

Scope of Political Marketing in the Context of Pakistani Political Environment

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Abstract

Political marketing is practically not a new idea; parties and candidates are marketing themselves from ages. However, now it has been acknowledged as a separate intellectual concept. The paper examines basic flaws made by candidates and/or political parties of Pakistan and leads to inappropriate implementation and unsatisfactory results. This makes politicians of Pakistan feel that marketing has nothing to do in politics. Article identifies the basic implementation issues in elements of Political Marketing and proposes ideas to rectify them in the context of Pakistani political environment. It will help in proper implementation of Political Marketing, and will also facilitate the implementation of democracy in political parties of Pakistan and other developing and underdeveloped countries that have similar political structure to Pakistan. It will also help in developing trust between voters and politicians of these countries. The authors reveal that in Pakistan; corruption, destructive opposition, illiterate practices and lack of voter orientation result in distrust of voters in politicians and their parties. The paper recommends that voter's trust can be built by avoiding over promising, focusing on voter's needs, designing integrated communication and distribution channels, managing strategic relationship with media, and incorporating the idea of public funding and parallel campaign management.

Key words: Political Marketing, Voters, Public Relations, Parallel Campaign, Public Funding

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Introduction

In conventional Political Science literature, Political Marketing is relatively a new terminology. It implies the usage of six Ps of marketing i.e. product, price, place, promotion, people and process in politics (Kotler & Kotler, 1999). According to Menon (2008), Political Marketing is the result of marriage between Politics and Marketing. Political advertising, celebrity endorsements, involvement of professional consultants and campaign managers; online campaigning, mobile phone canvassing, segmentation and micro targeting, etc. are some of the techniques being used extensively in Political Marketing. Political marketing has been widely used by both military rulers and democratic leaders to win mass support, sustain power and build their branded image; and has significantly affected the working style of political parties and their leaders. According to Harrop (1990), Political Marketing is not simply about party advertising, political broadcasts and electoral speeches but it covers the whole area of party positioning in the electoral market. According to O' Cass (1996) the use of Political Marketing offers political parties the ability to address diverse voter concerns and needs through marketing analysis, planning, implementation and control of political and electoral campaigns. Harris & Kolovos (2005), further argues that central purpose of Political Marketing is to enable political parties and voters to make the most appropriate and satisfactory decisions.

Political Marketing is being used and implemented with different names and different forms since centuries. Kelly (1956) by and large, is considered to be the first who used the term Political Marketing, it was regarded as a significant subject even in that era. According to Hussain (2008), Political Marketing is still in developing phase and calls for a lot more in the area to formally make it recognized as a separate academic discipline. Political Marketing is highly significant to democratic governments, especially in developing and underdeveloped countries.

This article explains the functions of Political Marketing identified by Henneberg 2003, in milieu of Pakistani political environment and discusses their implementation issues in developing countries. The article also suggests the ways for effective implementation of the concept in the context of Pakistani Political Environment in particular and other developing and underdeveloped countries in general.

1. Product Function:

In Political Marketing practice, a product, like mainstream marketing, should be formally designed to be offered by a political party to her electoral market. The product, a party wants to market can be intangible like a promise of good governance, the image of the candidate, an ideology or certain foreign policies, etc. (Menon, 2008). The major conditions for an exchange (or exchange related interaction) are the subsistence of an offering that is valued by the buyer (voter or citizen), produced by the seller (political party or candidate) and willingness of the both parties, the seller and the buyer, on the exchange for mutual benefits. Candidate's characteristics play a decisive role in voter's decision making process (Sniderman, 1991; Popkin, 1994). The product function constitutes main elements of provision of an offering and is a strategic management of a trade off process among elements of leading or following, voters preferences,

balancing the inflexible (e.g. ideology), the flexible (i.e. political agenda) and the semi flexible elements (e.g. certain characteristics of candidate) (Henneberg, 2003). Product function does not provide much more than a promise to be delivered in the future under uncertain circumstances through distribution . However this promise has characteristics of “public goods”, i.e. it is promised to and will be “consumed” by every one - not just target segment (Wortman, 1989). In USA, the main proposition offered by the Democratic Party were the Obama Brand and good governance based on change.

