



Structural elements of political marketing: political advertising and publicity

Coordinator: Prof. Constantin Sălăvăstru, PhD

Author: Ștefan Covaciu
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIO-POLITICAL SCIENCES



Abstract

Political marketing is a peculiarity of commercial marketing. This helps us analyse the democratic exchange process based on economics knowledge. Starting from the premises that market economy and democracy are two systems with analogous structures, it can be considered that the form of organization of the democratic and economic exchange have a similar structure:

In economy, the place where the transaction takes place is the market. Entrepreneurs offer economic goods, and consumers present their demand for such goods. The exchange means used is money and the market is regulated by economic competition. The consumers' sovereignty and the competitive context lay pressure on entrepreneurs so that the offer focuses on the consumers' needs.

In democracy, the exchange process is achieved through election. The offerors are the political parties, respectively the candidates, who propose to the electors, in their capacity as consumers, political goods. The exchange instrument is the vote, and the principle regulating the market is political competition. The citizens' sovereignty and political competition force the offer in the direction of the electors' needs.

In the electoral campaign, political goods take the shape of political topics proposed to the public opinion, and the grouping of several themes is a political programme. The fact that the political good only has the nature of a proposal or promise until achieved raises an extremely important credibility issue.

The politician or the political party plays the role of an offeror in the political exchange process and they expect, in exchange for the social and institutional management services they offer, the benefits associated to power and prestige. The politician's pathway may be described as follows: the politician aims at reaching his own goals; in order to achieve that, he will follow the strategy of the maximization of the number of votes; this is only possible if his offer equals policy directed towards the needs and desires of the target electors. A politician who constantly gains in prestige will generally focus on the political activity. The politician trade thus comes to life, as an effect of the workforce specialisation, similarly to the economic environment. The politicians' specialisation should not be regarded as a negative aspect, or as a hazard against democracy. In many cases, politicians' expertise is the only way in which difficult problems may be solved or complex policies may be developed.

A solitary politician might find it hard to promote his political offer (political program) to all electors. It would be difficult for him to even know the other candidates' political programs. For this information issue, the solution is to group several politicians into political parties.

For the elector, as *homo politicus*, the solution of the politicians' organisation into political parties has the advantage that it reduces his effort and information costs (Nelson, 1970, p. 323) – he only has to acquire information on the political programme of the party, and not of each individual member. With this information, he can assess each individual member of the party. The belonging to a political party thus is a sign of “low-cost” politics, perceived as a positive attribute in politics.

Moreover, for a politician, belonging to a political party has the advantage that it exonerates him from the obligation of being an expert in all political matters, and he can thus specialise on certain fields only. Through this organisation, politics manages to extensively gain in efficiency (Ufert, 2006, pp. 15-16).

The role of a political party can be understood as follows: a political party desires to accede to government due to its members' individual purposes. In order to manage that, they

shall look for a strategy to maximize the number of votes. This goal may only be fulfilled if they present the electorate with a joint political offer. If the party wins the elections, its members have access to the desired positions.

Because of the work specialisation, politics only plays a secondary role for electors, as compared to the case of politicians for whom politics is a trade. The elector is a politics consumer and he has to choose from amongst the parties' offers on elections day.

In so far as the political decision is concerned, an important difference can be noted between the market and elections: the elector holds the right to one vote (Ufert, 2006, pp. 18-19). On the economic goods market, the consumer may choose, from amongst several producers' offers, the good or service that best suits his needs. Depending on his financial resources, he can purchase one or several products, as desired. In general, the market does not include time or quantity limitations, except maybe for the case of promotions. If he is not satisfied with his choice, or somehow changes his mind, the consumer can purchase a different similar product or can even change it. In the economic environment, offerers are so flexible that many of them can provide services or goods suiting the consumers' particular preferences.

In the case of elections, the elector may only decide for a programme, i.e. a group of political goods. The "sectioning" of the vote according to his own preferences, just like in the case of money, is not possible. After elections, the elector has to live with the offer and with the winning party's or coalition's capacity, regardless of whether he has voted for them or not. Hence, Wangen (1983, p. 49) believes that votes are not similar to money - a universal means of exchange - but that it actually is an exclusive means of exchange.

