organisations, and a graphical representation may not necessarily be able to capture nuances such as relative power and influence, reciprocal recognition, and the organisation as the central actor (Fassin, 2008, 2012). Including interactions between stakeholders that occur independently of the focal organisation (Phillips, 2003) and network-based models (Key, 1999; Rowley, 1997)

can alleviate some of these modelling issues but not the issues of market dynamics (Freeman, 1984; Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001) and the impact of the wider and more diffuse environment (Key, 1999) and context (Hall & Vredenburg, 2005; Hansen, Bode, & Moosmayer, 2004).

The term "stakeholder" is thus multifaceted and often used without considering its meaning (Roberts & Mahoney, 2004; Waxenberger & Spence, 2003). This has led to a dilution of the explanatory power of the stakeholder concept (e.g., Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Hay, 1996; Stoney & Winstanley, 2001; Weyer, 1996) and a high degree of disagreement about how the term "stakeholder" is understood in the academic literature (Kaler, 2002). For example, stakeholders have been understood from descriptive, normative, and strategic (instrumental) perspectives (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), from managerial and legal perspectives (Fassin, 2009), as a metaphor (Freeman, 1984) and as a decision-making heuristic (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Treviño & Weaver, 1999). The stakeholder concept has been argued to be context-specific (Hall & Vredenburg, 2005; Hansen, Bode, & Moosmayer, 2004), implying a dynamic dimension to an already ambiguous concept. Some authors have gone further by arguing that a higher level of granularity in terminology is needed; for example, Holzer (2008) distinguishes between stakeholders and stakeseekers, and Fassin (2009) distinguishes between stakeholders, stakewatchers, stakekeepers, and stake imposters.

3 | FRIEDMAN AND MILES' (2006) FRAMEWORK

Friedman and Miles (2006: 11) develop a framework that maps the alternative definitions of the stakeholder concept on two dimensions, according to the scope of the definition (a broad or narrow stakeholder focus) and the extent to which the definition emphasises the normative or strategic relevance of the individual stakeholder to the organisation. Friedman and Miles (2006) identify a further characteristic of the stakeholder concept, symmetry, understood as the extent to which the relative power of the organisation vis-à-vis the stakeholder is explicitly included in the definition.

3.1 | The scope of the definition: a broad or narrow focus?

A narrow approach to defining the stakeholder concept restricts stakeholders to groups that the organisation considers to be essential for the organisation's continued survival; for example, actors that have a direct interaction with the organisation (e.g., Carroll, 1993) or to whom the organisation is contractually obliged (e.g., Freeman & Evan, 1990). Broad approaches to defining the stakeholder concept vary from a group of identifiable actors that can influence or be influenced by the organisation (Gray, Owen, & Adams, 1996) to a wide range of non-human actors, such as units of culture that affect behaviour (Dawkins, 1989), naturally occurring phenomena (Phillips & Reichart, 2000; Starik, 1995), and God (Schwartz, 2006).

Hansen et al. (2004) nuance the broad/narrow dimension by arguing that context is essential to understanding which stakeholders are relevent to the organisation, as the organisation itself is a coalition of heterogeneous stakeholder groups, the interests of which the management must balance with the interests of stakeholders outside of the organisation in order to achieve the organisational aims. Stakeholder management is in this way integrated into all organisational activities rather than being simply a strategic choice (Hansen et al., 2004).

With the current tendency towards networks of organisations competing in specific marketplaces (e.g., Naudé, Henneberg, Zolkiewski, & Zhu, 2009; Thornton, Henneberg, & Naudé, 2015), all actors that participate in the value creation process, even those with which the focal organisation has no direct contractual or social contact, can be considered as stakeholders (e.g., Phillips & Cauldwell, 2005). Globalisation widens the geographical dispersion of potentially relevant stakeholders, whilst the internet brings them closer, and so it is necessary to identify the context within which the organisation exists before deciding on a broad or narrow scope.

3.2 | Normative or strategic criteria?

Normative and strategic approaches to understanding the stakeholder concept have traditionally been considered as an either-or proposition; Goodpaster (1991) identified the "stakeholder paradox," that good business is incommensurable with good ethics. The question is, ought an organisation take a group into consideration on normative grounds, even though this group has no impact on the organisation's ability to achieve its strategic aims? Or are stakeholders restricted to those actors which have a direct bearing on the ability of the organisation to achieve its strategic goals?

