Political Marketing Theory:
Hendiadyoin or Oxymoron

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Abstract: Research on political marketing has now established itself as a spirited sub-discipline of mainstream marketing, producing considerable numbers of high quality learned articles and books each year. However, certain stagnation in knowledge development has been identified. Consequently, this paper links this inadequacy to the dominating tendency of focusing research on campaign applications of solely marketing instruments, emphasising a reactive and managerial orientation. In discussing the core of political marketing theory, two different stances are identified: first, a narrow one, focussing on understanding marketing activities in politics and, second, a wider one, concerned with a more holistic attempt of achieving breadth of knowledge of politics. An idiosyncratic discussion of the ontology and epistemological implications of this wider stance identifies four concepts as pivotal: the exchange character of political marketing; a 'qualified' market environment; the social embeddedness of the political system in other generic systems; and the structural connectedness of political marketing and politics, implying ethical considerations. While current research limitations in political marketing can be explained by an (implicit) focus on the narrow interpretation of political marketing theory, the wider stance frames a new research agenda for political marketing that provides new directions and less restricted conceptual horizons. The implications of this new research agenda are discussed and the consequences and limitations are outlined

Key words: Political marketing theory; political marketing research; epistemology and ontology; research agenda

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INTRODUCTION

Marketing theory has been influenced by many different disciplines (Arndt, 1983) but it has also contributed, in a reciprocal relationship, to the development of other academic areas within management studies (Day, 1992; Hunt and Lambe, 2000) and, arguably, beyond. In particular the aspect of 'broadening' the core *explananda* of marketing (Kotler and Levy, 1969; Luck, 1969; Kotler, 1972; Enis, 1973; Hunt, 1976; Arndt, 1978; Arndt, 1982; Hunt and Burnett, 1982; Hunt, 1983; Levy, 2002) has enhanced the scope for cross-fertilisation between disciplines. In the area of social and non-profit marketing (Andreason, 1994; Kotler and Andreason, 1995) the application of marketing theory to the political sphere constitutes a relatively new phenomenon (O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Kotler and Kotler, 1999). While there exists a considerable stock of knowledge concerning political marketing, especially in the areas of campaign management, political marketing strategies and comparative political marketing (Newman, 1994a; Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1995; Holbrook, 1996; Butler and Collins, 1999; Baines and Egan, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Lees-Marshment, 2001), the essence of political marketing theory remains somewhat opaque; crucial elements are still ill-defined in marketing terms, e.g. the 'political market', or the 'political product', and the underlying exchange process (Scammell, 1999; Newman, 2002; O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2002a). This is sometimes explained by the notion that "*traditional marketing frameworks do not fit neatly into a political marketing configuration*" (Dean and Croft, 2001, p. 1197). Furthermore, no

clear understanding of the ontological and epistemological implications of a 'marketing perspective on politics' has been developed due to the research focus on descriptive studies that attempt to explain what political actors *actually do* (Marland, 2003). In this paper, I argue that this 'managerial' focus constitutes only one element of political marketing theory. What has been neglected is an epistemological view of political marketing as a 'research lens', a meta-theoretical vehicle for making-sense of the political sphere. The differences (and dialectic) of these two perspectives of political marketing theory will be introduced and the application of political marketing theory as an epistemological tool will be outlined. As such, this conceptual paper will contribute to the main focus of this AMA 2004 Summer Educators' Conference by 'enhancing knowledge development in marketing' through an assessment of, and the provision of a new research perspective for, political marketing theory.

In order to develop this argument, the appropriate point of departure is provided by a concise overview of the 'state-of-affairs' in political marketing, beginning with applied marketing applications in politics, followed by a discussion of existing research on political marketing. This will be followed by the main section of this paper, tackling the two different facets of political marketing theory: initially with a description and understanding of managerial marketing activities, and next an epistemological stance to gain understanding of political phenomena in general. Finally, the implications of both aspects will be discussed.

