

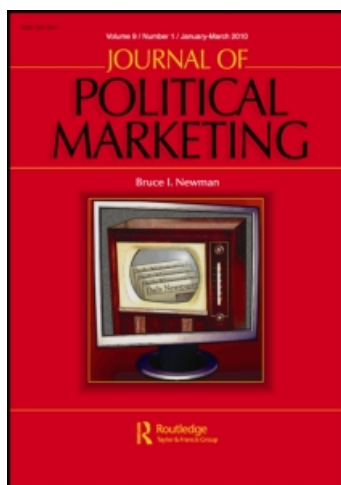
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### Bridging Two Schools of Thought: Applications of Public Relations Theory to Political Marketing

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# **Bridging Two Schools of Thought: Applications of Public Relations Theory to Political Marketing**

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*The use of public relations strategies and tactics are ubiquitous in many areas of political communication. This is especially evident when considering the emerging field of political marketing. However, little application of public relations theory and research has been integrated into the study of political marketing processes. Thus, this work seeks to bridge two schools of thought and to identify some of the major conceptual perspectives from public relations theory that can be used to better understand and analyze the dynamics of political marketing processes. Specifically, the perspectives include relationship theory, contingency theory, situational theory of publics, and agenda-building theory.*

**KEYWORDS** *agenda-building theory, contingency theory, political marketing, relationship theory, situational theory of publics*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The use of public relations strategies and tactics are ubiquitous in many areas of political communication. In essence, every organized effort to influence public opinion or specific target groups, directly or through the media, involves the use of public relations strategies and tactics. Despite the growing influence of public relations, however, little application of public relations theory and research has been integrated into the study of political campaigning and political marketing processes.

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This is especially pronounced when it comes to political “marketing,” a field that builds on a merger between marketing and “politics.” As such, it is concerned with the application of marketing techniques, strategies, and concepts to politics in a broad sense (Henneberg, 2002; O’Cass, 1996; Lees-Marshment, 2001), even though most observers tend to discuss political marketing as related only to political campaigning. Some even seem to conceive of political marketing as the final or the last stage in the evolution or professionalization of political campaigning (Farrell, 1996; Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Farrell and Webb, 2002; Norris, 2000).

Even though it is misleading to conceive of political marketing as a derivative of the professionalization of political campaigning (Strömbäck, 2007a), it is nevertheless clear that a deeper understanding of political marketing must include theories regarding political communication as well as public relations. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to bridge two schools of thought and to identify some of the major conceptual perspectives from public relations theory that can be used to better understand and analyze the dynamics of political marketing processes. Specifically, the key perspectives include relationship theory, contingency theory, situational theory of publics, and agenda-building theory.

The paper consists of six sections. In the first section, we will synthesize previous research and theory regarding political marketing. This section will underline the importance of understanding political marketing as processes built upon the wants and needs of selected people and groups in society and as exchange processes between a political organization and its different “markets,” “arenas,” or “publics.” In the following four sections, we will review relationship theory, contingency theory, situational theory of publics, and agenda-building theory, respectively, and analyze their applicability to political marketing. Finally, we will summarize and draw some conclusions.

## THE ESSENCE OF POLITICAL MARKETING

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the literature about political marketing has grown considerably (Newman, 1994, 1999b, 1999a; Maarek, 1995; Lees-Marshment, 2001; O’Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2002; Wring, 2005; Ormrod, 2004). However, despite, or perhaps due to, the fact that political marketing as an academic field has grown so fast, the literature offers several different definitions of political marketing. All agree that political marketing means the application of marketing principles to politics, but whereas some see political marketing as the highest stage in the evolution of political campaigning (Farrell, 1996; Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Farrell and Webb, 2002; Norris, 2000), others see political marketing rather as a distinct form of organizational philosophy.

