

103. Butler and Collins, 1996: 42.
104. Harrop, 1990: 297.
105. Scammell, 1995: xv.
106. Frankin, 2004.
107. Lees-Marshment, 2001a: 225, 228.
108. Kotler and Kotler, 1999: 3; Lees-Marshment, 2001a and b; O' Cass, 1996; Harrop, 1990; Scammell, 1995: 298.
109. Kotler and Kotler, 1999: 3.
110. Lees-Marshment, 2001b: 699.
111. Abramson et al, 1988, cited in Scammell, 1995.
112. O'Shaughnessy, 1990: 247.
113. Canovan, 1999: 2.
114. Taggart, 1996: 32.
115. Dahl, 1961.
116. Later neopluralists revised this to acknowledge the influence of business which is assumed to have a 'privileged position in government'. See Lindblom, 1977: 172. Dahl, 1982, also later revised his understanding of pluralism to acknowledge that countervailing power does not always act as a check against the interests of business.
117. Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 23.
118. Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 25.
119. Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 24-25.
120. Smith, 1995: 211.
121. Smith, 2006.
122. Cf. Lees-Marshment, 2001a and b.
123. Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 23.
124. Held, 1997: 209.
125. Held, 1997: 209.

... And Rational Choice Theory

That political parties/candidates behave in a similar manner to businesses and compete around the average voter is neither an original nor startling insight in political science. This simple premise is one of the key starting points within rational choice theory, which in itself has come to play a dominant role in the analysis of politics.¹ As such, this chapter will show how the increasingly influential field of political marketing can be identified as a contemporary variant of this theoretical approach. By rendering this link explicit, it is then possible to demonstrate how political marketing in its current form has inherent, and as yet unexposed, weaknesses.

As demonstrated in chapter 1, essentially the political marketing perspective is premised upon an analogy: political marketing comprises a series of tools and techniques that are used to promote a political 'product' in a political 'marketplace'. Consistent with economic analyses of politics, the focus is upon the production and consumption of politics. Underlying this is the unquestioned notion that competition is occurring in a marketplace. Attention is drawn to the existence of a political market, with actors/parties competing for votes. Underpinned by neoclassical economic assumptions of rationality, political actors adopt rational means-end behaviour in order to achieve their goal: to win elections. Political marketing is clearly underpinned by assumptions drawn from neoclassical economics. First, this is evidenced implicitly by the use of frameworks drawn from management marketing, which are derived from economic philosophy and business practice. These accounts begin from the central assumption of analytic rationality on the part of the consumer and the business.² Second, these neoclassical economic roots are explicitly accepted within some of the political marketing literature and the link to earlier economic models of political behaviour has also been acknowledged.³ These analytical claims, and underlying economic assumptions, can be considered to be analogous, and have been linked to, those of rational choice theory, in particular the seminal work of Anthony Downs' (1957) *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Rendering this explicit facilitates the identification of, and the opportunity to reflect upon, a series of difficulties highlighted by rational choice accounts and implicit within the political marketing literature. This link means that the use of marketing can be seen to institutionalise the process by which party platforms come to resemble one another, thereby reducing the choices available to the voter. The adoption of marketing as a philosophy can by extension be viewed as the internalisation of rational choice theorising. In short, the more parties conform to the prescriptions of marketing models, the more their behaviour becomes consistent with the theorising of Downs. Not only can this lead to partisan convergence in terms

of electoral competition, but it is argued that if voters perceive political actors to behave in a manner that is consistent with rational choice theorising, then it becomes rational for voters to behave in this way too. Rational choice theorising also draws attention to the paradox of voting, that the cost of voting exceeds the benefits; therefore, a rational voter will not vote.

Given the emphasis upon the 'consumer' influencing the nature of the product, this chapter also reflects upon how economic accounts deal with the issue of preferences. The following chapter addresses how preferences are identified and fed into the political 'product', but this chapter provides the theoretical background and as such draws attention for the potential for manipulation of preferences by the organisation.

As such, this chapter sets out the way in which neoclassical economics have been used to inform political science and draws out two of the key concerns this raises: in respect of the nature of party competition and the paradox of voter turnout. It then explores the inherent structuralism within rational choice which suggests that actors have little 'choice' available to them, and that they are operating within a climate that privileges ideas in relation to markets. This would suggest that the adoption of marketing and by extension the internalisation of rational choice assumptions becomes less of a choice but the optimal route available to political voters and actors alike. This has an impact not only in terms of the potential effects upon electoral turnout, but also raises broader concerns in the manner in which democracy is characterised, conceived of and practised.

Economic models in political analysis

The use of economic behavioural assumptions to inform political analysis is nothing new. Most prominently these accounts in political science are located within rational choice theory. Rational choice adopts the methodology of neoclassical economics and seeks to model the behaviour of individuals. This begins with the assumption that individuals are rational actors, seeking to maximise their utility, who have expressed identifiable and transitive preferences. They use means-ends strategies in order to achieve their goals. As such, rational choice provides a model, or series of models, through which the use of parsimonious assumptions facilitates the simplification of reality. This is done in order to explore the way in which actors optimally adapt to their circumstances and pursue the rational course of action available to them. This enables analysts to account for (and explain) political behaviour and generate predictions. As with marketing, this approach has a normative aspect in that it suggests how actors should behave in order to achieve their goals; prescribing a focus on the means of achieving goals, rather than what those goals should be. These approaches are also positive in that 'what is' and/or 'what if' questions are addressed; implications are deduced from a set of premises.⁴ Rational choice is both a theory and a method. It is a method of studying politics using a particular set of assumptions. These assumptions are used to construct models from which deductive explanations of individual behaviour are produced. It is also a theory because the use of these models has generated a set of coherent arguments about the nature of political competition.

