



# Political marketing management and theories of democracy

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**Abstract.** *Political marketing management is often criticized for devaluing democratic processes. However, no literature exists which outlines different concepts of democracies and systematically juxtaposes them with political marketing management in its varied conceptual and practical facets. In this article, we outline three different perspectives, i.e. a selling-oriented, an instrumentally-oriented, and a relational political marketing management, and analyse their compatibility with two different concepts of democracy, specifically competitive elitism and deliberative democracy. We discuss implications of political marketing vis-à-vis the theory of democracy as well as necessary further research. We find that while certain political marketing management perspectives are associated with different theories of democracy, the current normal paradigm of marketing theory shows the least overlap with democratic theories.* **Key Words** ● competitive elitism ● democracy ● participatory democracy ● political marketing

## Uneasy partners: Political marketing and politics

Political marketing means many things to many people. In general, it is a term more often used in academia and practice in Europe than in the US (Scammell, 1999). The distinction between political marketing, political management or political communication is not always clear and is often obscured by overlapping

interpretations. However, what is clear is that political marketing often evokes negative feelings and is assumed to be harmful for politics and democratic systems (Dermody and Scullion, 2001, 2003; Moloney and Colmer, 2001; Lilleker, 2005). The use of marketing instruments in politics is argued to imply atrophy and aberration. Henneberg (2004) has collected and catalogued some of these criticisms by political scientists as well as by marketing theorists; while political scientists mostly focus on ethical aspects of political marketing management practice, e.g. questioning the use of political marketing instruments during election campaigning, marketing theorists are concerned with more theoretical shortcomings in the theory of political marketing. Especially, the lack of a clear and consistent position of political marketing vis-à-vis political practice on the one hand and democratic fundamentals on the other are discussed as shortcomings that hold back the research area of political marketing (O'Shaughnessy, 2002; Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007).

In general, the merging of the two worlds of marketing and politics, perceived to be that of the trivial and superficial in contrast to the spiritual and substantial, to paraphrase Werner Sombart (1915), provokes profound anxiety. At its most extreme, the fear is for politics itself, transformed from what should rightly be a quest for a common vision of the just, noble and good into the private and often irrational whimsy of consumerism. Political marketing, it is argued, encourages voters to judge politicians in terms of the selfish rewards of consumer purchase (Qualter, 1991; Bauman, 2005); equally it may undermine the courage necessary for political leadership (Klein, 2006). However, on the other hand political marketing has been discussed in a more positive light; e.g. Bannon (2005), Johansen (2005), or Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy (2009) argue that a relationship-building approach of political marketing could well provide a basis for more meaningful interactions between voters and political institutions. Furthermore, political marketing should not be judged against ideal and impossible standards of a perfectly informed, knowledgeable and participating electorate, but rather against the real world of relatively low interest and knowledge in politics. This 'realist' strand of research claims that marketing of some sort may be valuable, even essential, for promoting voter interest and involvement (Popkin, 1991; Wring, 1997; Corner, 2003; Scammell, 2003).

However, as O'Shaughnessy (1990) put it, 'The answer to the ethical question [regarding political marketing] depends on the views of democracy we hold' (1990: 6). Therefore, we posit that a critique of political marketing management needs to be underpinned by a clear understanding of the conceptual complexity of the phenomenon in question as well as by a rigorous analysis of the yardstick that is employed. Existing literature in political marketing and political science does not engage with the epistemological foundations of political marketing management but remains concerned with specific applications and tools (Wring, 1997; Henneberg, 2008). We therefore attempt to fill a gap in the literature which hitherto has hindered further conceptual development of the area of political marketing as well as cross-disciplinary interactions between marketing theory and political science. Our contribution is based on a discussion of different aspects of



political marketing management vis-à-vis key concepts of democracy in order to provide a rich and rigorous juxtaposition of the compatibility or incompatibility between them.

Specifically, we are interested in whether the current ‘dominant paradigm’ of (political) marketing management is commensurable with theories of democracy. What we will not attempt is an in-depth discussion of ethical issues – i.e. axiomatic philosophical judgements – associated with this juxtaposition (Hunt and Vitell, 1986; Lacznik and Murphy, 2006; Nill and Schibrowsky, 2007).

We will structure our argument as follows: to specify and motivate our research, in the next section we will briefly discuss the status of political marketing management with regard to politics. Following on, an analysis of the characteristics of three distinct concepts of political marketing management will be introduced, derived from theoretical vantage points. Two different normative concepts of democracy will subsequently enable a juxtaposition of political marketing management on the one hand and democratic theories on the other, exemplified in a categorization scheme. In a concluding section we will synthesize our findings and their consequences, and discuss implications for research in the area of political marketing.

## **The ‘status’ of political marketing management in politics**

Political marketing as an academic discipline ‘works’ on two levels: first, it consists of explanatory constructs for political marketing management activities as employed by political actors in practice; second, it represents an exchange-based research lens to explain the political sphere per se (Henneberg and O’Shaughnessy, 2007; Henneberg, 2008). However, research in this area also ought to be concerned with the general ‘fit’ of the concepts of political marketing management in relation to the research phenomenon in question (Lock and Harris, 1996; Egan, 1999; Scammell, 1999). More specifically, political marketing research needs to be concerned with issues of democracy in general and its commensurability with political marketing management and its underlying concepts, such as voter-orientation or market-orientation (O’Cass, 1996, 2001; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Newman, 2002; Ormrod, 2007).

