



# Political marketing and stakeholder engagement

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**Abstract.** *Political marketing theory has developed and evolved in conjunction with advancements in political science and commercial marketing. Commercial marketing has been increasingly interested in developing marketing mechanisms which allows it to satisfy the core customer groups while also meeting the broader needs of the community and other stakeholders. Political marketing has the opportunity to build a marketing framework that focuses on delivering value to a core target market (voters, supporters) and addressing the needs of society at large. The paper outlines a new definition of political marketing to meet the challenges of addressing the needs of the political marketplace, political party stakeholders, and the broader social agenda. **Key Words** ● marketing definition ● marketing mix ● political marketing definition ● stakeholders ● 2007 American Marketing Association definition*

## Introduction

Political marketing is a hybrid sub-discipline that draws on the parent disciplines of commercial marketing and political science. As a sub-discipline with two parents, political marketing has the strength of drawing from the two theoretical fields, and the weakness of drawing down from two areas of vulnerability, which includes the need to adapt and adjust to changes in either parent discipline, and the need to address the tension between the incompatible elements of political science and political marketing. This paper is focused on addressing the first point – the need to adapt and adjust to changes in the parent discipline of marketing, given the developments in commercial marketing practice, including the recent decision by the American Marketing Association (AMA) to release a new definition of marketing. While political scientists may still debate the role of marketing in politics, marketing researchers perceive it to have an appropriate and acceptable role in the electoral process (O’Cass, 2001a).



The paper develops a new definition of political marketing which encompasses political marketing theory, practice and tradition with the contemporary AMA (2007) definition of marketing. As a conceptual framework, the paper aims for a global definition that can guide the efforts of political practice in first-past-the-post, preferential, presidential and other political campaign styles by emphasizing the approach of striking a balance between the needs of the marketer, marketplace and society. By emphasizing the processes of political marketing, such as voter-orientation balanced against stakeholder needs, rather than the content of political marketing, the definition is intended to be transferable into the specific cultural, economic and political context of different elections and electoral systems (Baines et al., 2001). The adaptation of the definition is following the Lock and Harris (1996) 'marketing-is-different' approach, which argues that the applicability of marketing theory and practice in politics is contingent on its adaptation to the political environment.

## Defining political marketing

In 2007, the AMA issued a revised and updated version of the official definition of marketing, in recognition of the diversity of marketing practice, and the failure of the AMA (2004) definition to fully capture the nuances of contemporary business and non-business marketing activity. The new AMA (2007) definition of marketing reads as:

the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.

Keefe (2008) notes that the inclusion of 'clients' specifically relates to the role of social, political and non-profit marketing in society, and the growing influence marketing has beyond the traditional commercial spheres of influence. The recasting of the AMA definition of marketing to explicitly recognize non-commercial marketing activity presents an opportunity to revisit the interplay between commerce-derived marketing theory, and application of political marketing. Sun (2007) noted that the AMA (2004) definition appeared to encompass political marketing through stakeholder management and exchange theory, although this was never fully tested in the literature. The new AMA definition of marketing created an opportunity to apply the Lock and Harris (1996) approach of adapting commercial marketing principles before applying them to political marketing practice. To this end, the paper offers an adapted version of the AMA (2007) commercial marketing definition based on the extension of prior definitional adaption work of Hughes and Dann (2006a, 2006b), the integration of contemporary definitions of political marketing, and the influence of broader political marketing theory and practice outlined below. Political marketing is defined as:

a set of activities, processes or political institutions used by political organisations, candidates and individuals to create, communicate, deliver and exchange promises of value with voter-consumers, political party stakeholders and society at large.



The new definition of political marketing groups the recipients of political marketing practice into clusters of marketers (political parties, candidates and individuals); voter-consumers (customer/client); political party stakeholders (partners/clients); and society at large.

## **Constructing the political marketing definition**

The definition presented in this paper has been developed specifically to adapt the 2007 AMA definition for political marketing purposes. It is a customized definition, purpose built and designed to be applicable where the AMA (2007) definition is the dominant understanding of commercial marketing. The AMA (2007) definition of marketing was selected as the core bedrock definition for adaptation for two reasons. First, the recent update in the definition provided a timely opportunity to explore new conceptual ground. Second, a search of the academic journals demonstrates the relative dominance of the AMA's definitions (1937, 1985, 2004) on commercial and non-commercial marketing theory. Consequently, the paper recognizes the AMA definition as the dominant contemporary framework that underpins the 'marketing' side of the Anglo-European, Asia-Pacific and American political marketing literature reviewed for the paper.