Methodologically both approaches proceed in the same manner. Political marketing models begin with a series of simplifying assumptions used to produce generic models from which propositions are deduced, and are then tested against the empirical evidence to

produce retrospective predictions.⁵ Despite the parsimony of these assumptions, it is their applicability and testability that are assumed to establish the validity of the theory (consistent with the Downsian view).⁶ However, it is the contention of this book that the use of this modelling also raises a series of implications for the democratic process. The basis of the argument presented here is to extend analysis to that of the model itself. Rather than using the model to generate post hoc predictions and descriptions of political behaviour, and given the prescriptive character of these models, it is argued here that this modelling also contains a series of implications for the way in which the activity of politics is perceived by analysts, practitioners and the public.

The following sections will highlight the convergence between the political marketing literature and orthodox rational choice accounts (summarised in table 2.1). This will be done with particular reference to the seminal rational choice account of electoral competition. As such, it will proceed initially by identifying the underlying assumptions within the political marketing literature. Subsequently, it will outline Downs' model of electoral competition and party behaviour, before finally discussing the assumptions made about voters. Consistent with orthodox rational choice, this agency-centred approach is reflected within much of the political marketing literature, which assumes that actors are relatively unconstrained by their environment.⁷ However, as has also been noted, there is an inherent structuralism in rational choice theory⁸, and this point will inform the critique offered of the political marketing literature.

Table 2.1. Convergence between orthodox rational choice theory and political marketing modelling

Key Aspects of Orthodox Rational Choice Theory ⁹	Political Marketing
Assumption of rationality	Evidenced through acceptance of underlying neoclassical economic assumptions
Individuals are units of analysis	Attention is drawn to political actors (parties and candidates) and voters
Models use simplifying assumptions to produce deduction	Marketing models imported, simplifying assumptions accepted, with the explicitly stated aim of generating predictions (see chapter 1)
Predictions are post hoc	Description of campaigns using models is used to justify the utility of marketing as an explanatory tool with predictive capacity
Individuals are seeking to maximise their utility	Political actors employ marketing for the purpose of winning elections
There is a clear hierarchy of transitive and expressed preferences that are identifiable	Voter preferences are identifiable through market research and available to be accommodated
Normative in prescribing means to achieve goals (without specifying what goal should be)	Accepts this normative aspect; prescribes marketing to win elections

Key Aspects of Orthodox Rational Choice Theory ⁹	Political Marketing
The behaviour of political parties in electoral competition can be predicted given the distribution of voter preferences	Given this identification, the adherence of political actors to the marketing framework can mean electoral victory (see chapter 1)
Draws attention to problems of collective action	Attention to the underlying assumptions of political marketing can draw attention to the collective action problem of voter turnout (see chapter 6)
Limited awareness of discussion of broader contextual factors	Assumes political actors and voters in a market. Minimal specification of context.
Implausible theoretical assumptions	Simplistic and simplifying models adopted from management, premised upon rationality assumption

Table 2.2. Specific theoretical assumptions

Rational Choice	Political Marketing
Parties behave as if businesses	Parties behave as businesses
Voters behave as if consumers	Voters are consumers
Political actors pursue policies to win office	Political marketing is necessary to achieve office
Preferences fixed, expressed, identifiable and transitive, and available to be accommodated	Focus groups, opinion polls and market research identify expressed preferences. These preferences are then incorporated into the political 'product'
Unimodal distribution of preferences	Unimodal distribution of preferences
Unidimensional space (characterised by political ideology)	Unidimensional space assumed (characterised by marketing ideology)
Voter choice based on ideology (not policy)	Voter choice based upon brand (not policy)
Policies 'bundled' into ideological package	Policies 'bundled' into a brand image

The nature of party competition

In economic accounts of two-party competition, parties are assumed to converge and compete around the median voter. Preference accommodating strategies are pursued in order for parties to seek to maximise votes. These frameworks are described in order to (a) demonstrate how the political marketing literature and this economic modelling are analogous, as summarised in tables 2.1 and 2.2 and (b) to argue that the use of marketing institutionalises the process of partisan convergence. This in turn reduces the 'choice' available to voters.

Existing political marketing research overtly identifies its foundations in neoclassical economic thinking.¹⁰ Congruent with rational choice theorising, the principal assumption

that informs the political marketing literature is: parties behave like businesses competing for votes in an arena which is analogous to that of a commercial marketplace. One area of analysis within rational choice theory is a focus upon spatial models of competition. While initially derived from economics, these have been extensively applied to the activity of politics. Spatial models of electoral competition assume that parties compete in a 'space'. The primary assumption here is that political space can be mapped as a linear, one-dimensional spectrum. This is conceived of as an ideological continuum. In orthodox economic accounts of politics, this is from extreme left to extreme right with positions in between. Candidates/parties thus position themselves within this space in order to define their competitive stance. There are three main components to this model: (1) that voters will choose the candidate or party most able to maximise their own utility; (2) that parties will maximise their utility by seeking to attract the greatest number of voters; (3) that assuming a unimodal distribution of expressed voter preferences, parties will converge and compete around the centre ground. This was first articulated by Downs, who provided the seminal and enduring work on electoral competition and provides the starting point for theories, methods and assumptions from economics to be explicitly applied in attempts to account for political behaviour.¹¹ This modelling of party competition begins with the analogy of parties as if businesses and voters as if consumers operating within a marketplace.