This goes beyond more specific questions regarding the applicability of political marketing activities, such as whether it is ethical to focus only on ‘floating voters’ in a targeted election strategy (Baines et al., 2002; Lilleker, 2005). The point of departure of this argument is the fundamental question regarding the integrity of political marketing management (O’Shaughnessy, 2002). When posing the question in this way, there is somehow not enough clarity regarding the constructs concerned: what do we mean by ‘democracy’, and what exactly is ‘political marketing management’ in this context? Thus, this question quickly disintegrates into more complex sub-questions once the two main components are scrutinized. Political marketing management and its theoretical and conceptual foundations, following marketing theory, are not monolithic blocs of unambiguous definitions, clear aims and aligned activities, but comprise many different ‘schools’ (Hunt,



1976, 1983; Sheth et al., 1988; Wilkie and Moore, 2003). Below, we focus on three distinct concepts of a marketing orientation in politics, which span the space of possible options: a 'selling-oriented' concept of political marketing management; an 'instrument-mix-oriented' concept; and a 'relationship-building' concept that is also informed by societal marketing considerations. Thus, the initial conceptual question about the relationship of political marketing and democracy needs to be related to each of these concepts of political marketing management.

Moving to the second core component, that of democracy, it is equally clear that conceptually this too is a contested and fragmented construct (Cunningham, 2002). To judge the 'affinity' of political marketing management against a democratic 'yardstick', one needs to consider which of the many expressions and principles of democracy are used, e.g. are we talking about the ideals of deliberative democracy or the norms of 'realist' models? Again, for the purpose of our subsequent argument, we will focus on two different schools of democracy to illustrate our points: the 'competitive elitist' approach, and the 'deliberative' concept of democracy.

Our analysis is therefore grounded in two parsimonious categorization schemes (one of political marketing management concepts, and one of theories of democracies) and their interrelations (Hunt, 1983). Such juxtaposing analysis will allow us to provide a discussion of political marketing management not just on an 'activity' level but on a conceptual and therefore more general level. Furthermore, it also provides alternative benchmarks through the explicit use of a set of normative 'versions' of democracy (Scammell, 1999; Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007).

## Concepts of political marketing management

Political marketing management (PMM) provides a theoretical umbrella for different applications of marketing concepts within the political sphere. No singular approach to PMM exists, in line with the multi-faceted nature of commercial schools of marketing. Sheth et al., in 1988, identified twelve different schools of marketing. Many of them are inspired by social exchange theory, micro-economical theory, or institutional political economy (Alderson and Martin, 1965; Hunt, 1976, 1983; Arndt, 1983; Pandya and Dholakia, 1992; Hyman, 2004). However, since then, several other conceptual schools of commercial marketing have come to the forefront of academic research or practical application: for example relational marketing, or a network marketing approach for organizational interactions (Andersen et al., 1994; Parvatiyar and Sheth, 2001; Shaw and Jones, 2005). Although marketing theory is dominated by the 'instrumental' or 'managerial' school as the normal paradigm, it has been questioned whether the managerial school of marketing is in line with the richness of the social exchange theory underlying marketing thought (Grönroos, 1994, 2000). Furthermore, it has been argued that it is incommensurable with pivotal marketing concepts like customer-orientation, that it is simplistic and that it is merely a pedagogic tool (Easton and Araujo, 1994; O'Malley and Patterson, 1998; Grönroos, 2006).



As in the case of marketing theory, a similar variety of approaches exist in PMM. This is represented in the extant literature by analyses of communication-based campaigning approaches (e.g. Harris et al., 2005; O'Shaughnessy, 1990, 2005; Newman, 1994, 1999, 2001, 2002; Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1996; Wring, 2002), by strategic positioning approaches (e.g. Butler and Collins, 1996; Baines, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Henneberg, 2006), or by concepts based on the organizational attitudes and behaviours in their relationship with external and internal political stakeholders (e.g. O'Cass, 2001; Ormrod, 2007). However, only a few categorization attempts exist that provide a comparison of different political marketing management approaches, e.g. Lees-Marshment's (2001) conceptualization of product, sales and market(ing)-oriented parties.

For a juxtaposition of political marketing management and democratic theory, we have to be precise about the characteristics of PMM as represented by different, often incompatible, concepts. We select and define three distinct schools of PMM that cover the spectrum and richness of marketing approaches to politics:

- selling-oriented PMM
- instrumentally-oriented PMM
- relational PMM.

These approaches have been chosen because they exemplify ideal types of orientations, because they are based on state-of-the-art research discussions, and because they constitute the dominating paradigmata for research and practice in this area.

The *selling-oriented PMM* is most often equated with a traditional, ideology-oriented approach to politics (Kavanagh, 1995; Henneberg, 2002). The political offering, i.e. the policy promises, and the electoral and campaign activities are derived from solid political convictions, often characterized by an alignment with certain interests within dominant or social cleavages, such as race, ethnicity and region (Lipset and Rokkan, 1966). A 'market-leading' perspective and a predominantly tactical use of political marketing instruments characterize this approach (Henneberg, 2006). A selling-oriented PMM is often seen as the 'first age' of political marketing, exemplified by the use of party political broadcasts, slogans, posters, and (in America) the 30-second spot replacing the rally and the speaker meeting (O'Shaughnessy, 1990, 2005). It has been argued that this meant that political *management* mattered more than political *marketing* (Wring, 2005). Examples of a selling-oriented PMM are now often found in primary-issue parties, typically Green parties or regional parties, such as Plaid Cymru. The German Green party campaigns offer an illustrative example, focussing on policies which are derived from a belief in environmental sustainability, while at the same time using selected political marketing instruments (Blühdorn and Szarka, 2004).