## **Political marketing literature review**

The review of the prior political marketing literature has been divided into the distinct periods of marketing identified in line with AMA definitions of marketing. Baines et al. (2001) noted that developments in political marketing are often seen as an American export industry, and as such, are influenced by the AMA's conceptual frameworks. The paper will briefly overview the influence of prior AMA definitions on political marketing literature through the respective reigns of the different AMA definitions of marketing.

### **American Marketing Association (1937)**

The AMA (1937) defined marketing as 'those business activities involved in the flow of goods and services from production to consumption', later subtly refined by the AMA Committee on Definitions (1960) as 'the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers' (Gundlach, 2007). Kotler and Levy's (1969) suggestion that political candidates could be marketed as well as soap, and in a manner not dissimilar to the sales practices of the soap marketers, focused on the movement of party ideology to the voter. Developments in commercial marketing theory, such as the McCarthy (1960) marketing mix and the Bagozzi (1975) exchange theory, were adapted by the developing political marketing movement with O'Leary and Iredale (1976) discussing the application of the marketing mix for political purposes, and Sharma (1975) applying the exchange concept.



### Political marketing (1985 to 2004)

The AMA (1985) definition of marketing as ‘the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives’ represented a world view of marketing dominated by the Bagozzi (1975) exchange paradigm, McCarthy’s (1960) marketing mix, and a managerial approach of marketing as a planned procedure. Political marketing literature of this period adapted the exchange theory, marketing mix, and managerial marketing.

Political marketing theory had been an early adopter of the Bagozzi exchange paradigm with O’Leary and Iredale’s (1976) exploration of its application to a bi-directional benefit flow of benefits for votes and votes for electoral outcomes, and subsequent examinations of exchange through Lock and Harris (1996) Newman (1999) and O’Shaughnessy (2001).

Newman (1999) approached political marketing holistically, applying marketing principles and procedures to political campaigning, with O’Shaughnessy (2001) and Lees-Marshment (2001) emphasizing the managerial aspects of the adaptation of business concepts, strategy, tactics, structures, labels and techniques to explain the process of exchange between voter and political party. O’Cass (1996a, 1996b) and Lock and Harris (1996) viewed the activities of the political marketer as a strategic approach, utilizing marketing techniques of positioning, communication, research and market orientation for political campaigns.

Supplementing the exploration of the exchange were efforts to apply the AMA (1985) conceptual parameters of the marketing mix, with an emphasis on the product as ‘ideas, goods and services’. Clemente (1992) integrated elements of the AMA (1985) in viewing political marketing as involving ideas and opinions which relate to public or political issues. Harrop (1990) outlined a view of political marketing as a form of services marketing in which the political marketer was no different from any other services marketer who was promising intangible benefits from a future service.

### Political marketing (2004 to 2007)

In 2004, the AMA released a relatively controversial new version of the commercial marketing definition, which recast the discipline as:

an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.

The decision by the AMA to release a new version of marketing in 2004 resulted in the need to re-examine how political marketing integrated the new understanding of commercial marketing into the political marketing sphere. The changes between 1985 and 2004 had several impacts on the way marketing was to be considered, which included removing exchange as the core of marketing, discussed in depth elsewhere (Dann, 2005; Hughes and Dann, 2006b).

With the radical shift away from exchange and the revised definition of market-



ing incorporating value creation, organizational benefit and benefit to the organization's stakeholders, Dann (2006b: 6) outlined a new definition of political marketing as:

a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering promises of value to voters and for managing voter relationships in ways that benefit the political organization and its stakeholders.

Hughes and Dann (2006b) also defined key elements within the primary definitions as follows: 'Promises of value' were defined as 'political products which included explicit promises of policy, political candidates and implicit promises of the party's ability to govern'; 'Benefit for the political organization' incorporated support such as votes, financial donations and other support of time, effort and loyalty.

### **The AMA (2007) definition of marketing**

In 2006, the AMA elected to undertake an uncharacteristically rapid review of the definition, and move towards developing a revised position before the tenure of AMA (2004) was fully established. The AMA defines marketing as:

the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.