THE 'STATE-OF-AFFAIRS' IN POLITICAL MARKETING

Political Marketing Management

It has often been argued that the application of 'marketing' tools and instruments in politics is nothing new (Perloff, 1999; Baines and Egan, 2001). This may or may not be the case, but what certainly has changed in the last 25 years is not (just) the magnitude of political marketing management but the belief that political actors (and these include not only political parties and politicians but also governments, single-issue groups, lobbying organisations, etc.) (Harris *et al*., 1999; Nimmo, 1999; Harris, 2001a) not only act out but also 'think' in marketing terms; they believe that they *do* marketing management, and they try to integrate their use of marketing instruments in a coherent marketing strategy (Newman, 1994a; Dermody and Scullion, 2001). This is notwithstanding the idea that much of their 'marketing knowledge' might be "*political folk wisdom*" (Scammell, 1999, p. 738). The changes in the 'mind-sets' of political actors have been tracked in several studies, (Jamieson, 1992; Scammell, 1994; Scammell, 1995; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Wring, 2001; Wring, 2002b) and have been considered a "*revolution*" (Lees-Marshment, 2001, p. 229) or even a "*new age in politics*" (Newman, 1999b, p. 125). In addition, political marketing applications have moved from solely a communication tool to an integrated way of managing politics, be it policy development, permanent campaigning (Nimmo, 1999), or even governing (to the extent that government has become 'symbolic' in certain circumstances) (O'Shaughnessy, 2003). Six main developments of applied applications of political marketing can be generalised for most democratic political systems in the last two decades: an increased sophistication of *communication and 'spin'* (Kavanagh, 1995; Kaid, 1999; Sherman, 1999; Harris, 2001b; Lees-Marshment,

2001; Palmer, 2002); strategies for *product and image management* (Scammell, 1995; Baines, 1999; Kotler and Kotler, 1999; Newman, 1999b; Newman, 2001; Smith, 2001; Baines *et al.*, 2002; White and de Chernatony, 2002); *news-management*, i.e. the use of 'free' media (Franklin, 1994; Schnur, 1999; Franklin and Richardson, 2002); more coherent and planned *political marketing strategy development* (Newman, 1994a; Butler and Collins, 1999; Kotler and Kotler, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Henneberg, 2002; Wring, 2002a); intensified and integrated use of *political market research* (Huber and Herrmann, 1999; Mitchell and Daves, 1999; Smith and Hirst, 2001; Sparrow and Turner, 2001; Sherman and Schiffman, 2002); and emphasis on *political marketing organisation and professionalisation* (Panebianco, 1988; Lees-Marshment, 2001).

However, most political actors are far from having an integrated and sophisticated understanding of marketing applications for their political exchange situations. Political marketing management in politics has caused some 'leading' parties and candidates to adopt a simplistic and populistic 'follower'-mentality, contributing to the disenchantment of the electorate and a resulting cynicism regarding politics in general (Henneberg, 2005).

Research on Political Marketing

Serious, intensive, coordinated research activities on marketing applications in politics constitute a fairly recent addition to the area of social and non-profit marketing. The field of political marketing started to form fifteen to twenty years ago with several seminal contributions (Mauser, 1983; Newman and Sheth, 1985; Farrell and Wortmann, 1987; Reid, 1988; Harrop, 1990; O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Smith and Saunders, 1990) that introduced topical foci and in-depth analyses of marketing

instruments; but none proffered a 'general' theory. However, research on political marketing quickly gained momentum, driven mainly by the dynamic development of marketing applications by political parties and candidates. Although technological drivers, especially in the media arena, are often quoted as being the main reason for this accelerated development (Newman, 1994a; Newman, 1994b), an amalgamation of crucial changes in the political sphere fostered this development: a weakening of political 'cleavage-systems' (Palmer, 2002) and consequently lower levels of party identification (Ware, 1996; Henneberg and Eghbalian, 2002) and higher electoral volatility (Perloff, 1999), as well as more competitive pressure in the political market through non-electoral competition (Lees-Marshment, 2001), less differentiation between political offers, and a general professionalisation of political management activities (Panebianco, 1988). To provide a new understanding of these phenomena and the reactions of political actors, research on political marketing became an established sub-discipline of marketing, especially in France, the UK, Germany, Australia, as well as the USA (Perloff, 1999). The need to describe and understand these phenomena instigated numerous publications in standard marketing and politics journals (e.g. special issues on political marketing in the European Journal of Marketing, the Journal of Marketing Management, or the Journal of Public Affairs) as well as books and monographs (Newman, 1994a; Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1995; Newman, 1999b; Lees-Marshment, 2001; O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2002b) and also the establishment of dedicated *fora* for discourse on political marketing. For examples, since 1995 there has been an International Conference on Political Marketing held annually, also a dedicated Journal of Political Marketing was founded (Newman, 2002) and a Handbook of Political Marketing published (Newman, 1999a). Whilst the institutional requirements for the development of political marketing

theory are in place, an assessment of current research on political marketing shows shortcomings. Without being able to go into considerable detail (such discussions of research on political marketing can be found in Scammell, 1999; Henneberg, 2002; Henneberg, 2004), the following presents a concise critique of the existing body of knowledge.

