Research Article

DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL MARKETING: A STUDY FROM THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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A R T I C L E I N F O	A B S T R A C T
	In political marketing, political parties apply the concept and tools of marketing in order to attract the attention of the electorates with the aim of gaining competitive success in elections. In this paper, we have, on the first hand, identified from existing literature, the different facets of political marketing. Subsequently, on the basis of the insights from extant literature coupled with the 7P framework of marketing, we have developed a questionnaire for obtaining the inputs from marketing experts. We have employed factor analysis for extracting the dimensions of political marketing and these dimensions have been examined using appropriate analytical techniques. Secondly, the extracted dimensions have been elaborated and qualitatively validated with respect to the Indian experience on the basis of content analysis of reports, records and other secondary data sources. The implications of the dimensions have been examined and the imperatives for political parties have been highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Dimensions of Political Marketing: Introduction

From contemporary perspective, there have been significant transitions and transformations in the field of marketing. Marketing, as a field of study, is now being applied in areas where it has hitherto not been specifically applied. The areas where it is being applied pertain to the fields of politics, education, sports, events, etc. which in other way is helpful in extending its relevance in the contemporary perspective. Behind this expanding domain underlies the application of "marketing of ideas" and in this perspective scholars believe that the most prevalent and continuous application takes place in the field of politics (Frain, 1999:238). In this context, experts like Lees-Marshment (2003) have narrated the extension of the domain of marketing from business perspective in order to encompass non-profit areas; and concomitantly the theoretical and empirical research continued to witness the application of marketing in unexplored areas. The application of marketing concepts and principles in the field of politics can be considered to be the subject matter of political marketing. Newman (2002) observed that political marketing has developed into a separate field and has gained prominence largely in developed countries in the U.S. and in Europe.

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However, the field has not come into focus in developing countries like India. Although the Indian political system has attracted the attention of researchers in various fields, the relevance and practice of political marketing has not been unfurled so far. In this perspective, the present paper is concerned with an analysis of the domain of political marketing on the basis of opinions of experts in the field coupled with the perspectives drawn from secondary sources.

Dimensions of Political Marketing: Theoretical Exposition

Political marketing connotes a unique blend of two distinct fields: politics and marketing. Marland (2003) explicated the fusion of marketing and political science discipline through change in 'conventional political phrases'. In line with this, Kotler and Levy (1969) argued that elections should be one of the new arenas of application of marketing concepts and it is in this perspective that political marketing comes into sharper focus. Lees-Marshment (2003) underscored that subsequent to bringing non-profit organisations under the ambit of marketing, there is need to apply marketing in political communication in order to enhance the magnitude of political marketing. According to Newman (2002), political marketing comprises a broad range of concepts and theories which traditionally has been used by both businesss and non-profit organisations to offer their goods, services, and ideas to a wide range of consumers. In this context, some experts consider voters to be synonymous with consumers since voters are influenced by the brand image of a political party (Peng and Hackley, 2009). Extant literature highlights different aspects

and domain of political marketing. Some experts have observed the application of qualitative research to enhance the information traditionally obtained from quantitative polls (Sparrow and Turner, 2001). Researchers have also examined how politicians have employed the media in varied contexts, ostensibly using it to create and develop their images, explain their policy, and communicate various types of messages to the public (Kates, 1998). The common assertion in political marketing literature is that market orientatation is an essential step for a political party seeking electoral and competitive success (Lilleker, 2005: 584). It is therefore essential that among other things, a political party adopts the marketing approach professionally. Promotion is considered to be the most important aspect of political marketing campaign and the promotional mix is divided into "paid" and "free" media, wherein the former encompasses the varieties of advertising (Wring, 1997). Experts are also of the opinion that political campaign is a conglomeration of political ads, media coverage, other campaign activities (like debates and leaflets), and a number of other potential influences (Kates, 1998). In this context, there is need to consider political marketing from a holistic perspective wherein the process would comprise four essential components, namely, the party organisation (or candidate), the environment which affects its development, the strategic mix it deploys, and eventually the market it seeks to serve (Wring, 1997). So, political parties need to give adequate emphasis on these aspects in order to market themselves in the light of the increasing relevance of political marketing.

