Move aside, *advocatus diaboli*: It is time to hear the position of the *advocatus dei* on political marketing

By

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University of Bath, School of Management
Working Paper Series
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Move aside, *advocatus diaboli*: It is time to hear the position of the *advocatus dei* on political marketing

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August 2003

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*Key words:* Criticism of political marketing; ethics of political marketing, political marketing theory
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1. POLITICAL MARKETING UNDER ATTACK

Political marketing has a difficult position. Research on political marketing appears constantly under an obligation to justify itself and to defend against criticism of its research ethos, i.e. the use of marketing concepts and instruments in the political sphere. It sometimes seems as if any attempts of merely gaining insights into the nuts and bolts of the application of political marketing by parties and other political actors is associated with sinister plans to develop a political “Cacotopia”, to use Jeremy Bentham’s term. Negative feelings evoked by the use of marketing instruments in politics seem to rub off onto political marketing research itself (O’Shaughnessy, 1990). The result is that many researchers in this area are confronted with the phenomenon of being ‘guilty by association’. However, worse than describing political marketing, one might think, is the development of prescriptive marketing management tools for the political arena. Such a ‘Faustian’ pact immediately disqualifies the research; and the researcher is evicted from any decent discussion of how a sustainable and successful democratic system should work…or so it seems to some academics. Research on political marketing is sometimes condemned *per se* purely due to its link with political marketing practice that is seen as harmful to our democratic party political systems. In such a climate it is difficult for a, still new,
research (sub-) discipline to find and develop a sound theoretical and empirical footing while developing the confidence to engage in a meaningful discourse with other disciplines such as political science (Scammel, 1995).

While invariably political scientists voice their critical opinions against political marketing (as stated previously, this can indiscriminately include the application of managerial concepts as well as researching them), the additional discipline that contributes to the theoretical foundation of political marketing, i.e. marketing theory, also has reservations (Henneberg, 2002). Any reservation deserves to be taken seriously and needs to be addressed. In the following discussion, several of the principal critical arguments against political marketing will be dealt with. These were collected from discussions and via e-mail surveys. From the rhetoric and replies it becomes apparent that there are two distinct groups of issues: criticism of political marketing practice, and criticism of political marketing research associated with such practice. While this author does not want the impression to emerge that merely some convenient strawmen were built up that could then be elegantly demolished, it must be borne in mind that the selection of criticisms selected to be tackled are based purely on an ideosyncratic choice, guided by an understanding of the most frequent and important objections against political marketing. However, the ultimate aim of this plea by an advocatus dei is not so much the ‘beatification’ of political marketing, as it is to create a counter-weight to the overpowering and omnipresent voice of the advocatus diaboli. Only a restrained and unbiased approach to the topic, sine ira et studio, can help the emergent subject of political marketing to develop into an area of serious and rigorous academic research.
To organise the following argument, some of the main objections to political marketing are described and analysed systematically. No specific attention was given to definitorial distinctions with regard to whether or not specific arguments were really about 'marketing in the political sphere' or about 'propaganda' (O'Shaughnessy, 1999). Subsequently, some implications for political marketing theory and practice are explored. Thus, it is necessary to introduce a distinction between different levels of political marketing, entitled: categories. The argument will employ these categories to get to grips with distinctions of the criticism raised.

2. CATEGORIES OF POLITICAL MARKETING

Discussions concerning political marketing in addition to research publications on the topic can suffer from a somewhat confusing understanding of different categories of political marketing. For the purpose of this paper a specific categorisation scheme is used. It is possible (see Figure 1) to distinguish three levels of involvement with the explanandum at hand, and two levels of focus (Henneberg, 2002), as introduced by Sheth, et al., (1988).

Political marketing in general is defined as facilitating the societal process of political exchange, while Political Marketing Management describes the 'art and science' (Kotler, 2003 p. 9) of successfully managing this (political) exchange process. Thus, political marketing and its managerial application, Political Marketing Management, can be signified as the research object (explanandum) in question. Activities might comprise developing a strategic political posture for a party, micro-managing an election campaign, co-ordinating the spin on certain communications with 'parallel'
organisations, using political marketing research to focus marketing spend resources, etc., (Butler and Collins, 1999; Henneberg, 2002; Newman, 1999; O’Cass, 2001; O’Shaughnessy, 1990).

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Figure 1: Categorisation scheme of political marketing

However, in researching these phenomena, one needs to distinguish two separate levels (Sheth et al., 1988): First, the Theory of Political Marketing Management encompasses the academic interest in dealing with the operational management issues of political exchanges. It consists of a theoretical and analytical examination of managerial behaviour. Questions answered on this level are for example: What do political actors do to manage the political exchange? Which instruments and concepts are successful, and under what circumstances? However, this operational and managerial focus means that certain elements are not covered by the Theory of Political Marketing Management. One may ask: What about the wider impact of
political marketing activities on democracy or the interplay with different party or electoral systems? … the understanding of how voters perceive political actors in an electoral market system? … the description/definition of different exchange structures in the political marketing, etc.? These and more fundamental questions, without direct managerial relevance, are covered by the Theory of Political Marketing. They consist of the crucial conceptual ‘backbone’ of research on political marketing. The main thrust of this article, i.e. ethical dimensions of political marketing, is in fact rooted here.