Downs and party competition

Downs drew from Hotelling's¹² work to offer the insight that electoral competition can be modelled and described in a manner analogous to that which occurs within an economic market, with political parties behaving as if they were businesses, and voters assumed to behave as if they were consumers. In this sense then, the political market is assumed to comprise buyers and sellers actively engaging in a process of exchange. This is governed by a set of rules, and the process of exchange is influenced by supply and demand.¹³ Parties were assumed to be unitary rational actors, motivated by the desire to maximise their utility (votes) in order to achieve their goal (office). Politicians would identify voter preferences in order to seek to incorporate them into party programmes. This would be done so that popularity, and hence votes, would have the potential to be maximised, in order for political actors to achieve their goal. In a two-party system, both parties would seek to accommodate the preferences of as many voters as possible. Voter preferences were assumed to be (a) identifiable and (b) distributed unimodally in a 'bell curve' distribution in a one-dimensional space. This then would logically suggest the convergence of electoral programmes as parties competed around the median voter.

Political marketing accepts the underlying conception of rationality, and marketing is used to provide 'rational'¹⁴ strategies for behaviour. Political marketing assumes in its prescription of these models (indeed this is also explicitly stated) that the party best at marketing will win the election—voter preferences are assumed to be susceptible to comprehensive marketing strategies. Voter preferences are also assumed to be fixed and identifiable through the choices they make. Parties are office seeking, and, therefore, need to accommodate voter preferences in order to maximise the number of votes they receive in order to achieve office. To attract voters, in rational choice accounts, policies are part of loose ideological bundles. This is regarded as a cost-saving device for voters. In political marketing terms, the brand replaces ideology as the cost-saving device for voters.

Context and conception of democracy

Consistent with the minimal specification of context, the key components of the political market are 'the existence of a mass electorate; competition between two or more parties for the votes of this electorate; and a set of rules governing this competition'.¹⁵ Following Downs, and Schumpeterian conceptions of democracy, the political process is regarded as a 'democratic method [which] is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to govern by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'.¹⁶ This instrumentalist conception of democracy is implicitly accepted within the political marketing literature. Democracy is not imbued with an intrinsic value; rather, it is a mechanism through which competition is structured and facilitates the means through which actors can achieve their goal. That goal is assumed to be electoral victory.

The Downsian account assumes a single dimension within which competition occurs. This is a consequence of assuming a unimodal distribution of voter preferences. This would suggest that parties are responsive to voters, positioning themselves around the centre ground, and that political conflict can therefore be mapped in a single-issue space. This leads to parties locating themselves around the centre ground, in order to compete for votes that are thought to exist in a single peak. The political marketing literature also assumes a single peak, as parties compete around the median voter. The unidimensional space in political marketing is a marketing, not a 'political', ideological one, though. Political marketing alters this Downsian assumption of 'space', as the site where competition occurs is assumed to be characterised by marketing, this renegotiation is discussed later (see chapter 4).

Emergent issues

Policy substance, within the political marketing perspective, is only regarded as important in terms of its effect upon party image. This would suggest that political marketing again fits with the Downsian assumption that 'parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies'.¹⁷ In two-party systems, political actors are not directly motivated to give voters the policies or product that they want, rather they offer the 'product' as a means to achieve their primary goal—to maximise votes and win elections. As has been noted, substantive policy debates are less likely to be the focus of marketing.¹⁸ Scammell argues that 'policy discussion is related not to intrinsic merits or national interest, but to potential effects on party images'.¹⁹ In emphasising the importance of image, political marketing implicitly accepts the orthodox rational choice assumptions about voter 'rationality'. Downs argues that the costs of acquiring information are greater than the benefits derived from voting. Therefore, voters make their choices based upon ideologies, or in political marketing terms, brand images, saving themselves the costs of gathering detailed information about policy stances.²⁰ This is done in order to appeal to voters who are assumed to cast their vote affectively. In this sense, this might suggest that competition becomes peripheral, that rather than seeking to differentiate their 'products', leaders become content to offer stylistic changes.²¹

If, as rational choice implies, competition between parties is perfect, this indicates that, ultimately, parties will offer identical solutions to political problems. Logically developed, this implies that, whichever party wins the electoral competition, policy outcomes and subsequent individual utility will be the same, regardless of the party in office. Thus, the costs

of mobilisation considerably exceed the benefits, and it becomes rational for the individual not to vote. The paradox, that it is rational not to vote, goes to the core of rational choice critique and is something which many attempts have been made to overcome.²²

Spatial models of electoral competition are operationalised, premised upon the assumption of a median voter.²³ That is, voter preferences are represented on a unidimensional ideological spectrum and are assumed to exist as a single peak. So, there is the assumption of a unidimensional ideological spectrum; a single dimension of political conflict. For spatial models of electoral competition to be applied, parties and voters must fit along a single ideological dimension. As the parties converge ideologically (assuming a unimodal distribution of voters), their relative position provides less opportunity to make a distinctive choice and, thus, the act of voting becomes less than rational.