A distinct bias in the research foci of marketing instrument usage in campaign situations obscures the more general and theoretical discussions. Whilst communication, market research tools and other political marketing instruments have been well analysed and compared, with regard to the contingencies of their usage, this has been undertaken on a descriptive level. Prescriptive studies are rare. Furthermore, this writer has suggested (Henneberg, 2004) that more fundamental issues such as ethical dimensions of political marketing, underlying exchange mechanisms and the interaction of marketing activities with the political system have remained under-researched. As such, political marketing 'theories' have not been developed in any depth. Many crucial definitorial discussions have remained unresolved, not resulting from competing positions and interpretations but because of negligence and inactivity in these areas. Furthermore, a tendency towards ossification exists as many political marketing studies use an over-simplistic 'managerial' interpretation of marketing (Sheth *et al.*, 1988; van Waterschoot and van den Bulte, 1992; Webster, 1992; O'Malley and Patterson, 1998), classified by Carman (1980) as part of the persuasion/attitude change paradigm, and oriented towards the 4Ps and the marketing mix. This causes a decoupling of research in political marketing from fresh developments of marketing theory, be it on conceptual or epistemological levels (Henneberg, 2004). For examples, relational marketing concepts which have gained

importance in marketing theory in the last decades, do not find their equivalent in political marketing (Dean and Croft, 2001; Scammell, 1999; Henneberg, 2002; Bannon, 2003) or non-profit marketing, for that matter (Arnett *et al*., 2003). Several arguments have been put forward that theoretical and applied research on political marketing needs to be more innovative; and a next phase of activities is advocated to reinvigorate the discipline.

Following this initial overview of research on political marketing, I now address political marketing theory from a conceptual perspective, i.e. analysing what the core of such a theory needs to provide. As the following discussion shows, this core encompasses two different aspects in a dialectic embrace. While one aspect has dominated the literature so far (and might therefore be used to explain the current situation of research in political marketing), it is important to understand the other argument in order to utilise political marketing theory to its full potential.

POLITICAL MARKETING THEORY

Essentially, the different aspects of political marketing theory can be exemplified by two questions: "How to *do marketing* in politics" and "How to *know* in politics". Whilst to first question is focussed on managerial aspects of marketing (without implying a purely normative focus), the second is concerned with an epistemological stance *per se* and is therefore not limited to marketing applications. These two questions (and the underlying research activities associated with them) are not independent of each other, rather they are bound in a dialectic relationship: although one can describe political marketing practice without necessarily employing a

marketing epistemology (as well as one can look at political phenomena through a marketing lens without focusing on marketing aspects), the two are intertwined. Managerial concerns of political marketing management usually imply (consciously or unconsciously) an application of a marketing-oriented epistemology, while theoretical sense making uses the actual *explanandum* (in this case political marketing practice and our understanding of it) as a 'check-and-balance' system regarding its appropriateness of explanatory efforts. These two elements together, in the dialectical integration as synthesis, provide the core for a holistic theory of political marketing (Henneberg, 2002).

Political Marketing Theory as Understanding Marketing Activities: An Oxymoron?

The initial aspect of a political marketing theory takes its impetus from existing practice in the political sphere: political marketing management happens. It manifests itself in such diverse activities as focussing a campaign on the salient political issues of swing voters, through the application of sophisticated segmentation techniques (Smith and Hirst, 2001), a consequent voter-('customer')orientation (Newman, 1994a; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Lees-Marshment, 2003), the application of celebrity endorsement strategies as part of an integrated marketing communication (Chen and Henneberg, 2004), or the institution of powerful Directors of Communication (Wring, 2002b). Furthermore, political actors as well as political communicators (and to some extent also the electorate) believe that marketing has become an essential part of political management in many situations. This belief has now entered the 'mainstream' through endless discussions and analysis of the ill-defined concept of 'spin' in the media (Harris, 2001b).