Conversely, for reasons of the following argument, it is also important to distinguish two levels of focus: a descriptive versus a prescriptive (normative) argument. As these categories are widely used in marketing theory (Arndt, 1982; Hunt, 1976; Hunt and Burnett, 1982), a detailed description can be omitted. Putting these categories together, the categorisation scheme allows a clear focus of criticism of political marketing.

3. CRITICISM OF POLITICAL MARKETING

It is appropriate to introduce the contenders. First, the advocatus diaboli: the following criticisms of political marketing have been chosen for further consideration, as described earlier. They are paraphrased below as factual statements. Some of the ‘accusations’ are not mutually exclusive and therefore overlap.

Common criticism with regard to Political Marketing Management, i.e. the practical application of political marketing, can be summarised by the following six statements:
$S_1$ - Through the use of political marketing elections can in effect be “bought” (also: only rich candidates can afford to run).

$S_2$ - Political marketing has transformed politics into being obsessed with “spin” and “packaging” (also: politics has become void of content because of political marketing).

$S_3$ - Political marketing has caused more populism in politics, a “follower mentality” prevails, based on focus group results and perceived public opinion (also: politics has become void of political leadership).

$S_4$ - Parties and politicians that use political marketing are using the wrong reference points/mindsets. Politics is essentially not about “selling” but about something completely different.

$S_5$ - Political marketing is not compatible with how voters (should) make an informed voting decision (also: political marketing uses manipulative methods/smokescreens to betray voters).

$S_6$ - Political marketing causes campaigns to be negative.

On the level of the Theory of Political Marketing as well as the Theory of Political Marketing Management, five more criticism can be distinguished with regard to how researchers approach political marketing:

$S_7$ - Research on political marketing is not focusing on politics but on ephemeral activities like communication tactics and campaigning.
S8 - All research into political marketing helps in the end to foster the adoption and application of (inherently bad) management practice and thinking in politics. This is not only true of normative research but also of purely descriptive research.

S9 - Research in political marketing is not sophisticated, it does not utilise the leading edge political science and especially marketing theories available.

S10 - The political arena is not really part of the “marketing domain” and should therefore not be researched using marketing concepts.

S11 - No theoretical and ethical framework exists that allows (value-) discussions about political marketing.

If these statements are clustered into the categorisation scheme of political marketing introduced above, the following picture emerges (see Figure. 2) which also indicates whether a critical statement was typically associated with a political scientist or a marketer.

Most criticisms regarding Political Marketing Management come from political scientists. Not surprisingly, few marketers find the use of marketing instruments and concepts in politics objectionable. The only concern that some marketers have about ‘selling politics’ (S4) is connected to the fundamental theoretical problem stated in S10: whether or not marketing concepts as such can and should be used to describe political behaviour (the ’domain’ question).
Marketers’ criticism is concerned with theoretical questions of how Political Marketing Management is researched. Interestingly, marketers were the only researchers that focused on critical aspects of the Theory of Political Marketing, i.e. thinking about some underlying theoretical and conceptual elements of political marketing that affect and shape the Theory of Political Marketing Management as well as the epistemological position vis a vis its research object.

4. ENTER THE ADVOCATUS DEI

In breaking with (clerical) tradition, the criticism (see the 11 statements above) was introduced first in this argument. Therefore, it is time for the counsel of political
marketing, the *advocatus dei*, to address the eleven critical statements. As some of these criticisms are linked, they will occasionally be dealt with together.

**The Practice – Political Marketing Management**

*Elections can be bought.* One of the most damning criticisms of the use of political marketing instruments in the political arena is the accusation that democratic elections can now be ’bought’ (S₁). The reasoning behind this can be summarised as follows: today’s elections are won by the candidate/party that sets the agenda through political adverts and media manipulation, planting of soundbites in the news media, micro-targeting of communication instruments, focus on marginal seats, etc. In general this means the electoral market is dominated by the one that has the * slickest* and most professionally run campaign management. Such professionalism (as well as media slots, especially on national television) comes at a price (Franklin, 1994; Gould, 1999; Newman, 1999; Newman, 2001; Steen, 1999). Consequently, the party/candidate with more resources or better fund-raising capabilities over the period of high electoral competition wins irrespectively of the political argument (Wray, 1999).