The act of voting

Rational choice predates political marketing in its assumption of the voter as consumer. Tullock notes, 'Voters and customers are essentially the same people. Mr. Smith buys and votes; he is the same man in the supermarket and the voting booth'.²⁴ Downs (and much of the political marketing literature also shares this assumption) assumes voters behave in a rational manner. Voters will vote for the party which provides them with the most benefits.²⁵ Voters are also assumed to vote either in favour of, or against, the incumbent administration. To vote in favour, signals the desire for a continuation of existing policies, to vote against means that the opposition will be required to make changes once in office.²⁶ This also means that, despite the convergence around the median voter, there is a difference between the two parties. For Downs, it does matter, and does make a difference, which party is elected.²⁷ Voters, however, are regarded as 'not interested in policies *per se*, but in their own utility incomes'.²⁸ Assuming costless and complete information, voters then assess the present utility under the incumbent administration and the potential utility from the competing party. Voters then establish a preference between the two, consequently voting for the party that s/he prefers.²⁹ This assumes that choices are equal to, and reflect, expressed preferences. The assumption of costless information, for Downs, makes voting a rational act.³⁰

Voters, for Downs, are assumed to vote affectively; that is, they are assumed to identify with a 'brand' image. They are not assumed to assess rationally the costs and benefits of each policy (this is consistent with Downs' explanation for the adoption of ideology). Spatial models of electoral competition suggest that voters choose parties based upon ideology. They do not assess each policy in terms of its distance from themselves. To make a choice based upon policy requires too many costs. Therefore, the space in which political competition occurs is an ideological space rather than a policy space. Within political marketing competition is assumed to occur between brands, not policies. As with Downs' model, voting within much of the political marketing literature is assumed to have an expressive function. Political marketing assumes the existence of a political market; this is the electorate.³¹ However, despite being regarded as consumers, within political marketing the vote is regarded as 'a forceful social and ideological affirmation'³² and a 'psychological purchase'.³³ Major social cleavages are thought to be expressed in elections, with votes reflecting identity before issues.³⁴ Party image is considered a more significant factor for voters than policies.³⁵

Retrospective voting is accounted for within the political marketing literature (not unlike Fiorina's retrospective model of voting behaviour). While voting is a one-off activity every four or five years, the decision for whom to vote, within the political marketing literature, may depend upon the service received over the previous electoral period.³⁶ Consistent with rational choice revisions, political marketing focuses upon the benefits and costs to democracy and the role of civic duty. Yet, this is problematic in itself. To assume that the voter is a consumer and that voting is an act of consumption, denies the civic responsibility attached to the notion of citizenship (see chapter 5).

The utility of Downs' model stems from the fact that it provides a formal and deductive explanation of voters and parties in an analogous marketplace. Rational choice modelling allows for a less static and deterministic interpretation of electoral activity. In highlighting the importance of party competition and its potential impact upon voting behaviour, this model goes beyond the traditional party identification perspective which argues that voting behaviour is sociologically structurally determined as a result of historical conflict resolution.³⁷ However, while rational choice accounts seek to explain voting behaviour as a rational act, given that the costs of the act of voting invariably outweigh the individual benefits, paradoxically it becomes rational not to vote, but to 'free ride'.³⁸ Downs acknowledged this and reverted to sociological explanations of time- and cost-saving mechanisms (as indicated above), although to some extent, this undermines his original premise that all action is based upon the individual as a rational actor.

Voting also has a broader systemic function, and for Downs this activity makes democracy possible; without it, the system collapses. He assumes that 'citizens of a democracy subscribe to its principles and therefore derive benefits from its continuance'.³⁹ He argues that despite the costs of obtaining information, and the assumption of voter rationality, this would rationally lead to voter abstention, given that the costs outweigh the benefits. Given the limited likelihood of a single vote making any difference to the electoral outcome, it is rational for individual voters to abstain, letting others bear the costs of voting, while benefiting from the continuance of the democratic system. Downs argues that voters do, however, vote. Voters are assumed to be motivated by a sense of 'social responsibility' leading them to behave in a manner that contradicts the assumptions of rationality. They vote for affective/emotional reasons, rather than 'rational' ones. Further, Downs seeks to overcome the problem in respect to voting by giving participation a structural property. 'Participation in elections is one of the rules of the game in a democracy, because without it democracy cannot work'.⁴⁰

The motivation for voter behaviour has been an issue which has plagued rational choice theorising. In an inductive attempt to overcome 'the paradox that ate rational choice', Fiorina sought to provide a more realistic explanation of voting.⁴¹ He argued the voter acted instrumentally, rather than rationally, and voted retrospectively. Voters considered the past performance of the party, not just the present. Voting was not a new decision at each election but resulted from the development of party identification and retrospective evaluation. Voters were directly influenced by retrospective judgements and, subsequently, were assumed to reward governments for good times and punish them for bad times. This implied that citizens/consumers made an informed decision. Building on this, Himmelweit et al developed the consumer model of voting, as a systems account, from a social psychological approach. This allowed for the interdependence of the individual and society by examining social reality and individual experience of that reality.⁴² This model was predicated upon the

axiom of the voter as an informed consumer. In accepting a changing environment and an individual's perception of that environment, they argued that their framework provided an essentially cognitive model.⁴³ Voting was assumed to be an individual and active, rather than a passive, activity, with emphasis placed upon policy preferences. From this perspective, individuals were assumed to assess the ability of parties to implement their proposals before casting their vote. Voters consciously and instrumentally decided for whom to cast their vote. While accepting that voters may have developed 'brand loyalties', Himmelweit et al argued that 'each election is like a new shopping expedition in a situation where new as well as familiar goods are on offer'.⁴⁴ They dismissed the notion of partisan identification, arguing it was not central to explanations of voting behaviour. Further, they argued that their findings suggested that '*in the future the influence of the individual's past habit of voting on his or her subsequent vote will, if anything, decrease further*'.⁴⁵ These assumptions of issue-based voting have been adopted within the marketing literature, although the 'issue' is not one of policies or politics, but primarily focused around a brand or an image, emphasising style over substance, image over policy content.⁴⁶ This is done to connect with the 'consumer' who 'purchases' ahistorically, without sense of political loyalty, in a manner akin to any other consumer purchase, such as soap powder. Given the fluidity of cognitive and affective components which motivate this choice, the preferences of voters need to be expressly incorporated into the political product, the assumption being that if voters perceive a political actor/party has accommodated their preferences, this will motivate the voter to vote for that particular party/actor.