Because of these (perceived or real) occurrences of marketing practice in politics, the use of marketing theory as a means of explaining these phenomena seems obvious. Whilst political science (or other related disciplines) have little to say about topics such as segmentation, brand management, or strategic capability management (at least these topics are only tangential to their theory constructs), they fit easily into an explanatory scheme that is based explicitly on management and marketing theory. As such, political marketing theory is a necessary (if not sufficient) way of getting to grips with some modern developments of (Western) democratic life. It allows us to describe certain political phenomena in a way that political science would not be able to. Furthermore, as part of the established tradition of marketing theory (Hunt, 1983; Hunt, 1991), political marketing theory can integrate an (initial) descriptive understanding of political marketing management with a prescriptive theory, i.e. one that can help political actors to apply political marketing management techniques effectively and efficiently. This has been called a 'Theory of Political Marketing Management' (Henneberg, 2002).

However, what does such a view of 'political marketing theory as understanding marketing activities' comprise? I argue that understanding political marketing theory in such a way leads to an *oxymoron*. While it is self-evident that marketing practice in the political sphere can be *described* by such a 'theory', it does little more than describe. In fact, it is a mere reaction to changes *in vivo* (mirrored in its development and exegesis). The *explanans* follows breathlessly the (changing) *explanandum* without catching up or developing the ability to reflect on the changes happening or the wider implications. It cannot break out of its self-induced (narrow) focus on marketing activities, relegating everything else to imponderables. Hence, in such an

interpretation the wider political environment that frames the application of marketing management in politics remains somewhat 'alien', ill defined in its interactions and interrelations with marketing.

Political Marketing Theory as Knowing Politics: A Hendiadyoin?

This perspective takes its starting point not from the necessity to understand political marketing management as seen in practice, but is based on a wider meta-theoretical foundation. This stance attempts to understand the whole of politics through a marketing-oriented epistemology. Such a preposterous claim (at first glance) needs justification that can best be provided by looking at some of the embedded elements.

Firstly, political marketing theory in this wide interpretation is not solely about the marketing aspect of it, but tries to integrate it with the political environment in which it is deployed. Therefore, a holistic understanding of all political activities, players, structures, etc. will be sufficient to understand the specific ramifications of, and for, political marketing management. Such a development seems necessary in light of the frequent claims that political marketing theory has not as yet developed any meaningful ethical frameworks, or analyses regarding the implications for structural variables of politics such as the party system, voting mechanisms, the media landscape, power distributions in society, etc. These shortcomings, if addressed, need a greater holistic approach to political marketing.

Secondly, a wide interpretation of political marketing theory is concerned with epistemology i.e. the "*enquiry into our knowledge of being*" (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, p. 6). This is not to say that marketing *is* an epistemology but rather that certain ontological and epistemological positions are connected with a marketing perspective,

i.e. the specific and fundamental issues that establish the identity of the field of marketing (Day and Montgomery, 1999). The constituting elements or premises of marketing theory provide such a position as outlined below (although not all of these principles are uncontested in the marketing literature). These positions, in so far as they differ from those of political science, provide a new and innovative way of making sense of the political sphere. As with all ontological/epistemological stances, limitations exist in as much as they obscure certain issues and highlight others; and therefore need to be supplemented by alternative (i.e. not isomorphic) perspectives, which brings us to the next point.

Thirdly, political marketing theory as a way of knowing politics has to be seen as part of a methodological pluralism. The implication is not that a marketing-related epistemology would explain better the political sphere than a political science, sociological, or psychological one. Any deontological aspect of such a theory should be discarded. Evaluative judgements need to be employed with regard to the 'appropriateness' of certain positions in the face of a *specific* phenomenon (to give an examples: an understanding of the impact of negative advertising on voter decision making processes in order to provide guidelines for self-regulating bodies of political advertising). Hence, this is concerned with the respective explanatory power of different epistemological stances in a concrete situation and for a given purpose. As an abstract concept, no preferences can be deduced beyond that. Therefore, a political marketing theory of politics would not supersede but complement other (e.g. political science) theories. It would be more appropriate in explaining certain elements of political life while others would not be covered in the same depth, rigour or quality. Additionally, certain explanations might contradict those of political science directly,

without it being clear which claim is of higher 'appropriateness'; thus stimulating further discussions. As such, a political marketing theory would consist of theories of middle-range and would have no ambition to provide any 'grand' or 'general theories' (Hunt, 1983).

