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Political Marketing Segmentation— The Case of UK Local Government

Patricia Rees
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SUMMARY. This article considers the nature and use of segmentation in political marketing. The importance of an awareness of political marketing at a more local level will become particularly important with the onset of regional government. The article particularly concerned with segmentation in local government where there has been little empirical research. The results of a survey amongst local government officers are presented. The article concludes that a significant minority of local government officers use segmentation. The key factors facilitating the use of segmentation were found to be education, experience, the role of the chief executive and central government pressure. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Political marketing has been largely concerned with the activities of central government and the major political parties. It now needs to be developed further to consider the wider aspects of politics. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines politics as “the science dealing with the form, organization, and the administration of a state or part of one.” Local government is part of the administration of the state and thus part of the remit covered by political marketing. The way in which local government carries out its activities has a direct impact on the way in which political parties and their policies are viewed. Just as political parties need to carry out marketing activities and engage in a market orientation (Lees-Marshment 2001), so too does local government. The conceptual framework for Political Marketing characteristics outlined by Butler and Collins (1999) draw attention to not only the structural characteristics but process characteristics ‘that define, develop and deliver value’ (p. 56). It is at local government level that value delivery occurs. In addition it must be remembered that good government at a local level can ameliorate the ‘protest’ votes re central government at the time of local elections. A further imperative for considering political marketing at a local government level is the impending development of regional government in the UK.

This article considers the use of segmentation in Local Government. In order to set the tone of this article with regard to the nature of marketing and by association segmentation, the following definition of marketing, (which has been formed from an extensive study of the nature of local government and the issues facing it) is given:

Marketing is the philosophical position that places the needs of the customer at the heart of the organization. It is an exchange process between the organization and its customers that recognizes the organization’s ability (or not) to provide for the customer’s need. The marketing philosophy is based on a long-term approach and in the case of local government, survival rather than profit is often the goal. *Not for profit marketing differs from commercial marketing only in the acceptance of the idea that value need not be monetary.* The customers of local government may be any number of different people—for example, the elected member, the citizen and the family members. The customer is often not the actual user of the service as would be the case in respite care. Those who adopt the marketing philosophy have a toolkit of marketing concepts—including segmentation—to operationalize their standpoint. These concepts go far beyond the popular notions of advertizing and promotion.

We argue that local government is already embracing the concept of marketing and its attendant tools and concepts. To illustrate this a brief overview of the context of local government, as well as the development of not for profit marketing, will be given. This is followed by a discussion of one of the major marketing concepts—segmentation and its use in the not for profit sector and local government. The results of some empirical work regarding the use of segmentation in local government are then presented. The article then concludes and suggests directions for further work to ensure the continued development of the field of political marketing, with particular reference to local government.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The history of UK local government indicates that it has never been exactly stable. Since the 1800s it has been expanding and contracting in turn and changing the shape of its functions. Burns, Hambleton and Hoggett (1994) summarize the changes made to local government since the arrival of the Conservative government in 1979. Firstly, cuts were made in financial support for local government from central government. Secondly, local government became more politicized and thirdly central government imposed particular forms of management on local government. Some manifestations of these changes have been: Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). This is where departments, who have in the past provided local services (e.g., refuse collection, the cleaning of public buildings, legal and financial services), now have to compete with private companies for the work; Care in the Community (placing people initially cared for in homes back into the community); Local Management of Schools (taking the management of schools out of the hands of local government and giving it to the schools). More recently the introduction of Best Value (which replaces CCT) in local government stipulates that amongst other things, local authorities must consult with their citizens. There seems little doubt that local government is going to remain under continued external pressure from central government to change.