Identifying stakeholders that are of strategic importance to the organisation is relatively straightforward, as models from the strategy literature have long provided a go-to list of groups that can impact on organisational performance (e.g., Porter, 1980). Normative criteria are more elusive, as the moral foundation can vary, depending on the context, from legal, institutional, and historical factors on the one hand (Hansen et al., 2004) to the marketplace and the morality of individual managers (Friedman & Miles, 2006: 257).

Jones and Wicks (1999; see also Parmar et al., 2010) argued that it was necessary to integrate (converge) the normative and strategic understandings of stakeholders in order to capture the nuances of the real world. Freeman (1999) criticised Jones and Wicks' (1999) convergent approach as flawed due to the "stakeholder paradox" (Goodpaster, 1991), and Gioia (1999) doubted the practical utility of normative approaches to managerial decision-making in general.

However, more recent work (e.g., Fassin, 2012; Parmar et al., 2010) has adopted Jones and Wicks' (1999) convergent stakeholder approach; instead of competing stakeholder theories, Parmar et al. (2010) argue that a stakeholder approach should be seen as a "framework" or "set of ideas," whilst Freeman (1994) states that a stakeholder approach is an academic "genre" rather than a distinct theory. Common to both Parmar et al. (2010) and Freeman (1994) is the opinion that a stakeholder approach can contribute to the development of theories in management disciplines as diverse as corporate social responsibility, finance, accounting, and marketing.

3.3 | The (as)symmetry of the definition and reciprocal responsibility

Friedman and Miles (2006) note that some definitions of stakeholders contain symmetrical elements such as "...affect or is affected by..." (Freeman, 1984: 46, Carroll & Näsi, 1997: 46) and "...influenced by, or itself can influence..." (Gray, Owen, & Adams, 1996: 45). Other definitions, however, are assymmetric in that the definition is restricted to how the organisation affects stakeholders or vice versa. Friedman and Miles (2006) note that most definitions are primarily organisation-centric (e.g., Clarkson, 1995; Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997), that is, focusing on the impact of the stakeholder on the organisation. However, other definitions are stakeholder-centric (e.g., Frooman, 1999; Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003) or focus on the relationships between the organisation and the stakeholder (Friedman & Miles, 2002; Hill & Jones, 1992).

In a practical sense, "symmetry" refers simply to the question of who identifies whom is an actor a stakeholder because the organisation acknowledges them to be a stakeholder or can an actor self-select itself to be a stakeholder of the organisation—or both (Friedman & Miles, 2006: 8)? Closely linked to the symmetry of the stakeholder definition is the reciprocity of responsibility (Fassin, 2009, 2012). If the stakeholder is dependent on the organisation, does the organisation consider itself to have a moral responsibility towards the stakeholder, even if there is no strategic benefit to the organisation? Both symmetry and reciprocity are context-specific in the sense that market dynamics can change the relationship of the organisation and the stakeholder after an event.

This section has provided an overview of how the stakeholder concept is understood in the academic literature. Answering the straightforward question of "what—or who—is a stakeholder?" is in reality a complex undertaking due to the ambiguity of the stakeholder concept (Kaler, 2002). Friedman and Miles (2006: 10) propose a useful framework that emphasises two dimensions, namely, normative-strategic and wide-narrow, but for managers and academics alike—as with any attempt at reductionism—understanding precisely which actors can be considered as stakeholders of their organisation is complicated by the issues of reciprocity and (as)symmetry (Fassin, 2009, 2012), with context-specific history, social norms, and institutions (Hansen et al., 2004), and through the impact of market dynamics and networks or coalitions of actors (Naudé, Henneberg, Zolkiewski, & Zhu, 2009; Thornton, Henneberg, & Naudé, 2015). The following sections will discuss how the stakeholder concept can be understood in the context of political marketing, and subsequently propose a definition of stakeholders in the political marketing.

4 | THE STAKEHOLDER CONCEPT AND POLITICAL MARKETING

It has long been recognised that commercial marketing theory has explanatory power in the political "marketplace" (e.g., Kotler & Levy, 1969; Lippmann, 1922; O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Shama, 1975); for example, branding (French & Smith, 2010; Pich, Dean, & Punjasri, 2014; Smith & Speed, 2011), market segmentation (Baines, 1999;

Bannon, 2005; Henneberg, 2002; Smith & Hirst, 2001), and market research (Sherman & Schiffman, 2002; Sparrow & Turner, 2001) enjoy widespread use by political actors in an ongoing understanding of the needs and wants of stakeholder groups.

