Engagement or Apathy? Political Marketing's Impact on Campaigning and Civic Engagement in the European Union

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Executive Summary

Leading up to the European parliamentary elections in June 2009, the question to which extent political parties are able to engage citizens through strategic marketing efforts regains significance in the public discourse. The paper analyzes both the origins and trends of political marketing to distill its effect on voters and elections. It finds that marketing, despite of having become an essential part of the political action repertoire, has created effects contrary to its objectives, hindering valid information provision and reinforcing apathy towards politics. Due to these shortcomings, it is largely insufficient in achieving a meaningful contribution to bridging the widely-perceived democratic deficit in the European Union.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In June of 2009, five years after the beginning of the European Union's latest enlargement round to first 25 and later 27 member states, elections for the European Parliament [EP] will be held for the second time in a dramatically enlarged Union. Struggling with low citizen trust, a notion recently reaffirmed by the negative outcome of the Irish referendum about the Treaty of Lisbon (McKittrick & Merrick, 2008), the Parliament's election will take place amidst a strained climate of relations between the EU and its citizens.

Paradoxically, the treaty in question would, among other measures, introduce reforms of the European Parliament that extend its influence on legislative procedures within the Union, and thereby slightly shift the power balance towards voters. Following the gradual augmentation of Parliament's power through reform treaties over the years, the Parliament and its political parties would play a greater role in European policy making.

Such considerations about the Lisbon Treaty and its possible outcomes highlight the fact that a fundamental issue within the European Union remains the much-discussed democratic deficit and its electorates' civic engagement. How can citizens' lacking trust in politics and parties on the one hand be reconciled with their rising importance on the other? Effective governance of an ever-increasing Union remains a persisting issue for EU bodies, which suffer a perceived distance between the electorate and their vast apparatuses (Eurostat, 2007). This issue further manifests itself in an empirically verifiable decrease of voter turnout (Eurostat, 2007), alongside declining party memberships (Mair & van Biezen, 2001).

As much as the upcoming election will therefore be yet another acid test of the electorate's interest in the Union, it will simultaneously offer a significant chance for parties to strive for more than receiving votes. Utilizing the election as an information platform, they have the opportunity to raise awareness about particular political profile and values among the voters.

Currently, it is commonly attempted to achieve such an objective through conventional campaigning prior to an election, an activity increasingly optimized by embracing marketing strategies from the private sector. Yet why did marketing start gaining a hold within political campaigning; and in how far can it help overcome the estrangement between the Union and its citizens?

Purpose of the Paper

Through an empirical analysis, this paper shall argue that the discipline of political marketing stems from the reformation of public administration towards a managerial practice. By making the case for a service-oriented society, in which politics are increasingly valued by their reward to the individual, a framework of contemporary campaigning will be drafted. Thereby, light will be cast on the use and effectiveness of political marketing as a means for strategic promotion and eventual reengagement of the general electorate.

While a wide variety of publications scrutinize political marketing, its implications have remained largely opaque (Henneberg, 2004). Dismissing existing approaches as too narrow, the author criticizes the common focus on mere identification of marketing methods. Intending to build on the existing literature of the discipline, this paper shall therefore take a modified approach, regarding political marketing as a prism through which the broad spectrum of underlying political processes can be analyzed.

Hence, the first chapter will summarize the rise of contemporary marketing. In the second chapter, these finding will be related to the political considerations, which led to their adoption in European Union politics, placing political marketing within the context of government provision and elections. The concluding two chapters will then apply these principles to the European Union and its party system, describing political marketing's effect on public processes and the electorate.

Research Question, Material and Methodology

This paper's central research question was outlined in the initial research request as follows: *What is the origin of the measures currently being taken by European Union political parties to market themselves, and what are the implications of such marketing on the political landscape?*

Accordingly, the central research paradigm of this paper will be qualitative, descriptive research, following the Critical Realist Perspective. Hereby, it is crucial that the ever-changing nature of the subject matter is acknowledged: The state of political marketing, as described below, is merely a snapshot of its contemporary application at the time of this investigation.

The main methodology will be desk research; relying on secondary literature to address the central research question of political marketing's impact and effectiveness as a tool to reinvigorate civic engagement. By considering knowledge from both political science publications and relevant marketing literature, it will take a two-source approach in answering to which extent political marketing succeeds in capturing and retaining the voter's interest. Subsequent application of this model to the European Union and its polity will determine the degree of success to be expected from the parties' prevalent efforts.

Chapter I:
A Typology of Marketing in the Political Sphere

Before linking marketing to politics in order to identify overlapping areas, it is useful to consider the two disciplines separately, first outlining the underling targets of the marketing function. Its contemporary realm of which can best be explained through a brief look at marketing's emergence and overall objectives.

1.1 Emergence

Marketing as a private sector discipline evolved from business economics, particularly the initial function of sale and advertising. With the advent of advanced machinery and production strategies during the course of the Industrial Revolution, mass production became ubiquitous in Western markets, allowing for the sale of large amounts of products to the general public. Due to increased efficiency in production, businesses aimed to take advantage of scale economies through higher sales figures. Wishing to drive sales and gather knowledge about the characteristics of their current and potential consumers, markets became subject to investigation by entrepreneurs and economists. Through such investigation, commercial sales activities gained sophistication and slowly began exceeding their initial scope: Advertisement came to be seen as a long-term process rather than a mere facilitator of transactional activities. This entailed the realization that moving beyond simple promotion of products or services would allow businesses to establish a relationship with consumers as well as a public image of their product (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006).

Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) explain that before the backdrop of an economy fueled by competition, this strategy became crucial in engineering differentiation within a market of more and more homogeneous products. The authors point out that the so-called *relationship marketing* has become the paradigm of successful contemporary selling[1]. While marketing continues to revolve around the exchange dynamic, the theory bears the significant axiom that engagement plays a pivotal role therein (Hastings & Saren, 2003). A relationship with consumers and the positive public perception of a product, service and their provider is considered a key contributor to success within the commercial environment.

As such, present-day marketing is intrinsically a holistic activity (Holm, 2006). Broadly touching upon and integrating several strategic aspects, it is a tool that cannot achieve its objectives unless it is embraced by all functions of an organization. As image-building gains importance, coherence in the marketing messages has become of utmost importance to avoid compromising overall strategic efforts (Grant, 2006). A product, for instance, needs to live up to its values promoted during advertisement in order for its producer's integrity to remain untainted. Similarly, all stakeholders of an organization need to be aware of these values and carefully further them in their work with consumers.

1.2 Objectives

A commonly accepted definition of marketing stems from the American Marketing Association [AMA] (2007), which describes the activity as a "set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large". Building on the AMA's definition, the following section shall give an overview of the specific objectives of conventional marketing. While the discussion will be short and concise due to reasons of brevity, it will be pointed out that marketing has come to mean more than competitive selling through clever advertisement. Since the political strategies discussed later are only to a limited degree comparable to products or services, it should be born in mind that marketing attempts to engage a target group (Fill, 2005). The term *engagement* is defined as "emotional involvement or commitment" (Mirriam-Webster, 2007), signifying a cognitive dedication or loyalty to a certain offering.