In the case of the voting decision, the elector is a *homo politicus*. According to Downs (1968, p. 35), in order to rationally maximize its vote, the citizen will opt for the party expecting the highest efficiency. Through his optimistic behaviour, he aims at obtaining a personal advantage out each negotiating situation and each political asset thus obtained (Braun, 1999, p. 39). This opportunistic man calculates his gain by comparing the costs, such as time or commitment. The theory presents a social man, in whose case altruistic decisions are hard to find. The choice is influenced by a "party differential" (Downs, 1957, p. 40). In order to set the differential the government party's activity over the recent period is taken into account, which is compared to the activity expected from competing parties. Thus, the citizen will decide which party generates most advantage. The difference results from the promises of the government party and those of the competing parties. If the difference is positive, the elector decides for the opposition, and if the result is null - he refrains (Downs, 1957, p. 38). Hence, the elector makes his decision based on the hypothetical future advantages.

In order for the elector to calculate the policy generating most advantages, he first needs to define these advantages. An important premise is that the elector is aware of his current circumstances and of their advantages or disadvantages. Hence, he needs to acknowledge the way in which his standard of living is influenced by the current politics and what would be the attitudes required for the improvement, respectively maximization, of profit. The individual thus builds an expectation standard, based on which the parties may compete. To this end, he does not only resort to acquiring information and party programmes, but he also needs to learn to compare the competing parties' programmes.

The theory may be interpreted in various ways. On the one hand, the elector carefully gathers information, so that his voting decision generates the highest benefit. On the other hand, Anthony Downs believes that voting participation differs in relevance for citizens. Consequently, the extent of the costs an elector is willing to pay in order to acquire information so that deep down he is convinced that he has made a good choice needs to be set (Downs, 1968, p. 210). This means that an elector will very carefully collect information if he believes that the advantages he might obtain pursuant to the voting decision are very

important. However, an elector will quickly end the information and decision-making process if he appreciates that the personal advantages of the voting decision are insignificant. In this case, an analysis of the voting decision from the perspective of the cost-benefit ration would be difficult to perform, because of a difference in the assessment of information.

Hence, the elector's decision is influence by the question: What are the personal benefits he can obtain if he participates in the elections? From here, it can be speculated that a citizen who does not participate in the elections is unable to identify any benefits brought by such participation, or that the possible advantages are exceeded by the costs involved.

All this leads to two reasons for which the decision not to participate is made. According to the Down model, either all parties are rejected, or all parties promise an identical programme, generating the same benefits. A third rational reason occurs when the costs associated to the making of the decision or to the participation in the voting procedure exceed the benefits. Downs continues his reflection concerning the information costs and asks himself whether detailed information is actually possible: "The second question is as to whether the indifferent elector actually has a null sum party differential, or whether he simply lacks information [...] we've seen that most electors do not hold sufficient information to clearly set their preferences, because each of them is aware that their vote is of minor relevance. [...] The information costs make all information unreasonable" (Downs, 1968, p. 258). If these costs are supplemented by others, refraining has a reason even if there is a clear, reasonable preference for a party. Here, we could include, for instance, the time the elector has to invest on the elections day, along with the decision-making process (Downs, 1968, p. 260). Hence, in order for the elector to refrain from voting, the absence of a personal benefit or the fact that advantages are exceeded by the costs that are too high is of essence.

Where are the personal benefits of the participation in the elections? The adepts of the Rational-Choice Theory identify them in the elector's possibility to contribute, in a determined way, towards the result of the elections, through the single vote he is entitled to. The critics of this theory focus on the fact that the possibility for an elector to hold the decisive vote in a ballot with millions of participants, and for the result to be influenced by such vote, is a utopia. Consequently, the benefits defined by Anthony Downs could never exceed costs in this way, and, hence, a vote could never be rationally explained. Eilfort phrases the idea as follows: "Because the odds for a vote deciding the result of the elections are generally quite low, considering the number of participants, and because the personal advantages expected pursuant to the winning of elections by an approved party or candidate are generally limited, as the decision-making costs exceed the benefits – no one should participate in the elections, and the rational, logical elector would be the one who refrains" (Eilfort, 1994, p. 76).