The *instrumentally-oriented PMM* can be characterized as the 'normal paradigm' of current research in political marketing. A sophisticated and managerial use of political marketing activities and strategies is employed to convince voters of the value of the political offering, adapt the offering to target segment preferences, and implement political marketing campaigns effectively and efficiently through the co-ordinated use of a multitude of political marketing instruments

(Lees-Marshment, 2001; Wring, 2005). This is in line with 'market-led' approaches of strategic marketing (Slater and Narver, 1998, 1999), or a 'following' mentality as a radical interpretation of a voter-orientation (Henneberg, 2006). Tony Blair's first UK General Election campaign represents an example of such 'focus group'-driven campaigning (Wring, 2006). An instrumental approach can mean a focus on short-term expediency with emphasis on responding to tracking polls and public opinions. Instrumentally-oriented PMM describes an amalgam of techniques and a formulaic approach to the implementation of the marketing concept (Johansen, 2005).

Recently, a *relational approach to PMM* has been advocated (Bannon, 2005; Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2009). This is inspired by societal marketing considerations (Ward and Lewandowska, 2006; Kang and James, 2007), which have also been advocated in the political sphere (Henneberg, 2002; Newman, 2002). The emphasis is on long-term exchange interactions that benefit all relevant actors as well as society (i.e. direct as well as indirect stakeholder interests are considered) (Lacznik and Murphy, 2006). Value considerations are linked to an acknowledgement of the (inter)dependency of all involved exchange partners and are therefore grounded in mutual benefits as well as societal needs, based on delivering on promises, i.e. a voter-inclusive approach to policy implementation (Johansen, 2005).

To make the relational approach to PMM operational, however, it has to go beyond the cosmetic and the superficial (such as the silver wedding card from President Bush recently received by the family of one of the authors). The current London mayoral campaign is evidence of how far relationship-oriented political marketing is being advanced. Emails and text messages, social networking sites and YouTube have all been used extensively by the candidates. For example, Ken Livingstone's team offered sympathetic bloggers special information and interviews with their candidate: his focus was on personality cult, with no mention of party, only candidate, as well as personalized letters to all Londoners. The candidates had some success in building relationships: a YouTube video of Conservative candidate Boris Johnson received more than a million hits, and his campaign created an online supporters network called Team Boris, with more than 9000 members. This enabled the campaign to ensure crowds wherever their candidate appeared, organised via Facebook, Twitter or text message (BBC News website, Brian Wheeler, 16 April 2008). While none of this really amounts to Political Relationship Marketing in any finished sense, and it may be seen as fostering the illusion of participation, it nevertheless establishes a trajectory along which we are being driven towards relational interactions in politics.

To juxtapose these three distinct approaches, some pivotal characteristics are selected which emphasize the essence of the different PMM concepts. These dimensions are used to describe typical and therefore to some extent generic aspects, and cover elements of the strategy on which the specific PMM is based, the envisaged characteristics of the underlying political exchanges and the specific activity patterns associated with the relevant PMM (see Table 1). In the following discussion, we will focus particularly on the differences between these schools of PMM.



Table 1

**Schools of political marketing management**

	Selling-oriented PMM	Instrumentally-oriented PMM	Relational PMM	
<b>Strategy Dimensions</b>	<i>Rationale of PMM</i>	Offering (ideology)	Voter needs	Voter and societal needs
	<i>Target segment(s)</i>	Cleavage group	Floating voters	Core and periphery voters
	<i>Targeting strategy</i> <i>Importance of PMM for party/candidates</i>	Undifferentiated Peripheral; tactical activity management	Differentiated Central; tactical/strategic activity management	Differentiated/micro Central; strategic policy development/ implementation; strategic/tactical activity management
<b>Exchange Dimensions</b>	<i>Interaction</i>	One-way	Mediated one-way	Dialogue
	<i>Value construct</i>	Conviction-based promises	Needs-based promises	Mediated needs-based promises
	<i>Temporal orientation</i>	Short-term, electoral	Short-term, electoral	Long-term, electoral and governmental
<b>Activity Dimensions</b>	<i>Main PMM activity</i>	Communication	Communication Channel management Offering development Activity co-ordination Intelligence management	Policy and value strategy development Promises implementation Micro-activity management Managing in relationships
	<i>Main instruments</i>	Push marketing instruments	Push and pull marketing instruments	Relationship building instruments
	<i>Campaign orientation</i>	Election	Election; Resource-generation	Election Government Resource generation Implementation

With regard to the *strategic dimensions* the three PMM rationales differ: while a selling-oriented approach is offering-focused, i.e. puts an ideology or conviction first, instrumentally-oriented PMM is focused on a deep understanding of primary stakeholders, specifically target voters' needs and wants. A relational

approach enhances this perspective in line with a wider societal orientation which also incorporates the interests of stakeholders who are not direct exchange partners and assesses the trade-offs between short-term and long-term effects. While this implies a differentiated targeting approach covering core and peripheral actors, the instrumentally-oriented PMM focuses pragmatically on those decisive voter segments which need to be convinced in order to achieve the organizational aims, i.e. main target segments are 'floating or indecisive voters', or 'swing seats'. An undifferentiated targeting of voters who are aligned with the core offering is to be expected for selling-oriented political organizations. Consequently, these political actors use PMM as a peripheral and tactical tool of politics, while PMM is central for the two other approaches, specifically for the relational political marketing management concept which perceives marketing strategy as the guiding principle of offering creation and stakeholder interaction, as well as service delivery in politics (Smith and Hirst, 2001; Henneberg, 2006).