1.2.1 Recognition of Consumer Needs, Segmentation and Targeting

Marketing activities commonly have their starting point in in-depth market research. Through recognition of the overall consumers' characteristics and needs, they aim to subsequently address these with a tailored product offering. Increasingly, the process of recognition makes use of the reduced proximity between marketers and consumers by involving the consumer in the planning process (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995): Prior to the launching of a specific offering, polling and focus groups are instruments employed to further the knowledge of the market and to project its acceptance to the offering (Scammell, 2007). For this reason, correct recognition of consumer needs is tied to identifying market niches, achieving the highest possible market relevance, and ultimately satisfying the consumers' perceived needs. If this objective can be consistently attained, it not only facilitates sales, yet might additionally lead to long-term retention of consumers.

The identification and ensuing marketing of a product towards consumer needs takes place through segmentation. During this process, a target market is effectively divided into different groups with the largest possible amount of homogeneity. This allows for the design of a customized offering to these groups, aimed at achieving maximum convergence with the previously identified needs and wants shared among the group. Additionally segmentation facilitates the focused broadcasting of customized messages to consumers as a form of advertisement (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006). Once groups have been identified, they can be addressed through various communicative channels.

1.2.2 Building Trust

Products are positioned through conscious differentiation and relationship building. While the former defines certain criteria of the product, such as positive attributes intrinsic in the offering, the latter is concerned with consumer engagement, prior to and following the sale (Fill, 2005).

Together, these two elements lay the foundation for the gradual establishment of trust between a consumer and the product or its provider. Advertisement and differentiation are able to generate a certain pattern of expectations within the consumer. The later fulfillment of these through the display of long-term consistency and reliability of the product (Palmer, 2002) gradually leads to confidence in the certainty of expectation fulfillment and consumers' predisposition to make recurring purchases (Harrop, 1990).

1.2.3 Branding

Branding constitutes a method designed to increase the effectiveness of promotion and to facilitate the building of trust. A brand provides a canvas onto which marketing can project positive images and to which messages can be tied. Commonly manifested in symbol or a word mark, "a brand is an intangible asset, a psychological good leading to consumers making an *intuitive, implicit purchasing decision* [italics added]" (Scheier [Own Translation], 2009, p. 142). Extending this conception, marketing also allows grouping a diverse offering to give it a common identity and "to encourage associations between a product and specific attributes" (Fill, 2005, p. 125). Hence, by actively building a perceived image, branding aids marketers in positioning a product in the consumer's perception. The example of a successful consumer brand such as Coca Cola exemplifies how branding firmly differentiates a product range's values and characteristics from competing offerings. Simultaneously, it thereby bestows it with personality (Grant, 2006), in the case of Coca Cola that of a softdrink, which has remained true to its origin and recipe. Furthermore, brands constitute barriers against the market entry of competitors, which are forced to invest heavily in order to offset the advantages held by the brand owner (Bowler, 1990).

1.2.4 Conclusion

Marketing is a strategic activity, which lies at the core of virtually all elements of sales activities. Using tools such as branding and relationship building, it engages consumers in a target market, who gather information, build up expectations and identify with an offering, thereby driving sales figures and consumer satisfaction.

EU voters' engagement and satisfaction, however, lag far behind such successes. As previously discussed, the European electorate commonly feels powerless and remote from Brussels' politics. For this reason, it is already conceivable to discern parallels and some of the incentives having lead to the adoption of marketing principles in the public sector.

Therefore, it shall first be pointed out in how far the marketing of political parties coincides with marketing in the private sector. Afterwards, disparities will be considered in order to create a subset of strategies and rules.

1.3 Differentiating Public and Private:
What Sets Political Marketing Apart From Consumer Marketing?

Within both the private and the public sector, the goal of marketing is essentially identical: It is designed to initiate an "effective behavioral change" (Laing, 2003, p. 428) among its target group. In political marketing, however, the intention does not lie in obtaining profits through payment from consumers, but rather in winning the electorate's approval and ultimately its vote at an election. O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg (2002) define that

> political marketing seeks to do so by establishing, maintaining and enhancing long-term voter relationships at a profit for society and political parties so that the objectives of the individual political actors and organizations involved are met. This is done by mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises. (pp. 102-103)

 Simultaneously, marketing is intended to supply a curious electorate with substantive information about the party programs on which it can base its decision-making (Scammell & Langer, 2006).

Lock and Harris (1996) outlined seven criteria of differentiation between political marketing and product or service marketing, which will hereby be summarized and amended with insight from further relevant publications.

1.3.1 Intangibility

First and foremost, politics, political parties and candidates can only to a limited degree be compared to physical products or even services that are marketed in the private sector. A political party's product consists of its ideology and policies, party figures, and general members (Kolvas & Harris, 2005). In a direct comparison of attributes, therefore, the 'products' of the public sector noticeably lack in tangibility and near-instant availability. Decisions and policies, take place in a formalized environment, which is commonly remote from voters and within the realm of complex organizations; they are harder to grasp and to interact with. Direct citizen participation in these processes is typically limited to the elections taking place years several years from one another or the occasional referenda.

Due to such distinctions, political marketing remains inherently abstract, offers virtually no instantly gratifying experiences to the citizen and is consequently much harder to assess than a product or service. Since the tangible attributes of politics therefore pale in comparison to physical products or services, its abstract attributes are inevitably augmented in the citizens' perception.

1.3.2 Voting

Voting is the closest political equivalent of making a consumer purchase (Lock & Harris, 1996), as it involves decision-making and the subsequent investment of a certain 'capital', namely the only vote a citizen has. It takes place on the same day or short time span for the entire electorate, which is therefore unable to follow an overall trend during the election process. Furthermore, the act of voting is not tied to any financial costs and therefore marks a different

degree of commitment. The absence of a financial investment facilitates casting a vote, even though the degree of cognitive dissonance (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006), a post-purchase feeling of doubt about the choice made might be equally high.

Due to the nature of elections, the vote cast might also not result in an individual voter's preferred outcome, leading to dissatisfaction. There is no equivalent to this in the market, where a consumer would simply avoid making the purchase of an undesirable product and would consequently be spared such feelings.

1.3.3 Broad Target Group & Offering

Secondly, marketing in the public sector aims to embrace a much wider target group than marketing in the private sphere, namely the general electorate (Laing, 2003). Naturally, this group is markedly diverse in its composition and behavior, thereby harder to tailor an all-satisfying 'offering' to.

The effect is intensified through preexisting opinions among the public, making parties' communication towards the electorate walk a tightrope between two groups: Those voters in line with its program and ideology, and the rest of the public that might openly oppose the values a party stands for. Medvec (2006) argues that political marketing therefore necessarily causes polarization and enhances existing party orientation among voters, jeopardizing the engagement of a certain part of the electorate. Additionally, citizens tend to lay greater emphasis on parties' ideologies and images than on their actual policy output (Harrop, 1990), resulting in a higher loss of votes if such images or ideologies are compromised.

For these reasons, political parties face the contradiction of appealing to a broad group by projecting a consistent and distinct image, while deliberately avoiding an all-appealing image of themselves. The implications of this specific trait shall be discussed in a later chapter of this paper.

1.3.4 The Media as a Middleman

Not unlike the sale of physical goods, which normally involves an intermediate such as a retailer, political parties are subject to the national media as an intermediate. Similar to retailers, which sell and present products, the media's task is to present and examine actions and messages, during the process of which they are commonly interpreted. Political parties are subject to great amounts of ongoing media exposure (Trenz, 2004), as opposed to commercial products or services that seldom retain the media spotlight for an extended period of time. This is not to say that free market products are exempt from such public scrutiny, their coverage is nevertheless considerably smaller due to the shear amount of products and companies in the marketplace and the fact that they are not considered of such high importance to public life as political processes.