In the light of the literature identified in this section, it is palpable that the issue of integrating the two apparently diverse aspects politics and marketing is a challenging one, more so in the Indian perspective. Furthermore, we also believe that political marketing is very much context-specific. Hence, the aspects of political marketing are likely to have country-wise variations. Based on the insights from extant literature, we believe that country-specific perspectives and contexts are relevant in understanding political marketing, although there are some generic issues that are universally applicable across countries. Hence, we hypothesise theoretically that political marketing comprises some generic and some country-specific aspects. The next question would be to develop an appropriate construct of political marketing. In this context we can relate political marketing with service marketing. In this perspective, experts are of the view that political marketing has similarity with service marketing rather than product marketing (Harrop, 1990: 278). In this context, Marland (2003) argued that candidates of political parties are promoted more like a service than a product. He vouched for a meaningful alignment between electors and political actors and implementation of appropriate strategies, as used by commercial marketers, and introspection of the traditional electoral jargons in order that traditional political campaign gets a meaningful marketing perspective (Marland, 2003).

Dimensions of Political Marketing in India: Search for Research Construct and Design

Introduction

It would be academically rewarding to examine the issue of political marketing from the Indian perspective by developing an appropriate research design. On the basis of insights drawn from existing literature, a two-pronged research approach would be effective in addressing the research question. Since,

as already stated, political marketing is context-specific, there is need to identify the aspects and context. Taking cue from experts' opinion would be a right approach in understanding the research perspective in a better way. In this backdrop, based on the insights from literature, we have developed a questionnaire for identifying the dimensions of political marketing. Since, as previously stated, the aspects of political marketing are more aligned with service marketing, we have taken into consideration the 7Ps framework in developing the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises 57 items on different aspects of political marketing. Experts have been requested to give their opinion on the statements in terms of their relevance with regard to political marketing in India. Subsequently, on the basis of factor analysis, the dimensions of political marketing have been extracted using appropriate statistical techniques. Secondly, the extracted dimensions have been elaborated and qualitatively validated with respect to the Indian experience on the basis of content analysis of reports, records and other secondary data sources.

Sample design and data collection

Since the objective of the present research work is to contextualise political marketing vis-à-vis the Indian perspective, we understand that seeking opinions from marketing experts would facilitate an effective identification of the dimensions. We have therefore tried to obtain inputs from experts in the field of marketing comprising faculty members specialising in the field of marketing and marketing executives associated with different organisations in India. Experts with more than 10 years experience in the academia or industry have been considered in the sample. We have prepared a list of 200 marketing experts who have been randomly selected and they form the sample size for the present research work. Since the objective of the research work is to understand the Indian perspective of political marketing, an effort has been taken to give the identified sample a pan-India character so that the multiple perspectives can be accommodated. Multiple modes of communication comprising e-mail, Google form, postal and personal visits have been preferred in order to enhance the number of responses from experts.

Analytical techniques used

In order to extract the dimensions of political marketing, factor analysis has been employed (Field, 2009). Since our objective is to reduce a large number of aspects into components or factors signifying the dimensions, factor analysis appears to be an effective tool. In carrying out factor analysis, we have used principal component analysis using Varimax rotation (George & Mallery, 2008). The number of factors to be extracted has been determined following Kaiser's criterion wherein factors above the Eigen value of 1 are considered (Kaiser, 1960; Yong and Pearce, 2013). Factor analysis has been carried out in an iterative manner wherein based on the values of factor loadings (< 0.5), items have been dropped and eventually, the dimensions have been finalised when all the values of all the aspects of political marketing have factor loading greater than 0.5. In carrying out factor analysis, values of communalities, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity have been considered and appropriately addressed. Weights of the extracted dimensions have been calculated as a ratio between % of variance of a factor and the summation of the % of variance of the factors extracted in terms of the Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings

of factor analysis. Furthermore, the reliability of each of the extracted dimensions has been computed using Cronbach's Alpha (George and Mallery, 2006). The computation of the reliability of the dimensions would in other way, signify the strength of a particular dimension of political marketing.