Whilst it is certainly true that electoral campaigns have become progressively more expensive and that it is estimated that political candidates running for the US presidency spend more than half their time fundraising (including such activities as renting out the Lincoln bedroom in the White House to party contributors) (Gould, 1999; Himes, 1995), the direct relationship between campaign spend and campaign success is certainly overstated. Looking at commercial campaigns in an for-profit market environment, more campaign budget does not correlate very well with commercial success (Berkowitz *et al.*, 2001; D’Souza and Allaway, 1995).
Furthermore, while there are certainly examples where the big political spenders in the end win elections, there are also counter-examples: in the run-up to the 2001 general elections in the UK, the Tories spent £12,751,813 in comparison to Labour’s 10,945,119…and suffered a second humiliating and crushing defeat at the polls (31.7 percent of the national vote compared to Labour’s 40.9 percent). Furthermore, the LibDem result of 18.3 percent sounds extraordinary if one looks at their respective campaign spendings: £1,361,377 (Electoral Commission, 2002). In addition, this statement would not be able to account for the sometimes considerable electoral volatility in party systems where the main source of funding is state-based and calculated as a results of a party’s electoral success at the last election (e.g. as in Germany) (Seidle, 1991). While resource-acquisition is certainly a contentious issue on the political agenda (Jamieson, 1992a), it is more a discussion about funding sources in a democracy than about Political Marketing Management itself.

Packaging without content. Political Marketing Management is commonly accused of having ’emptied’ political communication as well as party politics of any direct relation to political issues and deeply held political convictions that are expressed in coherent political and topical offers (S2). In Franklin’s words: “Image has supplanted substance” (1994, p. 9). Instead, political marketing has introduced, so the argument goes, an obsession with the way political messages are packaged. Political arguments are cut down to what is now commonly called ’spin’ and ’soundbites’: void of political content and meaningfulness, but delivered in a bombastic and impressive shell, prepackaged for a two-minute news slot, solely relating to ’image’ (Jamieson, 1992b; Jones, 1995; Moloney, 2000; Wring, 2000). Consequently, image consultants argue that politicians should become brand managers and Prime Ministers and governments should manage ’the nation as a
brand' (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Smith, 2001). The obsession with spin has even caused the unprecedented move by the Speaker of the House of Commons in the UK to attack professional ‘spin doctors’ (read: media advisors and communication specialists) directly as being a “nuisance” (Independent, 2003, p. 5).

From a marketing point of view it is certainly possible to agree with this criticism to some extent. Politics is essentially about managing a service in the form of promises (public goods) to constituents (e.g. the electorate). These constituents are not isomorphic with customers but better described as clients. The promises evoke expectations in the minds of the constituents that are measured against political activities once the political actor (party or candidate) is in a position to implement these promises, i.e. once in government or able to influence governmental activities. In a simplified way this means that if these expectations are not met by delivering certain political outcomes (e.g. tax cuts, political leadership, improving the international importance of a country), dissatisfaction follows (according to the confirmation/disconfirmation model of consumer behaviour) (Churchill and Suprenant 1982; Fournier and Mick 1999; Spreng et al., 1996; Tse and Wilton, 1988).

However, if expectations are constantly not met and the constituents perceive most promises to be empty, a general disillusionment can follow. Although this is lamentable, it inherently has a built-in balancing mechanism: dissatisfaction causes behaviour change, behaviour change means certain beneficial activities (votes, resources, donations) are withheld or shifted to other players (sometimes out of the electoral market) (O'Shaughnessy and Wring, 1994). The often heard argument that the electorate 'forgets' false promises and that after an election period the lies and disappointments of the previous campaign and the first year(s) of the government are not relevant for the decision-making process sounds hollow: these are the same people
that as a consumer are believed to become more and more sophisticated, that quickly
shift brand loyalties when dissatisfied, and that should never be disappointed because
their long-term memory is better than that of elephants (Antonides and van Raaij,
1998; Kotler, 2003). It seems astonishing that these very same people, the scorn of
modern marketing, should transform into unthinking sheep that believe in the
packaging more than the content, that forgive easily, and that can be (mis)guided by
modern political marketing techniques, just because these same activities and
instruments are not concerned with the commercial sphere but the political (Holbrook,
1996). Should the (rather unsophisticated) political marketing have a much stronger
influence on behaviour and attitudes than (extremely sophisticated and optimised)
commercial marketing? This seems to be difficult to believe. What can nevertheless
be said is that more and more political actors use a 'follower mentality' (see
discussion of statement S3 below) which inherently means that the 'packaging' and
customising of political messages and promises becomes more important in order to
specifically address the needs and wants of a certain target audience (Collins and