Coupled with these initiatives is the evolving management style of local government. Byrne (1994) considers that local government is very varied both within and between authorities. The roles of the chief executive and the elected members are changing with speculation as to what the strategic thrust is and from where the impetus should originate (Worrall et al. 1996). The management of local government has moved from the bureaucratic through what Pollitt (1993) terms New Managerialism to variants of New Public Management (Ferlie 1999 and Raine and Wilson 1996). New Public Management,

which involves the use of tools and concepts formerly deemed exclusively private sector, is seen as a means of bridging the gap between the pre Thatcher Public Administration ethos and the commercialism of succeeding decades. The debate still rages, but meanwhile local government is turning to frameworks used in the private sector concepts such as marketing, for inspiration and help, in the face of a turbulent environment.

NOT FOR PROFIT MARKETING

Not for profit marketing is associated with all those organizations that do not have profit as their main motivating force. Examples of not for profit marketing include, health marketing, arts marketing, charities marketing and political marketing. Interest in not for profit marketing has been encouraged by two main forces. Firstly the recognition amongst academics and practitioners that marketing can be applied to an area with no profit motive. Secondly the pressure on not for profits to become more business-like.

The notion that marketing in a sector with no obvious profit motive could be possible was probably facilitated by the Social Exchange school of thought. Alderson and McInnes are credited by Sheth, Gardner and Garrett (1988) with putting forward this perspective. They see markets being created by the social intercourse of producers of goods and services and users. Marketing is seen as an activity that brings into being a potential market relationship between producers and users. As Wilmott (1999, p. 215) puts it "The discourse of exchange is so beguiling because it suggests that each individual is a customer who is free to pick and choose in the market place." The paper that is generally accepted as being the starting point of NFP marketing is that of Kotler and Levy (1969). They saw marketing as a "pervasive, societal activity" (p. 10) and as "serving and satisfying human needs" (p. 15). Their point was, that non business organizations could benefit from the use of marketing, in the same way as business organizations did. Since then there has been a growing literature around not for profit marketing in both the UK and the USA (Rees 1998). This growth has been further facilitated by a burgeoning Services Marketing literature (for example, Berry and Parasuraman 1993; Knight 1999).

With regard to the public sector becoming more business-like, Kotler and Andreasen (1996) list critical developments in the social and economic environment which have brought further attention to the concept of "nonprofits"; changes in the political environment encouraging increased privatization of public services; changes in the social climate encouraging increased voluntarism and changes in the traditional sources of support for nonprofits. The last

section indicated quite clearly the scale of the changes in the political environment affecting UK local government.

The area of local government marketing is now benefiting from the development of the Political Marketing field (See the special editions of the *European Journal of Marketing* 2001 and the *Journal of Marketing Management* 2002). This field is cross disciplinary with academic participation from both the marketing and the political science areas. For example the UK Political Studies Association conferences now have a political marketing group.

Meanwhile there has been considerable disquiet expressed about the applicability and appropriateness of marketing in local government (Walsh 1991, Ratcliffe and Kitchen 1995 and Kearsy and Varey 1998) Aside from the emphasis on the very different nature of local government, the transfer of marketing tools from the private to the public sector with little adaptation is an area of concern. The following anonymous review of an earlier article in this area perhaps best sums up the situation:

Local government is very diverse in its provision and the application of marketing in local government has to take account of very different needs and expectations of the various user groups in relation to the products and services that are being used. Slavish application of marketing tools that are appropriate to the private sector is not appropriate to the public sector. The drives and motives of buyers and users are fundamentally different where public sector provision is concerned. Furthermore there are very many different types of relationship between provider and user, for example in the police force the relationship between one individual and the police will be different where the person is stopped for speeding on the one hand and seeking assistance after a burglary on the other. The marketing issues therefore are very different.

However, segmentation in particular, is a marketing tool that could address such complex relationships (which incidentally are not only to be found in the public sector—a nightclub bouncer has a similar two-sided relationship as that of the policeman, with a customer that needs to be ejected and another that needs protecting). By understanding more critically the nature of the potential market/audience for services/ideas, government at both the national and local level will be able to strategically develop and target their outputs. Surely this is an important goal and one that could be expedited by the more careful use of segmentation analysis. There has, however, been little empirical research into this area and much of the work has been theoretical and speculative. The next section explores the literature on segmentation from its inception to its use in the not for profit sector and political marketing.