Dimensions of Political Marketing in India: Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Based on the sample set, we have received responses from 74 experts which signify a response rate of 37%. As stated in the methodology section, initially, factor analysis has been carried out considering all the aspects of political marketing. A closer look at the values of factor loading emanating from the initial factor analysis reveals that there are several values of factor loadings that are less than 0.5. We could identify 15 such aspects. Hence, these 15 aspects were dropped and the analysis was re-run once again. In the second and third iterations, 4 aspects and 1 aspect were dropped respectively. Thus, factor analysis has been carried out as a repetitive process until the third step wherein we have observed that all the values of factor loadings are greater than 0.5. The ultimate factor analysis comprises 37 aspects that converged into 11 dimensions. These therefore constitute the core dimensions of political marketing. The 11 dimensions alongwith the factor loadings have been depicted in the table in the appendix. We have obtained an acceptable value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.587) and a significant value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (George & Mallery, 2006). On the basis of the aspects that make up each factor, the dimensions have been appropriately named as enlisted in the table. It can be observed from the table that the first dimension has been named as *Strategic Political Marketing Orientation Dimension*. This dimension appears to be the most important dimension since it has the maximum weight (32.19%) and comprises 6 aspects like value proposition, voter segmentation, identification of common man's problem, use of segmenting variables and use of marketing research techniques. Following the strategic marketing approach vis-à-vis value proposition as identified in literature, political parties can deliver a sustainable value proposition to an identified group of political customers. In this exercise, the other strategic issues like carrying out voter segmentation, application of segmenting variable, marketing research technique are supposed to be aligned and these need to be considered in unison. Coupled with these issue of strategic marketing orientation, two more issues appear to be aligned with it namely, the identification of common man's problem and employment and job opportunity. Although these aspects may apparently appear to be unrelated to the other issues, these are more strategic in nature in the light of the existing perspectives of voting decisions.

This dimension has highest reliability as shown in table 1. Thus, the strategic political marketing orientation dimension emerges as the most important dimension in terms of its importance (weight and reliability).

The second, third and fourth dimensions have been named as *Political integrity dimension*, *Political promotion dimension* and *Political communication dimension* which have weights 12.13%, 10.6% and 9.27% respectively. We can observe that these three dimensions have satisfactory degrees of reliability (0.766, 0.784 and 0.749) signifying the strength of these dimensions. Political integrity dimension comprises aspects like action against indiscipline, corruption of leaders, disciplined behaviour of party workers, good governance, political favouritism and political alliance. The binding force behind all these aspects is the issue of integrity of a political party and hence this dimension has been named accordingly. These are issues that enhance the image of a political party in the long-run and hence parties need to consider these issues in the right perspective. While the political integrity dimension would enhance the credibility of a political party, the political promotion dimension would actually act as a conduit for reaching the political consumers. The political promotion dimension comprises local promotion materials, varied campaign materials, rallies before election, continuous media advertisements and controversial words by leaders. While all these aspects connote positive impact of communication, the issue of use of controversial words by leaders carry a negative connotation in the sense that along with what the leaders say ('content' of communication), the use of controversial words may come into the limelight in the form of 'context' of communication. This is likely to give negative publicity to the concerned political party.

The subsequent dimensions namely, *Cadre preparedness dimension, Political guidance dimension* and *brand contact dimension* carry a comparatively lower weight signifying the fact that their relevance is comparatively less vis-à-vis the other dimensions of political marketing. The cadre preparedness dimension can be considered to be similar to internal marketing. Internal marketing from a business organisational perspective is a function that is relevant with regard to "service-mindedness and customer consciousness of employees" (McGuire, 1999; Saee and Mahmood, 2007). This approach can be applied in the context of political marketing wherein political parties can effectively orient their cadres (internal political customers) in order to serve the external political customers in a better way. Brand contact in the context of marketing signifies the experience of a customer with regard to a particular brand and it can effectively fortify current brand thereby strengthening brand relationships with

Table I Weights and Reliability of Political Marketing Dimension

	Political Marketing Dimension	Weight of Dimension (In percentage)	Reliability
1	Strategic Political Marketing Orientation Dimension	32.19	0.829
2	Political integrity dimension	12.13	0.766
3	Political promotion dimension	10.6	0.784
4	Political communication dimension	9.27	0.749
5	Cadre preparedness dimension	7.39	0.778
6	Political guidance dimension	6.53	0.750
7	Brand contact dimension	5.17	0.568
8	Effectual communication dimension	4.57	0.670
9	Credence dimension	4.31	0.676
10	Innovative promotion dimension	4.18	-
11	Leader's 'way of life' dimension	3.66	-

customers (Schultz, 1999). It is quite palpable that brand contact is also relevant in the context of political marketing wherein a political party can establish contact through its symbol and develop personalised contact with the political consumers.

