

## CONCEPTUALIZING POLITICAL MARKETING: A REVIEW

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**Abstract:** *The bond between political parties, voters and society at large that may be established by applying the principles of marketing is a very significant area of research. Over the time the implied link between the politics and marketing has become clearer. But Apart from public opinion polls, organizing rallies, advertisement in print and broadcast media marketing in politics is largely a hidden process and activity. Although it is very clear that all political parties and governments do it, there have been very few research studies on the use of marketing tools and techniques in politics especially in the developing countries. This review article conceptualizes the political marketing and highlights the status of political marketing research in advanced western countries and also reflects the inadequacy of research in the area in developing country like India.*

**Keywords:** *Political marketing, Politics, Voters, Political parties, Market planning and communication.*

### INTRODUCTION

The use of marketing tools in politics has been not given much attention in both the marketing and politics literature (Mauser, 1983; O'Shaughnessy, 2003). In reality use of marketing techniques for political activities has become more frequent and common in developed western countries i.e USA, Canada and Europe during last 30 Years (Lees Marshment, 2001) and now other countries of the world are not an exception to this. In India majority of the political parties are now using different tools and techniques of marketing to attract the voters. The recent Lok Sabha elections in 2014 have witnessed significant use of marketing tools in political campaigns. Political parties used integrated marketing communication tools i.e. use of social networking sites, advertisements in all forms of media, promotion through merchandise, public relations, use of latest technology to deliver 3D speeches etc., to reach and attract all sorts of voters.

The existence of political marketing had co-existed with the theories of marketing primarily developed for commercial purposes. Political marketing to large extent is the application of marketing theories by political parties, local

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councils and other groups in the society to achieve their objectives. It also includes conducting marketing research to identify the problems and needs of the citizens, change the policies to solve those problems and meet the demands and communicate their offerings more effectively.

### **Political Marketing and Consumer Marketing**

Kotler and Keller (2009) define marketing as an “organizational function and a set of process for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in a way that benefit the organization and its stakeholders”.

Marketing discipline is influenced by many other disciplines and to reciprocate helps in the development of other bodies of knowledge within the management area. In the context of nonprofit marketing, social marketing and political marketing application of the theories of consumer marketing is a recent phenomenon (Henneberg, 2004).

Less Marshment and Robert (2005) explained that political marketing is important area in academic study and in politics all over the world. Voters are now treated as consumers by the political parties, political systems are now referred as markets, and policies are now considered as a product to satisfy the consumers. There is growing pressure from different groups within the society on achievable promises and need to perform in government. All these things are really important for success in politics market which is very dynamic and unpredictable. The current different insights into the voter attitude and behavior have been made by the social researchers in such areas such as political geography, occupational sociology and economics (Dunleavy, 1990).

The oxford English dictionary defines politics as “The science dealing with the form, organization, and the administration of the state or part of one” (Rees and Gardner, 2005).

Different authors have given different definitions of political marketing which are summarized in the table below:

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Butler and Collins (1994)	The basic purpose of Political marketing is to influence voters during the elections. It is differentiated from the traditional marketing in the sense that in political marketing hopes, dreams and ideology are sold whereas in traditional marketing the sale is of products and services. But political marketing apply same tools such as advertisement, public relations and publicity as used in traditional marketing.
Kavanagh (1995)	Political marketing is application of tools and techniques to get the understanding voter opinion and behavior before and during

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	the election campaign to develop the contents and to measure the effect of campaign.
O'Cass (1996)	Political marketing is building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationship between the voters and political party through planning, implementation and control of political and voter's programs.
Wring (1996)	Political marketing is using of marketing research to design and promote the offerings which satisfies the voters and helps in achieving the organizational objectives.
Newman (1999)	Political marketing is application of tools and techniques of marketing while designing political campaigns by the various political parties and individuals. The process includes planning, management and execution of campaigns by the candidates or political parties, governments or various other organizations that wants to influence citizen's opinion, promote their own philosophies, win political battles and pass legislations to meet the aspirations of voters or certain groups in the society.
Lees-Mmentarsh (2001)	Political marketing is adapting commercial marketing tools and techniques by political organizations for the achievement of their objectives.
American Marketing Association (2007)	Marketing designed to influence the behavior of target audiences to vote for a particular person, party or proposition.
Osuagwu (2008)	Political marketing can be defined as application of tools and techniques of traditional marketing in political issues by persons, groups, organizations or even nations.
Menon (2009)	The American marketing association embrace the concept of political marketing by incorporating the word "idea" in its redefinition of marketing in 1985; giving that: "Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfies individuals and organizational objectives."