Communication from parties to the general public traditionally takes place through the media, which makes marketing attempts subject to its transmission and can lead to obscuring of the messages. Despite parties' attempts to undermine this scheme through the use of new

communication methods (Halser [Own Translation], 2009), the media continues to play a pivotal role in political marketing and exerts a great influence on the public perception of parties.

The media also possesses the capability of setting the stage for public discussions about certain issues. While this process supplies party information to the voter and accordingly aides in the process of opinion forming, it lies outside the control of parties and can bring to attention those issues not otherwise part of the parties' planned marketing strategies.

1.3.5 Brands

In a similar way that a brand serves as a tool for engagement in the free market, it is commonly used in the public sector (Scammell, 2007), albeit to a smaller extent and under different conditions. In contrast to the private sector, it is extremely difficult to introduce an entirely new party in the form of a brand into the market (Lock & Harris, 1996), rendering competition far more limited than it is in the products and services market.

Branding is primarily utilized as a tool to associate a party with positive aspects, such as trustworthiness, strength and reliability. In order to actively build an image of themselves, political parties are constantly involved in the creation and transmission of brand messages. This takes the form of the communications they transmit through the media, the visual identity they choose for themselves and the language they use when addressing the public. Harrop (1990) gives an excellent illustration of this concept when claiming that "the ideal party is a political version of the Holiday Inn: safe, predictable, reliable" (p. 279). The author describes an important attribute of branding, namely its objective to associate appealing and desirable outcomes with a political entity. The accommodation chain Holiday Inn bases its success on a value proposition of a universally similar, solid quality hotel experience at affordable prices. Consumers choosing to stay at this chain know what to expect from their stay, which facilitates their selection between competing hotel offerings and makes them more likely to select the Holiday Inn.

Branding of political parties therefore ideally takes place through a comparably universal, permanent display of values that familiarizes the electorate with the parties. Aside from messages, it can be expressed through such techniques as a strong visual identity. This includes the entire realm of graphic tools, ranging from typography over colors to symbols. The consistent use of these images leads to their association with a party.

An example of a particularly successful attempt of assigning a color to a particular party can be found in the Ukraine, where the party color of current president Viktor Yushchenko became an iconic symbol for not just the organization but also just elections, which later became dubbed the 'Orange Revolution' (Quinn-Judge, 2004). In Spain, President Zapareto's Socialist Party is represented (both nationally and on the European level within the Party of European Socialists) by the iconic symbol of a hand holding a rose (Partido Socialista Obrero Español [PSOE], 2006), setting it apart from other parties' logotypes that merely consist of a typeface. The symbolism,

which might appear arbitrary, gains a meaning through the values it is endowed with during a marketing campaign.

1.3.6 Conclusion

While it can in to a certain extent be compared to services marketing, political marketing requires a modified approach, mainly due to its proximity from the customer. Regardless of attempts to bring politics closer to citizens, notably through the recent surge of online communication mechanisms and e-government initiatives, politics remain distant and political marketing limited in scope. Decisive factors are the intangible nature of the political offering and its strong reliance on the media. For these reasons, political marketing mainly takes place in the form of message broadcasting, their framing, interpretation, and image building through branding.

Even more than the private sector, effective political marketing therefore depends on recognizing the fluctuating dynamics governing the relationship between politics and the electorate (Laing, 2003). The environment within which it operates is characterized by constant change; due to national and international issues, shifting social patterns, and unexpected developments, the nature of the target group can rapidly change.

This brief look into the differences between political marketing and its private sector counterpart already pose questions concerning the implications political marketing has on political processes. The following chapters will provide an answer through a focus on the public management trends that contributed to the initial rise of marketing in the public sector and its effect on EU politics.

Chapter II:
The Rationale for Political Marketing

2.1 The Adoption of Marketing in the Public Sector

Before considering the change brought about by the advent of marketing strategies among the political sphere, it is crucial to understand the reasons that lead to its initial adoption within a sector previously reluctant to embrace commercial practices (Laing, 2003). Related to this is an analysis of the environment within which political marketing came about and continues to operate.

2.1.1 Public Sector Reforms & New Public Management: The Doctrine of Service Delivery

A cross-section of political science literature links political marketing to the shifting perception and operation of public administration in Western Societies (Lane, 2000; Palmer, 2002; Henneberg, 2004). Therefore, marketing should first and foremost be examined in the context of the theoretical structure of *public management* theory, an extended, modernized definition of public administration (Lane, 2000).

As the term implies, public management is regarded as a governmental function emanating from a certain body, directed at another, with the first supervising the latter. It also correlates to the way management is understood in the free market.

Analyzing this term is elaborated by the fact that its conception has been subject to constant changes over the last 30 years. Building on incremental changes, the way public administration is conducted (and the term should be understood) was subject to far-reaching modifications. Today, governments and actors of public administration occupy a position serving the public body, not unlike service providers in the private sector. The relationship between public services and the citizens using them has thus slowly evolved from being based on a social obligation alone to being based on consumerist pressures and expecting citizens (Laing, 2003). Previously, the general public was subject to governance solely on the base of their citizenship, increasingly, however, governance is viewed as a service whose effective delivery citizens are entitled to. Such a development signifies a much closer connection between the electorate and its governing body than ever before.

The key driver for such rethinking along the lines of consumer service lie in the reasoning of *New Public Management* (NPM) first pioneered in the USA (Lane, 2000). As a philosophy of conducting public administration, NPM emerged in the 1980s among moves to reengineer the provision of public services. Lane (2000) summarizes the idea steering this process as follows:

> Common to all, the public sector reform efforts is the attempt to employ new governance mechanisms in the public sector that go beyond the traditional institutions of governance such as the bureau and the public enterprise and that employ or imitate market institutions of governance. (p. 6)

Through considerable restructuring, slow, ineffective and costly systems were to be replaced with a system emphasizing flexibility, accountability, and the overall refocus on the citizen as a receiver of services. During this process, government adopts the role of a provider of services to citizens, based on a so-called 'management approach' which borrows elements from private sector practices.

The use of marketing is in many ways derived directly from this reengineering. With politics as a provider of services to a target group of citizens, citizenship effectively converges with the role of a consumer in a consumption-driven society. Due to this convergence, marketing is a logical method of gearing public services and catering for service receivers' interests. Marketing effectively supports the provision of services by stressing their characteristics and raising citizen awareness about them. Thereby, it supports the conception of a public sector that is oriented by citizens, recognizes their needs and actively works towards fulfilling them.

2.1.2 From Public Services Marketing to Marketing of Political Parties

The idea of such citizens, which are influenced in their political opinion by their freedom as consumers, will be called the *citizen-consumer* (Shah, McLeod, Friedland, & Nelson, 2007) throughout this paper. To illustrate this term, it shall for a moment be taken a look at what has been driving the notion of consumerism in the Public Sector forward.

Parallel to NPM's reengineering of state, citizens have been primed to think of themselves as service receivers. Aside from commercial businesses, consumerist tendencies have therefore been branching out into the realm of the public. Many institutions across the public sphere have adopted marketing practices, a fact that can be elucidated with the example of city marketing. The Spanish city of Barcelona, for instance, has adopted broad appearance in its publications, framing all its publications and messages under a common visual identity (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2007). The Scottish city of Glasgow promotes itself with the slogan 'Scotland with style' (Glasgow City Council, 2009), while the German city of Hamburg has established an entire publicly funded company to centrally handle its marketing (Hamburg Marketing GmbH, 2008). If successful, to do so has a wide array of advantages for a city, such as promotion of the region abroad as well as spurring foreign direct investment and tourism.