Understood in this epistemologically-oriented way, a 'theory of political marketing' cannot be anything but a 'sense-making framework', i.e. a way of knowing (in this case knowing politics). Consequently, this perspective can be characterised as a hendiadyoin: a characterisation by two conjoined and overlapping attributes or descriptions ('theory' and 'knowing').

While these theoretical considerations can only present political marketing theory as a possibility for enriching our understanding of politics, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". Therefore, the ontological and epistemological essence of a political marketing theory need to be described in order to gauge an understanding of how far these provide a specific and valuable lens for the gaining of knowledge in the political sphere (Cornelissen, 2002). In the following, I will distinguish four core notions of political marketing (see Table 1), informed by Day and Montgomery's (1999) fundamental issues for marketing. It is my contention that these core notions directly influence the way research in political marketing is done (i.e. regarding methodology, research design, research foci). However, whilst these core notions are derived from marketing theory, they are open to discussion and (to some extent) individual choice.

Ontology	Epistemology	Implications
• *Exchange*	Enquiry focus on dyads (or networks of relationships)	Marketing management as interconnections/perceptions within an exchange property
• *Qualified Market*	Enquiry focus on interactions and interrelations of actors	Cooperation/collaboration; mutually beneficial rela-tionships; time dynamics
• *Social Embeddedness*	Enquiry focus on systems	Complex systems, no simple/uni-dimensional associations; exogenous variables not always definable
• *Structural Connectedness*	Enquiry focus on interdependent management and politics spheres	'Neutrality' exclusion; ethical implications

Table 1: Overview of meta-theoretical assumptions of political marketing theory

The character of marketing as focussing on exchange (theory) can be seen as also providing an ontological foundation for political marketing (O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Newman, 1999b). The assumption is that 'reality' is made up of actors (or forces) in relation to each other. Everything achieves its characteristics and qualities within a web of (multiple) 'pairings' (Bagozzi, 1975). Marketing, in its simplest form, cannot be done by one actor alone; it is always an exchange between actors (within or

between entities). Thus, the corresponding epistemology would prescribe an enquiry that looks at dyads (or networks of relationships) as the main focus of analysis. While these dyads/networks are made up of actors, the exchange focus of political marketing means that, for example, research on political campaigns should not focus on the political marketing activities of parties/candidates, but embed them in the relevant exchange structures, with voters, donors, the media, etc. (Henneberg, 2003). Perceptions and interpretations of activities and other meaning-laden properties (e.g. intentions, positions, resources) within the dyad become the defining epistemological characteristics of political marketing enquiry. Kotler and Kotler (1999) realised this when they wrote: "*Marketing orientation means that candidates recognize the nature of the exchange process when they ask voters for their votes.*" (p. 3)

Related to this point is the ontological assumption of a 'qualified' market exchange. While a traditional (micro-economic) market understanding as a 'clearing mechanism' prescribes certain exchange characteristics (namely independent actors with self-interested goal functions which they maximise in single and unrelated transactions) (Carman, 1980; Arndt, 1983), political marketing theory characterises exchange interactions and interrelations of (by varying degrees) dependent actors and structures. This would also encompass cooperation and collaboration, and in some cases also collusion. An epistemological enquiry focusing on these dependencies and interconnections can be deduced (in traditional markets deemed to be anomalies), together with an increased emphasis on time dynamics: not only single interactions are analysed but the totality of exchange relationships constructed within relationships over time. Historical determinants, as well as future-oriented considerations, become 'real' forces within these market exchanges (Scammell, 1999; Baines *et al*., 2003).