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From the above definitions several common points can be chalked out. First of all majority of the authors agrees that political marketing is linked with political campaigns. It includes identifying the needs of voters which can be served with the help of political product. Secondly the main aim of political marketing is to influence people to behave/vote in a certain way. This means that elections must be without any fear and biasness so to make political marketing meaningful. Thirdly there is agreement between researchers that political marketing applies tools and techniques developed for commercial purposes into political arena. That is way majority of the political parties now talked about voters segmentation based on different criteria. Fourth political marketing is broader than the political advertisement. Political marketing includes many activities such as identification of needs of voters, segmentation of voters, planning and execution of different

marketing programs etc. Political advertisement could be one of the most expensive and important among all those activities but it is not the only one. In nutshell it can be concluded that political marketing is use of marketing tools and techniques by any political setting.

Further, from marketing point of view a politician or a political party is a service provider and voter/citizen must be viewed as a customer in political market place. A politician is different from the other service providers because he operates in a complex environment that includes both controllable and uncontrollable factors. Secondly he/she plays the role of both campaigner as well as the service provider and thirdly the type and level of communication used in politics are different from the one used in commercial organizations.

### **Dimensions of Political Marketing**

Different researchers described different dimensions of political marketing. Osuagwu (2008) describes political advertising, cyber democracy, propaganda in politics, direct marketing, women in politics, companies in politics, e-government, Marketing research and polling, strategic management of political parties and strategic corporate lobbying the main dimensions of political marketing. Vankov (2013) divided dimensions of political marketing in three parts namely Strategic dimensions which consists of rational of political marketing, target segments , targeting strategy and importance of political marketing for party, Exchange dimensions which includes interaction, value construct and temporal orientation and activity dimensions which includes political marketing activity, instruments and campaign orientation.

### **Research on Political Marketing in Western Countries**

The increasing use of political marketing is the outcome of amalgamation of politics and marketing knowledge. The main purpose of political marketing is to influence the voters and putting the political party in advantageous position than their rival political parties by applying specific tools and approaches.

Political marketing aims to increase the political party dominance in conflicting situations especially in elections. Political parties make an effort to increase their success chances in those situations by using political marketing.

The recent research studies about application of marketing concepts and techniques into political arena played a very important role in explaining a new field of study in public and social marketing. Also last decade has seen a phenomenal growth in research into application of marketing theories in politics (Smith and Hrist, 2001). So appraising political processes and voter's behavior from a marketing point of view offers new understanding into the way of working and achievements of political parties. Niffenegger (1989) applied P. McKarti's

marketing model, using process of environmental scanning and finally including product, price, promotion and position he highlights the marketing role and functions in elections with reference to USA Politics. Further Butler and Collins (1994) highlights the structural characteristics of political marketing in context to Europe which includes political product, Political organization, Political market and process characteristics and marketing strategies related to each characteristic. They concluded that political marketing is very helpful in understanding the behavior of voters and then marketing tools can be applied to drive the voter's opinion. Bains *et al.* (2002) develop marketing planning frame work for political parties in UK political system to improve brand image and effectively coordinate election campaign which includes four stages namely Information gathering and constituency identification, competition and voting group determination, party positioning and voter group targeting and post election analysis. Marland (2003), examined the use of five traditional political marketing tools (comparative advertisement, direct mail stealth campaign, pre campaigning, celebrity endorsements, oppo) and five contemporary marketing tactics (push polls, video imaging, robo calls, internet campaigns, paid phone banks) by the political parties in Canada. The study also examined the applicability of American style marketing tactics by conducting depth interviews with two dozen Canadian federal election campaign strategists and found that Canadian election decision makers are very selective in the American style marketing tactics they adopt. Thrassou (2008) found out important factors of small political parties marketing communication success and develops the marketing communication frame work for small political parties in developed countries based on increasing inter relation between political and commercial marketing, an environmental perspective that increases and develops relationship between party and voters, association of critical factors of success and perception management and the presence of many limitations of application of classical marketing theory to small political parties. Potincu (2008) conceptualized the various aspects regarding ethical and unethical issues that can be seen in the political marketing area which could have an effect on electoral behavior during the elections campaigns. The author highlights surveys having a negative influence i.e. being published during the electoral campaign only to change the voting intentions of the electorate and excessive use of persuasive method and techniques as unethical ways to manipulate the voters in Brasov, Romania. Dean and Croft (2009) argued that electorate behavior is complex and not simple. In politics there is no simple model as exchange process which can explain the electorate decision making process. After considering the different forms of rationality, critical reasoning, notion of irrationality and emotional decision making the researchers proposed a framework based on interplay between rationality, irrationality, reasoning and emotions to understand the electorate decision making in United Kingdom. Less (2009) discussed about how marketing tools can be used after winning the elections while governance. A framework using new theoretical view

points and comparative empirical research has been developed for market oriented government in Europe which includes five main areas of (a) delivery management and communication (b) continual market consultation (c) responsive product re-development and strategic thinking (d) Product refinement in response to competition (e) maintenance or re-establishment of a market oriented attitude among MP's and leadership (f) engagement in market oriented communication.