Again, branding plays a major role of an umbrella tool, under which services, offerings and even something as large and diverse as a city can be brought together. It is observable that marketing methods permeate through different levels of public life, emphasizing the value of virtually any imaginable product or service offering. Thereby, those formerly intangible ideas, such as a city, are converted into a tangible, brand-able and ultimately marketable entity. Similar observations can be made about other institutions, ranging from government departments such as the Dutch ministries uniting under common visual identity 'Rijksoverheid' (PSFK, 2008) over public transport such as the distinctive brand identity of the London Underground (Mahr, 2005), libraries, to public health care in some Scandinavian countries. Through marketing, each is

transformed from a relatively anonymous part of public provision into a service offering with expectations to be fulfilled and a reputation to live up to. Branding assigns a commercial character to these offerings that were formally considered a public offering and were therefore under limited pressure to deliver maximum service satisfaction.

With the adoption of such strategies, citizens are introduced to the reality of marketing and branding in the public sphere. A citizen is turned from a mere user of a public offering into a recipient of services. The expectations previously initiated through marketing are subsequently to be fulfilled, similar to those of a consumer who engages in a purchase.

Reversing this observation, a comparable effect is visible when considering the citizen-consumers' effect on politics. What Henneberg (2004) describes as politics' transformation into a product, is called "politicized consumption" by Shah et al. (2007, p. 8). Both refer to citizens' reasonable inference that the doctrine of service delivery applies to politics as much as it does to other public services. Political parties, in many ways democratic society's protagonists, therefore find themselves in a position where marketing becomes a necessary means of yielding to public expectations.

2.2 Contextual Developments Impacting the Advent of Political Marketing

The aforementioned processes are in many ways linked to further, more general circumstances affecting contemporary society. The following analysis will consider those prominent environmental factors regarded as having contributed to marketing becoming a necessity for the public sector. As an extension of the previous section, it describes the attributes of the citizen-consumer and grounds, which lead to the public's disenchantment with politics.

2.2.1 Social Shifts

The lack of interest towards political parties and processes is largely due to social shifts, which tone down the traditional drivers of political interest and partisanship (Swanson, 2000). In contemporary Western societies, individualist stances increasingly take precedence over the notion of a political community, a fact frequently illustrated by debates about the extent of welfare state provisions[2]. Shah et al. (2007) ascribe those developments to consumerism, which the authors regard as having compromised the value of civil society. As consumerism moves the individual into the center of product and service marketing, including custom-tailored offerings, it entails an inwardly oriented society as a ramification. Abercrombie's study on the effects of consumer society (as cited in Laing, 2003) underlines a "decline in the idea of community and citizenship values and a corresponding increase in emphasis on the rights of the individual" (p. 429).

What all of these authors point to, is a consequence of the politicized consumption discussed above: Modern society deflects some of the core drivers of political engagement and instead provides room for citizens' personal ideals.

It should be acknowledged that this is by no means necessarily a negative development. Individualization broadens the spectrum of political issues, including topics that were not previously part of the political agenda. On the other hand, it complicates the work of political actors aiming to cover and address all these topics, as shall be discussed below.

2.2.2 Disenchantment with Politics

Naturally, politics are deeply affected by social developments. After all, political parties derive their power from votes stemming from an involved public. In a society where the electorate reacts largely apathetic towards the methods governing them, politics are in a state of crisis.

Nowadays, the electorate is concerned with a wide spectrum of issues, exceeding the traditional ideologies of parties. Political parties and their common agendas appear less relevant in the light of new issues. Topics such as environmental protection, human rights and various lifestyle issues are increasingly becoming the focal point of public interest. In many of these fields, dedicated NGOs, interest groups and private organizations have sprung up to fill the void, rendering party politics less important in the minds of many voters (Swanson, 2000).

In a brief discourse of citizens' disenchantment with the political executives, their low participation in elections, and consumerism's impact, Scammell (2007) summarizes voters' behavior accordingly:

> Individuals' greater control as consumers exacerbated their sense of loss of control as citizens. Conventional politics was blamed for the rising climate of insecurity and social fracture, while being considered irrelevant to a new consumer world of empowerment, self-actualization, and personal values. (p. 190)

Polls confirm that about a two thirds of the European population distrust political parties (European Commission, 2008) and have doubt in their ability to deliver working solutions for today's issues (Ferrera & Weishaupt, 2004). Because of this, political messages often spark disinterest among a large part of the population; up to 65% of respondents in a British poll conducted in 2001 (Ipsos MORI, 2001) found political messages on television outright boring. Not only do those poll results reflect a significant de-alignment from politics, the development also entails a much less predictable voting behavior at elections (Newman, 1999; European Commission, 2008).

Party loyalty declined along the lines of such disenchantment, visible in the lower number of party memberships (Mair & van Biezen, 2001). Interestingly, the number of trade union memberships declined in a similar manner (Visser, 2006), highlighting that another traditional representative of citizen interest has been suffering from declining belief in being able to live up to its role.

These phenomena mirror a shifting social reality. Modern societal trends and developments exert a negative influence on the engagement with traditional political actors. De-alignment from politics has developed largely proportional to consumerist tendencies and adoption of management techniques in the public sector. This is especially true in the European Union,

where the time of the first EP elections in 1979 coincided with the beginning of such trends. Additionally, citizens of the Central and Eastern European states, who gained their first opportunity to participate in the European Elections after accession in 2004, had particularly low participation rates (EurActiv, 2004), indicating a high amount of uninformed voters, distrust and lack of interest towards the Union, only briefly after becoming a member.

2.2.3 Diversifying Media

A main source of influence on public perception, especially in respect to politics continues to be the media. Developments within this sector have made in more diverse in focus (Grant, 2006): Nowadays, the media reports on a much wider variety of topics, which automatically leads to the allocation of reduced reporting space to politics, decreasing its media coverage. Diversification also takes place across the different channels that are available to the media. Particularly the internet has begun playing a major role herein: Through the customization of news, it allows for a selective exposure to reports and publications.

For all of these reasons, the media's role as a middleman is in a state of flux. It continues to play a large role as an intermediate between the parties and the public, but channel diversification, non-political content and the parties themselves are eroding its position. Meanwhile, public actors remain dependent on positive media exposure in order to reach the citizen they try to involve.

Salience of political issues becomes a more and more important factor in determining whether a particular political topic is to be covered, a fact that is particularly important on the level of the European Union, which suffers from much lower coverage than national politics. In an analysis of eleven European newspapers' coverage of EU topics, Trenz (2004) found the coverage to be "critical towards European governments and institutions" (p. 319) yet largely positive on the general topic and conceptions of European Integration.

2.3 Chapter Conclusion

The observations made about the characteristics of the European Union's electorate paint a picture of a public that is disillusioned with the idea of common societal problems being addressed only by political institutions and party politics. On the level of the European Union, the public affairs have been rendered too complex and multilayered to be understood by many; an issue compounded by the impact of consumerism. Consumer-centered approaches have brought forth a public increasingly unwilling to actively inform itself about processes and, above all, to compromise on its individual issues and seek solutions for them within politics. For this reason, the public's enthusiasm to participate in elections or to become involved in other political processes has declined dramatically.

Following a lack of accountability and increasing inflexibility of governmental process, political scholars pointed to the private sector as an orientation for optimization, resulting in a reengineering of public policy provision along the lines of New Public Management

Subsequently, politics were gradually redefined as the provision of a service of governance to citizens as a target group. This process took place alongside of social shifts placing the individual citizen as the central target of political activity and leading to a convergence of the terms 'citizen' and 'consumer'.