The *exchange dimensions* of PMM are concerned with what kind of interaction is facilitated by the specific approach, on what aspects value considerations are based and what time perspective underpins the different approaches. For a selling-oriented PMM approach, a uni-directional and episode-based exchange, focusing on election campaigns, is characteristic. This is in line with a conviction-based definition of exchange value components. An instrumentally-oriented PMM shows some similarities. However, the underlying exchange value concept derives its content from the current needs of specific groups of voters or the general prevailing public opinion. On the other hand, the relational PMM concept stresses the long-term perspective, including also other interaction processes besides elections, such as governing and policy implementation as part of societal interactions. A dialogue with changing agenda-setting functions between different interaction partners is envisaged, with a societally-mediated value concept as its foundation (Newman, 1994, 1999; Scammell, 1999).

Relational political marketing management is based on a comprehensive and 'permanent' (i.e. continuously ongoing) portfolio of marketing activities, including policy development, communication, implementation, and long-term relationship and stakeholder management. This contrasts with the more limited *activity dimension* set of the other two approaches: while the instrumental PMM orientation focuses specifically on communication, intelligence gathering and market-based policy development, a selling-oriented PMM predominantly uses communication activities, specifically deployed in a push-marketing setting for election campaigns (Bannon, 2005; Johansen, 2005).

## Concepts of democracy

The previous discussion has outlined the differences between three approaches of using marketing for the management of a political organization. We are concerned now with how these approaches intersect theoretically with democracy. 'Democracy', in practice and theory, does not exist as a single universally agreed model





(Lijphart, 1984). Held's (1996) influential categorization identified six broad groups of democracy (including direct, Republican, elitist, New Left participatory and New Right democracies); concepts which differ with respect to emphasis on core ideas of participation, liberty, equality, leadership and the democratic process. For reasons of clarity and parsimony, we focus here on only two. This will enable us to shed conceptual light on the relative importance of political marketing management, and to assess how the demands of democracy are met or threatened by the three particular approaches of political marketing management outlined above.

We concentrate on the following conceptions of democracy:

- competitive elitism (particularly as expounded by Joseph Schumpeter)
- deliberative democracy (particularly as introduced by Jürgen Habermas)

These conceptions cover widely different normative beliefs about the essence of democracy and how democracy ought to function. Each arises out of particular intellectual traditions and spawns its own set of internal arguments, which we acknowledge but cannot encompass here (for discussions, see Held, 1996). The prime reasons for our selection are that these two conceptions represent the broad spectrum of contemporary debate in democratic theory. Competitive elitism, by common consent, has been an extraordinarily influential model in western democratic theory (Scammell, 2000). Its insistent realism, critics would say pessimism, has provided the touchstone for arguments about the nature of democracy for more than fifty years. Modern theories of participatory democracy emerged in part as a reaction against competitive elitism; of the various versions of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy is the most influential in political communication research. Habermas's idea of the public sphere is a core concept of deliberative democracy, 'ballooned into the new God-term' of critical analysis over the course of the 1990's (Gitlin, 1998: 168).

### Competitive elitism

The conception of democratic competitive elitism is based on elite theory, which has an impressive heritage in political thought, from Plato's *The Republic*, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, through to the early 20th century 'Italian school' descendants, notably Mosca, Pareto, and Michels (Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2001). Its most durable claim is the inevitable stratification of society between rulers and the ruled. Elite theory is often disliked because of its profound pessimism about democratic possibilities, and rejection of the grander liberal and socialist ideals of freedom, equality, popular sovereignty and the realization of human potential. The elitists' answer relies on 'realism': history and social science demonstrate the presence of a ruling class in all political organisms (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987). Furthermore, recognition of this unavoidable fact is essential for the establishment of the normatively desirable, namely that governing *should* be in the hands of those most fit to rule. Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (originally published in 1943) remains the most influential account of *democratic* elitism.



Schumpeter begins from a rejection of what he calls the 'classical doctrine of democracy', in which elected representatives realize the common good by carrying out the will of the people. His chief criticisms centre on 'the will of the people' and the 'common good': he argued that the classics had overestimated the possibilities of both. There was no such thing as the common good to which all people could agree by force of rational argument. Questions of principle were irreconcilable 'because ultimate values and our conceptions of what life and society should be and are beyond mere logic' (Schumpeter, 1943: 251). He also disparaged the very idea of the will of the people: if it was to command respect, it required a level of knowledge and rational ability in individual human beings that simply did not exist among the masses. In reality the will of the people was little more than '... an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions' (p. 253).