Rothschild (1978) in his study "political advertising: A neglected policy issue in marketing" present a model to hypothesize some effects of political advertising in USA. The study highlighted the role of television and increase in campaign cost in changing the marketing/political relationship from implicit to explicit. By taking into consideration the literature on involvement and political advertisement effects the study concluded that neither all voters nor all voting situations are same. Highly involved voters will not be affected by political advertisement whereas less involved voters will be more easily influenced by political advertisement. By looking at the effect of advertisement on voters study also raised several policy issues regarding control the nature and amount of political advertising. Holbrook (1996), opted for concrete approach called "minimal effects hypothesis", which says that campaign may or may not matter but the outcome of campaigns are predictable in advance by taking into consideration the status of the economy and the popularity and performance of incumbent president. Fournier, et.al. (2004), argues that all the voters do not make up their mind in advance regarding voting. There are voters who decide whom to vote during the campaign, after the campaign or even on the election day. American national elections "2006" data also revealed that approximately 14.8% of the voters make up their mind during the conventions, 27.6% after the conventions and 2.2% on the election date. So there is great room to influence voters through political campaigns. To elaborate further Baron (2008) in his study conducted in USA concludes that there are situations where campaigns do not have any effect and on the other hand there are certain situations where campaign matters. Campaigns does not have much impact on preference shifting whereas when there is question of turning unlikely and non voters into voters campaign definitely has the influence.

From the above it is very clear that research on political marketing has got considerable attention of scholars in European countries, UK and USA which includes study of marketing strategies of political parties, proposing marketing planning framework for political parties, proposing frameworks to understand the decision making behavior of voters, using marketing tools after winning the elections and study of effects of campaigns and advertisements on the voters etc.

### **Political Marketing Research Status in India**

The survival and growth of democracy in any country depends on different opinions, alternative policy choices and constructive criticism. In fact discussions

and debate are two pillars of democracy. Violence is fatal for democracy and political competition. Contrarily fair political practices symbolize the democratic process. Political Practices in any country have long term ramification on the growth and stability of any country. Political practices usually fabricate the nature of national politics. Being the largest democracy in world and with 1737 political parties (eic.nic.in) it is quite imperative and interested to know the extent and nature of research on application of political marketing. But as far as research related with application of political marketing in Indian context is concerned the researcher could find very less work. The article by Thakur (2014) highlighted the use of different medias by Prime Minister Candidate Mr. Narendra Modi during Lok Sabha elections in 2014 with special reference to social media.

Although In India the total numbers of political parties are quite large i.e. 1737 (eic.nic.in) as compared to very few political parties in advanced western countries still there is theoretical deprivation in the area of political marketing. Lock and Harris (1996) regret that the work in political marketing as compared to development in political activity and is very less. In addition the application of marketing principles, theories and strategies has not been sufficiently explored across different political settings and cultures. Because of dearth of research work in political marketing it is very difficult to draw general outcome of political marketing. So to understand the political behavior i.e strategies and practices of political bodies it is vital for the interested researchers should use theoretical marketing frameworks developed within related contexts and countries and test the relevance of these frameworks in particular political setting and environment. Further both political systems and marketing have considerable tremor on behavior and directions of the society. So any research on linkage between political systems and marketing is very much desirable especially in developing countries such as India which has grasp democratic tendencies. The central to democracy is political parties and modern democracy is the creation of political parties and it is impossible to think democracy without political parties. Therefore research on political marketing should include analysis of policies, programs and strategies of political parties. In the developing countries like India empirical research on political practices and processes is very limited. The disciple of political marketing is at very young stage and the applicability of marketing in political activities is debatable.

Research work into application of political marketing tools in developed countries such as USA, UK and Europe concludes that scope of political marketing is very broad and it also throws light of analytical tools which political party's uses to achieve effectiveness and efficiency (Less Marshment, 2001). But a major drawback in literature related with political marketing is that it is mainly concentrated on the issues drawn from the political systems of Europe, UK and USA which may not be true in other democracies (Butler and Collins, 1996). By

conducting research in political marketing area in developing countries like India a clear understanding of competitive positions, marketing strategies of political entities and its effects on voters can be worked out.

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