More recently, the applicability of the resource-based organisational focus (O'Cass, 2009) and the service-dominant logic of marketing (Butler & Harris, 2009) have been demonstrated, despite there being characteristics of the political marketplace that preclude a direct juxtaposition of commercial marketing theory with the political context (Henneberg & Ormrod, 2013; Lock & Harris, 1996; Ormrod & Savigny, 2012; Ormrod, Henneberg, & O'Shaughnessy, 2013).

Political marketing research has used the term "stakeholders" to label central actors in empirical investigations (Opoku & Williams, 2010) and as elements of conceptual models (e.g., Dean & Croft, 2001; Ormrod, 2005); indirectly, Winther-Nielsen (2012) uses the term "political entities" synonymously when discussing political marketing strategy. In addition to this, some definitions of political marketing name specific stakeholders (e.g., Henneberg, 1996), some include stakeholders that are specific to the political organisation (e.g., Hughes & Dann, 2009), whilst others include the more general political environment as a stakeholder (Henneberg, 2002; Ormrod et al., 2013; Winther-Nielsen, 2011).

So whilst political marketing is different to commercial marketing on the theoretical/conceptual (e.g., Henneberg, 2006a, 2008; Ormrod et al., 2013; Savigny, 2007) and strategic/tactical (e.g., Baines & Lynch, 2005; Lock & Harris, 1996; O'Cass & Voola, 2011; Ormrod & Henneberg, 2010) levels, the lack of research into how the stakeholder concept can be understood in the context of political marketing—as opposed to a focus on understanding the relationships between stakeholders (Baines & Viney, 2010)—has been carried over from the commercial sphere. This is undoubtedly exacerbated by the primary focus of political marketing research on facilitating the dyadic exchange of value between political candidates and voters, which is generally assumed to be analogous to the seller–buyer dyad in the commercial marketing context (Henneberg, 2002). However, Henneberg and Ormrod's (2013) more recent work on a triadic conceptualisation of the political exchange of value emphasises nonexchange interactions between multiple, heterogeneous actors.

Henneberg and Ormrod (2013) propose a triadic exchange structure for the political context, consisting of three, linked interactions in the electoral, parliamentary, and governmental marketplaces. Political actors interact with different core stakeholders in each of the three marketplaces: voters, other elected members of the legislative chamber, and the implementors of government policy (Henneberg & Ormrod, 2013). From a stakeholder perspective, this triadic exchange structure dictates three criteria: (a) that stakeholders can be roughly divided into direct (interaction marketplace-specific) and indirect stakeholders, with a further subdivision into those stakeholders with a strategic and/or normative influence vis-à-vis the political actor; (b) that the direct stakeholder changes in the three interaction marketplaces across the electoral cycle (for example, voters become an indirect stakeholder after an election, albeit with a high level of influence through opinion polls conducted by other indirect stakeholders, such as the media); and (c) that context is a factor given the dynamic nature

of the political exchange (e.g., historical, institutional, and legal structures).

Surprisingly, there has been little research into the stakeholder concept in the context of political marketing. Hughes and Dann (2006, 2009, 2012) provide the most focused discussion of the stakeholder concept in the political marketing context by developing the American Marketing Association's 2007 (American Marketing Association, 2008) definition of commercial marketing to propose a definition of political marketing. Hughes and Dann (2009) use alternative categorisation schemes to provide a method of "identifying, classifying and prioritizing stakeholder influence over the political marketing organization" (Hughes & Dann, 2009: 249). Legitimacy-urgency-power framework of Mitchell et al. (1997; Agle, Mitchell, & Sonnenfeld, 1999; Mitchell et al., 1997) and a developed version of Grimble and Wellard (1997) and Dann and Dann's (2007) framework adds a dynamic "switch" element to the original active/passive categorisation of stakeholder behaviours. Both frameworks are applied to 17 stakeholders identified through Scholem and Stewart's (2002) stakeholder mapping process and the more general political marketing literature (Hughes & Dann, 2006, 2009).