SEGMENTATION

The concept of segmentation was developed by Smith (1957). It is a means of defining customers in terms of what they want or will accept from a product, service or idea, at what price (cost) and also the best way of accessing them. Segmentation seeks to make producers of goods/services/ideas better understand their markets/customers/clients. This better understanding in turn leads to the development of goods/services/ideas which relate more closely to the needs of the customers/clients/citizens. Segmentation has been used for decades by manufacturers of consumer goods to increase market share and profits by creating consumer loyalty based on consumer satisfaction and repeat purchases. Segmentation has been proved to be one of the fundamental marketing tools which has allowed marketers to reach their target market based on accurate segmentation. It has become one of the corner stones of the marketing profession.

Textbooks provide information on the ways to segment markets. These range from the reasonably simple (geographic, demographic) through to the complicated (multivariate techniques). In between there are items such as 'lifestyle profiling' and 'benefit segmentation.' These can be summarized as:

Organizational Markets Segmentation Variables	Consumer Markets Segmentation Variables
Organizational Characteristics: Size, Location, Usage Rate	Geographic
Product or Service Application	Demographic
Product	Geodemographic (e.g., Acorn)
Application	Psychographic (Activities, Interests, Opinions)
Technology	Behaviour (Benefits sought, usage rate, Loyalty, Attitude, Buyer readiness stage)
Purchasing Policies	Multivariable (Combination of above)
Decision Making Unit Structure	
Decision Making Process	
Buyer-seller Relationships	

The criteria for successful segmentation are considered to be (Brassington and Pettitt 1997): distinctiveness—a segment must be significantly different from another segment; tangibility—a segment must be of a suitable size (substantial) to make it worthwhile pursuing; accessibility—a segment needs to be accessible both physically and by means of communication such as advertising; defendability—the segment should be one that can be defended against competition and sustainability—the segment should be likely to be around for a

reasonable time. These criteria which have been developed for consumer/for profit markets—may not actually be appropriate in not for profit settings. For example, firstly local government has to provide services for the whole community—it cannot pick and choose its segments and secondly segments may not be easily accessible (for example, children in need of protection or drug users). Nevertheless it is still useful to be able to segment not for profit markets—even if only to ensure a more accurate way of identifying the various groups.

The following outlines some of the research into, and comments about, segmentation in the not for profit sector, both in the US and UK. Yavas and Riecken (1993) and Yavas et al. (1993) investigated donor behaviour with regard to the perceived risk involved in giving to charities. A greater understanding of the donor segments—Non donor, sporadic donor and consistent donor—was attempted, facilitating more suitable targeting of each segment. An earlier study by Harvey (1990) investigated why people donated to charity. Benefit segmentation was utilised in this case, to divide the market. Benefit segmentation is where buyers are segmented according to the particular benefits they are seeking. Three core benefit segments are often recognised in markets—those who seek quality, those who seek service and those who seek to minimize costs (Kotler and Andreasen 1996). Benefit segmentation was also used to understand affluent donors (Cermak et al. 1994).

Kotler and Andreasen (1996) address segmentation in the not for profit sector in some detail. They suggest bases for segmenting markets as: Objective General Measures (Geographic, Demographic); Objective Specific Measures (Past Behaviour); Inferred General Measures (Psychographics) and Inferred Specific Measures (Benefits sought). This produces some colourful segmentation criteria. For example, when drawing up benefit segments for a family planning agency, there are segments called: Firefighters—who need an immediate solution to a problem; Desperates—who need relief from feelings of desperation; Married Rationals—who have freedom of choice, control, financial stability and marital harmony. Other areas where segmentation has been addressed in the US include: Outdoor Recreation (Miles, McDonald and Capella 1993); Green Movement (Olsen, Jackson and Granzin 1993); Museums (Todd and Lawson 2001) State Sponsored Lotteries (Miyazaki et al. 2001) and Associations (Levy 1992).