Chapter III:
Marketing's Effect on Campaigning and Citizens

3.1 The Broad Impact of Political Marketing

After considering both the origins of political marketing and the environment it arose within, it is now possible to continue with its effects. The above discourse has concluded in a realization that private management approaches have taken a hold in public practices. Starting to view citizens as receivers of public services, the public sector adopted marketing mechanisms in order to nurture a relationship with the electorate. As such, parties are under pressure to uphold their image in the media and among the receivers of such services.

Palmer (2002) remarks that through the entailing orientation towards popular rather than political issues, political marketing has shifted the public sector's role from traditional provision of governance to the people towards a constant struggle aimed at the acquisition and subsequent retention of power.

To illustrate that statement, it is beneficial to consider politics' transformation towards user of the party offering in the context of Kirchheimer's historic notion of a *catchall party* as electoral strategy. Published in 1966, his article "The Transformation of the Western European Party System" was among the first to recognize parties' organizational behavior aimed at engaging the electorate through fulfillment of expectations (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2002). Describing the behavior of parties after the Second World War, the author identified mass-integration parties that moved away from traditional ideological programs towards a centrist stance. By embracing wider issues and standpoints, these parties managed to capture the votes of a greater part of the electorate.

In line with Kirchheimer's projections, contemporary parties have largely abandoned the previously common focus on mere ideologies. Instead, their behavior attempts to gain votes through emphasizing the broad service they provide rested on their core party values (Palmer, 2002). Such action is directly reflected in private sector marketing literature (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995; Silveira, Borenstein, & Fogliatto, 2001; Brassington & Pettitt, 2006), according to which the provision of an offering is to be supported with marketing messages in order to reach a market position and ensure its long-term retention.

The following chapter will elaborate on this observation and briefly show in how far marketing as an element of campaigning practice has brought about change within the public sphere and among the electorate.

3.1.1 Optimization Engenders Scrutiny

Repositioning politics within such a rationalized framework, however, naturally brings about changes in the way that an institution is perceived among the public: With a focus on the

individual citizen as consumer or recipient of the service performed, politics become subject to constant scrutiny of citizens and the media, each demanding the dutiful fulfillment of governmental obligations (Kriesi, Tresch, & Jochum, 2007) and deriving an image of the sector based on the successes. The issue of perception relates directly to the topic of engagement, as perception majorly impacts the latter. Parties' reasoning in devoting large amounts of time and resources to marketing is therefore simply to increase their chances of winning a political conflict or a later election. In 1960, Schattschneider (as cited in Kriesi et al., 2007) already observed that these "are frequently won or lost by the success that the contestants have in getting the audience involved in the fight" (p. 53).

Especially for parties, therefore, it becomes imperative to take into account the public opinion and to accommodate its standing on image-determining issues in a campaign. Having previously been largely dominated by issues, campaigns are thus turned into a broader competition, which puts these intangible factors to the test alongside of the ideological issues represented by the party. Ultimately, the focus on perceived performance indicators such as the image and value of a political party levels the playing field between perceived status and the manifest political results, such as policies.

3.1.2 Accountability and Image Construction: The Constant Campaign

Thus, a party ceases to be assessed and to compete solely based of its political agenda, but increasingly on grounds of the image it projects. In the UK elections of 2005, for example, long time voters of the Labour Party had become so disenchanted with party leader Tony Blair's behavior when defending the British involvement in the Iraqi war, that the party was forced to address this image issue. Through a 'repositioning' of the politician using political marketing techniques, it succeeded in retaining the votes of these citizens (Scammell, 2007). Importantly, the Prime Minister's behavior took precedence over the actual political issue. The opinion about the leader had such a strong impact on the voters' decision-making that Labour had no choice but to act.

Such a case exemplifies the importance that perceived images about a party and its prominent leaders play in determining election outcomes. It is understandable that political campaigning has had to broaden its scope and is no longer a temporary activity constrained to the timeframe around an election. Harrop (1990) summarizes: "Real campaigning and the real marketing are over before the election is announced" (p. 290). As a result of the perpetual assessment of intangible values, campaigning and marketing become all-encompassing activities (Steger, et al., 2006). Both occur continuously and in combination, a phenomenon referred to as *constant campaign* (Scammell, 2007).

Taking place before the backdrop of a watching public, an alert media and the pressures to transmit a positive party image, the constant campaign describes parties' ongoing commitment to market their values. As a deeply competitive activity (Steger, Kelly, & Wrighton, 2006),

campaigning requires maximum attention to the methods and steps taken to ensure full effectiveness. For this reason, parties commonly employ opinion polls and focus groups to pre-assess their actions, partly surrendering party activity to the strict guidelines of public relations, and the methods meant to build trust (Shah et al., 2007).

3.1.3 Lack of Transparency & Loss of Identity

Despite all of this, it can be argued that the constant campaign entails a few positive results, notably the reasoning that intensified limelight, in which parties find themselves, leads to a more transparent and ultimately more democratic way of conducting public affairs. Manin (as cited in Kriesi et al., 2007) claims that precisely the constant campaigning has empowered citizens to participate in the democratic processes outside of the scope of elections. This is true to a certain extent, since media outlets have gained an unprecedented amount of information about parties and their leaders. With it, they have enabled the ability to expose false claims, misconduct, and failed targets. Furthermore, the media has helped bridging the information gap between public officials and the electorate by getting them in touch with one another and thereby adding value to the democratic process (Kolvas & Harris, 2005).

It should be pointed out, however, that such phenomena are not an intentional result of marketing. Most information that parties release to the public constitutes the work of public relations departments and is hence fabricated. Steger et al. (2006) go so far as to criticize marketing as a tool to deliberately mislead citizens. The authors argue that for several reasons, marketing in fact decreases transparency in public affairs. Criticizing that parties' decision-making has become subject to the goals of marketing and is driven by the presentation of a party, they consider it an instrument that obscures the actual party goals.

Furthermore, political advertising is frequently dismissed as trivializing and too strategic in its objective to bring across relevant information (Scammell & Langer, 2006). The marketing tied to it suffers from similar limitations. Rather than increasing the transparency of political bodies, it projects manufactured messages, which uphold the impression of a transparent body, while the actual planning and policymaking takes place behind the scenes (Palmer, 2002).

On the other hand, researchers question to which extent a party identity can be retained within a marketing-oriented environment. Newman (1999) observes an ever-increasing tension between party goals and winning strategies, causing him to warn that the tactics engineered to build images and win elections endanger the 'party of ideology'. The researcher finds that political marketing and its constant campaigning blur the lines between different party ideologies and entail the loss of strictly ideology-driven parties. Instead, he observes the rise of parties preferring to behave compatible to mass-opinion, an indication of the validity of Kirchheimer's projections.

3.1.4 Summary

The implications of political marketing on public processes are manifold. Primarily, it has been observed that the usage of marketing strategies has sparked a chain reaction of parties becoming increasingly self-aware, leading to their constant deliberation on how to construct their image through ongoing campaigning and propagation of messages. Consequently, this behavior enables the electorate to inspect party performance, benchmarking it to its pre-election promises. With the help of the media, citizen-consumers become able to influence policy-making outside of the scope of elections, a democratic tendency not previously visible. Nevertheless, political marketing methods also restrict the scope of political action. Aiming at fulfilling citizen pressures, parties are rendered immobile by the suspecting public and are forced to divide their efforts between campaigning, planning and the actual design of policies.