Voters within political marketing are assumed to have identifiable and expressed preferences or wants. Therefore, extensive research, through focus groups, opinion polls and market research, is used to identify these voter preferences. As Shama argues, the 'marketing concept is interested in the basic political needs and wants of the voters with the intention of offering them candidates who are capable of satisfying these needs and wants'.⁴⁷ Once these needs and wants, or preferences, are identified, the political product is refined accordingly in order to accommodate them. The point is to offer a candidate/party who satisfies voter demands, or appears to accommodate voters' expressed preferences. The party that accommodates them most successfully will be the party that wins the election. Or, in political marketing terms, the party/candidate that most successfully utilises marketing will be the one which wins the election.⁴⁸

The way in which these preferences are identified and incorporated into the political product, or the way in which marketing is implemented, is discussed in the following chapter. However, given the significance of voter preferences in shaping the political 'product' and providing a rationale for voting behaviour, it is useful to understand what is meant by voter preferences.

Assumptions about voter preferences

The political marketing literature makes a series of key implicit assumptions in respect of preferences. Consistent with orthodox rational choice assumptions, preferences are taken as a given. They are also assumed to be fixed, expressed and identifiable. In assuming that voter preferences are fixed, the options available to political actors in electoral competition are limited. This would suggest that political actors then pursue preference-accommodating strategies. The successful identification and accommodation of these preferences is assumed

to enable the party or candidate to maximise their utility. Parties redesign their 'product' to fit expressed voter preferences (identified through opinion polling and focus groups); the party which offers the best 'fit' is assumed to gain the most votes and, therefore, win the election. Political actors identify what voters want, then provide a 'product' that reflects these preferences; preferences appear to be accommodated in order that organisational objectives may be achieved.

In both the rational choice model and the political marketing literature, preferences are assumed to be single peaked. In both rational choice terms and political marketing terms, it is the distribution of preferences that determine the party's positioning. The direction of causality is from voter to party. This again confirms the preference accommodation thesis. If the preferences are assumed to be distributed bimodally, parties will compete around the left and right poles. The political marketing literature notes the assumption of the bimodal distribution of preferences in the 'product' and 'sales-oriented' era of its framework. This leads the party to focus on their product, and the selling or promotion of it, assuming a market in which voters are located at either the left or the right. Parties assume they are accommodating the preferences of voters at either end of this ideological spectrum.

Preference shaping

The management marketing literature (and its political marketing derivative) claims a normative justification for the adoption of marketing strategies in the satisfaction of consumer demands. Consumers are assumed, by the management marketing literature, to impact upon the process of producing the product. However, not only must identifiable and expressed consumer wants and needs be accommodated and satisfied⁴⁹, but there is also space for an element of manipulation, as the organisation may seek to shape those wants and needs.⁵⁰ Marketers, advocating an ethnographic approach to marketing⁵¹, note the importance of consumer involvement with the idea of the product, that they should be involved is beneficial, as this then makes them much more receptive to the promotion of that product. As Dowding notes, 'Preferences and power are intimately linked . . . for we assume that people generally act in order to promote their wants. However, individual wants are not merely givens which themselves require no explanation. Actions are explained by examining beliefs and desires'.⁵² These actions and beliefs can be shaped by organisations and political parties in order to further their own interests.

Subsequently, this would suggest that voters' behaviour must also be shaped so that it is influenced favourably towards the product made available by the organisation. In political terms, this suggests that political actors also must seek to engage in preference-shaping strategies, prior to presenting a product that supposedly accommodates preferences. Consistent with revisions made by Downs⁵³, values and beliefs become an important part of the process. Marketing as a philosophical position then has a potential social and political impact. Indeed, Edwards goes as far as to suggest that marketing 'remains central in shaping our conceptions of ourselves, past and present'.⁵⁴

So, this is not the equal relationship that is first implied. The ultimate goal of marketing is the influencing of behaviour and, while the primary objective is not to educate or to change values, this may be done as a means of influencing behaviour.⁵⁵ The marketing literature argues that marketing is 'concerned with the process by which people adopt, maintain, or discard patterns of behaviour—or accept ideas and beliefs that are precursors to

behaviour'⁵⁶, advocating a more preference-shaping role for actors than explicitly acknowledged in the political marketing literature. Within this literature, preferences must be shaped by an organisation before they are accommodated. Preference-shaping *precedes* preference-accommodation. In political marketing terms, this would suggest that prior to explicitly claiming to accommodate voter preferences in terms of a political product, political actors must first shape those preferences, through proselytisation and/or persuasion. If it is not political actors who seek to shape those preferences, then consideration must also be given to the role of other actors (for example, the media and business). What this means is that the reciprocity and transparency first suggested by placing the consumer at the centre of the process becomes asymmetric.