A third element is concerned with the embeddedness of politics, especially its relationship with social and other narrative models of representation. This position is related to Hunt and Burnett's (1982) notion of 'total marketing systems'. It can be posited that the 'political sphere' does not exist independently of other cultural and social aspects of life (Butler and Collins, 1999). The interactions and dependencies of politics on the economy, the legal system, social and cultural experiences (and *vice versa*) give a clear indication for the arbitrariness of any attempt to disentangle the *conditio politicae* from its contextual frame (Mancini and Swanson, 1996). As this condition is existent on an epistemological level (i.e. in the way we attempt to gain understanding about politics) and also on an ontological level (i.e. the fabric of politics as is), any political (as well as social) marketing enquiry needs to look at (interconnected) systems; and cannot focus simply on a whichever way delineated political sphere (Brenkert, 2002). This complexity precludes simple and uni-dimensional explanations (or at least makes them very unlikely). Furthermore, it becomes difficult for political marketing theory to find clear-cut 'horizons' for its explanatory purpose.

Lastly, the structural connectedness of the 'management of politics' and 'politics' itself is ontologically anchored in political marketing theory (and this maybe perceived as a sub-point of the previous argument). The often-identified difference between 'content' and 'packaging' in politics (Franklin, 1994) is treated as spurious. Any management or marketing activity relates to policy/politics content (either through considerations of development, execution, or assessment), while policies, issues-stands and 'governing' are either 'management' or frame management (Newman, 1999b). Any enquiry in political marketing, therefore, also looks at aspects

of politics that, 'in a narrow sense', do not have anything to do with marketing instruments. Epistemologically, political marketing theory cannot limit itself to political marketing management, understood in a purely executional sense, 'putting the gloss' on politics. Directly linked to this is a recognition that marketing is not a 'neutral' aspect of politics and that ethical considerations have to be an integral part of any political marketing theory.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL MARKETING

While these four emphatically provisional notions of ontological and epistemological underpinnings of political marketing theory have the characteristics of a *credo* (and are therefore open to critique), they present one possible choice based on established marketing theory. However, using a marketing-related epistemology would only have limited justification without ongoing marketing practice in politics (another dialectic of political marketing theory). Thus, the equivocal acceptance that political marketing as a *de facto* phenomenon in politics exists, allows us to ask the question regarding the implications of the outlined epistemology for research in political marketing, especially with respect to the current state-of-affairs of the discipline.

It is the main contention of this paper that the outlined 'state-of-affairs' in research on political marketing can be explained through connecting it with the two different perspectives on political marketing theory. The underpinning hypothesis is that the shortcomings of the current stock of research is linked to the research community that subscribes to an interpretation of political marketing theory as being concerned with understanding (existing) marketing activities in politics. While this happens

predominantly implicitly, this 'managerial' stance is widespread, not only with researchers but also commentators on, or opponents of, political marketing applications (Henneberg, 2004). It can be argued that political marketing mirrors the situation in mainstream marketing (Sheth *et al*., 1988; van Waterschoot and van den Bulte, 1992; Webster, 1992; Easton and Araujo, 1994). Political marketing theory, understood as an epistemological lens, has not yet been employed or conceptually discussed widely. Its weakness in terms of the research practice causes the field of political marketing to be 'one-sides'; the dialectic nature of political marketing does not come to bear as one crucial element, so is missing to provide a necessary synthesis. The main implication of this hypothesis is that the research agenda on political marketing needs to be broadened in order to enhance the knowledge development in political marketing (and implicitly in social and non-profit marketing). In the following, some aspects of this new research agenda for political marketing will be derived before some of the consequences are discussed.

Utilising an epistemologically-oriented interpretation of political marketing theory presupposes a clarification of the ontology and epistemology of political marketing. The brief outline above should be seen as a first attempt to stimulate discussions in this area. A clarification of the main exchange characteristics in the political sphere (e.g. multi-directional, deferred), the essence of the interaction structures (e.g. the political 'product', the characteristics of policy deliveries, participative 'product' realisation) or the functional prerequisites to underpin such exchanges (on systems level but also on organisational entity level) (Alderson, 1957; Arndt 1983; Henneberg, 2003) need to be reassessed.