Something has to be said about 'spin' and 'image' itself: it is not a modern
phenomenon but inherent in any attempt to 'convince' and make an argument.
Oratory and rhetoric (much nicer terms for what is now simply called political
communication), from the Greek forum to Speakers Corner, from Disraeli to Reagan,
was always full of exagerations, the stage managing of effects, etc. but not necessarily
about deception (Egan, 1999; O’Shaughnessy, 2002c; Smith, 2001). Prima facie it is
impossible to differentiate 'images' from 'issues' in an argument, they are socially
constructed (Banker, 1992). Furthermore, spin depends on the media and therefore
has to be seen in a dialectic relationship between different players (O’Shaughnessy,
2002b), although some critics assume that the ‘media are used routinely by politicians to set news agendas’ (Franklin, 1994, p. 17). What is really modern about spin is the professionalism and omnipresence of spin, e.g. the political consultants (Johnson, 2002) and ‘Directors of Communications’ like Alistair Campbell for Tony Blair, Karl Rove for George Bush Jnr., or Bodo Hombach for Gerhardt Schröder (during his first term in office). However, it is interesting to see that these communication and campaign specialists have now become political influencers and politicians themselves (sometimes elected, sometimes not) (Newman, 2001). Karl Rove for example has a permanent office in the White House. Besides accountability problems this professionalism has at least caused the political process to be much more efficient and effective.

**Populism and no leadership.** Parties and politicians follow, they run after the political opinion and adapt to any small changes, especially to perceived opinion shifts in crucial segments of the electorate like opinion leaders, swing voters, or electoral areas with ‘marginal seats‘ (S3) (Harris, 2001). To this end, political marketing research (e.g. the ominous and omnipresent focus groups) are employed. Their outcome determine policy, which, always running after the whims of the electorate, is being driven by the market, the *vox populi*. The argument attributes this ‘following‘ mentality to the essence of marketing, namely the concept of customer-orientation (Collins and Butler, 2003), often misunderstood as being customer-led (Slater and Narver, 1998).

The central problem with this argument is not that there is no tendency towards populism in politics (a time-honoured accusation in the political discourse). Although it can be argued that recently the ‘tactical populist‘ (Henneberg, 2003) has become the
main strategic posture for mainstream parties, it can also be argued that this is not an optimal posture under many circumstances and that it neglects crucial aspects of a customer-orientation as postulated in the marketing literature. Without going into the details of the 'market-orientation versus customer-orientation' debate of marketing theory (Conor, 1999; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater 1990; Noble et al., 2002; Lafferty and Hult, 2001; Slater and Narver, 1998; Slater and Narver, 1999) and the related aspect of a 'social orientation' (Liao et al., 2001), it can nevertheless be stated that an exclusively market-driven approach in politics falls short of a consequent customer/voter orientation (Newman, 1999; Smith and Saunders, 1990).

In fact, the dialectical interplay of market-driven and market-driving behaviour characterises successful (political) marketing management in term of building long-term relationships. An element of 'leading' complements an emphasis on following and satisfying customer needs and wants. This is true for the economic sphere (e.g. Sony’s walkman, Toyota’s Lexus, or Lufthansa’s introduction of e-tickets) as well as the non-profit (Liao et al., 2001) and political one (e.g. the emphasis by voters on leadership qualities in politicians) (Henneberg, 2003; Herrmann and Huber, 1996).

Therefore, a political marketing approach that is purely market-driven is often bad politics and bad marketing as well. The irony is that leading and following can sometimes develop into a 'devil and the deep blue sea' phenomenon, as Tony Blair discovered: Usually exposed as an opportunist that depends on focus group results for policy making, his leadership stance of siding with the US during the Second Iraq War is now characterised as being out of touch with the people (Ritson, 2003). It remains to be seen if he can transform his image from a 'follower' to a 'leader' comparable to Thatcher’s development (Scammell, 1996).
Politics is not about selling. Equating politics with selling washing powder using *inter alia* the same methods and mindsets for both, corrupts politics and devalues it. The importance of democratic political decisions, their wide-ranging implications for the well-being of many people, constitutes a completely different quality from picking up a can of Coke in a Walmart hypermarket (S₄) (Jones, 1995). This truism is often used against Political Marketing Management and advocates of a 'new public management' concept (Collins and Butler, 2003). It is based on a like-for-like equation of the political and the economic market. However, as already alluded to above, this is not a straightforward case. While politics is in fact not very similar to normal products, an analogy with services is not totally unreasonable. Many characteristics are similar: both are promise and experience-based, non-tangible, perishable, partly public goods, prosumptive etc. (Butler and Collins, 1999; O'Shaughnessy, 2002b; O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2002). Furthermore, constituents like voters or grass-root supporters are not really customers but resemble clients (Newman, 1999). Therefore, while the equation of politics and washing powder is in fact obscene, the analogy of politics with a professional service, say a lawyer, seems a more reasonable one (Egan, 1999; Henneberg, 2002; Smith and Saunders, 1990). Services marketing, which is heavily committed to building trust and commitment in a relational exchange (Berry, 1995; Bitner, 1995; Grönroos, 1990; Grönroos, 1994; Grönroos, 1997), can therefore be a guiding concept for Political Marketing Management.