From a marketing perspective, “the marketing concept holds that the needs of consumers are of primary concern and should be identified and

attempts made to satisfy the identified needs” (O’Cass, 1996, 38). Thus, “a market orientation refers to the organization-wide generation of market intelligence, dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and organization-wide responsiveness to it” (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993, 53; see also Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Accordingly, and in the context of political marketing, Newman (1999c, xiii) writes that

Political marketing is the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations. The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists, and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in a society.

What is notable in these and other definitions is that marketing essentially is about identifying, responding to, and satisfying the needs and wants of selected groups and people in society. Thus, it is not only about political campaigns. Rather, political marketing and market orientation is about the relationship between political organizations and their target groups and stakeholders. As noted by Lees-Marshment (2004, 6), political marketing “is concerned with how political organizations such as political parties understand the demands of those they serve or seek support from, determine their behavior in response to public wants, and communicate them. It is not, as is often commonly thought, simply about election campaigns, even if marketing tools such as direct mail, polling, and targeting are used in campaigns.” As the kind of campaign an organization runs is a function of the organization, it follows logically that only market-oriented organizations can run market-oriented campaigns.

Thus, there is an important distinction between using marketing techniques on the one hand and being market-oriented on the other. All kinds of organizations can make use of marketing techniques, but that does not indicate that they are market-oriented. Only political organizations that attempt to discover the wants and needs of their targeted groups and to satisfy those wants and needs can properly be characterized as market-oriented (cf., Slater and Narver, 1998; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Strömbäck, 2007a, 2007b; O’Cass, 1996; Lafferty and Hult, 2001; Henneberg and Eghbalian, 2002).

Within the context of political parties—and the same logic applies to other organizations—market-oriented parties can be distinguished from sales- or product-oriented parties (cf., Henneberg, 2002; Henneberg and Eghbalian, 2002; Lees-Marshment, 2001, 2004; Strömbäck, 2007a, 2007b; Nord and Strömbäck, 2003). In somewhat simplified terms, the defining characteristic of a *product-oriented party* is that it argues for its own ideas and policies. It assumes that those ideas are superior and that voters will

realize this and accordingly vote for it. If such a party does not succeed in an election, it tends to believe that voters just do not realize that the party's ideas are the best ones, and it thus refuses to change policies. A *sales-oriented party* is similar to a product-oriented party in that it believes in its own ideas and policies, as defined by its members and activists. However, it realizes that those ideas and policies must be "sold" to the public, and therefore it makes use of marketing techniques to communicate more effectively with its target groups. A sales-oriented party does not change its behavior or policies to give people what they want, but tries to make people want what the party offers. Thus, if the party does not succeed in an election, it attempts to make better use of market intelligence and other marketing techniques, that is, it attempts to become more professionalized in its campaigning.

A *market-oriented party*, in contrast, uses market intelligence to identify the needs and wants of selected groups and people and design its policies, images, and behavior to *respond* to those wants and needs and to provide voter satisfaction. Thus, it does not attempt to change what people want, but to give people what they want. If a market-oriented party fails in an election, it uses market intelligence to redesign the product, so that it becomes more suited to the wants and needs of targeted groups.

Because market orientation is about identifying, responding to, and satisfying the needs and wants of selected groups and people in a society, such an organization logically needs to (1) identify its target groups, (2) view the relationship with the target groups as dynamic and as a constantly evolving exchange process, (3) use the marketing tools that are available, and (4) keep track of its most important competitors and their behaviors.

Moreover, a market-oriented organization must also realize that their target groups and stakeholders are located in different arenas or markets. Regarding political parties, they are active on at least four different arenas, each accompanied by its primary actors and its strategic party goals (Sjöblom, 1968; Nord and Strömbäck, 2003; Strömbäck, 2007b). The four basic arenas are the *parliamentary arena*, the *electoral arena*, the *internal arena*, and the *media arena*. The primary actors in the parliamentary arena are the members of parliament from different parties, and the strategic goal is to maximize the parliamentary influence. In the electoral arena, the primary actors are the voters, and the strategic goal is to maximize voter support. The strategic goal for the internal arena is to maximize internal cohesion, and the primary actors are the members and the activists of the party. Finally, in the media arena, the strategic goal is to maximize positive publicity, downplay negative publicity, and influence the coverage of issues and policy matters. The primary actors are journalists, editors, and gatekeepers within the media. One can also, as do Kotler and Kotler (1999), speak of five different markets that candidates face in organizing political campaigns: the media, voters, contributors, party organization, and, finally, interest groups, issue activists, and organized constituencies.