In terms of research foci and research methodologies, the systemic embeddedness and the structural connectedness of political marketing with social and cultural aspects implies an explicit acknowledgement of the ethical implications in terms of the functioning of democratic systems (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Collins and Butler, 2003). The relationship of political marketing with different concepts of democracy (especially a more 'plebiscitary' democracy) have to be made explicit (O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Scammell, 1995) and the notion of identity in a (post-)modern world within a 'marketing-democracy' of "*signification and representation*" (Dermody and Scullion, 2001, p. 1087) needs consideration (see also Bauman, 1997; Bauman, 1999). This needs to go beyond existing ethical considerations and should be anchored in ethical theories (with prescriptive character) that are connected to a marketing-oriented understanding of political actors, especially voters (Bartle and Griffiths, 2002), beyond utopian presuppositions of how voters actually ought to behave and make decisions. In general, the voter (also other political actors like donors, citizens, etc.) should be brought back into the focus of research attention as part of the dyads and relationships that are at the heart of the *explanandum*. This would provide a redressing of the balance; thus the dominance of the current party and candidate-focused research practice would be challenged. A shift in applied methodologies would also need to go with this change in focus, balancing the more quantitative orientation of psephology with a more qualitative understanding inherent in a marketing-oriented voting behaviour theory (Bartle and Griffiths, 2002).

The current 'managerial' and reactive inquiry/research practice would need to be continued but a complementary and broader conceptualisation, based on overarching theoretical narratives that form theories of middle-range, has the potential to balance

the research agenda in political marketing. However, going beyond clear marketing practice in politics while keeping the marketing framework for explanation implies certain risks, notably the 'risk of failing' inasmuch as the political marketing concepts could prove to be less appropriate than other disciplines' explanations. This is an inevitable consequence of a more dynamic discourse in political marketing but would allow the discipline to 'lead', i.e. informing political marketing practice rather than running with (insufficient) explanatory nets after ever new (and elusive) political marketing "butterflies" in the form of new marketing instrument applications in politics.

Such a research agenda, based on a epistemological understanding of political marketing theory, opens up another issue, and one that is thrown at management theories regularly (Arndt, 1978): that of 'conceptual imperialism' and overreach (Wring, 1999; O'Shaughnessy, 2002). However, in a pluralistic environment many new insights are gained at the flexing points of theories, were friction between competing theory constructs, based on different epistemologies, exists. If there is an 'overreach', the insights gained should be shallow or not appropriate (in relation to other explanatory constructs). Marketing theory needs to be willing to accept (and engage with) other disciplines and their specific starting points for analysis. Management studies and marketing, in their essence are an eclectic methodological mix of other disciplines, should not strive for hegemony in explaining political phenomena but should 'show relevance' through their theories, a relevance in a wider sense that makes it inevitable for researchers of any discipline to consult them in their search for knowledge in politics. Currently, the field of political marketing research is a considerable distance away from this aim.

CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTION AND LIMITATIONS

Research on political marketing has now established itself as lively sub-discipline of marketing, producing considerable amounts of learned articles and books each year. However, a certain stagnation of knowledge development was noted. This paper links this finding to the currently dominating tendency of focusing research on campaign applications of marketing instruments, emphasising a reactive and managerial orientation. In discussing the core of a political marketing theory, two different stances have been identified: first, a narrow one, focussing on understanding marketing activities in politics and, second, a wider one, concerned with a more holistic attempt of achieving knowledge of politics. An idiosyncratic discussion of the ontology and epistemology implications of this wider stance identified four concepts as pivotal: exchange character of political marketing; a 'qualified' market environment; the social embeddedness of the political system in other systems; and the structural connectedness of political marketing and politics, implying ethical considerations. Whilst the current research limitations in political marketing can be explained by an (implicit) focus on the narrow interpretation of political marketing theory, the wider stance frames a new research agenda for political marketing that can provide new directions and less restricted conceptual horizons. However, the dialectic of political marketing theory prescribes that both aspects of theory building need to be done in a complementary fashion, giving each other relevance and justification. This allows for the dialectic tension that will provide a rounded frame for political marketing.

While this paper contributes to the ongoing discussion of knowledge-building and the direction of political marketing theory by introducing an additional possibility of anchoring political marketing research, several limitations can be noted. The ontological and epistemological interpretations of political marketing theory represent an initial, and personal, outline. A wider discussion around the essence of theory-building in political marketing is necessary. Furthermore, no discussion was provided regarding specific topics of political marketing, i.e. a detailed criticism of (research on) political marketing (however, for a more detailed outline of these views see Henneberg, 2004). In addition, implications of the use of alternative epistemological systems (Arndt, 1985; Hunt, 1991; Hunt, 2003) (e.g. the application of non-neo-positivistic, e.g. social constructionist or critical realist stances) have been excluded from this discussion.

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