Another and more fundamental issue of the 'selling politics' argument has to do with the question of whether or not marketing management practices or concepts are applicable in non-economic exchanges. Non-profit and social marketing (e.g. cause-related marketing, health management, sports or arts marketing, to name only some)
Voters vote differently. This argument is grounded in an understanding, or, to be precise, a premise about how voters go about making sense and an informed choice about political issues. This choice can consist of forming a political opinion or it can be behaviourally relevant in the sense that it triggers certain political activities. The one activity that is normally discussed, and which is arguably the determining behaviour in democratic political systems, is voting. The argument against Political Marketing Management insists that voters need to be able to gain access to political information and 'facts' in order to form a 'rational' opinion on which they can base their voting decision (S5). However, nowadays voters do not get the information about important political issues that they need, political campaigns are about personal characteristics, about empty arguments, images, catch-phrases and sound-bites (discussed above). These stimuli do not consist of the right kind of political information for voters to be able to form an informed opinion. The voter's opinion remains a one-dimensional image of the shallow political discussions fostered by political marketing management (Franklin, 1994; Jamieson, 1992b).

These arguments are clearly inspired by political theory and a prescriptive understanding of how democracy ought to work, how voters are supposed to make up their mind (Brennan and Lomasky, 1993). However, the assumption that voters (could) decide in a rational way, that they (could) form opinions in a 'power and dominance-free' environment, is certainly based on a fallacy. Such deontological abstraction might serve some purpose in underpinning micro-economic theory (in
political science for example, embraced by the economic school of voting behaviour; to derive from it the ways of how a political discourse ought to look, what kind of information shall or shan’t be part of political campaigns is not realistic (Kaid, 1999; O’Shaughnessy, 2002a), e.g. the demand for a “fair, accurate, contextual, comparative, engaged campaign discourse”(Jamiesson, 1992b, p. 11). Any ’rational’ voting behaviour theory shows only part of the complex human processes of deciding and acting. Consumer behaviour theory, although indebted to micro-economic models, has accepted this and there are attempts to integrate the findings of consumption studies with those of voting behaviour theories (Bartle and Griffiths, 2002; Newman and Sheth, 1987). In its essence the voting decision is a very complex and difficult process. Therefore, non-rational elements or decision-shortcuts such as the reliance on heuristics and decision cues help voters to make up their minds (Brady and Sniderman, 1993; Brennan and Lomasky, 1993; Newman, 2001; Sniderman et al., 1993b). This could mean taking the perceived personal characteristics of the main candidate as a pars pro toto of the attractiveness of a political party and their programme. Such reasoning does not constitute a demeaning of politics but is an expression of the coping strategies innate in human beings (Kaid, 1991; Popkin, 1994; Sniderman et al., 1993a). Political Marketing Management accepts these shortcomings and uses them to develop an appropriate communication strategy. Therefore, any arguments against political marketing on normative grounds of an optimal decision-making process need to be qualified. More appropriate and realistic voter behaviour theories (i.e. better description and less prescription) can provide the basis for a criticism of certain Political Marketing Management phenomena.
Campaigns have become personal and negative. With the advent of Political Marketing Management, so the argument goes, the political discourse and especially political campaigns have become obsessed with negativity and sometimes personal insult (S₆). Negative campaigning can be concerned with political issues but more often than not a direct and personal attack on political opponents (their character, their biography, their personal relationships, etc.) becomes the focal point of political discussions (Egan, 1999; Franklin, 1994; Harris, 2001; Jamieson, 1992b). Political marketing has changed the political culture, away from issues and towards persons; with this the political discourse has entered the arena of show-business and character assassinations. Negative campaigns create counter-campaigns until the political discourse has disintegrated into a mud-wrestling contest. Worse, there is the fear that these methods actually work and that negative campaigns can win elections.

Negative campaigns are a nuisance and watching them is sometimes not a pleasant experience. However, it is important to deconstruct the argument into two aspects: focus on persons on the one hand, and the negative content of the communication on the other. In line with the service characteristics of the political offering, the importance of the 'delivery' people for assessing the (anticipated) quality of a service does not come as a surprise (Lee et al., 2000; Swan and Bowers, 1998). In services marketing, 'people' are an additional instrument in the marketing mix of the 7Ps (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). As the service is intangible, the contact and delivery personnel (as well as the tangible elements of the delivery channel) becomes an important cue in forming expectations and, indeed, also satisfaction/experience judgements. The mere content of a political programme does not say everything about a party; for voters it is also important if they believe that the politicians have the necessary characteristics (e.g. leadership, expertise, emotional balance, pragmatism,
international standing) to implement the programme and deliver on their promises (Popkin, 1994). The political offering needs to be seen as an amalgamation of different elements, like the programme and personal characteristics, and it is therefore beneficial if Political Marketing Management (as well as media coverage) provides both (Axford and Huggins, 2002).