Schumpeter reverses the order of classical liberal theory in which the people elect representatives who then give effect to the will of the people. The role of the people is to produce a government that takes it upon itself to establish the common good. Democracy becomes an arrangement for arriving at political decisions, in which leaders acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people's votes. Democracy, in short, is reduced to a method for the periodic and peaceful transfer of government between two or more groups of leaders. The most that can be expected of democracy is that it may choose the most competent leaders and provide mechanisms for controlling their excesses. According to Schumpeter this greatly improves the theory of the democratic process, emphasizing the importance of leadership, which was neglected in classic theory. It states also that the method of competition for leadership is crucial to democracy: the process must be generally accepted as fair, if not perfect. Schumpeter's durability resides primarily in two factors: first, the considerable body of evidence which continues to show that despite apparent improvements in education, large minorities of the population (about one third in the USA) have little interest in or knowledge of politics (Bennett, 1988; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Second, he compels attention to the quality of the electoral systems and processes. As Shapiro (2002) notes, theorists are often discomfited by the competitive elitist tendency to reduce democracy to procedures, yet these are vital for structuring power relations and limiting interference with individual and/or group pursuit of their versions of the good life. Norris's (2004) study of some three dozen parliamentary and presidential elections concurs: the detail of 'electoral systems may appear unduly technical and dry' but matter significantly for 'basic issues of political representation and accountability, for patterns of participation and party competition, and for the effective health of democratic institutions around the world' (p. 264). To juxtapose this democratic perspective with a diametrically opposed conception, the main characteristics are summarized in Table 2.



Table 2

**Schools of theories of democracy**

	Competitive elitism democracy	Deliberative/participatory democracy
Starting point	Structure of a stratified society Political preference incompatibility	Changeable structure Unified will of people exists/can exist
Context	Limited voter knowledge/interest in politics Political instability	Voter rationality/knowledge can be created
Focus	Process/method focus to produce government and imbue legitimacy	'Gestalt' perspective on political discourse framework Sovereignty of the people realised through deliberation in the public sphere
Main instruments	Political leadership by elite	Communication and dialogue by public (healthy public sphere)
Outcomes	Competent leadership Legitimate/fair process Stability	Political participation by citizens Knowledgeable citizenry

**Participatory/deliberative democracy**

Contrasting with this view, deliberative democracy emerged as a distinctive strand of the New Left backlash against Schumpeter's pessimistic portrait of democratic possibilities. Led by Pateman's (1970) seminal work, the New Left argued that the Schumpeter-influenced 'contemporary model' of liberal democracy was excessively afraid of the dangers of popular active participation. While expressing some concern with voter apathy, they offered no account for it, and instead located the major threat to modern democracy in 'mediocrity and the danger that it might destroy its own leaders' (Pateman, 1970: 10–11). Pateman argued that the Schumpeterian legacy had abandoned a central democratic tenet: the insistence on participation. For the New Left, the concept of participation is clearly differentiated from the far more limited pluralist concerns to increase voter engagement with politics. Pateman argues that the pluralists' concern is essentially with stability: that is, participation is necessary only to the extent that it is sufficient to ensure the legitimacy and stability of the democratic system as a whole. For participationists, however, participation is itself a goal. Democratic politics, properly conceived, is about the self-development of citizens, fostering concern for collective problems and enabling the development of an active and knowledgeable citizenry. Participationists dispute the 'realist' assumptions of elite theory; they accept that the actual levels of knowledge and participation are low, but dispute that they must always be low, and that such low levels are compatible with genuine democracy.



The stress on participation as deliberative communication or dialogue is the main contribution of deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy represents an 'exciting development in political theory' (Bohman and Rehg, 1997: ix): it reclaims the classic idea that democratic government should embody the will of the people. In essence legitimate lawmaking results in this view from the public deliberation of citizens. It rejects Schumpeter's view that there is no such thing as a common will, and that the public is not capable of rationality. On the contrary, deliberative theorists argue that democratic legitimacy depends precisely on a rational consensus of public opinion (see Table 2).

Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy, inspired by Rousseau's republicanism, is the best known of these theories (Calhoun, 1992). For Habermas, citizen status should mean more than the protection of private rights and periodical voting opportunities. It demands a commitment to democratic processes that ensures that people are the authors of the laws that govern them: in short, a healthy public sphere with a 'guarantee of an inclusive opinion- and will-formation in which free and equal citizens reach an understanding on which goals and norms lie in the equal interest of all' (Habermas, 1996: 22).

Habermas's version of deliberative democracy, i.e. a public in continuous, rational, deliberation about its own governance, has had a huge impact on political communication scholarship (Scammell, 2000). This is not surprising because, unusually for democratic theory, it places communication (via Habermas's conception of the public sphere) at its core. Its power stems both from its critique of the failures of existing democratic practice, characterized by declining participation and increasing public dissatisfaction with the formal institutions of politics, and from its sheer optimism that, given conducive conditions, a genuine mass participatory democracy is possible. Barber's (2003) *Strong Democracy* with its menu of initiatives to encourage public debate, is arguably the most important practically-oriented intervention in favour of deliberative democracy. Barber contrasts his model of strong democracy to what he calls the 'thin' democracy of Schumpeter-influenced liberalism, which actively encourages little or no participation from citizens between formal elections.

## Relationships between PMM and democracy

It now remains to be seen how the three distinct concepts of political marketing management relate to the two selected theories of democracy. The following provides a juxtaposition of them (progressing from a discussion of the selling orientation, followed by instrumental and finally relational orientation) to facilitate an assessment of their relationship vis-a-vis each other, with specific focus on the current 'normal paradigm' of PMM, i.e. the instrumental school.



## Political marketing management and competitive elitism

Schumpeter is often considered the theoretical forerunner of political marketing, although as often as not he is cited without any acknowledgement of the elitist underpinnings of his ideas (O'Shaughnessy, 1990). His attraction for political marketing scholars is that he is among the first and most important political theorists to argue that elections were analogous to sales in commercial markets (Street, 2003). The need for political salesmanship stemmed both from the logic of competition and from the passive and largely uninterested state of the electorate which needed mobilizing into voting. The economic logic of markets demands that producers compete to sell their wares; the reality of uninterested voters demands that politicians find ways to attract attention and mobilize support. Thus, famously for Schumpeter, what he called the 'psycho-technics' of electioneering (advertising, slogans, rallies, stirring music and suchlike) were not corruptions of democratic politics, but were essential if the process was to work at all.