In the end, it should be first of all set if the costs associated to votes reside in information, in the decision-making effort, and in the invested time in general. The rational elector sees the usefulness of his effort in the support he grants to his favourite candidates, so that they win the elections, and, by that, make sure that political measures are applied, which will positively influence his life. From the point of view of the actual relevance of each vote, it seems that refraining based on the cost-benefit ratio analysis is a certainty. If the elector becomes aware of his insignificant influence in the voting process, his availability to participate in the political opinion formation process lowers, or as, explained by Braun: "According to the model, it follows that the elector will limit himself to the most elementary information collection elements, so as to avoid the costs as much as possible, because the interest limit is very low. Concretely, this means that he will only take into account the free information, sent within a relatively short period of time. The sales principle of tabloids seems to rely on this very rational model" (Braun, 1999, p. 69).

The applicability of the Rational-Choice Theory in the case of citizens refraining from voting - non-electors - cannot be reduced by the mere reference to the electoral paradoxes and the opinions on the maximization of benefits. Firstly, apart from the simple non-electors, there are non-electors who consider whether to vote or not upon each ballot. The section below analyses a few basic developments of the Rational-Choice Theory for the refraining case.

Starting from the understanding of the politician-elector relationship as a sales relationship similar to the one in the economic environment, Basting (2008, pp. 70-73) identifies the following features of this relationship:

- The institutional framework is given by the national laws, regulating the political trading process through elections.

- The voting time – as the political transaction time – is fixed. The system is organised so that the political demand and offer meet at a certain point, unlike the economic case, where the demand and the offer can meet at all times. Hence, the negotiating space is limited to this campaign/ballot time.

- The non-compulsory nature of the service provided. It is impossible for the elector to bind the politician, by participating in the transaction, to observe the promises in the political programme.

- The result is decided by the choice of the majority. By way of consequences, we cannot speak about political consumption, as long as the elector cannot individually decide on the political product he is to benefit from over the term of the following mandate. Due to the freedom of expression of the political opinion, he can at least decide on the political offer he is going to vote for. However, he cannot decide whether he is actually going to receive the respective political good.

- In the economic transaction, the seller can communicate the offer at all times, and can exert his influence over the consumer. In politics, this is only possible during the electoral campaign. Outside the campaign, they have other means available, i.e. political attitudes.

- The political offer, which precedes elections, is provided under an immaterial form - a promise. Based on these promises, the politician receives the mandate. Hence, it follows that the only instance through which the mandate is granted is the politician's offer credibility. The elector's decision as to the received offers is subjective. However, the decision space is very limited, as the political promise is non-compulsory.

The features of the political exchange relationship, presented by Basting (2008, pg. 70-73), offer a discretionary negotiating space to the politician, while for the elector, the political control would suppose very high costs. Based on the constitutive signs of the political transaction, the elector - as an agent - is unable:

- To individually set the elections time, considering the existence of political interests;
- To prevent the politician from occupying the position, even without his consent;
- To change the politician's activity, due to the collective asset nature of the political item;

- To clearly understand the politician who will occupy the public position, because of the internal party nominalisations (such as the position on the party lists) and due to the election through the majority of votes;

- To negotiate the content of the political offer with the politician;

- To sanction the politician during the mandate, if he fails to observe his promises (as politicians regard them as non-compulsory).

From these peculiarities of the trading relationship, an increase of the elector's uncertainty level (perception, decision-making, and negotiation complexity) and the critical

importance of credibility/trust follow within the exchange relationship between the politician and the elector.

Starting from the features of the relationship between the politician and the elector, the explicit aspirations of the work are to identify the influence factors within the political exchange relationship and to analyse the ways in which they can be processed towards an enhancement of the voting mechanism, represented through the political exchange process between the seller and the political services beneficiary. Pursuant to the detailed approach of the topic, it follows that the systematic analysis and the definition of the exchange process between the seller and the beneficiary of political services should rely on both the marketing and the political sciences areas, and, especially, on the new institutional economy. This model for the study of the voting mechanism has been ignored up to now especially in the specialised Romanian literature, but the quality of results obtained may constitute proof as to the need of the work and the method used, to take over the previous descriptive, normative, theoretical, and empirical studies in the political marketing and the new institutional economy and apply the same on the politician-elector behaviour. Moreover, the lack of a detailed investigation on the essential features of the trading relationship between the politician and the elector may be noted in the specialised Romanian literature. Hence, the work tries to answer the questions:

- What are the constitutive features of the political marketing review system?
- Do these constitutive features condition a market analysis that is different from the previous models?
- How does the decision to vote influence the constitutive elements of this exchange process?
- How can these constitutive elements be managed and what are the resulting effects?
- What are the implications, recommendations, and solutions resulting from the politician-elector behaviour management method?