Negative content in political discourse is often condemned in general. However, this means ‘throwing out the baby with the bathwater’. Comparative advertising can help the voters and other political decision makers to clearly see differences between offers, it allows political parties and candidates to emphasise differentiating elements (this can enhance voters’ understanding of the political market in times when most parties compete in a very small option space, i.e. the political centre) (Banker, 1992). In fact, it has been shown that negative advertisements are more issue-oriented than positive ones (Kaid, 1999). On the other hand, character assassinations and constant personal attacks (founded or unfounded), the routine scrutinisation of opponents private lives (sometimes going back decades), is unquestionably an unsavoury aspect, but not one necessarily of Political Marketing Management but of general media coverage (sports and movie celebrities will testify to this). However, the political culture and the structure of the party system might foster or dampen this tendency (Kaid, 1991; Holtz-Bacha and Kaid, 1995). In countries with a party-oriented system in contrast to a candidate-centred and presidential system, these negative campaigns might be less prevailant. Furthermore, a strong political culture can also counteract interest in private aspects of politicians (the example of France and President Mitterand’s ‘private life’ that was not discussed by the media during his lifetime underlines this point). However, the tendencies of increasing emphasis on people might have an impact on the political culture and the degree of privacy that politicians
are allowed. To emphasise this point, Political Marketing Management does not always show the appropriate restrictiveness (and can in fact be counterproductive to its own goals) but comparative research nevertheless shows (against expectations?) that in most countries election campaigns focus on political issues, not on persons (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995).

The Research – Theory of Political Marketing (Management)

Too much communication focus. Research on political marketing has often been criticised for being overly focussed on one aspect of marketing theory, i.e. communication as part of an election campaign. Political campaigns and political marketing activities are often exclusively defined through their communication content and the media vehicles employed (Franklin and Richardson, 2002; Kaid, 1999; Kavanagh, 1995; Wring, 1999). This is a shortcoming that means that many aspects of marketing theory are neglected, that the focus is purely operational and mainly on one specific marketing instrument (Sγ) (Egan, 1999; Scammel, 1995). A classification of existing political marketing research literature found this emphasis clearly substantiated (Henneberg, 1995). These findings have been repeated in the literature since then (Lees-Marshment, 2001; O’Cass, 2001). This oversimplification of political marketing research in fact constitutes an empowerment of the subdiscipline which can endanger its development. Strategic aspects of Political Marketing Management, other marketing instruments and, for that matter, the underlying functions of political marketing management have been neglected (Newman, 1994; Henneberg, 2002). Too much emphasis of current research appears to be channeled towards comparative campaign studies, looking at different countries,
describing instrument use and communication content, without synthesis or conceptual work appearing alongside (see also S₉).

While this state is lamentable and the criticism is certainly somewhat justified, the emphasis in research on campaigns and communication, mirrors the emphasis of Political Marketing Management itself. It seems that the practitioners share the reductionist approach towards marketing. Political Marketing Management, in most cases, does not focus extensively on strategic issues and also has a very narrow view with regard to the underlying tactical functions of Political Marketing Management (Henneberg, 2002). This becomes more understandable when one looks at the background of political marketing managers or consultants: most often than not (at least in Europe) they are trained in advertising/communication or have worked as (commercial) campaign managers.

Research insinuates management practice. Research on political marketing management helps to spread management practice and ethics in the political sphere. It encourages the use of such marketing instruments and concepts and redefines the way everyone is thinking about politics (S₈). This ‘imperialism’ of management theories crowds out more appropriate ways of thinking about politics. This is not just true for research that helps optimise political marketing management tools and concepts but also for purely descriptive research. Thus, this radical argument goes, one should either abstain from research grounded in marketing theory or use it with circumspection.

That such objections are still voiced shows not just the level of critical vigour but also the fact that (political) marketing theory has not yet been able to convince its critics through meaningful and seminal analyses which show that in fact research into
political activities by actors in the competitive world of politics can gain considerable insight through using political marketing concepts without 'harming' its research object. Three issues can be addressed with regard to this objection at hand: first, it is commonly stated that political actors use instruments and concepts that are influenced by marketing (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Newman, 1990; O’Shaughnessy, 1990). Therefore, marketing theory is uniquely positioned as a research tool in order to make sense of these phenomena and to interpret them in an appropriate way. Second, much research that is published in the field of political marketing does use marketing theories only tangentially or inappropriately (see S9) and is still steeped in political science and communication studies methodology. Therefore, the influence of marketing theory in describing politics as well as prescribing political management is still small and should not be overestimated. The political marketing management practice (though limited as it is) seems to be far ahead of any catching-up efforts by academics. Third, the compatibility of the 'professionalisation' of politics with political concepts of democracy itself is a very interesting subject for the Theory of Political Marketing. This has not been addressed sufficiently so far (see Collins and Butler, 2003 for an exception), neither by political scientists and philosophers nor by marketing theorists. General discussions on the appropriateness and domain of non-profit marketing (see S10) are not enough to resolve this underlying ethical issue. S11 will touch upon this problem again.