3.2 Effect on Voters

In what follows, political marketing's impact on the electorate will be evaluated as to answer the question whether it can contribute to improving the general population's interest in the public sector. Afterwards, the final chapter will relate these findings to the context of the European Union and its parties.

Beforehand, it should be stressed that marketing does not necessarily set out to increase voter turnout and to improve the workings of representative democracy. It is instead concerned with creating a connection between a candidate or party and the public in an attempt to capture a higher percentage of votes. For the purpose of this paper, however, its effect on the electorate will be analyzed in terms of such targets.

Let us therefore first return to the notion of engagement, which lies at the core of the analysis: Swanson (2000) suggests that "engagement refers to the various forms and manifestations of citizens' interest and participation in matters of public interest, including traditional forms of participation in the political system" (p. 411). Hence, engagement is to be established as a measure counteracting the slow decline in interest, participation and ultimately the institution concerned.

3.2.1 Marketing Evokes Schemas

Medvic (2006) emphasizes that marketing activates specific schemas within voters, which take both negative and positive forms. Firstly, marketing frequently gives varying degrees of prominence to political parties and their activities, thereby actively moving them into voters' perception. It does so by capturing the electorates' attention through relevant messages about current issues and frequently about other political parties. These messages eventually invoke recognition of the attributes related to parties. Hence, the public is informed about parties' political profiles and issues. The provision of such information evokes content, as it aids voters

in opinion forming and ultimately supports them in making their political decisions, both on grounds of party images and the agendas they propagate among the public.

These advantages, however, are greatly balanced out by the fact that marketing carries several adverse effects, which take the form of negative schemas and arise alongside of the positive results. Many of them appear beneficial upon first inspection yet entail undesired consequences that greatly compromise the discussed successes of the discipline.

Above all, marketing raises certain expectations among voters, which need to be fulfilled in subsequent policymaking (Bowler, 1990). Failure to do so leads to a loss of trust in parties, an effect that makes them subject to rigid performance criteria and susceptible to dissatisfaction among the electorate (Laing, 2003).

3.2.2 Agenda Setting

Marketing empowers citizen-consumers in their ability to influence the political agenda, bring topics to the attention of political stakeholders and to influence them in taking action. (Micheletti, Føllesdal, & Stolle, 2004). Parties striving for maximum convergence with citizen preferences are forced to follow these citizen demands accordingly if they are to remain relevant, appear in touch with the polity and want to brand themselves positively. During this process, they might be forced to abandon certain topics, which could endanger their positive image. Especially unpopular issues such as tax policies are therefore avoided in public promotion. Medvic (2006) confirms this notion when describing the important role political consultants play in contemporary campaigning, fulfilling tasks such as optimizing messages and political agendas in order to align them with voter preferences. In many ways, this requirement of branding, namely the perpetual display of well-designed political action, is therefore a major contributor to the constant campaign (Scammell, 2007).

3.2.3 Tension between Parties, Skepticism among the Electorate

Additionally, marketing raises tensions between different parties, whose marketing campaigns commonly entail unfavorable comparisons with one another. Not only does this have a negative impact on cooperation, something particularly important in countries traditionally reliant on coalition governments, but it also impacts on citizens' perception of such marketing efforts. Researchers have long described a correlation between negative election advertisement and voter turnout. Negative comparisons taint the image of marketing campaigns in general, regardless of the approach they might take. This claim is now challenged by research finding a positive effect herein, whereby such strong methods of marketing actually increase citizen's curiosity in an election and particularly care about its outcome (Finkel & Geer, 1998). Nevertheless, such generation of curiosity does not constitute true engagement, as it fails to bring about true interest in the policies' at stake but instead in the parties' fierce tactics to discredit one another.

As described, marketing campaigns often lay a focus on current issues, which are deliberated among the public and in the national media. Bowler (1990) finds that moving between political

positions does not pass unnoticed by voters, which develop skepticism towards the parties' consistent devotion to their own agendas in consequence to this behavior. Parties appear opportunistic, which ultimately reaffirms and reinforces previously held stereotypes of parties as power-seeking organizations, which will direct their primary efforts at gaining votes or at remaining in power.

Palmer (2002) poses the theory that marketing actually disguises the real motivations of a party, which instead remains hidden in the back rooms of policy making. Political marketing, while intended to make the parties' positions known, has become a vehicle of transmitting positive messages and thereby necessarily has to hide certain elements unfavorable to the electorate. For this reason, Swanson (2000) argues that political marketing has indeed achieved the contrary of what it set out to do. Rather than building reaffirming values and images about parties and candidates within the voters, it has ironically had the adverse effect of sparking doubt about the validity of proclaimed values and messages sent by parties. Linking marketing attempts of party programs to high cynicism among the electorate, the author claims that such marketing techniques have in fact opened the citizens' eyes to political malpractice and have cast their doubt upon the public sector's performance. As such, it fails to affirm an image of a public sector that is primarily concerned about the citizen rather than its own good. Swanson continues by stating that political marketing simply highlights the parties' desire to remain relevant in the light of power moving into the hands NGOs, large corporations, organizations such as the WTO, and special interest groups.

3.2.4 The Potential of Single Politicians

A notable exception to what has been observed is the degree of engagement that can be achieved by single candidates. Recent examples, such as the successful election campaign of the American President Obama, or the British Labour Party's landslide victory in the 1997 elections are directly tied to successful political marketing. Using the candidates as the manifest artifact of their branding attempts, parties were able to counteract the perceived distance and intangibility of politics. A charismatic leader, such as Obama or Blair can manifest the values a party stands for, acts as the spokesperson for the party and thereby overcomes the described apathy of voters (Scammell, 2007). For the electorate, forming trust becomes facilitated when hearing campaign messages on the one hand and seeing them embodied by the acts of a politician on the other. Even when only casting a vote for a party, voters therefore feel like they are deciding between candidates, a phenomenon significantly more successful in raising voter turnout than. For this reason, it is observable that many parties emphasize their candidates within election advertisements, including the candidate in the overall branding of the party and trying to leverage their popularity.

3.3 Chapter Conclusion

In many ways, political marketing is a vicious circle stemming from the expectations pioneered in a consumer society that stresses choice and individualism. Trying to remain relevant through the fulfillment of such expectations, parties have raised the stakes for themselves, frequently at the expense of actual transparency. While marketing allows citizens to gain a better overview of party activities, it does not actually provide them with transparent or unbiased means of exploring the actual motivations of such parties. On the contrary, parties are forced to produce a perpetual stream of messages directed at the electorate, which later on determine their image.

Considering the negative side effects of political marketing, it is understandable, why marketing campaigns mostly increase skepticism rather than animate voters to truly care about the political issues or more deliberately take part in the political processes. The only exception to this rule lies in powerful candidates, which are sometimes able to offset this negative trend. True engagement of citizens is, however, seldom achieved through marketing, as it mainly reaffirms voter's existing stereotypes about parties and ultimately the body they operate in. Hence, it will be challenging to raise the EU population's awareness and interest in the European Parliament without proper interest in it and exposure to the parties that drive its activity. Clearly, such an issue casts long shadows on the entire European Union, which suffers from negative or apathetic images held towards one of its bodies. The following chapter will consider this fact in more detail.