Hughes and Dann (2009) refrain from proposing a formal definition of stakeholders, although the most likely candidate is the definition proposed by Mitchell et al. (1997) that includes both normative (legitimacy and urgency) and strategic (power) elements (Friedman & Miles, 2006), thus adopting a convergent approach to understanding stakeholders (e.g., Friedman & Miles, 2006; Jones & Wicks, 1999; Parmar et al., 2010). The groups that are explicitly stated in Hughes and Dann's (2009) definition of political marketing are "voter-consumers, political party stakeholders and society at large" (Hughes & Dann, 2009: 244).

As such, Hughes and Dann (2009) fall foul of the conceptual and lexicographic problems associated with the stakeholder concept (Kaler, 2002), namely, that the understanding of a "stakeholder" is generally implicit in the political marketing literature. This has resulted in the simultaneous use of the term for all actors in society and for a specific subset of actors that are selected according to one or more normative and/or strategic criteria (Roberts & Mahoney, 2004; Waxenberger & Spence, 2003). In order to address this issue, the following section uses Friedman and Miles' (2006) wide-narrow and strategic-normative dimensions in order to apply the stakeholder concept to the political marketing context and discusses the impact of reciprocity and symmetry on the stakeholder–political actor interaction.

5 | FRIEDMAN AND MILES' (2006) FRAMEWORK AND POLITICAL MARKETING

The stakeholder concept in the political marketing context needs to reconcile strategic and normative issues, taking into consideration the assymmetry of power and reciprocity in the interaction. From a strategic perspective "politics is the art of the possible," whilst from a normative perspective, all actors that exist in society have some form of moral claim to representation, irrespective of their relative power vis-à-vis the political actor. There is also a level of reciprocal influence between the stakeholder and the political actor, irrespective of whether this influence is as a direct or indirect stakeholder based on

normative and/or strategic criteria. This influence is in a practical sense asymmetric, and for the political actor depends on such factors as whether the political actor is already represented or competing in the electoral marketplace for the first time, whether the political actor is in opposition or incumbent (Ormrod & Henneberg, 2006), and the impact of interactions in previous marketplace(s) together with expectations of the impact of the results of current interactions on future marketplaces. Building on these arguments, this paper argues that in the political marketing context, stakeholders are "context-specific agents that directly or indirectly influence or are influenced by the political actor."

This definition emphasises that stakeholders are context-specific rather than specific to each of the interaction marketplaces, as the direct interaction partner in one interaction marketplace—for example, voters in the electoral marketplace—becomes an indirect stakeholder in the subsequent interaction marketplace (the parliamentary marketplace). Voter opinion, however, influences the behaviour of the interaction partners in the parliamentary marketplace; voters are in turn influenced by the results of the implementation of legislation. In the following, we discuss the way in which strategic and normative considerations of current marketplace characteristics, together with how inclusive a scope the political actor adopts, is balanced with a context-sensitive perspective that takes multiple, consecutive marketplaces into account.

Narrow understandings of the stakeholder concept focus on those stakeholders which have a direct influence on the ability of organisations to achieve their strategic aims (e.g., Freeman, 1984; Orts & Strudler, 2002), together with other stakeholders that have a specific, legitimate interest in the activities of the organisation (e.g., Reed, 1999; Scott & Lane, 2000). In the political marketing context, the stakeholder concept needs to be narrow enough to provide a focus that enables the optimal use of resources on the direct and key indirect stakeholders in each of the interaction marketplaces, such as voters (direct) and the media (indirect) in the electoral marketplace (Henneberg & Ormrod, 2013).

However, if the stakeholder focus is *too* narrow, the context of one interaction marketplace may be at odds with the needs and wants of the direct stakeholders in subsequent interaction marketplaces. For example, conviction politicians could stand by what they believe in the parliamentary marketplace, despite opposition from their own party members (direct stakeholders) and public opinion (indirect stakeholders), such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair's decision to participate in the Iraq war (Henneberg, 2006b). Whilst Tony Blair may have perceived his decision (in the parliamentary marketplace) and subsequent legislation (in the governmental marketplace) to be normatively "right," his actions had a negative impact on strategically important indirect stakeholders, together with the direct stakeholders (voters) in the following General Election (electoral marketplace). Of course, the opposite behaviour can have a similar effect; changing policy positions as a result of the influence of the direct stakeholders that are present in each of the interaction marketplaces may lead to accusations of "saying one thing and doing another" or "pandering to the ephemeral whims" (Coleman, 2007: 182) of the interaction market-specific direct stakeholders.