Non-sophisticated research. Especially marketers often voice this concern. Two (linked) aspects of this critical argument can be distinguished: one is concerned with the lack of connection between research in political marketing and the forefront of mainstream marketing theory, the other focuses on the static nature of research in political marketing (S9).
Although research on the level of the Theory of Political Marketing (Management) is still somewhat in its infancy (most research in this area did not start before the beginning of the 1990s, taking O’Shaughnessy, 1990 and Harrop, 1990 as the seminal ‘kick-off’ sources), it seems to be strangely decoupled from several major trends that have dominated marketing theory during this time. For example, the discussions around market orientation as well as relational and network marketing and the advancements of the ‘Nordic school’ of marketing in the area of services marketing have had little impact on political marketing scholars (O’Shaughnessy, 2002b). It has to be said that the author of this article agrees with this criticism and perceives this fact as one of the main stumbling blocks for the development of political marketing as a research discipline. Sometimes it seems (polemically speaking) as if political marketing theory consists of not much more than an analysis of the political 4Ps (with emphasis on Promotion) and the political marketing mix. The fact that mainstream marketing theory itself has now advanced from this concept, e.g. through functionally-oriented marketing theory (van Waterschoot and van den Bulte, 1992) and relational approaches (Grönroos, 1997), makes the limited use of marketing concepts by political marketing researchers even more worrying.

Furthermore, and this addresses the second point of the ‘non-sophistication’ argument, a tendency of ‘reinventing the wheel’ with regard to research content has been observed. Although progress has been made by adding to the research agenda on political marketing, articles that fundamentally do nothing else but toil the same ground over and over again still prevail. Many descriptive pieces on campaigning in different countries appear without new conceptual developments and clear impetus for further research. Evidence is often anecdotal (Butler and Collins, 1996). Again, the author would not want to contest this criticism.
Not a marketing domain. This is a fundamental criticism with regard to the essence of marketing and whether or not political marketing has a place within the domain of marketing. Clearly, this issue hinges around the Theory of Political Marketing and as a criticism, if accepted, would mean that the research community in political marketing is actually ‘barking up the wrong tree’.

The 'domain' discussion, defining the “nature and scope of marketing” (Hunt, 1976, p. 17) was one of the focal points of discourse in marketing theory in the 1960s and 1970s (for a history of this discourse see Meinert et al., 1993), linked to the clarification of the exchange paradigm in marketing (Bagozzi, 1974; Bagozzi, 1975; Bagozzi, 1978; Foxall, 1984; Martin, 1985; White, 1986). Broadening the concept of marketing beyond classical product-based for-profit organisations (Kotler and Levy, 1969a) meant, firstly, to incorporate explicitly services organisations, and, secondly, non-profit organisations like charities, hospitals, political parties etc. The inclusion of non-profit or social marketing which was grounded in a wide definition of the marketing domain (Arndt, 1978; Enis, 1973; Hunt, 1976; Kotler, 1972; Kotler and Levy 1969b), was not universally accepted and is to some extent still occasionally contested. The use of marketing theories and concepts to explain and frame research on political issues in a non-profit market place (i.e. shaped by competitive but non-economic exchanges), can be rejected for theoretical reasons, as part of a narrow definition of marketing, limiting marketing to economically motivated exchanges in which values can be directly quantified through an exchange price ($S_{10}$) (Luck, 1969; Luck, 1971). However, in the last two decades, social marketing has gained importance with regard to practice and research. It is now generally accepted as being part of the marketing domain. The wide definition of marketing is now prevailing in marketing textbooks and the proliferation of social marketing studies in all kind of
varieties (e.g. church marketing, arts marketing, sports marketing, cause-related marketing) shows that such a conceptual grounding in marketing theory has become accepted (Andreasen, 1994; Cornelissen, 2002; Levy, 2002). The author would therefore suggest to leave the ‘Pandora’s box’ of the domain question shut (at least in the context of political marketing) and accept political marketing as an integral part of the many explananda of marketing (Hunt, 1983).

Value discussions are not grounded. Marketing management in the political sphere needs to be judged and supervised from a moral and ethical point of view, especially with regard to possible (positive or negative) ramifications for democratical practices. Tendencies of professionalisation and ‘political management’, of increased populism and ‘market-driven’ behaviour by political actors, and of expensive and negative campaigning (see S1 to S6) make it inevitable that their influence on the functioning of the political system needs to be assessed and also judged. The widespread use of Political Marketing Management has the potential to change the way our democracy works (Collins and Butler, 2003; Lees-Marshment, 2001). To understand these implications, it is necessary for value discussions to have a theoretical and ethical framework that can make sense of Political Marketing Management (O’Shaughnessy, 2002a). It is the conjecture of S11 that we are currently lacking such a framework. Thus, political marketing has no normative instrument or yardstick of its own to assess our explanandum in question. Many value discussions do not take into consideration the specific stance of political marketing and its underlying conceptual tenets. Therefore, it is difficult to judge the value of political marketing through more common (deontological) theories of democracy which see any political marketing management activity as an alien (exogeneous) element to politics and are thus possibly somewhat loaded against its usage.
It is remarkable that many marketers have identified this as one of the main research shortcomings of political marketing. There seems to be an understanding in the research community, shared by the author, that genuine ethical and normative research on political marketing has been neglected, especially by marketing theorist (O’Shaughnessy, 2002a). It seems therefore valid to shift the responsibility for some of the shortcomings with regard to discussions about political marketing (e.g. S₈ and S₉) onto the level of the Theory of Political Marketing and hope for more involvement in normative discussion within political marketing research.