Preferences: critique

As noted in chapter 1, there is space within the marketing literature for the organisation to manipulate the preferences of the consumer, as the organisation may seek to shape those wants and needs.⁵⁷ This is less explicitly acknowledged in the political marketing literature, which suggests that marketing is used only to identify expressed wants and needs, and subsequently to accommodate them, in order that the party (organisation) may achieve its objective (win an election). The political marketing literature operates upon the assumption that preferences are identifiable and available to be accommodated. It is unable to account, however, for the source of these preferences. How are preferences formed in the first instance? Adopting this simplified assumption of preference accommodation negates the ability of actor's with state power to pursue preference-shaping strategies.⁵⁸ Further, if voters are assumed to cast their vote affectively and rationally, the information that they receive in order to do this is provided through the mass media. It is acknowledged that the media and politicians each have their own agenda, yet the information through which the citizen makes his/her informed choice for whom to vote is mediated and represented through the mass media. This provides the media with an opportunity to play a role in preference-shaping strategies, and to define the parameters of available preferences. Political marketing deviates from orthodox economic accounts in discussing how preferences are identified and incorporated in to the political product through the collection of public opinion using opinion polling and focus groups. This provides political marketing a means through which to claim a normative defence; that is, the claimed responsiveness to public opinion. However, if the site of preference expression occurs outside of the electoral arena, this in turn affords the possibility of greater influence to those involved in focus groups and the generation of public opinion data, undermining the ideal of equality at the ballot box.

Problems also arise in rational choice accounts in respect of assumptions made about the nature of preferences. The basic Downsian model does not account for where preferences come from, or how they are determined and identified. This perspective assumes that preferences are exogenously fixed and unaltered by participation. This approach further fails to allow for parties manipulating the structural bases of preferences⁵⁹: how do parties attempt to shape voter preferences by altering the environment within which these preferences are formed? Downs later acknowledged the problems associated with assuming preferences as a given; accepting that their nature and changes may in fact impact upon economic and political behaviour.⁶⁰ He also admitted nonrational factors into analysis, arguing that 'the central institutions that constitute democracy probably cannot be sustained for long without

both reinforcing its key social values in the minds and hearts of existing citizens, and inculcating those values in the minds and hearts of future citizens as they grow up'.⁶¹ This means that while voter preferences may need to be accommodated, this is not a straightforward process. There is an acknowledgment that preferences are not preexisting but may be shaped within a broader context.

Political marketing and orthodox rational choice: critique

Having shown how the political marketing literature can be considered analogous to rational choice accounts, these accounts are now developed through critique in order to highlight the importance of a given context in structuring choices available to political actors. These theoretical issues are teased out in order to provide (a) a more systematic and detailed theoretical framework for analysis and (b) a more comprehensive understanding of political action.

Structural limitations

The limitations of rational choice theory may also be levelled at political marketing. In adopting simplifying assumptions, and reducing analysis to the level of the individual actor (parties are assumed to behave as unitary actors), rational choice theory tends to neglect the specificities of the broader institutional context in which such rationality is exercised.⁶² By focusing on observable behaviour, political marketing misses the role of structures and the dynamic of structures impacting upon and affecting individual behaviour. Yet, rational choice theory claims to seek to 'illuminate how choices are made within structures, the agenda sometimes stretching to the consideration of how rational choices reproduce or transform structures'.⁶³ Dowding acknowledges the latent structural elements of rational choice in arguing that '*it is the structure of the individual choice situation that does most of the explanatory work. It is the set of incentives facing individuals which structurally suggest behaviour to them; by studying those incentives together with assumptions about the way actors make decisions we come to understand why people act as they do*'.⁶⁴ However, he goes on to deny the significance of structures in explaining outcomes, arguing that 'the form of explanation I am associating with rational choice uses explicit assumptions about behaviour and in them it is the actions which are the causes of outcomes and not the structures'.⁶⁵ Dowding here reaffirms agency as causal for explanations of behaviour in rational choice accounts. This agency is accepted in much of the political marketing literature which emphasises the behaviour of agents as determinants of outcomes.

If rational choice theory (and by logical extension, political marketing) is broadened to acknowledge the introduction of behaviour as a dynamic process, then it becomes apparent that individuals interact with and are affected by, yet may also reproduce and transform, the structures within which they operate. However, this broadening has been rendered difficult by the existing dominant ontological and epistemological position of political marketing. If it is accepted that individuals operate within given structures, which may impact upon their behaviour, yet may not be directly observed, this has two implications. First, in order to fully explore the consequences and potential impact of political marketing, it is necessary to move beyond a focus on observable behaviour, and to analyse such behaviour with an explicit

acknowledgement of the existence of unobservable structures (such as ideology) which may impact upon such behaviour. Second, it is necessary to acknowledge the impact of ideational elements in affecting behaviour and the context in which actors operate, or *perceive* that they operate. Thus, structures and institutions may shape preferences and frames of reference through which actors view the context within which they find themselves.⁶⁶ For example, it may be necessary to consider the role of other actors in constructing the preferences of the electorate, i.e., the media, and the constraints that this may impose upon political actors. Further, the language used to describe this process is part of a broader discourse which defines the parameters of choices available to all actors. Actors are clearly not autonomous individuals but are connected to their environment which in turn structures the choices available to actors. This is not to suggest a structural determinism, but that there is a dynamic at play which privileges some choices over others. In this way, actors, by making those choices interact with and reconstitute that environment, which in turn structures or inhibits subsequent choices. That is, this is a dialectical and continual process which impacts over time.