Whether one prefers to speak of different markets or different arenas, or focus on candidate- or party-centered political systems, matters less in this context than the fact that the multiplicity of arenas or markets creates strategic dilemmas for the organizations. If, or rather when, the wants and needs of different target groups and stakeholders on different arenas are not compatible, how shall the organization act? Are there ways to meet some wants and needs of some target groups and stakeholders without alienating other target groups and their wants and needs?

Of course, these questions do not have any universal answers. Instead, they are a reminder that political marketing processes should be viewed as dynamic and constantly evolving exchange processes between an organization and its target groups and stakeholders. They also point to the fact that there is always room for the exercise of leadership and that being market-oriented does not necessarily mean that the organizations slavishly follow the opinions of any predetermined group of people. As emphasized by Slater and Narver (1998) in the context of business management, being “customer-led” is not the same as being market-oriented. People have not only expressed but also latent wants and needs, and according to Slater and Narver (1998, 1002),

The first, being “customer-led,” is a short-term philosophy in which organizations respond to customers’ expressed wants. The second, being “market-oriented,” represents a long-term commitment to understanding customer needs—both expressed and latent—and to developing innovative solutions that produce superior customer value.

At times, market intelligence might reveal that both expressed and latent needs can be addressed simultaneously, but at other times, they may be contradictory. The same logic applies to political marketing and the needs and wants of target groups and stakeholders. That leaves plenty of room for political leadership, and it is also a reminder of the importance of long-term perspectives and strategies.

To sum up, political marketing is an exchange process by which political organizations choose to build their actions and their products upon the needs and wants among chosen target groups and stakeholders, in a manner seeking to balance the strategic goals on several different arenas or markets. In the case of political parties, the product consists of four core components: policy commitments, party image, leadership image, and a mindset of voter-centeredness (cf., Wring, 2005; O’Cass, 1996; Lees-Marshment, 2004). Among others, their target groups include their members, key constituencies in the electorate, interest groups, donors, and the media.

In case of political organizations other than parties, the electoral arena is obviously not important because such organizations are not seeking electoral support in the elections. In such cases, the electoral arena might be substituted by an *opinion arena* because all political organizations need to find

support in the court of public opinion. The strategic goal would then be to maximize support in the public opinion, and the primary actors would be members of the citizenry.

From this backdrop, it is clear that political marketing and public relations are closely related and that political marketing *as a professional practice* hardly can do without making use of public relations strategies and techniques. Both public relations and political marketing are ultimately concerned with managing relationships with different key stakeholder groups, and strategic communicative planning and action are essential in order for market-oriented political organizations to reach their objectives. Thus, *as an academic field of research*, political marketing would benefit from an integration of public relations theory and research. Four public relations theories—relationship theory, contingency theory, situational theory of publics, and agenda-building theory—should be of particular interest to scholars and practitioners in political marketing.

## RELATIONSHIP THEORY

Relationship theory in public relations offers insights into the relationship between organizations and their publics (Ferguson, 1984). Prior approaches to evaluating success in public relations consisted primarily of measuring the short-term, immediate results of a public relations program (outputs) or assessing the impact the program had on a target audience (outcomes) and dealt primarily with one-way models of public relations. Relationship theory acknowledges a two-way model of public relations (Ferguson, 1984; Dozier et al., 1995; Huang, 1999; Ledingham, 2001). This relational approach is vital to the concept of political market orientation on multiple levels. Relationship theory clearly has the potential to help understand how political efforts can work to identify, respond to, and satisfy the needs of target groups. In addition, relationship theory research has stressed the quality of the relationships between an organization and its publics as an indication of public relations effectiveness (Dozier et al., 1995; Huang, 1999).