There are four major changes which influence impact on the adaptation and adoption of the revised marketing concept for application in political marketing theory and practice. First, there is a renewed focus on marketing being activities, institutions and processes that reflect its integrated role in the organization, in line with Lock and Harris (1996). Second, the principle of exchange has been restored to the core of the definition. Third, the outcomes of the marketing process are seen as 'offerings of value' rather than value itself. Finally, overt recognition of organizational benefit as a key outcome of marketing has been removed.

The development of a new definition of commercial marketing represents an opportunity to expand the political marketing portfolio to incorporate the recent developments in the marketing parent discipline (Henneberg, 2004). The following section examines the AMA (2007) definition in four component categories: 'Activity, set of institutions and processes'; 'Creating, communicating delivering and exchanging'; 'Offerings that have value' and 'Customers, clients, partners and society at large'.

### **Political marketing as 'the activity, set of institutions and processes'**

Political marketing as a set of processes is directly supported by Clemente (1992); Lees-Marshment (2001); Lock and Harris (1996); Newman (1999); O'Cass (1996a, 1996b); and implicitly recognized by Baines et al. (2002, 2003); Butler and Collins (1996); Egan (2005); O'Cass (2001b); O'Shaughnessy (2001); and Wring (1994, 1997).



## Creating, communicating delivering and exchanging offerings of value

Lock and Harris (1996) predate the AMA (2007) by a decade with their recognition of the voter-consumer's interpretation of the whole of the political campaign as the means of product creation. Similarly, notions of value creation and value exchange arise in the trade of promises of future intent in exchange for an immediate benefit to the organization such as votes, donations or volunteering (Harrop, 1990). Political exchange is a recognized element of the practical political marketing process in campaign volunteering, voting, campaign donations and active partisan support for an issue or organization (Stone and Rosen, 2006).

## Offerings that have value

Offerings of value exist in political marketing as promises of value between the political party and the target market as the abstract and intangible political product consisting of future promises and projected belief in the ability to govern, based on the policy, leadership, candidate, party and prior track record (Hughes and Dann, 2006a). Harrop (1990), Lees-Marshment (2001), Newman (1999) and O'Shaughnessy (2001) identify the political product as an intangible, abstract offering that has value both for the voter and for broader society.

## Customers, clients, partners and society at large

Customers are the recipients of direct value from the political process in exchange for their time, effort, votes or cash which includes voters, active party supporters, and current party members (Ormrod et al., 2007). Clients are those people who are the indirect beneficiaries of a policy or government action even if they did not vote for the political party. Partners are the active participants in the political marketing process which covers the suppliers and distributors of the political marketing product and may include the media and other parties within the political playing field. Society at large represents the whole of the community as a stakeholder in the political process (Ormrod et al., 2007).

The nature of the political process is such that while promises of future intent are produced for a specific target market, the consequences of the implementation of these promises are experienced by the whole of society, with the end result that successful political marketing is also required to address the needs of all stakeholders, as well as constituent target markets, while in office (Egan, 2005).

## Defining a stakeholder view of political marketing

Definitions of marketing are torn between being a descriptor of current practice, and an aspirant goal for future best practice (Hunt, 2007). Creating a new definition of political marketing is fraught with challenges from the perspective of producing an academically robust concept which is also sufficiently flexible to



proscribe and describe practical implementation issues. Any new definition must also compete with the existing definitions in the market, and present a case for its existence. For an applied discipline such as political marketing, the challenge is exacerbated by needing to choose between the practical orientation and the conceptual domain. As part of the new definition of political marketing, the paper also examines the implementation issue of addressing the four stakeholder clusters of clients, customers, partners and society at large as part of the new commercial and political marketing frameworks.

### Offering that has value for whom?

The implicit, yet relatively overt, tactical aspects of the political marketing definition is the requirement for the use of market research and market segmentation to identify and understand the voter–consumer and stakeholders targets of the promises of value. Market research will be required as a core part of political marketing for segmentation, targeting, listening and development of offerings of value for the marketplace (Foster, 2006; Hayes and McAllister, 1996; Scammell, 1995, 1999; Sparrow and Turner, 2001). Similarly, branding and positioning strategies need to be based on targeting electorate segments (Savigny, 2005; Seawright, 2005; Smith, 2005) in order to create the communications of value that underpin the application of the political marketing definition to practice.