Chapter IV:
Marketing in the Context of European Union Politics

It has been the purpose of this paper to investigate and describe political marketing as a strategic framework and to consider its broad impact on citizens and political processes. Hereby, the engagement of the public and the task of raising its interest in politics has been the main objective; the focus laid on political marketing's effect on decision-making, voter turnout, and building trust in politics. It was found that political marketing is a tool utilized to raise awareness about political parties and processes, thereby reinforcing voter opinions that demand the effective delivery of beneficial services. Simultaneously, however, it augments the role of political parties in the public discourse, causing a stronger focus on campaigning strategies and electioneering.

Most of the observations made have been of a general nature and need to be amended with the conditions prevalent in the European Union to be valid. The European public sphere is notably different from national circumstances, largely because of the Union's unique and diverse political body and the composition of parties at the European level, also known as 'Europarties'[3].

Parties in the European Union, both the ones acting nationally and the ones operating exclusively on the supranational level, are subject to the pressures and expectations of service delivery discussed. The extent of these, however, varies and on the EU level it is only slowly reaching the intensity visible in member states. Kriesi et al. (2007) describe a so-called *Europeanization of politics*, whereby the focus of both national and supranational political actors increasingly lies on the European Union. They find that due to this body's rising importance and the powers being transferred to it, the EU has moved onto the political radar of many political actors, making both elections and party input into the actual policies more significant than ever.

In spite of this various studies on voter engagement (Trenz, 2004) show that the Europeanization also manifests itself in voter's dissatisfaction with the actual bodies and parties of the Union. Despite of voters' chance to have a say in European politics through elections, they commonly perceive them as *Second Order Elections*, which are perceived as inferior and less salient than the elections of national parliaments.

This chapter amends the previous findings by exploring in how far the state of European parties structures influence the success of political marketing. By simultaneously showing why the European elections receive smaller attention than their national equivalents, it will be claimed that parties, the structures of the European public bodies, and elections actually inhibit marketing efforts.

4.1 Parties at European Level

Europarties are groups of member states' parties, cooperating on grounds of their analogous political affiliation or ideology. This composition has hardly changed since their early foundation; the groups remain a conglomerate of national parties formalized under a common party name, such as the 'Party of European Socialists' or the 'European Green Party'. Thus, Europarties remain a construct of national party delegates, whereby convergence of objectives and programs is achieved up to a specific point (Delwit, Kulahci, & van de Walle, 2004). Kriesi et al. (2007) claim that parties remain de facto patchworks, consisting of their incorporated national actors. Thereby they are said to retain traces of national standpoints and party politics. This is best illustrated by European parties' competition for voters, which remains "segmented along territorial boundaries of the nation state" (p. 51). Striving to capture voters in all member states, Europarties' national counterparts handle most of the public relations work for European elections in their respective country of origin. Hereby, they can employ their knowledge and profile in these particular 'markets'. A reason for this is easily found. There is simply no empirically verifiable transnational public media sphere at the EU level. Both the political and media landscape remains inherently fragmented among the national borderlines, making it a difficult to apply all-encompassing marketing efforts in such an environment (Kriesi et al. (2007).

This commonly entails singular parties moving into the foreground of their Europarty marketing efforts and thereby downplaying their own differences with the party they represent (Ferrera & Weishaupt, 2004). European political parties thus appear homogenous with national party stances during the previously discussed constant campaign. Ferrera and Weishaupt find that this overplays the EU-related content in election campaigns. In consequence, parties' visions on how they wish to shape the future path of European integration are not expressively made clear and are almost paradoxically absent in the content of EU-related issues in EP election campaigns (Thomassen, Noury, & Voeten, 2004).

Overall, the scale of Europarty marketing lags behind that of the national parties, the reasons for which are plentiful. Firstly, it needs to be pointed out that political parties at European level appear as an artificial construct in the eyes of many voters (Thomassen et al., 2004). This results mainly from their composition, yet also because of the fact that they do not possess a long history or prominent profile.

The first elections to the EP took place in 1979, when it became the only directly elected body of the European Union. As other actors of the integration process, the parties participating in these elections had to first be founded and were thus relatively new constructs at the time of the election (Delwit, et al., 2004). Being a newly established entity of political life, Europarties were relatively unknown among the electorate and had to raise awareness about their political profile among the electorate. Doing so was difficult since they were unable to base initial marketing strategies within a longstanding tradition or could root their actions in traditional

values. Instead, they were forced to unify a diverse body of parties within their structure and had to build an image from the ground up.

In his 1990 paper on political marketing, Harrop stressed that voters do not actually base their electoral decision making on manifest policies, but instead rely on a combination of the ideologies parties embody and the images held about them. Yet even today, Europarties noticeably lack such profile, which would make them more tangible and thus marketable. This becomes clear when considering them in comparison to national parties.

In part, it is because of the relatively small power held by the Parliament, as shall be discussed. However, political marketing as such can hardly be employed without the necessary efforts and commitment across the party and its national actors. Europarties lack a powerful central steering committee, which determines their strategy. Being composed of several parties, they are also forced to reconcile various different interests, which could severely hinder the creation of a commonly accepted message that is subsequently marketed in all member states. Similarly, as the parties' candidates have different nationalities they are not adequately marketed across all member states, where they might be entirely unknown. This prevents a certain candidate from emerging as a prominent manifestation of party values, thereby reducing the effectiveness of branding measures.

Returning to marketing theory, Hastings and Saren (2003) argue that it is "difficult to 'sell' benefits that the consumer may never see" (p. 310). There is an observable correlation between this theory and European Union parties, whose remoteness and intangible results constrain them in their ability to engage in effective marketing. Bowler (1990) argues that party images held by the electorate are often a result of their past behavior rather than their marketing efforts. As such, the perceived image "may drag behind current positions" (p. 66), failing to deliver the intended engagement. With low citizen awareness about the EP's function, its policy output (European Commission, 2009) and its past, it is easy to fathom the yet smaller exposure of Europarties and their manifest 'products'. Because of these challenges, marketing is currently unsuccessful in achieving engagement.

It can be summarized that Europarties suffer from a widely perceived lack of profile among the public, making them prone to disinterest and misconception. Current marketing efforts will have to overcome this obstacle if engagement is to be achieved. The main challenge lies in achieving marketing that is relevant to an electorate as culturally diverse and geographically spread as that of the European Union. The following section outlines why similar characteristics apply to the institution of the European Parliament and why this exerts a strain on successful political marketing.

4.2 Second Order Elections

Not only the parties in the European Parliament face the dilemma of low awareness and misconception, the institution itself suffers from voters' opinion that hinders successful image building. The main issue lies in what Weber (2007) called 'Second Order Elections', a term reflecting the Parliament's overall salience in public perception. Since EP elections do not impact the power balances within member states, voters deem them as secondary to the national elections (Ferrera & Weishaupt, 2004). Confirming this theory, Marsh's (1998) study found that national elections are indeed the most important for the majority of political parties and voters, as their outcomes impact them the most immediately. The alleged Europeanization of politics is therefore clearly out of touch with the observable realities in member states, where the election campaigns retain a mixture of national and international influences.

Nord (2006) finds that Europarties are commonly perceived to mirror their particular national equivalent and thus suffer from a backlash of unsatisfied or disillusioned voters in their respective countries. The author elaborates this finding by describing a convergence of campaigning practices, whereby the international level bears similarities to the national one. He finds that this is due to the nature of the European Union and, ultimately, the European political sphere. Kriesi et al. (2007) affirm those findings when arguing that national party actors derive "their cues above all from domestic politics, and are at the front line of the implementation of EU policies at the national level" (p. 50).