Sallot et al. (2003) extended Ferguson's (1984) research, indicating the need for more research in the area of relationship theory. Ledingham (2001, 190) has further developed the relationship perspective by suggesting a theory of relationship management that states "effectively managing organization-public relationships around *common interests* and *shared goals*, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics" [emphasis added]. Ledingham (2001) believed that relationship management could serve as a useful framework for organizing both academic and applied endeavors in public relations. This connects to efforts in the application of political marketing to understanding the relationship among political organizations, voters, donors, volunteers, and other important stakeholders and target groups.

Ferguson (1984) proposed several dichotomous dimensions that would help categorize relationships, including dynamic/static, open/closed, and satisfactory/unsatisfactory. She also indicated that there are numerous other variables that would be useful in describing relationships, including the degree to which each party feels it has control over the relationship, the amount of power possessed by each party in the relationship, perceptions of shared goals, as well as understanding, agreement, and consensus.

Additional studies have sought to explicate the relationship concept through identification of relational dimensions. Broom et al. (1997) stressed a need for a common definition of the term *relationship* in order to facilitate the identification of descriptive dimensions that make up this ideal. Currently, relationship research focuses on indirect measures that allow inferences about the relationship to be made. Thus, Broom et al. (1997, 95) stated

The formation of relationships occurs when parties have perceptions and expectations of each other, when one or both parties need resources from the other, when one or both parties perceive mutual threats from an uncertain environment, and when there is either a legal or voluntary necessity to associate. . . . Relationships are the dynamic results of the exchanges and reciprocity that manifest themselves as the relationships develop and evolve, but they can be described at a given point in time.

Public relations researchers have further explicated the defining dimensions of relationships in order to facilitate measurement of the construct. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) utilized Wood's (1995) relational dimensions of trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment, concluding that an organization-public relationship positively evaluated using these variables illustrates the value of a quality relationship to an organization's bottom line and can be used to illustrate the effectiveness of public relations. These are all points that can be viewed as relevant to the framework of political marketing.

More specifically, Ledingham (2001) used the Bruning-Ledingham Relationship Scale to assess the public's perceptions of relationship quality between community leaders and citizens in a suburb of a major Midwest metropolitan center. Initially developed by Bruning and Ledingham (1999) in this context, the scale provided support for the relational perspective and offered several observations for managing organization-public relationships, including the need for identifying common points of interest between organizations and publics.

Other studies have focused on relational dimensions such as openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment (Ledingham et al., 1997). Hon and Grunig (1999) developed quantitative measurement scales for assessing six proposed dimensions of an organization-public relationship: control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationships,



and communal relationships. These scales have proven to be “good measures of perceptions of relationships, strong enough to be used in evaluating relationships” (Hon and Grunig, 1999, 5). Incorporating such measures to the study and practice of political marketing can be a significant contribution to our understanding of such processes.

## CONTINGENCY THEORY

The contingency theory of accommodation in public relations posits that the practice of public relations moves on a continuum from total advocacy for an organization or client to total accommodation of a public (Cancel et al., 1997, 1999; Cameron, 1997; Cameron et al., 2001; Reber et al., 2003). The different degrees of advocacy and accommodation in the continuum represent many different roles that an organization will assume at any given time when dealing with an individual public (Cameron, 1997). This continuum differs from Grunig and Hunt's (1984, 285) exclusive categorization found in the four models of communication in which public relations is practiced. Cancel et al. (1999, 31) argue that the contingency theory of accommodation works to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the public relations environment, thus serving as “an alternative to the normative theory of excellence in public relations based on the two-way symmetrical model.” In doing so, a matrix of variables has been identified that might affect an organization's stance toward a specific public.

Contingency theory conceptually integrates with the view that political marketing processes are dynamic processes between an organization and its target groups and stakeholders. Contingency theory does this in part by using a matrix of variables, including variables affecting public relations practice and organizational factors (top management, public relations department, organizational culture, etc.). Therefore, the theory offers knowledge and understanding of the value of accommodating or advocating publics when an organization is faced with conflict.