With regard to the UK, Walsh (1989) considered benefit segmentation as particularly important. Local authorities need to ask themselves about the benefits consumers receive from the services provided, as well as the characteristics that provide those benefits. He does, however express concern (Walsh 1991) about the use of segmentation in general, in the public sector, because of the statutory nature of many services that need to be delivered universally.

However, it could be argued that even if services need to be provided to all, some idea about the varying needs of citizens might ensure more efficient provision. Hannagan (1992) raises the issue of the Pareto effect. He says that in charities it is often the case that 80% of the money raised comes from 20% of the donors. He wonders, therefore what many charities should do about segmentation and targeting. Should they bother communicating with the 80%? Bruce (1995) considers that charities do not pay enough attention to segmenting their publics.

Chapman and Cowdell (1998) say that the public sector needs to approach the issue of market segmentation in two contexts. Firstly in the area of non-discretionary demands such as refuse collection and basic health care. Secondly in discretionary areas, for example leisure services. Once these factors are borne in mind it is generally possible to apply segmentation processes developed for the private sector in the public sector. They stress the importance of recognizing user characteristics (geographic, demographic) and user behaviour (what do they actually do and want). By using such categories segments can be thought showered by those in the organization. The above examples would seem to indicate that those involved in/researching nonprofit marketing are already displaying creativity in the way they apply marketing concepts.

Political Marketing has recognized the importance of segmentation (Baines 1999; Baines et al. 2003; Bannon 2003; Dermody and Scullion 2000.) This is because political parties tend to rely on simplistic segmentation—for example—loyal voter/floating vote; male/female or old/middle aged/young (Lilleker 2003)—ignoring the more complex combination of say, age, culture, gender, race and the actual issue under debate.

Two pieces of empirical work have looked at the role of segmentation in UK local government. The first, by Cowell (1979), investigated the use of segmentation in local government. He discovered that like other marketing concepts it was infrequently applied. The second was by Yorke (1984). His article puts forward the view that leisure centre managers in local authorities need to use segmentation variables that are more sophisticated than the geographic one of 'catchment area' (where most of the clients live). He explains the nature of segmentation and shows how it might be used in order to understand a leisure center's market. To do this he constructs a three dimensional model combining the segmentation variables of family life cycle, sex and employment. This model alone produces 60 theoretical segments. The empirical research carried out amongst leisure center managers, leisure center users and members of the community indicated the gap between the needs of the different segments and leisure center managers' knowledge of them. He concludes that the use of segmentation analysis within the catchment area does have validity. Thus allowing leisure centers to concentrate their resources more effectively.

In recent years there has been little or no empirical research into the use of segmentation in UK local government. Reasons for this could be (a) marketing is considered incompatible with the public sector ethic, (b) marketing is viewed by those working in local government as firmly wedded to pricing and thus inappropriate in a not for profit organization, (c) marketing is misunderstood by those involved with the public sector (as purely advertising and promotion) or (d) there is little money to fund such research. The aim of this research is to see how, if at all the, application of segmentation in UK local government has developed and to provide a basis for further research in the area of segmentation within political marketing. To this end a survey was carried out to update the research.

THE SURVEY

One objective of the survey (amongst others) was to discover the extent to which local government officers knew about and/or used market segmentation. Questionnaires were sent out to two local government officers in every authority (812) in England and Wales. The sample was purposive in nature, as the intention was to choose officers from “opposite” types of departments. By this it is meant departments which seemed to have different roles and therefore, perhaps, a different view of marketing. As an example, the most obvious “opposites” are Leisure and Social Services. Questions in the questionnaire related directly to segmentation were: “Have you heard of segmentation?,” “Do you use segmentation?” and “The customers you serve have different needs and some are in need of your service more than others.” This last question was included as a surrogate to indicate the sub-conscious awareness of segmentation (even if they were unfamiliar with the term).