Therefore, the decision as to which indirect stakeholders the political actor needs to take into consideration can be based on an appraisal of the impact of the current context on subsequent contexts. This necessitates a broader approach to understanding the stakeholder concept. From a democratic perspective, the stakeholder concept needs to be broad enough to encompass those who have no say in the legislation that is passed by an incumbent government, such as voters who did not support the winning majority (nonreciprocated interactions in the electoral marketplace) but must live with the collective decision (Lock & Harris, 1996; Hughes & Dann, 2009 label this group "clients") yet can fruitfully be included in legislative deliberations according to the knowledge that they can supply as indirect stakeholders in the subsequent interaction marketplaces (Heidar & Saglie, 2003; Ormrod, 2005).

However, a resource-intensive, broad focus may only be possible for mass parties (Duverger, 1954) or catch-all parties (Kirchheimer, 1966) with a large resource base; niche parties (Butler & Collins, 1996; Henneberg, 2002) and "third parties" may find themselves unable to compete in the electoral marketplace due to the need for expensive election advertising (Pross, 2013). This said, an appropriate use of websites and especially the social media may serve to equalise party competition (Gibson & McAllister, 2015), and so, content provided by the political actor on websites or social media requires tailoring to both direct and indirect stakeholders across all three of the interaction marketplaces.

So how is it possible for political actors to understand the nature of the marketplace in order to reach out to those stakeholders that will help the political actor to achieve its aims? At the broadest end of Friedman and Miles' (2006) wide-narrow dimension, Starik's (1994: 92) definition of stakeholders as being "any naturally occurring entity which affects or is affected by organizational performance" is difficult to conceptualise in a way that is strategically useful to party professionals in the comparatively brief focus on the electoral marketplace. This is not to say that a broad definition cannot be useful for identifying both direct and indirect stakeholders, although the emphasis is more on the indirect stakeholders and from a normative perspective.

For example, Starik's (1994) argument that the deceased can have an impact on the political actor is apparent in the way that the legacy of significant political personalities continue to be used by political actors today; U.S. President Barack Obama referred to Ronald Reagan when speaking about the Buffett Rule (Obama, 2012). In addition to this, memes (Dawkins, 1976) such as "my lips are sealed" (Baldwin, 1935[1]) have entered into general language usage whilst their political origins have been forgotten, and nonphysical entities such as the social media have the potential to alter the characteristics of political participation and accountability (Aharony, 2012; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Fung, Russon Gilman, & Shkabatur, 2013; Harris & Harrigan, 2015). The deceased, memes, and the social media are all indirect stakeholders in each of the three interaction marketplaces, yet all can be assigned varying levels of strategic or normative importance dependent on the context.

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[1]Actually a misquotation of a line in British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's speech to the House of Commons concerning the Abyssinian crisis in 1935, "... for my lips are not yet unsealed."

6 | IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Adopting the stakeholder concept in research in the political marketing context brings with it issues that affect conceptual models that attempt to explain phenomena in the political sphere and also on how the practice of political marketing is carried out by political actors. This final section, whilst by no means comprehensive, aims to discuss two implications of adopting a stakeholder perspective at the conceptual (political market orientation) and practical (the permanent campaign) levels.

6.1 | Research: towards a conceptual model of political stakeholder orientation

The original conceptualisation of a political market orientation (PMO; Ormrod, 2005) focused on the relationship between party behaviour and four stakeholder groups, namely, voters, party members, competitors, and stakeholders external to the organisation. The PMO model was developed at a time when political marketing was still considered to be "special case" of commercial marketing, sharing the basic theoretical foundations but with some idiosyncracies (Henneberg, 2002; Lock & Harris, 1996). As such, the PMO was conceptualised in this way, drawing mainly from the research into commercial market orientation (e.g., Harrison-Walker, 2001; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1998) but developed to reflect the political context.