In its 2008 Special Eurobarometer report on citizen awareness of the EP, the European Commission summarized the essential dilemma as follows: "The general impression of the European Parliament is (…) positive. On the other hand, since European citizens are not familiar enough with the European Parliament this general impression does not lead to a clearly defined image" (p. 66).

On the topic of the European Union, unfamiliarity and disinterest affect one another. For example, since the most prestigious positions of the European Union, such as the President of the Commission are not chosen by popular vote but by Parliament and hence by proxy, citizens are confirmed in their feeling of remoteness. Such feelings are yet overshadowed by the fact that knowledge about the Parliament's actual function is relatively low among the European public (European Commission, 2009). Nevertheless, even properly informed citizens can observe that national governments majorly influence the overall direction of the European Union through the Council of Europe, viewing it as a concession to national governments afraid to yield too much power to the directly elected body.

Currently, the European Parliament is being marketed with a European-wide awareness campaign of the elections (European Parliament, 2009). The upcoming elections will show whether those attempts will be successful in raising voter's awareness about the body and thereby initiate them to participate in the elections. According to the research conducted, it is not to be

expected that the marketing of parties alone will be able to exert a decisive influence on the voter turnout or the engagement of the public.

4.3 Chapter Conclusion

European parties have a long way ahead of them before being able to effectively and successfully employ marketing in political campaigns in order to truly engage the electorate. Current attempts are largely overshadowed by the fact that their fragmented party structure is too diverse for focused messages and cooperation. Furthermore, the influence of the European Parliament itself is simply perceived as too low, which obstructs the marketing of the parties striving to gain seats within that body. Parties effectively suffer from the EP's low profile, because of which they receive only small attention.

On the other hand, due to low prominence among the electorate, Europarties have remained relatively untainted from the consumerism-induced fever of self-marketing. While this had the effect of being perceived as distant and anonymous, it also engendered parties' and the media's focus on the actual political issues at stake (Trenz, 2004).

Conclusion

Brief Summary of Findings

This paper considered various publications of political and social science alongside of marketing literature in order to investigate the origins and modern measures of political marketing. Simultaneously, it set out to answer which effect political marketing has had on public processes and whether it could aid in reconciling politics with today's electorate; a group increasingly out of touch with the traditional political process and the methods for participation it provides. Through research, it was possible to distil several theses on how political marketing has become a popular method for attempting to bridge the gap between these two sides.

Political marketing came about as the public sector's response to successful consumer engagement mechanisms pioneered in the free market. In the light of citizens' perpetual lack of trust in politics and an ineffective public sector, politics were thus redefined from a provision of governance to an orientation along the lines of service provision. The intention hereby was to increase its relevance to the general electorate. As a part of the restructuring, marketing was adopted to reinforce the new role of the public sector among the public and to differentiate its various actors.

Parallel to this adoption, societal trends, production advancements and relationship marketing within the private sector were able to move the individual further into the center of sales activity, thereby enhancing its relevance to consumers. Through relationship marketing, which bears the emphasis on trust and reliability, consumers were reminded of their role as service receivers. The adoption of marketing in the political sectors emulated such approaches, yielding the convergence of citizens and consumers to a polity with high expectations towards politics and low tolerance towards failure to deviate from expectations. Reconfirming this claim through a look at the realities of political communication and campaigning, it became clear that campaigns commonly stress the intangible characteristics of the parties they try to market. As an element of this, campaigns often attempt to appear as favorable as possible by embracing broad, general positions, avoiding unpopular topics or by restricting their focus to current issues. Fostering a positive image of themselves is therefore of crucial importance to parties in order to both remain relevant and to receive votes at an election.

Such behavior, however, does not only fail to provide true, unbiased information required to achieve long-lasting credibility, but also causes constant campaigning. In consequence, a constant broadcast of messages about party activities and opinions occurs in the public media, often bypassing the actual issues at hand, and trying to appeal on grounds of mere integrity or candidate popularity. All of these factors effectively neglect the visible dedication to policies.

Especially in the European Union, where the citizens' low familiarity with the political institutions and parties prevails in conjunction with low trust in the Union's ability to deliver

relevant solutions, current political marketing approaches are thus the wrong approach engage the public. Furthermore, due to their complex structure, the European Institutions are widely considered uninteresting and remote by the general electorate. Elections to the European Parliament are therefore perceived as being only of secondary importance. Similarly, European political parties crucially suffer from a lack of public profile or strong candidates. The electorate is therefore led to base its votes almost exclusively on opinions derived from Europarties' national equivalents and the images reflected by those parties' behavior in member states.

Nevertheless, reinvigoration of citizen interest is possible by addressing the root of the current issues. Research has shown that the public's negative predisposition towards politics largely stems from low awareness about the institutions concerned. For this reason, current approaches that involve messages about party programs are largely unsuccessful in informing voters about the actual institution concerned. New approaches need to be pioneered that overcome consumer citizens' negative predisposition towards politics and the institutions within which parties operate. Only through a wide-reaching realization among citizens that they can impact the course of European integration, can those issues be tackled. Such, however, would invariably necessitate parties' active differentiation from their national counterparts and work towards more effective information provision for the electorate.

Possible Further Research

Despite the recent stall in EU integration process, due to popular vote in various negative referenda, it is the opinion of this author that day to day European Union politics will continue to gain in importance as consequence of a globalizing Europe, in which politics need to overstep national boundaries in order to tackle common issues. Necessarily, this will entail more in-depth media exposure and intensify the constant campaign and its effects, as described in this paper. With national parties allocating resources to Europarties, they will be enabled to increase their public relations activities and with it their marketing efforts.

In time, the current limitations of political marketing within the European Union will most likely be eclipsed by intensified activities across different communication channels. The internet, for instance, is currently still undergoing rapid developmental changes, effectively transforming the nature that people interact with one another and with public authorities. These developments are having wide-reaching effects on the social sciences as well as traditional private sector disciplines such as marketing. Companies are already stepping up their marketing efforts via such channels, and the latest US election campaign shows that the public sector is slowly following suit.

Some of the lecture consulted during the research of this paper dwelled upon ongoing developments in consumerism and their chance for political reengagement. Recently, socially conscious consumption has become as much a badge of belonging as status conscious

consumption. This is evident in the success of such products as fairly traded coffee or fashion brands working with organic cotton. Consumerism can have a positive impact on civil society, as it engages the public for a political target directly affecting citizen-consumers. It shows that citizens do care; they have simply become estranged with parties and the working of politics to expect the solution of problems through them. This shows that consumerism might actually serve as a tool for the revitalization of traditional forms of consumer engagement, counteracting the decline of interest by using appealing consumer products to raise awareness of political issues.

Within this scope, further research should focus on the impact of intensified marketing efforts through online channels or consumerist methods. Thereby, it could be investigated whether those approaches succeed in nurturing a relationship with the electorate or whether they simply amplify the effects discussed in this paper.

Notes

[1] This claim is subject to certain discussion among researchers, some having called in question the validity of such an argument in the light of marketing's gradual evolution. See Brodie et al. (1997) and Coviello et al. (2002), as cited in Hastings and Saren (2003).

[2] For an example of the issues facing Sweden, a European state with traditionally high welfare state provisions, see the commentary by Assar Lindbeck at http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/lindbeck2

[3] European Political Groups, the cooperation between several MEPs from different parties or independents, are not specifically referred to in this paper as they fall outside of its scope. Nevertheless, the observations made are valid for them to a largely equal measure.

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