The remaining dimensions have been named as *effectual communication dimension, credence dimension, leader's 'way of life' dimension* and *innovative promotion dimension*. Although they have lower weights, the acceptable values of reliability signify that these dimensions are also effective in understanding the facets of political marketing. Creative ad agencies, opinion convergence of leaders and attitude of party activists have clubbed into effectual communication dimension. Political parties need to give adequate emphasis on effective communication because what is being communicated needs to be understood by the political consumers without distortion. The last two dimensions are having single variable and are therefore exclusive in nature. These two dimensions are highly context specific and many vary according to contexts.

Dimensions of Political Marketing: Contextualisation vis-à-vis the Indian Perspective

The dimensions extracted through factor analysis have been exhibited in Figure 1.

In this section, an effort has been taken to qualitatively validate and contextualise these dimensions with respect to the Indian perspective. We have already observed that strategic political marketing orientation dimension is the most significant dimension as observed from the results of factor analysis. Thus, strategic political marketing orientation is the first relevant factor for political marketing in India. Making value propositions alike business organisations in the form of different kinds of promises made before elections is an important issue through which political parties try to attract the attention of voters in India. Thus, it is imperative for political parties in India to focus on a group of voters which largely constitutes their 'vote bank' and formulate strategies for providing greater value for the identified voters. This is more relevant in the Indian perspective since in view of the prevalence of substantial heterogeneity among voters it is imperative for political parties to identify a particular segment of voters and cater to their demands more effectively than the others. Furthermore, segmenting the voters based on some important and relevant variables, addressing the problems of the common man to get the support of significant portion of the electorate, applying the techniques of the marketing research in modified form in politics, creating job

opportunities by inviting and setting up industries are some of the important aspects considered under this factor. Promises by political parties before elections to address issues like unemployment, inflation, law and order situation, corruptions, education are very common in Indian politics. The issues of providing enhanced employment opportunities has been identified as the most important issue in India according to a study carried out by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR-Daksh, 2014). Thus, political parties need to consider this issue in the right perspective. Presently, we have observed in India the promises of job-creation made by national political parties.

The Political integrity dimension, political promotion dimension and political communication dimension are also relevant in the Indian perspective. In India, corruption is an important issue. However, reports suggest that majority of voters are aware of the illegality of electoral candidates distributing gifts to woo voters before elections. Interestingly, it has been reported that half of the population in India tend to ignore the criminal records of candidates in view of the "good work" undertaken by them (ADR-Daksh, 2014:50). However, we are also observing the recent trend of cleaning the political and electoral system of our country. In this perspective, it has been reported that the Election Commission has proposed several recommendations to the government of India to reinforce the 'integrity of the election process' and to impose a restriction on election-related expenditure for controlling criminalisation of elections[1]. In this perspective, political parties need to give adequate emphasis in considering the political integrity dimension. We are presently witnessing the increasing relevance of political promotion in the Indian perspective. "*Chai Pe Charcha*" is one of the programmes through which voters were communicated effectively following a direct channel. Digitised political promotion is gaining prominence in the Indian political system and some have started to refer to this phenomenon as the "Americanisation" of election campaigns. During the Lok Sabha elections of 2014, we witnessed extensive use of social media in political promotion and political communication. It has been reported that 29 million Indians participated in 227 million interactions in Face book through posts, comments, etc on issues relating to elections (Kathuria, 2014). In the days ahead, political parties in India need to develop a structured approach with respect to political promotion and communication by taking into account the realities of the contemporary perspectives. Political parties in India can definitely take a professional approach in positioning themselves in both the digital and physical spheres of the political market place. Thus, the outlook towards positioning needs to be reconceptualised by the political parties in India and accordingly marketing strategies can be formulated by the leading political parties.

In line with communication and promotion dimension, training of party workers, conferences organised by political parties at different points of time, communication with the electorate through different means and maintenance of contact with the electorate with the help of party organisation at all levels are important considerations for Indian political parties. A few political parties regularly organise party classes for its cadres.

