

# 1

## Introduction

Research is about creating knowledge. The process of knowledge creation is central to all academic fields and can be separated into two main activities: developing theories and concepts, and fact-finding (Wacker, 1998). This book discusses the first two areas of knowledge creation, namely theory and concepts. The words 'theory' and 'concepts' are often the source of concern to students, but they need not be so. The purpose of this book is to take essential elements of the academic study of political marketing and make them more accessible. In this introductory chapter, we first discuss the reasons why theory and concepts are necessary for our understanding of a research field – in our case political marketing – and then we will provide a brief overview of each of the following twelve chapters of this book.

What are theories and concepts? According to Runkel and Runkel (1984), a theory can mean many things, from a guess to a law-like system of causal relationships or explanations, whilst Bacharach (1989) states that 'A theory is a statement of relations among concepts within a set of boundary assumptions and constraints. It is no more than a linguistic device used to organize a complex empirical world' (p. 496). In this latter case, theories create meaning by organising and explaining our knowledge about the various concepts in an academic field as well as communicating what the knowledge actually means (that is, both sense-making and sense-giving). Theories and concepts are important for all research fields because they provide a framework or structure for analysis, they are efficient in that they reduce problem-solving errors and allow us to increase the amount of knowledge we have in the field, and under certain circumstances they can also provide pragmatic explanations for empirical phenomena (Wacker, 1998).

However, being pragmatic is not necessarily the same as being 'true' (Hunt, 2003). As such, the appropriateness, breadth and depth of existing theories and concepts are central to any research area, although this does not imply precision or clarity. In fact, many theories and concepts in the social sciences can be shown to be intrinsically 'messy' (Law, 2004) because of the fluid, elusive and ambiguous nature of what is being explained. However, it is important to somehow examine the quality of existing theory in order to understand the contribution of any research domain and to identify issues of current research practice.

## 2 Introduction

Getting to grips with theory and concept development on a methodological level is central to any field of research, and many different general epistemological sources as well as discipline-specific discussions exist that define theories and concepts and assess their quality. Within the general marketing literature, discussions about theory-building and the relationships between marketing theory and practice are often neglected. This may explain why marketing as a research area is currently so fragmented and why so few articles in political marketing claim to tackle issues of theories of, and in, political marketing, with only limited epistemological discussions (Henneberg, 2008). This book attempts to address this fragmentation by discussing core theory and concepts in political marketing. Our assessment of theory and concept development in the field of political marketing is necessarily based on a perspective mainly derived from marketing theory and management studies (because of the background of the authors). Consequently, we will draw primarily on the general marketing and management literature, with specific sources from the wider social sciences and philosophy. A complementary political science perspective on theory and concepts in political marketing is encouraged.

### Theory and concepts in political marketing

---

#### *Part 1: Theoretical Issues in Political Marketing*

---

Chapter 2, 'Defining Political Marketing', will provide a brief introduction to some of the main themes in the book, such as different interpretations of political marketing, the underlying political marketing exchange and political relationship marketing, which are covered in greater depth in Chapters 3, 4 and 8 respectively. Following this, the chapter will discuss the normative and strategic approaches to understanding stakeholders and their relationships with political actors. Finally, a definition is presented that is based on the political marketing literature rather than an adaptation of an existing definition of commercial marketing for the political context.

Chapter 3, 'Theories and Concepts in Political Marketing', will introduce you to some of the main themes in modern political marketing and set the scene for the remainder of the book. This chapter is designed to demonstrate the breadth and depth of political marketing as a research area. The first part of the chapter discusses 'wide' and 'narrow' interpretations of the nature and scope of political marketing (management). The second part of the chapter introduces seven themes that characterise theoretical and conceptual issues in political marketing and which will be covered in the book: 1) that political marketing is grounded in exchanges and interactions; 2) that there are several competing theoretical approaches to understanding political marketing; 3) that existing marketing and political science theory and concepts need

to be adapted to have explanatory power for political marketing; 4) that pragmatic and abstract views of political marketing need to be integrated; 5) that political marketing theories need to cover what, how and especially why (and justify these choices); 6) that theories contextualise as well as bridge levels; and 7) that the theoretical and empirical planes need to be juxtaposed.