5. SO WHAT? CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

The discussion has dealt with eleven statements, all critical of political marketing on a practical as well as research level. To conclude this discussion, the advocatus dei pleads for more time and renewed efforts to find further insights. A recommendation for a beatification of political marketing can certainly not be made in light of the above discussion, but a condemnation as requested by the advocatus diaboli, on the grounds of the eleven discussed accusations, can also not be upheld. It has been argued that the statements S₁ to S₆, which address shortcomings of Political Marketing Management, can in toto not be accepted. However, more fundamental criticism with regard to political marketing research show some structural shortcomings: not enough rigid and conceptually grounded research has been done, especially with regard to the holistic nature of political marketing and its ethical implications.

However, it has to said that each of the eleven statements would merit further discussions and that there exist many more valid criticisms of political marketing
which were not touched upon in this paper. Thus, the argument above will hopefully stimulate further discourse by representatives from other disciplines. Political marketing is still somewhat of an “academic parvenu” (O’Shaughnessy and Henneberg 2002, p. xiv). Fundamental conceptual issues are still unresolved. For example, it is still not clear what impact using marketing and managerial concepts has in and on politics (Harris, 2001). The assumption that there is a distinction between policy-making on the one-hand and the management of government/politics on the other is seen as somewhat unrealistic (Collins and Buttler, 2003) but the interactions and repercussions are more often than not implied, not analysed.

Therefore, the critics of political marketing should lose their sometimes exaggerated fear of the impacts of political marketing (Butler and Collins, 1999) as well as their grounding in normative reasoning which in fact transforms the *advocatus diaboli* into a *promotor fidei* (“promoter of the faith”, its precise clerical name). A better understanding of political marketing theory through more conceptual discussions as well as the laying of the foundations for an ethical debate (like O’Shaughnessy, 2002a) is needed. Similar considerations in the area of social marketing could lead the way (Brenkert, 2002). For example, questions in how far political marketing shifts the system towards plebiscitary democracy (O’Shaughnessy, 1989/90)…and why this has not happened (yet?) can enrich the critical discourse. To make sure that political marketing research is innovative, more conceptual inventiveness is asked for, fostered by a link with newest developments in marketing theory and political science. It has to be said that marketers have not always fulfilled this *Bringschuld* (‘duty to deliver’) of inventiveness in the area of political marketing and should be held responsible for some of the shortcomings exposed in S7 to S11.
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This working paper is a shortened version of a paper to be presented at the Political Marketing Conference, London, Sept. 2003.

E-mails with a request to state the three to five most serious and/or most commonly heard criticisms of political marketing (its application in politics but also its use as an academic research subject) were sent to around 25 researchers in this area (about equal numbers of political scientists and marketers). In addition, a request was circulated via the Political Science Association’s Political Marketing Group, thanks to Jennifer Lees-Marshment.

This categorisation scheme was originally presented at the Political Science Association Conference in London (Henneberg 1995) and has been further developed subsequently. Here a simplified version is used.


Some elements of a service experience have public goods character: The experience of (and satisfaction with) a trip on an underground train is heavily influenced by the fact that other people are present, “consuming” the same service. Their influence and behaviour (loud music, overcrowding, body odour etc.) constitutes a public good (mostly of negative utility) that also determines the individual’s satisfaction with the overall service (Bitner et al., 1997; Swan and Bowers, 1998).

Services nearly always consist of some tangible elements as part of the offering or the delivery (e.g. the shop of the barber, the plane for the airline). This is often called the “physical evidence” (Parasumaran et al., 1985), another added element of the 7Ps (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).

Relevant literature for these concepts:

- **Market Orientation**: Harris, 2002; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Jaworski and Kohli 1993; Lafferty and Hult, 2001; Narver and Slater, 1990; for a comprehensive overview of seminal sources see Deshpande 1999.

- **Relational and Network Marketing**: for the IMP group Anderson et al. 1994; Leek et al., 2003; for a comprehensive overview of seminal sources see Naude and Turnbull, 1998; Ford, 2001; for CRM Grönroos, 1994; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; for a comprehensive overview of seminal sources see Sheth/Parvatiyar (2000) or the special issue in the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science 1995, Vol. 23/4; for the Nordic School Gummesson, 1996.

The author’s students call this “doing a Harrop”, referring to an article by Martin Harrop (1990) which had already set out most of the main basic tenets of political marketing.