Contingency theory studies 86 factors or variables (Cancel et al., 1999). These factors include both external and internal variables. These variables affect where an organization positions itself on the continuum when faced with different publics during a conflict. Contingency theory does not assess the outcome of the situation, but rather the decisions leading to the stance of the organization toward a particular public (Cancel et al., 1999). In addition, contingency theory works to sort out clusters of activity and techniques that may serve as models from the strategic position taken by an organization (Reber et al., 2003). This works to further understand the potential combination of techniques that may be used in a given situation leading to movement along the continuum from advocacy to accommodation.

Earlier contingency theory work (Cancel et al., 1997, 1999; Cameron, 1997; Cameron et al., 2001) found the advocacy/accommodation continuum to be a valid representation of the subjects and their organizations' interactions with external publics. Accommodation with external publics depends on how close or far an organization's predisposing variables are from pure accommodation on the continuum. Predisposing variables are defined as variables that "have their greatest influence on an organization by helping to shape the organization's predisposition toward relations with external publics" (Cancel et al., 1999, 177). Also involved in the process are situational variables that "influence how an organization shifts its stance toward an external public as the situation plays out" (Cancel et al., 1999, 177).

Further contingency theory research has worked on grouping variables from the original matrix into proscriptive variables that "limit, prevent, preclude, or prohibit any degree of accommodation by an organization of a given public at a given time" (Cameron et al., 2001, 247). These proscriptive variables add parsimony to the theory by establishing rules affecting a stance toward a public at a particular time (Reber et al., 2003).

The six proscriptive variables suggested by Cameron et al. (2001) are (1) moral conviction (where public relations practitioners act in the best interest of all parties); (2) multiple publics (when two publics are opposed on the issue and one public wants the organization to accommodate on its demands); (3) regulatory constraints (when two organizations may not be allowed to engage in collaboration or dialogue because of legal regulations); (4) management pressure (when management does not allow public relations practitioners to accommodate their publics because doing so would strain organizational resources); (5) jurisdictional issues (turf battles between departments within an organization may preclude accommodative or adversarial stances toward departments); and (6) legal constraints (when accommodation may be legally prohibited).

In addition, Reber and Cameron (2003) found support for public relations practitioners affirming the notion of bridge building as a primary goal for public relations. Within this context, they focused on five theoretical constructs: external threats; external public characteristics; organizational characteristics; public relations department characteristics; and dominant coalition characteristics. Thus, in this context, both the six proscriptive variables and the more recent five theoretical constructs of contingency theory may be helpful in guiding market-oriented political organizations in their efforts to develop and strengthen their relationships with target groups and stakeholders.

## SITUATIONAL THEORY OF PUBLICS

Grunig's situational theory of publics offers a critical conceptual perspective for predicting the communication behavior of target publics (Grunig and

Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1989). The core of the theory is that by effectively anticipating the communication behavior of members in stakeholder groups, public relations professionals can segment target publics and be strategic in their choices of how to best communicate with them. The application to political marketing lies in identifying strategies for how best to communicate with and receive feedback from voters, donors, parties, activists, and other key target groups and stakeholders (i.e., market intelligence). This can be used for a variety of goals, such as crisis communication, voter mobilization, and fund raising.

The three principal independent variables in the theory are problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement (Aldoory, 2001; Grunig, 1988; Roser and Thompson, 1995). The first variable deals with the extent to which members of a target public believe an issue is a problem. The second variable concerns the extent to which members of a target public perceive that there are obstacles impeding their ability to act on an issue. Finally, involvement entails how personally connected members of a target group feel toward an issue or problem.