Chapter 4, 'The Triadic Interaction Model of Political Exchange', will outline the foundations of the political exchange. The chapter discusses how the political exchange is fundamentally different to the commercial exchange, as the political exchange consists of three interactions in separate markets rather than a dyadic exchange between two consenting actors. These three interactions take place in the electoral market (between voters and candidates or parties), the parliamentary market (between elected representatives) and the governmental market (between governments and citizens). The triadic nature of the political exchange means that all three interactions have to be successful in order for an exchange to be completed; for example, it is possible for a voter to vote for a candidate who cannot deliver on the election pledge due to having no influence in the parliament or due to environmental factors.

Chapter 5, 'Critical Perspectives on Political Marketing', will introduce you to the distinction between political marketing management (the use of tools and concepts by political actors) and political marketing (a theoretical and conceptual research 'lens'). In addition to this, Chapter 5 identifies eleven criticisms of political marketing and political marketing management that have been levelled at both by marketing and political science scholars. Some of the criticisms that concern political marketing theory and concepts are dealt with in this book, including the nature of the political exchange, the relevancy of political marketing as a research lens to understand phenomena in the political sphere, and the non-sophistication of research.

Chapter 6, 'Political Marketing and Theories of Democracy', discusses the implications of a political marketing perspective for democracy. The chapter first describes the nature of three competing approaches to political marketing, the sales-based school (focusing on selling politicians to voters at discrete events), the instrumental/managerial school (focusing on the use of strategies, tools and tactics developed from commercial marketing over the electoral cycle) and the relationship-based school (focusing on identifying and managing relationships with stakeholders in order to achieve organisational goals). After this, the chapter discusses two alternative approaches to democracy, competitive elitism and deliberative democracy. The chapter then outlines the relationship between the three schools of political marketing and the two approaches to democracy and identifies that the relationship-based school of political marketing has the largest conceptual overlap. Therefore, the chapter concludes that it is necessary for political marketing research to move away from the dominant instrumental/managerial paradigm towards a relationship-based approach.

## 4 Introduction

Chapter 7, 'The Ethics of Political Marketing', examines the implications of six alternative ethical approaches to the field of political marketing, namely Kantian, consequentialism, contractualism, communitarian, objective realism and cultural relativism. Ethical questions cannot be answered definitively; their use in the context of political marketing is to define the nature of the moral issues involved and how to prioritise between these issues. The chapter argues that political marketing and political marketing management are not by definition 'bad', despite certain examples of negative advertisements pushing the boundaries of what some would consider ethically defensible. Indeed, utilitarians, objective relativists, cultural relativists and communitarians would support political marketing as it sharpens debate, is legitimated by competitive context, and the nature of the postmodern condition enforces it as it is a response to, rather than a cause of, the social and economic phenomena of these times. Freedom of speech, including economic speech, would be an argument of particular interest to communitarians. However, there are contractualist arguments: where the generation of imagery can be a substitute for political action and for the direct civic participation of citizens, the contract-violation criticisms cannot be dismissed as merely trivial. One thing is certain, however: there is no final resting place for the ethical debates surrounding the uses – and abuses – of political marketing.

### ***Part 2: Conceptual Issues in Political Marketing***

---

Chapter 8, 'Political Relationship Marketing', discusses how the commercial concept of relationship marketing can be developed to fit the political context. The chapter argues that despite the importance of relationships for the development and legitimacy of political actors, political marketing research is still characterised by a focus on the outdated instrumental/managerial approach which emphasises a short-term, transactional approach to understanding the role of political marketing (management) in the modern political reality. The aim of the chapter is therefore to provide arguments for the development of a rigorous conceptual framework of political relationship marketing by discussing existing, as well as potential, applications of relationship marketing within the political sphere. To achieve this, the discussion distinguishes between two perspectives on political relationship marketing: a micro-perspective which is concerned with specific entity and exchange-oriented aspects of long-term relationships in the political sphere, and a macro-perspective which is concerned with the interplay with the wider political structures and the overall political system.