Conceptually, Schumpeter's approach fits closely to the *selling-oriented* model of political marketing as outlined above. In both approaches the offer is essentially top-down, designed according to 'producer' convictions and then 'sold' through tactical use of marketing instruments. Schumpeter's view reflected the mid-war period of ideologically polarized political choice, class and social bloc-based politics and limited affluence and consumer choice. The selling model of marketing was effectively the only one available for mass markets (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Henneberg, 2002).

However, it is clear that competitive elitism must be less comfortable with tenets of what we call *instrumentally-oriented* political marketing. It is precisely a concern of modern competitive elite theorists that populist demands of mass-mediated democracy have potentially destructive effects upon political leadership (Scammell, 2000). While a voter-oriented follower mentality may be hailed as bringing in more consultative democratic aspects (Lilleker, 2005), pressures of media and the proliferating opinion polls on virtually all aspects of our lives effectively squeeze the discretionary power of leaders to set the political agenda. Gergen (2000), a White House adviser to Nixon, Ford, Reagan and Clinton, notes the escalation of poll-led politics:

All modern presidents have polled heavily – Haldeman [for Nixon] put three different pollsters in the field at a time and secretly paid for a fourth to keep an eye on the others – but no one before Clinton has taken a poll to determine whether he should tell the truth publicly (the Lewinsky case) or to use American ground troops (Kosovo). (p. 331)

Clinton, Gergen reports, spent nearly ten times as much on polling in his first year in office as his predecessor spent in two years.

The great concern of modern elitists is that political marketing (understood as instrumentally-oriented) encourages a shift in criteria for selection of candidates for office, away from intra-organizational success and competence towards media-centric qualities of personality, likeability and attractiveness. Instrumental marketing may be seen as an understandable response to increasing media power, but nonetheless it ratchets up the threats to leadership; as image comes to domi-



nate, competent but media-awkward candidates are sidelined in favour of celebrity and the political offer is increasingly cautious, determined by the results of polls and focus groups. The shoe-horning of politicians into poll-driven strategic moulds has been a recurring complaint of commentators who witness politicians turning into on-message robots day after day. Klein (2006) denounces political marketing consultants precisely for draining the authentic, human qualities out of the politicians they serve: 'They've put democracy in a Styrofoam cage. And the politicians – who tend to see caution as an aphrodisiac – have gone along' (p. 240).

Thus, instrumental political marketing may ultimately harm democracy by fostering weak and follower-type leaders, or, just as damagingly, a politics devoid of the idea of common interest altogether. Leaders, in the classic Schumpeterian formulation, should take it upon themselves to determine the common interest. Yet instrumental political marketing segments electorates and concentrates resources on the targets and niches required for victory (Smith and Hirst, 2001; Lilleker, 2005; Rees and Gardner, 2005). This may lead, as in the hands of a strategic marketer as effective as Karl Rove, George W. Bush's infamous architect, to a politics of national polarization. Worse still, instrumental political marketing revives traditional fears about the depth of attachment to democratic ideals among ordinary citizens and their vulnerability to skilful manipulation. The people's choice might well be for 'the politics of demagogic xenophobia, as witnessed by popular support for radical right-wing movements in contemporary Europe' (Blaug and Schwartzmantel, 2001: 261).

With regard to *relational* PMM, competitive elitism also shows some concerns. These are derived from the involvement of citizens not so much in the process of democracy but also in the content of the offering of creation and delivery, i.e. the fundamentals of policy development and implementation. Modern competitive elitists are not convinced that deliberation produces 'better' democracy, in the sense of fostering consensus on fundamental conceptions of the common good. As Shapiro (2002) argues, 'there is no obvious reason to think that deliberation will bring people together' (p. 238). Moreover, even if deliberative consensus were achievable, it is not necessarily desirable and may lead to the suppression of difference: 'the competition of ideas – argument rather than deliberation' is the vital ingredient of democratic liberty (Shapiro, 2002: 239). Thus, to the extent that relationships and interdependencies preclude competition they will not foster liberty. It is arguable that relational PMM is inherently problematic for a democratic orientation focusing on the need for meritocratic leaders to derive clear and decisive actions out of incompatible preferences. Furthermore, the theory of political elitism is sceptical that meaningful relationships with citizens based on political interactions are realistic. Even by increasing the numbers of citizens who are interested and informed, and therefore interested in political relationships, the majority, or certainly a large minority, will (want to) stay ignorant and potentially easily manipulated. Democratic elitism's main concern is therefore with the role of leadership (specifically that it must be protected and safeguarded) as well as the political competitive process (it must be fair, open and designed to produce the best leaders). Neither aspect is self-evidently a main concern of relationship-oriented PMM.