While the political marketing approach adds to orthodox rational choice models in providing rich descriptions of contemporary electoral behaviour, it may need to be broadened in order to increase its descriptive capacity. It may need to borrow from other perspectives in order to explain where preferences and interests come from and to recognise the constraints and opportunities afforded within the densely structured political environment in which actors find themselves operating. While acknowledging the existence of other actors in the political market, their role in the exchange is regarded as limited, as rational choice accounts separate action from structure. This serves to downplay the dynamism of the context in which political actors operate. To assume a direct, two-way relationship between political actors and voters is to neglect the complexity of a densely structured political environment. Surely if other actors exist in a marketplace, they too have the potential to 'consume' the product and to engage in more subtle exchange relationships with the producer of the product. This raises questions as to the nature of the exchange with these other actors. What do they bring to bear on the political product? How are their preferences accommodated? How does this conflict with accommodating voter preferences? Does this mean that the voters' preferences ultimately are shaped in order to accommodate the preferences of other actors within the market?

Political marketing, with its implicit assumption about preferences, also equates material preferences with interests. This has two significant impacts. First, it downplays the role of the ideational in the analysis. Second, it conforms to the classic pluralist assumption about power. Here, interests are identifiable, agents (negating the impact of structures and the potential latent exercise of power⁶⁷) exercise power through observable conflict. In adopting simplifying assumptions, and reducing analysis to the individual actor, this negates the broader institutional context in which such rationality is exercised.⁶⁸ Context is crucial in understanding the actions of an individual. Rational choice suggests a certain path dependence, whereby there is a rational course of action available to an actor in a context which is taken as a given. Therefore, the political marketing derivative also implicitly accepts that the rational course of action available to political actors, in the contemporary environment, is to adopt marketing strategies in order to accommodate market preferences.

In some respects this becomes contradictory. On the one hand, there is the suggestion that structures define the rational course of action available to an actor. Therefore, if the structure (or context) is known, this negates the need for agents, as there will be only one

given course of action available. This can be read from the structure/context. On the other hand, a dynamic is introduced, implying the capacity of individuals, making rational choices, to transform the structures within which available rational choices may be made. If rational choices transform structures and alter the context in which rational strategies may be selected, this highlights the significance of ideational analysis. By reducing analysis to the material, it assumes that actors have a perfect knowledge of the context in which they find themselves, paradoxically reducing the role of agency. Agents' behaviour becomes determined by the context. To introduce ideational variables into the analysis enables the recognition of differing motivations for behaviour, with the potential for a variation of outcomes. Moreover, this begins to enable an understanding of how actors are motivated, and how different motivations may produce alternate outcomes, as opposed to the path dependency assumed in rational descriptions.

The role of modelling

Downs notes that the function of economic analysis is to (a) identify the ends which an actor is pursuing and (b) to analyse the means of achieving them.⁶⁹ This is an analytical toolkit, however, rather than a template for behaviour. Downs' model is positive, in that it shows what will happen under a set of conditions. Simplifying assumptions are used to abstract from reality—they enable a focus upon the key components of phenomena. Downs' work is also explicitly presented as a model. It is a device through which reality can be simplified and used to facilitate predictions. The instrumentalist assumptions are simplified versions of reality for the purpose of modelling, not prescriptions for action.

Rational choice theory prescribes behaviour in order to achieve aims; it does not prescribe what those aims or end goals should be.⁷⁰ Political marketing prescribes behaviour in order to enable political actors to achieve their end goal (to win elections). In order to maximise their utility (vote maximise/win elections), the political marketing literature suggests that political actors need to adopt marketing strategies. Rationality is means-ends, in that certain strategies (means) are selected instrumentally in order to satisfy given ends—marketing strategies are selected to enable political actors to win elections. As rational choice theory provides a method by which an actor can adapt optimally to his/her circumstances, so political marketing provides a set of tools and techniques to enable political actors to adapt within a given environment. Rational choice models seek to identify logical possibilities rather than statistical predictions. The purpose of rational choice models, therefore, becomes not actually to measure voting behaviour empirically in order to make predictions, but to provide an analytic framework of possibility. It becomes important, therefore, not to overemphasise the empiricist application of rational choice theory; this point can also be extended to the political marketing literature.

Conclusion

Theoretically, political marketing can be demonstrated to have its roots in orthodox rational choice theory, and is able successfully to describe contemporary electoral behaviour. However, it mistakes evidence consistent with its account as a normative defence of its

contribution to democratic practice. Rational choice uses reason, raising analytical ontological questions. Rational choice accounts claim to demonstrate how choices are made.⁷¹ Linking these two literatures together demonstrates how political marketing, as a contemporary variant of orthodox rational choice, faces a series of challenges. The key concerns stated here then are that by locating the political marketing literature within rational choice accounts, a concomitant set of problems arise. First, rational choice theorising illustrates how party platforms and competition can converge around the median voter, limiting choice available to voters. In terms of electoral competition, the basis of marketing can be seen to be following the Downsian trajectory of competition around a single peaked distribution of voters, mapped along a unidimensional space. This means parties compete around a median voter. As parties move closer to each other, differences between them become peripheral. Competition becomes about stylistic differences rather than policy substance. In this way, it can be argued that the use of marketing, in practice, merely institutionalises the processes by which party platforms come to resemble one another. Second, this median voter is assumed to have preferences that are expressed identifiable and available for accommodation, negating the possibility that these may be shaped. Third, it can be seen that once this centripetal competition occurs, there is little or no incentive to deviate away from the centre ground. As such, fourth, there becomes an institutionalisation of the processes by which party platforms converge. To highlight the importance of structures illustrates how actors may have little 'choice' available to them. In turn, this means that an awareness of the broader material context in which politics takes place, enables an understating of the context in which it would appear to be a logical, rational response of political parties/candidates to adopt marketing.