Chapter 9, 'Strategic Political Postures', develops two concepts from the commercial strategy literature to the political context. These developed concepts – strategic political postures – are labelled 'leading' and 'following', and concern the extent to which a political actor bases their political

offering according to their own ideology or according to the results of public opinion poll data. The developed concepts are then overlaid to produce a two-by-two grid, describing four typologies, labelled *The Convinced Ideologist*, *The Tactical Populist*, *The Political Lightweight* and *The Relationship Builder*. The convinced ideologist focuses primarily on the needs and wants of party members, basing the political offering on ideological conviction. The tactical populist adopts the opposite approach by basing the political offering on the needs and wants of external stakeholders such as voters and the media. The political lightweight has a weak focus on ideology and does not take public opinion into account; this is arguably not a viable long-term strategy. Finally, the relationship builder draws upon the arguments made in the commercial literature that understands leading and following to be activities that are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Chapter 10, 'Political Market Orientation', develops the commercial concept of market orientation to suit the political context. The conceptual model of political market orientation that is developed in the chapter consists of two sets of constructs, representing the behaviour of party members and the attitudes of party members to stakeholder groups in society. The four behavioural constructs focus on the way in which information is generated, passed through the political organisation, used in the development of the political offering and finally implemented. Different stakeholder groups are derived from the commercial marketing literature (voters, competing parties and party members themselves), with the addition of several groups that have not been included in previous commercial conceptualisations (the media, citizens, and lobby and interest groups) but which are argued to be central in the political context.

Chapter 11, 'Political Marketing Strategy and Party Organisational Structure', links the strategic political postures conceptual framework and the political market orientation conceptual framework to provide an integrated concept of political marketing. Each of the four strategic political postures has a specific set of important stakeholders, and a set of dynamic relationships between the stakeholders and the elements of the party structure. The tactical populist concentrates its energy on voters and the media, and the structure of its internal relationships focuses on implementing a strategy that is decided on by the party top. The opposite of this is the convinced ideologist, which concentrates on party members and stakeholder groups with a special affinity with the party; there is a focus on the inclusion of party members of all levels, but this is at the expense of listening to stakeholders outside of the party. The relationship builder attempts to reconcile these two more extreme postures by balancing the needs and wants of a wide selection of stakeholder groups. Finally, we apply the integrated concept of political marketing strategy to the network party type from the organisational theory literature on political parties in order to demonstrate how concepts derived from commercial marketing theory can complement – rather than replace – existing models from the political science literature.

## 6 Introduction

Chapter 12, 'Symbolism in Political Marketing', describes the way in which symbols are used to persuade especially voters of a particular point of view in a political discussion. Symbolic acts have been at the heart of politics almost since recorded history began. What is often regarded as great political leadership is in fact the supreme sensitivity to symbols and a mastery of their manipulation. Symbolic government is a style of government where the creation of symbolic images, symbolic actions and celebratory rhetoric have become a principal concern. This is equally valid for political actors in opposition, but is more extreme in incumbents and so the chapter focuses mainly on symbolic *government*. Appearances do not just matter to the symbolic government; they are central to the way in which voters are communicated with. The symbolic government is a relatively new kind of government; this is not to say that previous governments did not frequently use symbolic images and actions, but what was once just one of several tools of government has now graduated into becoming its central organising principle, absorbing therefore much of the energy of government.

Chapter 13, 'Conclusion', draws upon the theories and concepts discussed in the preceding chapters in the book and proposes two research agendas. Taking the starting point of the 'wide' interpretation of the nature and scope of political marketing, the first research agenda discusses how topics such as relationship-building, political market orientation profiles and an understanding of the political exchange as three interlocking interactions can provide a theoretical and conceptual 'lens' through which to perceive phenomena in the political marketplace. The second research agenda concentrates on linking political marketing to issues in political marketing management, such as symbolism, values and the way in which election campaigns are increasingly 'outsourced' to lobby or single-issue groups.

## References

---

- Bacharach, S.B. (1989) 'Organizational theories: some criteria for evaluation', *Academy of Management Review*, 14: 496–515.
- Henneberg, S.C. (2008) 'An epistemological perspective on research in political marketing', *Journal of Political Marketing*, 7 (2): 151–82.
- Hunt, S.D. (2003) *Controversy in Marketing Theory*. New York: Sharpe.
- Law, J. (2004) *After Method*. London: Routledge.
- Runkel, P.J. and Runkel, M. (1984) *A Guide to Usage for Writers and Students in the Social Sciences*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman.
- Wacker, J.G. (1998) 'A definition of theory: research guidelines for different theory-building research methods in operations management', *Journal of Operations Management*, 16: 361–85.