These three independent variables are used to predict two types of communication behavior among key publics: information processing and information seeking (Grunig and Ipes, 1983; Slater et al., 1992). Information processing is defined as passively paying attention to messages regarding a particular issue. When paying attention, the processing of information is likely to be superficial and sporadic. Information seeking, on the other hand, involves paying careful attention to messages. It also entails actively looking for information concerning a particular issue. In short, information seekers are more likely to communicate about particular issues, as well as receive messages about them.

Based on situational theory, stakeholder groups can be classified as nonpublics, latent publics, aware publics, and active publics (Grunig, 1982). The principal theoretical propositions made in situational theory are that higher levels of problem recognition and involvement are linked with information seeking. In contrast, lower levels of constraint recognition are associated with information processing. Thus, individuals most likely to actively communicate about issues are those who perceive a situation is a problem, feel they have power to do something about it, and believe it is of great personal concern to them. Beyond predicting communication behavior, situational theory also posits that information seekers are more likely to develop cognitions, opinions, and actions in response to issues discussed in messages (Hamilton, 1992).

Several studies have offered support for the basic expectations outlined by situational theory (Aldoory, 2001; Cameron, 1992; Heath et al., 1995; Major, 1993; Grunig and Hunt, 1984). It also has proven compatible with other theoretical perspectives centered on communication behavior and message strategy, such as cognitive-response and protection-motivation

theory (Roser and Thompson, 1995; Slater et al., 1992). The robustness of situational theory has been tested in multiple contexts, including environmental communication (Major, 1993) and health communication (Grunig and Childers, 1988). Relevant in this context, Hamilton's (1992) study of the 1990 Kansas gubernatorial race not only found evidence supporting situational theory's predictions of communication behavior but also noted relationships between its independent variables and the demographic traits of target public members.

Consequently, when combined with demographic data, situational theory variables can serve as a vital framework for political marketing professionals in segmenting stakeholder groups for determining appropriate communication strategy. For example, this can drive decisions for selecting effective communication channels during campaigns. As Major (1998, 493) writes, "information seeking has generally been defined as interpersonal discussion and specialized booklets or pamphlets that tend to provide more problem-specific information. In contrast, information-processing behavior is a causal process and 'often takes place randomly,' by attending to news media sources including television, newspaper, and radio." Thus, Grunig's situational theory of publics has important implications for the field of political marketing.

## AGENDA-BUILDING THEORY

In contrast to the three previous public relations perspectives, agenda-building theory has received some scholarly attention in political marketing and political communication contexts. While traditional agenda setting has concentrated on the transfer of object salience (e.g., issues, organizations, and candidates) from the media to the public, the broader concept of agenda building views the process of salience formation as one of mutual interdependency among policy makers, news media, and the public. From an agenda-building perspective, the primary role of political public relations is in shaping the media agenda, although it is crucial to recognize its contribution to image management, internal party communications, and government information management (McNair, 1995). Political public relations efforts impact the media agenda through the use of information subsidies in the form of news releases, press conferences, interviews, and so forth (e.g., Gandy, 1982; Turk, 1986). Of these, news releases have been the most widely scrutinized.

Kaid (1976), for instance, examined the influence of campaign news releases on media coverage of congressional elections in Michigan. Her findings revealed that releases played an essential role in shaping news coverage. In assessing the effectiveness of different message strategies, she observed that news releases including personal information and

campaign announcements were covered more frequently than those mentioning issues.

In more recent research, Lancendorfer and Lee (2003) observed that the salience of issues in campaign news releases in the 2002 Michigan gubernatorial race influenced news coverage of issues during the campaign. Evatt and Bell (1994) detected similar relationships during the 1994 Texas gubernatorial election but reported that certain candidates are more effective in impacting the media agenda than others. As such, agenda building offers a noteworthy perspective in understanding how political candidates and campaigns may gain strategic advantages over one another during elections.

While much of the agenda-building research has focused on the relationship between political public relations efforts and news media, an understudied, but equally critical relationship, is the linkage between political public relations and public opinion (Tedesco, 2001). To date, few studies have explored such associations, but there are exceptions. For example, in a study of the 2002 Florida gubernatorial election, Kiousis et al. (2004) observed a strong linkage between the salience of issues in news releases from the two major candidates and the public agenda. Future research exploring the influence of political public relations efforts on the public agenda is needed to enhance our understanding of the broader relationship between political campaigns and public opinion.