Attention is also drawn to the problem of prescription. As these underlying assumptions become internalised (as advocated by marketing practitioners and academics alike), further difficulties arise. Orthodox rational choice modelling has developed not only to account for party competition but voting behaviour too. Here then to advocate marketing to political actors is to prescribe rational choice theorising. To internalise this and pursue this as a guiding philosophy conflates normative and positive accounts. This has further implications. The more that voters perceive political actors behaving in a manner consistent with rational choice theorising, the more likely it is that voters will behave this way too. This means that voters are likely to perceive the costs of voting as outweighing the costs of participating. Not only does this reinforce the paradox of rational choice—that it is rational not to vote—this also renders these models ontological rather than analytical, and violates their functions. Yet, for the political marketing literature to assume that voters do vote fails to address the empirical reality of declining turnout (see chapter 6). Significantly, these underlying economic assumptions in rational choice theory are divorced from their context. First, this inhibits comprehension and analysis, but second, this reinforces the methodological individualism of economic accounts. Orthodox economic accounts deny a broader context of political, social and cultural practices. In so doing, the individual is isolated and disconnected from this context. Advocated as practice then, this in turn suggests that individuals should be isolated from the wider society, concerned only with their individual self-interest, disconnected from the processes of politics and society more broadly. This practice is discussed in the following chapter.

Notes

1. It is particularly dominant in American political science, Green and Shapiro, 1994, and in Britain is one of the main areas within which contemporary research is published, see Marsh and Savigny, 2005.
2. O'Driscoll and Murray, 1998: 407.
3. Mauser, 1983; Newman, 1994; Butler and Collins, 1999: 55; Scammell, 1999: 726, 739; Lees-Marshment, 2001b: 694; Wring, 1997.
4. Hinich and Munger, 1997: 1.
5. Butler and Collins, 1994; Lees-Marshment, 2001b: 705.
6. Downs, 1957: 21.
7. For exceptions, see e.g., Wring, 1997; Butler and Collins, 1994.
8. Cf. Hay, 2004b; Tsebelis, 1990; Dowding, 1991, although while Dowding and Tsebelis acknowledge the existence of context in structuring choice, their accounts are still intentional, in contrast to Hay, 2004b.
9. Rational choice aspects adapted from Hay, 2002: 8–9.
10. Mauser, 1983; Newman, 1994; Wring, 1996; Butler and Collins, 1999: 55; Scammell, 1999: 726, 739; Lees-Marshment, 2001b: 694.
11. Downs, 1957.
12. Hotelling, 1929.
13. Downs, 1957; Scott, 1970.
14. Scammell, 1996: 132.
15. Gamble, 1974: 6.
16. Schumpeter, 1947: 269.
17. Downs, 1957: 28.
18. Butler and Collins, 1994: 27.
19. Scammell, 1995: xii.
20. Downs, 1957: 98.
21. Scott, 1970: 17–19.
22. For a summary, see Whiteley, 1995.
23. This is a convenient assumption, for the purposes of enabling mathematical modelling to be formulated.
24. Tullock, 1976: 5.
25. Downs, 1957: 36.
26. Downs, 1957: 41–42.
27. Given that 'if the opposition wins, it is sure to carry out policies different from those the incumbents would have carried out had they been re-elected'—Downs, 1957: 42.
28. Downs, 1957: 42.
29. Downs, 1957: 49.
30. Downs, 1957: 261.
31. Butler and Collins, 1999: 62.
32. Butler and Collins, 1999: 62.
33. Reid, 1988.
34. Butler and Collins, 1999: 63.
35. Egan, 1999: 496.
36. Egan, 1999: 498.
37. Cf. Lipset and Rokkan, 1966.
38. Olson, 1965, argued that it is rational for self-interested individuals to 'free-ride' rather than join organisations to pursue collective goods. Mobilisation is explained through the provision by the organisation of selective material incentives. In terms of electoral competition, free riders would let others bear the costs associated with voting, given that they would continue to receive the same benefits irrespective of their participation.
39. Downs, 1957: 261.
40. Downs, 1957: 267, 269.
41. Fiorina, 1989.
42. Himmelweit et al, 1985: vi.
43. Himmelweit et al, 1985: 2.
44. Himmelweit et al, 1985: 12.
45. Himmelweit et al, 1985: 205, original emphasis.
46. Harrop, 1990: 279.
47. Shama, 1976: 771.
48. Lees-Marshment, 2001a, 2001b.
49. Levitt, 1960.
50. Kotler and Andreasen, 1991; Lovelock and Weinberg, 1988.
51. Woolgar, 2004.
52. Dowding, 1991: 30.
53. Downs, 1991.
54. Edwards, 2000: 58.
55. Kotler and Andreasen, 1996: 38.
56. Lovelock and Weinberg, 1988: 9.
57. Kotler and Andreasen, 1991; Lovelock and Weinberg, 1988.
58. Dunleavy and Ward, 1991: 112–44.
59. Dunleavy and Ward, 1981: 351–80.
60. Downs, 1991: 145.
61. Downs, 1991: 165.
62. Hay, 2002: 9.
63. Ward, 1995: 84.
64. Dowding, 1991: 18, original italics.
65. Dowding, 1991: 24.
66. Hall and Taylor, 1996.
67. Cf. Lukes, 1974.
68. Hay, 2002: 9.
69. Downs, 1957: 4.
70. Elster, 1986: 1.
71. Parsons, 2005: 6.