In Pakistan parties are unsuccessful to design products according to the needs and wants of the public because there is lack of customer orientation in their new product development process. So what is recommended is that political parties should revise their product strategy based on customer orientation, and position them in such a way that their offerings can be easily differentiated from those of their competing parties. Most importantly, parties should avoid raising people’s expectations by over-promising rather they should build image of high credibility so that people can believe in their promises which might be slightly lower than the non realistic illusions offered by their competitors. Leader’s characteristics is a very important phenomenon, charismatic leadership can prove to be a differential advantage for a political party; for example, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto lead his party to the highest peaks by using the charisma of his personality and focusing on voters’ preferences. He gave a clear motto, based on public needs, of *Roti, Kapra Aur Makan* (Food, Cloth and Shelter) and won the hearts of people.

2. Distribution Function:

According to Henneberg, Understanding of Political Management (2002) distribution function refers to the product availability to the target market and has two aspects, campaign delivery and offering delivery. Through campaign delivery function the primary exchange partner, the voter, is provided access to all relevant information about the political products, information regarding key party policies and programs are disseminated, placing the candidates in right channels, and making sure that channel of distribution fits the ideology of the party etc. (Sniderman, 1991; Popkin, 1994). The complexity of campaign delivery function is expected to increase with the introduction of new media like e-campaigning and web TV. The offering delivery aspect refers to the “fulfillment” of political promises made by the party or candidate (Harrop, 1990; Palmer, 2002). This aspect comes into play when a political party or candidate has the political and legal resources to fulfill their promises, i.e. when they are in governing position. As services are ‘co-created’ i.e. the electorate and the executives are inscribing and enacting policies together in a participatory and coordinating fashion; monitoring of offering delivery is crucial for the success of distribution function of political marketing campaign (Wortman, 1989).

Campaign delivery is very important and very expensive but has become misleading in our elections because in Pakistan politicians criticize the previous government’s performance, promises for the improvement of literacy, employment and poverty, and the implementation of Islamic values etc. It indirectly leads to over promising with the voters which raise voter’s expectations and promises for better performance than the previous government place a multiplying affect to further raise the expectations. On the other hand most of the landlord and feudal politicians, to whom politics had become their family business, are not directly available

to voters even during elections rather their agent work for their victory based on their family power.

According to Hasan 2006, offering delivery or fulfillment of promises has become rare and is the main reason of failure of democracy in Pakistan. After the elections politicians remain unavailable to their voters because they are unable to duly fulfill their promises (Wilder, 1999; Keefer, 2002). To address these issues, parties should extend the concept of “co- created” services, from only within the party and the electorate, to include another third element media, as it has become very powerful to communicate and influence public perceptions about the government and political parties.

Parties have to be more conscious while designing their manifestos as the media is playing a very active role to educate and enhance the political wisdom of the voters and on the other side in doing postmortem of the manifestoes and practices of the political parties and their candidates. However, it may not influence the opinions of the followers of landlord and feudal politicians. Both the parties and the candidates have to be very careful while campaign delivery, it must be realistic and should be delivered personally by the candidates instead of advancing through agents. After the elections, candidates and political parties should ponder their promises and try to fulfill them in real essence.

3. Cost Function:

One of the elements of mainstream marketing is to sell and make a product available at a price which provides greater monetary utility to the target audience compared to other products available in the market (Wortman, 1989). In Political Marketing, cost function deals with the management of attitudinal and behavioral constraints of constituency members through carefully designed campaign strategies. All the information regarding the political products should be available to the voters without spending a penny (Henneberg, Understanding of Political Management, 2002). Niffeneager (1989) developed the concept that voters pay perceived prices as psychological construct, i.e. feelings of national, economic and psychological hope or insecurity. Another role of cost function is to minimize the opportunity cost in decision making process and electoral act itself. In Pakistan voters have to bear high psychological costs due to raised expectations based on fake promises which create frustration among the voters especially the educated and mature ones who can serve as reference groups.