## PMM and deliberative democracy

Authentic public deliberation requires spaces protected from manipulation and self-interested promotion in which citizens may engage as equals in discussion of matters of common concern. It is not so much that political salesmanship should not exist, rather that it should not displace or dominate the discussion of private individuals coming together to form the public. However, it is arguable as to whether such an un-manipulated ideal public sphere ever has existed or ever could exist (Schudson, 1995). Nonetheless it is the driving concern of deliberative democrats to increase protected spaces for citizen-to-citizen communication through, for example neighbourhood assemblies, televised town halls and mediated civic communications initiatives (Barber, 2003). It would seem clear that a *selling-oriented* PMM, as a vehicle for one-sided, uni-directional rhetoric, may be a threat to deliberative ideals; it offers at best competitive debate, which, while essential for electoral politics, is corrupting if it dominates the public sphere. After all, the ideal public sphere is precisely the place where private citizens create public opinion and hold critical authority over their governments and would-be leaders. Proponents of deliberative democracy must also be deeply suspicious of the dominant current practice exemplified by *instrumental* PMM. Their concerns are the mirror image of the competitive elitists' anxiety. Where the latter's prime fear is for weak leadership, the former's is for a populist democracy that effectively bypasses public deliberation altogether. Polls and focus groups express opinion of sorts, but that opinion may be anything: a reflex, a prejudice, even a totally invented view. Polls have no necessary correspondence to thoughtful, considered opinion (Frankovich, 2005). The danger of politics that follows polls, focus groups and casually expressed voter opinions is that it may in the context of a deliberative democracy compound prejudice, elevate it to policy and neglect the fora of truly public deliberated opinion. The clever and unprincipled power-seeker may ride to office on waves of prejudice, and as such s/he will not be the meritocratic leader that competitive elitism seeks, but neither will s/he necessarily be weak, and all the worse for democracy if strong.

Of the marketing models discussed here it would seem that only the *relationship-oriented* model based on a societal orientation has any potential for compatibility with the ideal construct of a deliberative democracy. This derives from the model's insistence on the maintenance of relationships with real people, rather than a purely poll-driven assessment of preferences (Johansen, 2005; Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Relationship marketing inherently invites dialogue, even if not necessarily the ideal deliberation of the public sphere. It emphasizes the need to pay attention to the core (supporters and members) as well the periphery of target floating voters and other societal stakeholders, and thus provides incentives to develop political interest and engagement on an enduring basis. A truly deliberative democrat (but also a convinced political relationship marketer) must look with scepticism at the proliferating claims of parties to be 'listening'. The 'Big Conversation', which Tony Blair launched in 2003 claiming it was the biggest consultation exercise ever with voters, is now largely forgotten, and was quickly



dismissed as a gimmick. However, the political drive for increased connection with voters does present opportunities for mechanisms of relationship building. Trippi's (2004) heralded open-source campaign for Howard Dean in 2004 (the 'Blog for America' campaign enabled citizens to place any message without censorship, and enlist to volunteer or to donate, with 40,000 people per day visiting this site) was high-risk and ultimately short-lived, but remains a high-profile and influential model of reciprocity between a candidate and supporters (Trayner, 2006). A polity constructed as part of on-going relationship building, e.g. using regular referenda, citizens' juries, or electronically-enabled interactions, could bring forth a genre of political marketing which focuses on the goals of information, persuasion and reciprocity, rather than attack and defence. The positive aspects of dis-intermediarization which are attributed to such e-enabled PMM would overlap with requirements of a deliberative democratic setting (Collins and Butler, 2003).

It is likely that the proponents of deliberative democracy have not fully grasped how flexible political marketing can be, and how effective it can become when used as a tool to counteract elitist hegemony. Political marketing management is not just confined to party campaigns. Marketing techniques, concepts and methodologies are being increasingly adopted by pressure groups such as the 'Stop the War Coalition' in the UK. While the first big demonstration to be held against the Iraq war in 2003 was a mass of discordant images, an anarchy of amateur poster designs with the total effect of confusion, the more recent demonstrations have become almost corporate in tone. This is exemplified by hordes of individual demonstrators carrying the posters designed by David Gentleman with a unitary, cohesive anti-war brand symbolism (spots of bright red ink on a white background with the black slogan 'Stop the War'). If a complete critique is to be developed of schools of PMM, it must be recognized that it is no longer the exclusive monopoly of elite groups such as parties, and that in the age of the internet even the powerless can turn to marketing.

However, it may be that competitive elitism is the more useful of the two democratic theories to political marketing theory. Its emphasis on the competitive nature of the struggle of votes regards marketing as *essential* to the democratic process, and not an alien import. Its concern with process directs attention to the need for incentives and disincentives to practise a democratically more wholesome political marketing. It tells us that the rules matter. Commercial marketing has been persuaded to take societal issues seriously, through a mixture of enlightened self interest and externally imposed regulation. Political marketing theory and practice should follow suit.

## Summary, conclusions and implications

The relationship between PMM and democracy encompasses the important issue of how to ensure that in liberal democracies the 'political competition' is enacted appropriately, measured against some normative ideals. As our argument has out-





lined, this relationship is multi-faceted and ambiguous. Different conceptual implementations of political marketing management can be 'tested' against different theories of democracy. Our juxtaposition has shown that while a selling-oriented PMM is to some extent compatible with a Schumpeterian approach of competitive elitism, the ideal of a deliberative democracy shows more affinity with a relational interpretation of PMM. What becomes clear is that the instrumentally-focused PMM, i.e. the political marketing approach most clearly associated with the current normal paradigm of marketing theory (Wilkie and Moore, 2003), shows the least overlap with the conceptual demands of either theory of democracy. This has considerable implications for the development of political marketing management theory and underlines the need for alternative and critical concept and method development in political marketing (Lock and Harris, 1996; Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007).