### Stakeholder-based political marketing

Political marketing has been relatively limited in the extent to which it regards political stakeholders as recipients of the outcomes of marketing, as much of prior literature has focused on the ‘transaction’ between voters and candidate, or voters and parties as the central political exchange (Ormrod et al., 2007; O’Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2007). Stakeholder engagement and stakeholder offerings of value are a central part of the political marketing definition. The following section presents a means for identifying, classifying and prioritizing stakeholder influence over the political marketing organization through adaptation of the commercial marketing stakeholder frameworks of Agle et al. (1999), Dann and Dann (2007) and Scholem and Stewart (2002).

### Assessing stakeholders in political marketing

Seventeen types of stakeholders have been identified from the broader commercial, political and social marketing literature through the use of Scholem and Stewart’s (2002) stakeholder mapping process. These groups have been clustered by the three targets of the political marketing process (voter, stakeholder and society), along with an assessment of their source of influence and type of stakeholder behaviour. These stakeholder categories have been determined by their alignment with the AMA (2007) recipients of marketing offerings of value, and an expanded Dann and Dann (2007) construct which identifies stakeholders as passive, active



Table 1

**Political marketing stakeholders (Derived from Hughes and Dann, 2006a)**

Stakeholder	Target group	Type	Source of influence
Alternative Political Providers	Party stakeholders	Switch	Legitimacy or Urgency
Electoral commission	Society	Active	Power and Legitimacy/Urgency
Government (parliament)	Society	Passive	Power and Legitimacy
Government (public service)	Society	Passive	Legitimacy
Industry Lobby Groups	Party stakeholders	Active	Legitimacy/Urgency plus varying Power
Issue Competitors	Party stakeholders	Switch	Power or Legitimacy or Urgency
Media	Society	Active	Power and Urgency and/or Legitimacy
Party Donors	Party stakeholder	Active	Power/Legitimacy
Party members and supporters	Party stakeholder	Active	Power and Legitimacy
Political candidates	Party stakeholders	Active	Legitimacy and Urgency and/or Power
Political opponents	Party stakeholder	Active	Urgency
Private lobbyists	Party stakeholders	Active	Legitimacy and varying Power and Urgency
Social pressure lobby groups	Party stakeholders	Switch	Varying levels of Legitimacy and/or Urgency and/or Power
Society / citizens / community	Society	Passive	Legitimacy
Splinter Interest Groups	Society	Switch	Power/Urgency
Voters (between elections)	Voter-consumer	Switch	Legitimacy
Voters (election time)	Voter-consumer	Switch	Power and/or Urgency and/or Legitimacy

or ‘switch’, depending on whether they influenced (active), were influenced (passive) or could perform either role in their interactions with the organization (Table 1)

Sources of influence are based on Mitchell et al.’s (1997) model for determining the relative importance of stakeholders. Urgency is the immediacy with which the organization feels it has to act to resolve the stakeholder’s issue, and operates as a multiplier effect on the influence of the stakeholder’s claim (Agle et al., 1999; Neville et al., 2003). The function of the stakeholder has the greatest impact on the level of dependence, which in turn influences the urgency, and creates the stake-





holder's organizational power (Neville et al., 2005). Power is regarded as the extent to which the stakeholders can assert their will over the political party through formal authority, administration of reward and punishments, personal power, politicized power and the convergence of opportunities, shared interest or acts of co-optation (Greene and Elfrers, 1999; Maignan et al., 2005; Yukl, 1998, in Bourne and Walker, 2005). Legitimacy is the appropriateness of the stakeholders' actions towards the party, based on their association with the party as voters, candidates, traditional support base or other affiliation (Mitchell et al., 1997).

### Using the stakeholder as a basis for ethical political marketing

Minimizing unintended stakeholder impact from political marketing activity has been an underemphasized aspect of the implementation of most political campaigns. Overpromising undeliverable products damages the political party brand (e.g. broken promises of low interest rates, undelivered tax reforms) and the overall reputation of the political product. Increased voter distrust of politicians increases the complexity of the task facing political marketers – one future development for political marketing is to improve the perceived product quality of the politician and political party in the marketplace.