In Pakistan electoral campaigns are very expensive and it is estimated that campaign spending was averaged USD 120,000 per candidate in the elections of 1997 (Keefer, Narayan, & Vishwanath, 2005) and is increasing election by election because politicians are ready to bear any cost for their victory, this attitude has made voters more demanding for personal interests. Finances for these campaigns are obtained from local elites, in exchange of private favors. Keefer, Narayan, and Vishwanath (2005), said that Pakistani voter's perceptions of instrumental and psychological benefits, the credibility of elections, and the costs associated with voting all influence the decision to vote directly and these are also major reasons of falling voter's turnout in Pakistan. These undue expenses in elections are major burden on economy and are considered as a negative aspect of democracy. Instead of vigorous spending to win the election the focus should be to build and retain long term relationships with voters which will reduce the cost of

campaign in successive elections. It is also recommended that restrictions should be imposed on amount of money to be exhausted in elections, as in UK. This will provide a level playing field to all candidates. If the Political Marketing is implemented in its real sense, it will generate satisfied and loyal voters who will serve as buzz agents for the candidate and party which ultimately will help to eliminate the psychological as well as monetary costs bear by the voters.

4. Communication Function:

Communication function in Political Marketing deals with communicating the internal (party members) as well as external (voters) stake holders about the offer and its availability (Harrop, 1990; O' Cass, Political Marketing, 2001; Harris P. , 2001), the purpose is to inform, remind or persuade (Kotler & Kotler, 1999). According to Scamell (1995), importance of communication is just like heart in human body. According to Wortman 1989 and Harris 2001, for a political party communication deals with interpretation of complex political jargons, spreading of political ideas, contents of political campaign, future programs and simplification of political messages. It interacts with campaign delivery aspects of distribution function, prescribes a dialogue and provides a medium for exchange partners.

In Pakistan, political parties have lack of coordination and integrated communication within themselves; different candidates give contradictory statements regarding hot issues which create ambiguity in the minds of voters (Hussain, 2008) integrated marketing communication approach should be implemented likewise mainstream marketing to produce *one single voice* of the political party. In external communication understanding of the voters' characteristics is very important e.g. how much voters are literate and what their needs and demands are. Due to illiteracy and poverty Pakistani voters especially in the villages take risk to believe in the words of their political leaders and are easily exploited by the politicians through their loquacious speeches and promises. Parties have to make a well defined system for internal integrated coordination and then should plan for effective external communication. It will help to develop trust of voters in the party and its product. In external communication, content or the real message that has to be communicated to the voters should so clear that it leaves no ambiguity for the audience.

5. Public Relations Management:

Public Relations Management plays indispensable role in the success of a Political Marketing Campaign and is aimed at managing building positive attitude of the public and media groups (secondary exchange partners) through managing good news by establishing good long term relationship with them. It is a not a paid activity and could not be directly controlled by the candidate and political organization. Most of the political discourses with the electorate are mediated through independent third parties e.g. media people. Managing good relationships with third parties contributes great importance in building good image of the candidate and political party (Wring, 2002). News management involves utilization of distribution channels with inherently high credibility levels. However, the communication could not be controlled; it can only be influenced for its better management. The exchange partners of the news management are mostly journalists and opinion leaders (Henneberg, Understanding of Political Management, 2002; Frankline, 1994).

In Pakistani political scenario, candidates or parties try to find ‘way-outs’ to do negative marketing against each other. This is the worst which parties can do with each other as it ruins the image and shakes the trust of other parties and candidates in the minds of the voters. For example; the daughter of a minister was appointed as first grade officer in foreign ministry, when he was approached by journalists he simply refused to answer any questions leaving ample space for media to criticize on him and his party for this unlawful action. Such actions like refusal to answer or simply denying strong allegations, are considered as negative news management and burst negative word-of-mouth against candidate and party which is hardly controllable. News management is the most difficult issue in today’s world where media is very fast and blunt, and in Pakistan it is even more difficult where media is playing a central role in building or harming image of the candidate and/or the political party party. Pakistani politicians should be courageous to face allegations against them and if found guilty, they should apologies to the Nation, it may restore the credibility of the candidate. For successful news management a well equipped and vigilant Public Relations Department is indispensable.