In order to answer these questions, a thorough research of the theoretical and practical fundamentals of the three sciences involved was firstly required. Thus, the thesis relies on a theoretical-inferential argumentation method, which can easily demonstrate the quality of the conclusions obtained pursuant to the analysis, starting from the previously mentioned premises. Hence, the formulation of premises is of special relevance in order to attain the proposed objectives, which is why, the identification of the constitutive elements of the trading relationship between the politician and the elector plays an important role in the economy of the paper. In order to raise the claim of a full identification of the constitutive elements of political marketing, the paper has taken into account the institutional conditions for the performance of the voting process, the offerer's and beneficiary's behaviours in the exchange process, the properties of the political services influencing the process and the behaviours of the stakeholders, as well as the institutional conditions imposed by the social organisation and the institutions involved. From among them, the following stand out: the settlement method upon the transaction time, the non-compulsory nature of the transaction, the absence of the obligation to observe electoral limitations, the restriction of the consumption decision due to the uncertainty of the ballot result, the domination of the voting time relevance. This method of analysis is substantially influenced by the paradigmatic framework of the new institutional economy, based on which the constitutive features influencing the stakeholders' behaviour in the politician-elector relationship.

Within the transaction between the politician and the elector, the constitutive features of the political exchange process, the elector has more disadvantages than his partners to the transaction. The most frequent consequence of this unbalanced relationship is that the elector

ends up disappointed. Hence, this leads to the idea of a control mechanism for the constitutive elements of the trading process, meant to solve the issue of conflicts, and, at the same time, to favour the completion of the exchange. In order to achieve a control mechanism, the paper went beyond the epistemological limits of political sciences, which cannot, by themselves, provide valid solutions for this matter. An extremely efficient support came from the theoretical and practical fundamentals of the new institutional economy, psychology, logics, and economy in general. From the new perspective proposed, the political trading relationship has been regarded as an economic transaction where a participant is to accept the exchange with the offer that best suits his interest. The factors influencing the voting decision and the implications have been indentified, depending on their distribution. The credibility, the benefits perceived by the elector and the decision-making and voting process costs are elements determining the result of the trading relationship, and the management of the exchange process supposes the influencing of these variables.

Hence, despite the appearances often referred to by political marketing specialists, the voting decision is seen here as a rational decision-making act, through which the elector decides to conclude a political transaction with one of the political agents, judging reasonably, in terms of loss and gain, or, in other words, in terms of cost and benefit. On the other hand, the selection is substantially affected by the perceived credibility, which is at the basis of the political disappointment phenomenon, as well as at the basis of the adverse selection phenomenon.

A summary of the scientific benefits brought by this research presents, in essence, the aforementioned techniques for analysis and review of the voting process, as well as the invitation to implement or put into practice the presented relationship management mechanism. The scientific benefits can be drafted from two perspectives:

For political marketing:

- At the end of the research, it can be stated that for the political marketing there are several investigation directions with very interesting potential for the development of the field, especially towards the new institutional economy.
- The research has been carried out from the perspective of the marketing science, though the development of the market analysis system has been taken into account, the results of the work are, however, subjected to an interpretation from the point of view of political and communications sciences.
- The results obtained and the presented analysis formulas are a novelty in the field, and they can be used as a topic or reference for future criticism or appreciation.
- Based on the recommendations as to the working methods, an empirical validation of the political transaction relationship is only possible after the disclosure of the quantifiable parameters for the three main variables.

For electoral campaign managers:

- Based on the results obtained, the decision-makers at the level of the parties can renew their voting decision understanding.
- Political decision-makers should be stimulated, through the nature of the results stressed, to focus on the credibility policy, as this is the only way towards a long-term harmonious relationship to the electorate.

Through the politician-electors relationship features, the paper has explained why it is relatively easy for the political services offerer to exhibit a less loyal behaviour towards the beneficiary and thus obtain several personal benefits. As shown in the paper, this opportunistic behaviour only generates short-term benefits. Hence, all good-faith citizens cannot but hope that political leaders will always be interested in a long-term relationship with their own electors, or, if this desiderate is too seldom fulfilled, that state institutions will have the power to correct the politician's straying from the terms of his contract with the electors.