Similarly, although negative campaigning has been a staple of the political marketing portfolio, it must now be viewed in terms of the impact on society and political party stakeholders (Bissell, 1994; Hughes, 2003). The after-effect of the use of fear campaigns to polarize an electorate or to marginalize a social group falls within the intended and unintended consequences of a political marketing campaign. Deliberately and willingly targeting a political product or message to marginalize a group (e.g. asylum seekers, unions) has an intentional consequence of damaging this group's reputation in the community in exchange for some form of political gain. Political marketers also need to consider the consequences of normalizing targeted discrimination and negative campaigning against a social group in the broader context of society. Increased levels of negative campaign, divisionary fear tactics and outright attacks on the personal character of members of social groups allow similar techniques to be used to foster racism, gender discrimination and bullying tactics under the guise of political speech. Where the original campaign may have run with the intention of gaining votes and supporters, it has the consequence of perpetuating damaging behaviours in the broader social system by normalizing unacceptable practices of targeted fear and marginalization campaigns.

### Limitations of the political marketing definition

First, although this paper is proactively in support of the use of marketing in the political context, this position is not universal throughout marketing or political science; for example Crot (2006) describes political marketing as a 'wrapper of deceit' on the political process. Similarly, the authors are aware of criticisms of



marketing's role and place through work such as Savigny's (2007) complaint that marketing, market research and segmentation was effectively depoliticizing the electoral process. The authors accept that a possible limitation of the paper is its fundamental assumption that marketing has accepted a role, and is entitled to a place in the political process.

Second, by choice, the authors have limited their work to the adaptation of the AMA (2007) definition of marketing, and while acknowledging the existence of alternative definitions of marketing, such as the CIM (2005) definition, the paper has not addressed alternative frameworks. Further research into the adaptation of the CIM (2005) definition and its competitors is recommended for researchers seeking a non-American focus to frame their future definitions.

Third, success metrics have not been integrated into the core of the political marketing definition, as the authors feel that political marketing should not be so narrowly defined as to apply only in the event of victory. Multi-party electoral systems, where political marketing can and will be applied across the whole of the political marketplace, allows for its success and failure in application – commercial marketing is not a guarantee of financial success, and political marketing should not be held to a less realistic expectation than the parent discipline.

Finally, the authors acknowledge a regional, cultural and historical bias inherited from their backgrounds in a multi-party system with a compulsory preferential voting system. While attempts have been made to source political marketing thought from a broader international context, it has been predominantly limited to the English language (with the exception of Bechtold and Grimiaux, 2006), and predominantly to American, European and Australian political systems with the exception of Taiwan (Chen and Chen, 2003) and Thailand (Nelson, 2007). Further research and application of the political marketing definition across cultural, political and electoral systems is required before the definition can be presumed to have the global reach intended in its design.

## Conclusion

Marketing has established and accepted a role and responsibility in the political process, and the time has come to recognize that after three decades of contemporary academic research, the question is one of the role that is being played, and not if a role is to be played in politics at all. This paper contributes to the development of the political marketing literature by adapting the AMA's definition of marketing for use in the political marketing context, and by supplementing the conceptual groundwork of the definition with a discussion of its implementation through the SIVA political marketing mix.

Political marketing has involved the targeted offerings of value to voters in exchange for votes, for the benefit of broader societal stakeholders, as the core part of its engagement in the political process. While party political product offerings are designed to meet the needs of key target markets, the political process and the act of government is also one of meeting the broader stakeholder needs of society.



To this end, the modern political marketing campaign must be examined in the light of both contemporary marketing understanding, and the importance of tempering targeted, niche-based political offerings of value against the broader societal needs of good government, political representation and societal benefit.

This paper offers the adaptation of the SIVA model as a mechanism for political marketers to assess their offers against the needs of the voter–consumer, and the needs of the party’s key stakeholders including the wider society in which the party operates. The consumer-voter-focused marketing mix allows for the creation, communication and delivery of customized solutions based on the needs of stakeholder, voter and society. The same political product of policy can be communicated, exchanged and delivered as a range of different solutions depending on the needs of the target market.

As the ultimate goal of political marketing is the opportunity to govern for the benefit of society, it should take the opportunity presented by SIVA, AMA (2007) and other developments in marketing to create, communicate, deliver and exchange political offerings of value to the stakeholder communities as part of the process of pursuing electoral success in 2008 and beyond.

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