RESULTS

Of the 812 questionnaires sent out, 374 were completed and sent back (46% response rate). In answer to the question “The customers you serve have different needs and some are in need of your service more than others” 99% of the respondents tended to agree with this statement. In answer to the question “Have you heard of Segmentation?” 69% answered yes. In answer to the question “Do you use Segmentation?” 40% answered yes. Cross Tabulations were then carried out to discover if there were any factors which might influence the use and/or knowledge of the concept of segmentation. These factors were derived from other questions in the questionnaire.

Table 1 indicates that working outside local government and some training in marketing is more likely to mean that an officer has some knowledge of segmentation and may even use it. The Pearson Chi-squared result for whether someone had worked in local government or not and their knowledge or use of segmentation was: 16.585 with 2 degrees of freedom at the .000 level of significance. The Pearson Chi-squared result for whether someone had been on an educational course containing a marketing element was: 23.914 at the .000 level of significance. Agreement with the surrogate statement was not significant in either case indicating knowledge the spirit of the specific marketing concept (segmentation) was not dependant on education or having worked outside local government.

Further cross tabulations were also carried out with regard to the role of the chief executive and the nature of departments. A question was asked about the role of the Chief Executive. Seven possible alternative roles for the Chief Executive were put forward and respondents were allowed to select more than one. These roles were derived from the literature (Kerley 1994; Dargie 1998;

TABLE 1

Heard of Segmentation	WITH	Always worked in LG	68%
Heard of Segmentation	WITH	Not always worked in LG	72%
Use Segmentation	WITH	Always worked in LG	34%
Use Segmentation	WITH	Not always worked in LG	54%
The customers that you serve have different needs and some are more in need of your service than others	WITH	Always worked in LG	97% agreed
The customers that you serve have different needs and some are more in need of your service than others	WITH	Not always worked in LG	100% agreed
Heard of Segmentation	WITH	Attended an educational course containing a marketing module	83%
Use Segmentation	WITH	Attended an educational course containing a marketing module	93%
The customers that you serve have different needs and some are more in need of your service than others	WITH	Attended an educational course containing a marketing module	99%

Hambleton 1998). It was possible to gather the roles into two main groups—one generally positive and one generally negative:

Generally Negative Perspective	Generally Positive Perspective
The CE plays a minor role	The CE has Vision
Unsure about the role of the CE	The CE works closely with the chairs
The CE plays one group off against the other	The CE is the interface between members and officers
The CE devises all the strategy	

Of the officers with a negative view of the Chief Executive only 33% had heard of used segmentation. This rose to 57% where there was a more positive view of the Chief Executive. This would indicate that where a chief executive is considered to maintain a positive role there is more likely to be an acceptance or use of segmentation.

As has been mentioned, officers from different departments were targeted in this survey. The rationale for this had been derived from both the literature and an earlier exploratory survey. Concern had been expressed, for example, that Social Services departments would have a greater difficulty in utilizing marketing concepts such as segmentation. Responses in the survey came from 125 different department titles. For the purposes of this discussion the departments were grouped under five main types: Leisure, General Administration, Community, Planning and Social Services (see Table 2).

From these results we see that leisure services and marketing are the most likely to be engaged in segmentation. Of the rest of the departments, Social Services use segmentation the most—with Planning departments less likely to do so. As with education and whether an officer had worked outside local government—the department worked for was significant in whether segmentation was used. The Pearson Chi-test was 75.3 at 10 degrees of freedom at the 000.