In addition to connections with news media and public opinion, recent research on agenda building has also suggested that campaigns may affect one another through their public relations efforts. More specifically, Tedesco (2005a) found that the salience of issues in campaign news releases among candidates during the 2004 Democratic presidential primaries were highly associated. Similar to Evatt and Bell's (1994) observation regarding impact on the media agenda, he found that certain candidates gain an advantage in terms of defining the campaign agenda for other candidates. Not limited to primaries, evidence for intercandidate agenda setting was also gleaned during the 2004 presidential election between the Bush and Kerry campaigns (Tedesco, 2005b). While most of the evidence showed reciprocal influence between the campaigns, at certain points in time each candidate was able to shape the agenda of the other. A major implication of such research is that it offers an innovative approach for assessing the effectiveness of political public relations messages beyond simple media placements and public opinion impact.

Whereas the traditional focus of agenda-building research has been on the salience of issues or other "objects," the contemporary explication of second-level agenda-setting, which links the process to framing, additionally proposes that studying the salience of attributes merits further scholarly attention (McCombs, 2004; Wanta et al., 2004). An attribute can be conceptualized as a property, quality, or characteristic that describes an object.

The use of “object” here is consistent with the use of an “attitude object” in psychology.

A growing body of research has begun examining the role of attribute salience in second-level agenda building. Tedesco (2001), for example, found that news releases from presidential candidates during the 2000 presidential election were not only associated with the salience of issues in media content, but the salience of attributes as well. In particular, stronger correlations between the campaign and media agendas emerged for the salience of audience strategy frames (e.g., conservative, liberal, independent) than for campaign process frames (e.g., polls, speeches). Elsewhere, Kiouisis et al. (2004) found evidence of public relations influence on the salience of substantive (issue position, biographical information, qualifications, personality, and integrity) and affective attributes (positive, neutral, and negative tone) in news media content and public opinion concerning political candidates. By incorporating attribute salience into models of agenda building, future research can more precisely understand the nuances in the discourse among political campaigns, news media content, and public opinion. Such knowledge can contribute significantly to the study and practice of political marketing.

## DISCUSSION

The emergence of political marketing can at least partly be explained by the changing relationship between political organizations and citizens in advanced postindustrial democracies. When Lazarsfeld et al. (1965, 94) summarized their findings in *The People's Choice*, they concluded that “The first thing to say is that some people *were* converted by the campaign propaganda but that they were *few indeed*.” This was a time when, as compared with the present situation, people had stronger party identification, when electoral volatility and political distrust was lower, when people had more respect for authorities, and when the media coverage was characterized by compliance rather than skeptical questioning (cf., Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Dalton, 2002; Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995; Pharr and Putnam, 2000).

Because such circumstances no longer exist, political organizations have to try harder than their predecessors to win support and trust. Accordingly, the stakes are much higher, and all political organizations need to develop strategies to respond to the changing environment and to build sustainable relationships with target groups and stakeholders.

Becoming market-oriented is one such strategy, which emphasizes the importance of market intelligence and of responsiveness to the wants and needs of target groups and stakeholders both internal and external. These can be found within the internal arena, the media arena, the electoral (or opinion) arena, and the parliamentary arena. However, even if political

marketing as an academic field of research recognizes the importance of building long-term relationships, gathering and making use of market intelligence and responding to the wants and needs of target groups and stakeholders, to name just a few examples, it suffers from a lack of a thorough understanding of modern public relations theories.