6. Fund Raising Function:

Unlike mainstream marketing fund raising is an important issue in Political Marketing. This function deals with collection of funds for political activities, the performance of other functions also depends on availability of funds. For the success of the political actors, availability of sufficient funds is vital which calls for a distinct fund raising function (Menon, 2008). Political parties, to a varying extent, depend on membership fee, donations, etc. for funds. In some party systems, e.g. in the USA, fund raising efforts constitute, arguably, the most important activities of political candidate (Himes, 1995).

Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency reports that in Pakistani Political System there are a lot of deficiencies and drawbacks, the most important of which are undue influence of money in politics and corruption, which has almost excluded the middle and poor people of the country from mainstream politics, an acute form of political feudalism prevails in the society. In Pakistan most of the political parties are owned and sponsored by the rich families, therefore the leadership rotates within the family and there is hardly any democracy within a party. Therefore, it is inevitable to re-examine our political practices and transport the desirable reforms. To eliminate the dependence of political parties on rich families and for the promotion of democracy public funding could be an effective tool. Major political parties should take into consideration this idea of public funding and incorporate in their manifesto if they found it appropriate. Intellectuals of society and media people should also consider this idea and should do open debates on it to develop consensus on public funding in political system of Pakistan. It will be helpful in developing reforms and real democracy within the parties in particular and country politics in general.

7. Parallel Campaign Management Function:

This function focuses on the co-ordination of campaign activities of the political party with those organizations who have overlapping or similar point(s) on their agenda, like “Green Peace” idea, which overlaps among many European social and democratic organizations (Henneberg, Generic

Functions of Political Marketing Management, 2003). Endorsement of parallel activities by other organizations increases the trustworthiness of campaign message. Furthermore, coordination and synergy in managerial activities could make the use of campaign resources more efficient. Campaign coordination in the political sphere must be seen as a generic function because of possible network effects of working together with other relevant actors in the political market (Menon, 2008).

In Pakistan the concept of parallel campaign management is hardly in practice because the role of modern social welfare organizations is perceived to be insignificant to influence the opinions and attitudes of the masses at country level; however, establishing parallel campaign management partnership with the organizations which are influential at regional can be beneficial for the political actors.

8. Internal Cohesion Management Functions:

This function deals with managing the relationship among party members, activists and spokes persons. This function plays a very vital role in creating internal stability, credibility and party's outside image, and should be managed professionally because it has strong repercussions on the voters' assessment of candidate and/or his party (Henneberg, Generic Functions of Political Marketing Management, 2003). However a too 'monolithic' appearance of the party gives the impression of an undemocratic decision making process and derisory influence of grass root members within the party. As much as one can exercise power over others by satisfying their needs and expectations; one thereby paradoxically submits oneself to their pioneer (Panbianco, 1988).

In Pakistan, political parties have traditionally been weak and unable to perform their main functions in an effective and meaningful manner due to inter alias, periodic restrictions on political activities under military rules, infrequent elections, weak organizational structure, poor discipline among the members, absence of attractive socio-economic programs, and a paucity of financial resources. Political parties also suffer from factionalism based on personality, region and ideology (International Crisis Group, 2005). Democracy within the parties can help to deal with such problems because hereditary leadership leads to conflicts within party and thus formation of new group or party become inevitable.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Traditional political culture, illiterate voters and candidates, corruption, destructive opposition etc. are major factors which create hindrance in building a healthy democratic political environment in Pakistan which results in lack of trust of voters on political parties in particular and on whole political system of the country in general. The effective implementation of Political Marketing Mix can ensure the trust of voters which will ultimately lead to a healthy political environment. It not only ensures success of a party but is also beneficial for the society. If implemented properly, Political Marketing can help in creating a constructive political environment based on long term voter-party relationship.

For effective implementation of the Political Marketing parties should plan their propositions based on customer orientation and competitive differentiation. To address the issues regarding campaign delivery and offering delivery parties should avoid raising people's expectations by over-promising and should include media in the co-creation of services. To effectively manage the cost of campaign parties need to shift the focus from winning the election to build the long term relationship with voters. Systems must be defined to ensure the internal integrated communication among party members; external communication should focus on the needs of the voters while considering the competence of the party to fulfill them; and media should be managed carefully to endorse credibility. The concepts of public funding, parallel campaign management can play important role to flourish democracy in party specifically and country in general.

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