A clear implication of our analysis is that political marketing needs to engage with theories of democracy in order to provide itself with legitimacy. While political marketing may arguably be 'conceptually neutral', its application and practice is not and needs to be imbued with a normative aim. For example, political relationship marketing, if pursued by politicians and political parties, could succeed in moving politics further towards the forms of deliberative democracy. The concepts, techniques and technologies inherent in the idea of political marketing, and based on societal marketing considerations, could be used to foster a true relationship between party, politician and their publics, re-inventing traditional methods of political proselytization such as direct mail, to inform as well as persuade, to listen as well as consult (Johansen, 2005). There are of course some good examples of exactly this, such as the 3000 constituents engaged in an internet dialogue with the British Liberal Democrat MP Stephen Webb (ST, 2005) or the Proposition Movement in California, a phenomenon that dates from the progressive era of a century ago.

In fact, the rise of such phenomena as bloggers, the idea of 'net roots' and the cacophony of democratic noise emanating from the internet, has persuaded some at least that we are on the edge of a new era of deliberative or consultative democracy (Collins and Butler, 2003). The resulting change in the balance of power between policy producer (political parties and politicians as well as media) and policy consumer (citizens), and the empowerment of self authorship, has some potential impact on the future possibilities for a deliberative democracy which can be channelled via relational marketing practices.

For its critics, the idea of 'political marketing' will be perennially suspect and anathema in relation to 'democracy', similar to the concept of marketing in the public sector in general (Collins and Butler, 2003; Laing, 2003). This is partly because of the negative resonances of the linguistic juxtaposition, which would appear to merge a significant activity, politics, with a seemingly trivial and inherently insignificant one, namely marketing. The inference is that political marketing management represents the ideology of consumerism applied to politics, and thus connects to broader fears about consumerism and consumer culture. While we do not want to be apologists of political marketing in our discourse, i.e. we see



our argument as an 'ordering attempt', not as an 'order' (Tadajewski, 2006), we argue that the critics' view takes into account neither the subtleties of different interpretations of political marketing nor those of different ideals of liberal democracy. While some of the concerns against PMM can be dismissed as amounting to mere prejudice (Henneberg, 2004), others are credible, for example the costs inherent in a marketing conceptualization of politics do mortgage politicians and parties, particularly in America, to powerful vested interests (Harris and Lock, 2005). This would be a potential vindication of the Schumpeterian case; the gratification of sectarian interest is then seen as inherent in the practice of political marketing. Cost is a mighty factor in campaigning, and this raises fears of public opinion becoming a commodity to be manufactured, bought or sold, i.e. the commoditization of opinion which becomes dysfunctional to the collective interest.

If political marketing management is defined to embrace the isolated use of sophisticated instruments, e.g. the generation of public imagery such as George Bush on the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln, and aspects of the so-called permanent campaign (O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Nimmo, 1999), then the critique that political marketing is enhancing an illusion of participation becomes more credible. However, we argue that there are other definitions of political marketing management and that we cannot choose between the desirability or appropriateness of these alternatives without explicating the democratic yardstick we use. What emerges clearly out of our exploration is that types of marketing have implications, conducive and corrupting, for ideal types. We have examined only two models of democracy; but for both of these we find that that the instrumentally-oriented perspective of PMM which dominates current (political) marketing theory is the least appropriate in terms of conceptual overlap with theories.

Thus, we are left with two alternative narratives, which represent different assessments of the present and different ideas about future possibilities. The one, based on a rhetoric of technology-driven empowerment, meaningful relationships, a societal orientation, and inspired by ideals of deliberative democracy, would portray a benign future constituted by a broadening down of democracy and enhanced by the application of relational political marketing tools, technologies and concepts. The alternative is to argue for acceptance of the elitist model, either from the perspective that it represents a genuinely more workable model of democracy, or from the cynical resignation of the disillusioned idealist. It may therefore be that political marketing management emerges almost naturally out of political competition, and is shaped by the structure of this competition. This would mean a preference for a selling-oriented PMM, including a strategic posture of leading the electorate (Henneberg, 2006). In either case, the status accorded to political marketing management is critical to the ascription of future scenarios of a desired democracy. Furthermore, for any of these two narratives to happen, the dominant paradigm in (political) marketing management needs to change.

Further research on this issue is necessary. In fact, the development of a critical theory of political marketing that takes an exchange perspective seriously and adapts it to the political sphere is an important stepping stone for further concept development in this area (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2007). This would



include an understanding of the contingencies of the interplay of different aspects of political marketing management and normative theories of democracy, and therefore constitute a 'marketing systems' approach (Shaw and Jones, 2005). As Dann et al. (2007) have pointed out, the current agenda is in need of comparative research about both the *effectiveness* and also the *relevance* of political marketing. While we were only able to focus on two interpretations of the democratic ideal, it is necessary to relate political marketing theory as well as practice to the contemporary discussions in political science and democratic theory. This includes discussions (and empirical analyses) of ethical dimensions of the interplay of political marketing management and theories of democracy, i.e. aspects which we have only 'framed' through our argument but have not extensively touched upon (Hunt and Vitell, 1986; Lacznik and Murphy, 2006; Mayo and Marks, 1990). Teleological (i.e. outcome-related) and deontological (i.e. means or duty-related) considerations are possible foundations for such political marketing ethics (Crane and Desmond, 2002; Gaski, 1999). Furthermore, political marketing research needs to take the concerns of political scientists seriously and develop alternative PMM models which are complementary to the dominant instrumental view of political marketing.

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