During the last 5 years, our understanding of the political marketing exchange has developed to possess a triadic structure with theoretically determined direct stakeholders and indirect stakeholders that are nonetheless essential to successful interactions (Ormrod, 2017). Thus, a PMO can be developed to be based upon a theoretical foundation that is specific to political marketing, implying that the focus can be shifted towards stakeholders across marketplaces. Ormrod (under review) terms this a *political stakeholder orientation*, arguing that political actors need to have a constant focus on direct stakeholders due to theoretical embeddedness, organisational members due to the impact of this group on the political organisation's offering and other, selected stakeholders due to their ideological and/or practical relevance. The implication of this is that long-term relationship management becomes more important than discrete campaigns.

6.2 | Practice: stakeholders and the permanent campaign

The "permanent campaign" is an ongoing activity that aims to keep a political actor elected to a legislative assembly (Cwalina, Falkowski, & Newman, 2011; Nimmo, 1999; O'Shaughnessy, 2001; Smith & Hirst, 2001; Sparrow & Turner, 2001; Steger, 1999). Initially occuring as part of the "marketization of politics" in the United States, permanent campaigns are now a normal part of the political reality in countries as varied as Greece (Koliastasis, 2016), Ecuador (Conaghan & de la Torre, 2008), Australia (van Onselen & Errington, 2007), Norway, and Sweden (Larsson, Kalsnes, & Christensen, 2016).

Some authors argue that election campaigns are permanent, simply varying in intensity across the electoral cycle (Strömbäck, 2007; Tenpas & McCann, 2007). Others discern between election campaigns and campaigning whilst governing with an eye to gaining reelection (Cook, 2002), but note that these two types of campaigning are becoming fundamentally indistinguishable from one another (Doherty, 2014). Common to these approaches is that the nature of the campaign is embedded within the marketplace in question.

Needham (2005) goes one step further, discussing the important differences between the permanent campaign as an electioneering strategy and, when elected, relationship marketing and brand management as a governing strategy. Whilst not completely moving away from the concept of the permanent campaign, Needham (2005) concludes that incumbents need to focus instead on managing relationships and the party brand; thus, the processes involved in campaigning are no longer permanent but restricted to the run-up to the election.

Therefore, instead of distinguishing between campaigns depending on the particular marketplace (electoral, parliamentary, etc.; Henneberg & Ormrod, 2013) or changing strategic focus from "transactional" to "relationship" (Needham, 2005), a stakeholder perspective would focus on the stakeholder across the electoral period, thus transforming our understanding of the concept of a "permanent campaign" into a focus on the "permanent relationship." The implication of this for political professionals is that relationship and brand management are constants; indeed, the relative success and professionalism of the individual campaign at election time may not even be the deciding factor.

7 | CONCLUSION

A problem that political actors face when developing their strategic plans is that of which stakeholders to include. The inclusion of too many stakeholders risks a lack of granularity that may limit the optimisation of resources in the political actor's stakeholder targeting activities; too few stakeholders, and there is the risk that resources will be targeted at the wrong stakeholders. In addition to this, there is the normative question of which stakeholders political actors *ought* to take into consideration; too many and the political actor may lose their ideological focus; too few and the political actor might be accused of narrow-mindedness or cynicism in the mass and social media.

Not only the political actors themselves impact on the relevancy of appropriate stakeholders; political systems differ in vote aggregation methods, and legal codes, political institutions, and state history affect the number, type, and characteristics of those stakeholders that are relevant to political actors in each of the interaction marketplaces in any given context. Indeed, some stakeholders may not even be "on the radar" of the political actor, and so a broad focus can allow for unacknowledged stakeholders who are still influenced by the behaviour of the political actor. Such a broad focus can also allow for those stakeholders who have no strategic influence yet are in possession of a democratic moral right to representation or consultation, for example, those members of the electorate who did not vote for the political actor.

The aim of this paper has been to discuss how the stakeholder concept can be defined in the political marketing context. It is, of course, the choice of each political actor to select appropriate stakeholders for each context and to justify why, just as it is the choice of each researcher to select which stakeholders will be included in their empirical investigations and to justify why. For researchers, this is a crucial consideration, as irrespective of which stakeholders are selected and the reasons why, it is necessary to take into account the context-specific influence of direct and indirect stakeholders vis-à-vis the political actor and to make explicit the place of the stakeholder in the focal interaction marketplace(s), the nature of political actor-stakeholder relationship, and the normative and/or strategic justification for the inclusion of the stakeholder.

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