TABLE 2

	Leisure	General Admin.	Marketing	Community	Planning	Social Services
Heard of Segmentation	17%	31%	25%	41%	38%	24%
Use Segmentation	70%	26%	75%	22%	10%	37%
The customers that you serve have different needs and some are more in need of your services than others	98%	100%	100%	100%	97%	100%

level. Once again the surrogate for segmentation was not significant. Associated with the nature of the department and the use of segmentation were the results from the question "Do you think marketing is appropriate for your particular service?" This was cross tabulated with whether they had heard of or used segmentation (Table 3). Not surprisingly, a far greater proportion of those who considered marketing to be appropriate had actually used marketing. The Pearson Chi-test at 2 degrees of freedom was 22.3 at the .000 level of significance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A significant minority of local government officers is using segmentation. The survey provided some indication of the basic use of segmentation. It did not suggest, however, the segmentation variables being used by local government officers. Consequently it is difficult to make comparisons with the extant literature on segmentation. Nevertheless this is some improvement of the conclusions drawn by Cowell (1979) more than twenty years earlier. The education and experience of officers outside local government increases their acceptance of segmentation, as does a positive view of the Chief Executive. Whilst there needs to be sensitivity about the nature of local government and its various publics/clients/stakeholders—there would appear to be some immediate applicability of segmentation—at least from the local government officers perspective. Departments associated with leisure services were the most pro active in the area of segmentation. This would seem a marked improvement from the situation described by Yorke (1984). However the results from the other departments indicated that others are beginning to see the efficacy of segmentation.

The advice about context given by Chapman and Cowdell (1998) needs to be heeded, as do the calls to keep segmentation user friendly. However some of the

TABLE 3

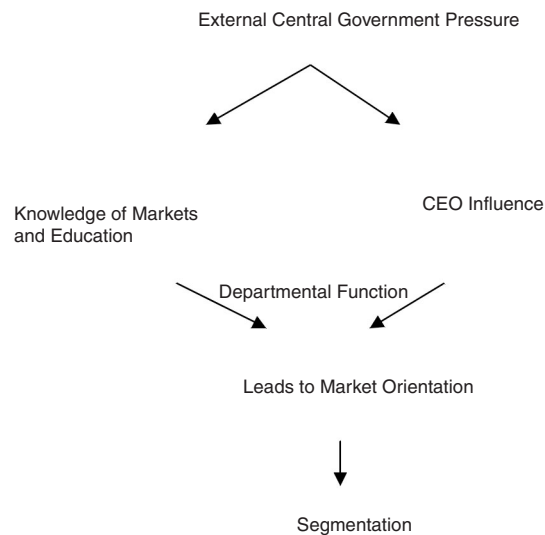
Heard of segmentation	WITH	Marketing appropriate	29%
Use segmentation	WITH	Marketing appropriate	43%
Heard segmentation	WITH	Marketing not appropriate	27%
Use segmentation	WITH	Marketing not appropriate	0%

more complex segmentation variables suggested by Kotler and Andreasen (1996) may be appropriate in the more complex local government services. Market segmentation allows customers/clients to achieve a greater degree of satisfaction. Moreover the more efficient use of resources provides the opportunity for the use of more sophisticated segmentation criteria, thus reaching the target market more effectively and efficiently.

The main result of this piece of research indicated that local government officers were comfortable with the idea of marketing in general. It also showed some movement down the road towards the use of segmentation as a marketing tool. A possible model of the present situation in local government is shown in Figure 1.

This article has provided a more contemporary view of segmentation in UK Local Government. The next stages of the research are; Firstly, to discover how segmentation is being used in UK local government—notably the types of segmentation variables officers are actually using. This would help to understand the extent to which local government is engaging in what was termed at the start of this article—simplistic segmentation. This research could be done in tandem with the work on segmentation in the area of Political Marketing. Secondly ascertain the relationship these variables have to the actual segments in

FIGURE 1



the local authority population. This could be done by in depth interviews with local government officers and focus groups with citizens.

There is no doubt that the pressure from central government will continue to make Local Government become more business like. Local Government can be aided in this process by a clearer understanding of business practices, tools and concepts adapted to their particular context. Echoing Butler and Collins (1999), it is important to recognize that material from two separate disciplines (Politics and Marketing) may not easily form an integrated model which can be applied to practical situations. What it does achieve however is to highlight the different components of both disciplines and allows researchers to identify those key components in certain situations. Effective implementation is another matter.

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