Four theories that have been discussed in this paper, which should be of particular interest to scholars and practitioners in political marketing, are relationship theory, situational theory of publics, contingency theory, and agenda building. For example, relationship theory emphasizes the importance of building long-term relationships around common interests and shared goals, which is necessary to any market-oriented organization that needs to be trusted in its attempts to respond to the wants and needs of target groups and stakeholders. Research on relationship theory has also developed measurements of, for instance, the perceptions of relationship quality and dimensions of organization-public relationships, such as commitment, trust, control mutuality, and satisfaction. This work could inform market-oriented political organizations such as parties in their efforts to develop and measure the quality of their relationships with target groups and stakeholders.

Similarly, contingency theory integrates with the view that political marketing processes are dynamic and constantly evolving exchange processes between an organization and its target groups and stakeholders, and it offers knowledge and understanding with regard to the value of accommodating or advocating these when conflicts are present or evolving. This is particularly true because the wants and needs can be both expressed and latent, and there may be conflicts between the wants and needs of different stakeholders and target groups within or external to the organization. In such situations, there are no easy solutions; however, theory and research on contingency theory can help guide the leadership of market-oriented political organizations in their efforts to strike a balance between different wants and needs, as well as different stakeholders and target groups within different arenas.

The situational theory of publics is also essential to market-oriented organizations, for example, with regard to gathering and using market intelligence. In attempting to understand and differentiate between expressed and latent wants and needs, it is crucial to understand whether different stakeholders or target groups should be classified as nonpublics, latent publics, aware publics, or active publics. Because active and aware publics are more likely to communicate with the organizations, the expressed wants and needs of those publics may mistakenly be taken as the wants and needs of a larger population. This might lead the organization to a poor understanding of the latent wants and needs of groups and latent publics that might be larger and additionally equally or more important for the long-term goals of the organization. By identifying different publics, the market-oriented organization

could also turn latent publics into aware or active publics, thus building new or stronger relationships with potentially important stakeholder or target groups.

With regard to the wants and needs of target groups or stakeholders, however, it is important to recognize that they are not static. This is one reason that attempting to satisfy only the expressed wants and needs would be shortsighted. Instead, the wants and needs are dynamic and highly susceptible to perceptions of the pseudo-environment (Lippman, 1997). Research on framing (Entman, 2004; Callaghan and Schnell, 2005), as well as the first and second levels of agenda setting (McCombs, 2004), has clearly shown that the media have considerable power in shaping people's perceptions of issues, events, organizations, and other "objects," and these perceptions shape the wants and needs of different groups both directly and indirectly. Thus, any market-oriented organization needs to take the role and the power of the media into consideration. By doing that and being proactive in the building of media agendas, the market-oriented political organization does not have to be a victim of agendas—and the wants and needs that subsequently will be expressed—shaped by competitors. Instead, by incorporating and drawing on lessons from agenda-building theory, it can enhance its skills in actively building agendas. This might lead target groups and stakeholders to focus their wants and needs on issues where the political organization is strong and credible.

## CONCLUSIONS

As the discussion suggests, political marketing both as a professional field of activity and an academic field of research would benefit from a broader and deeper understanding of modern public relations theories. This is not to say that political marketing is all about campaigning or public relations in the rather superficial way it is too often understood as outside of the field. As this article has shown, modern public relations theories emphasize the importance of building, maintaining, and managing long-term relationships between organizations and their publics. Thus, modern public relations cannot and should not be reduced to certain public relations activities, such as staging pseudo-events or writing press releases, just as being market-oriented should not be reduced to certain marketing techniques, such as polling or direct mail. Public relations is fundamentally about an organization and its management of relationships with different publics, just as political market orientation is fundamentally about a political organization and its management of relationships with stakeholders and target groups within and outside of the organization, combined with a long-term commitment to satisfying their expressed and latent wants and needs.



In other words, political marketing as a professional field of activity and an academic field of research would benefit from a broader and deeper understanding of modern public relations theories because it is not only about campaigning and because both schools of thought are essentially concerned with building and maintaining long-term relationships. This article represents a first attempt to bridge these two schools of thought and analyze applications of public relations theory to political marketing. As such, it should be perceived as an invitation for further theoretical analysis and empirical research that integrates political marketing and public relations theories.

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