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Street corners, small rallies in the locality on different issues, meeting with local people to address local issues are some of the means through which some political parties in India maintain contact with the voters throughout the year. Creation of expectation among voters resulting out of the presence of charismatic leader(s) symbolising the party, spontaneous help offered to the voters at the right time by the party activists, separate promotional campaigning strategies for loyal and floating voters are the issues that are considered by political parties in India. These aspects are part of the cadre preparedness dimension. Brand contact comprising the symbol of the party and the personalised phone calls and messages is an important issue in the Indian political system as well. Party symbol is something through which parties are recognised by the voters. In a country like India where significant portion of the voters are illiterate, the symbols become very crucial. Illiterate people recognise a party through its symbol while voting. Personalised messages and phone calls to the voters actually increase the number of contact with the political parties or political brand. Recently, we are observing that political parties in India have started realising the importance of using personalised phone calls to voters.

Role of creative ad agencies to creatively communicate the value propositions of the political parties, convergence of opinions of the political leaders of a political party, dominating and intimidating attitude of the party activists in the locality are the facets considered under effectual communication dimension. There are evidences that political parties took help of the ad agencies at different times in the past. The credence dimension largely involves past credentials of the rank and file of the political party, and the contents in the manifesto. Past records of the rank and file actually form the image of the different political parties in India. Contents of the manifesto actually show the direction of the political parties. If the contents of the manifesto of the party and the activities the political party are perceived to match, the credence of that political party is expected to improve in the minds of the voters.

CONCLUSION

An effort has been taken in this paper to objectively identify the dimensions of political marketing in India and then validate these dimensions on the basis of secondary sources. The framework developed in this paper is effective in understanding how political parties need to integrate the promotion of their respective credentials, activities and accomplishments amongst the voters who are considered as political consumers. In the light of the present-day perspective, political parties need to reorient their campaign activities following the political marketing approach. The paper underscores the need to professionally handle the traditional campaign and promotion activities in the light the political marketing paradigm. Thus, political parties in India can utilise political marketing to better position themselves in the 'political market place'. However, political marketing cannot be a substitute to effective performance in terms of achievement of societal and economic goals. Political parties can utilise political marketing in promoting achievements effectively. Political parties following the political marketing approach can develop separate marketing wing and political market research wing which would enable them to proactively identify issues and communicate their messages in a professional and effective manner. This approach will also enable political parties to 'leverage' their resources to effectively reach the political consumers.

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APPENDIX

Results of Factor Analysis : Rotated Component Matrix indicating values of Factor Loading

Dimension	Aspects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Strategic Political Marketing Orientation Dimension	Making Value Proposition	**.780**	.008	.056	.162	.183	.177	.082	.107	-.036	.096	-.045
	Voter segmentation	**.775**	-.013	.072	.119	.004	.048	.015	-.065	.199	.226	.146
	Common man's problem	**.755**	.042	-.048	-.037	.114	.267	.033	.185	.047	-.260	-.065
	Use of segmenting variables	**.629**	.094	.312	-.055	.110	.048	-.071	-.022	-.234	.339	.112
	Marketing research technique	**.570**	.469	.068	.064	.130	-.106	.159	-.030	.009	-.053	.275
	Employment and job opportunity	**.529**	.211	.051	.429	.136	.014	-.302	.027	.144	.016	.139
2 Political integrity dimension	Action against indiscipline	.014	**.804**	.126	-.079	.227	.078	.124	.182	.210	.163	-.023
	Corruption of leaders	.140	**.791**	.008	.041	.041	.102	-.109	.175	.186	-.030	-.130
	Disciplined behaviour of party workers	.116	**.664**	-.133	.228	.053	.128	-.054	.106	.220	.376	.070
	Good governance	.071	**.658**	-.008	.451	.127	.143	.167	.071	.005	-.104	-.007
	Favouritism	.052	**.621**	.265	.174	-.027	.027	-.189	.233	-.066	-.074	.238
	Political alliance	-.051	**.574**	.209	.466	-.107	-.056	.254	-.110	.028	.034	.001
3 Political promotion dimension	Local Promotion materials	.089	-.054	**.827**	.184	-.026	.019	.150	-.077	.119	-.027	-.019
	Varied campaign materials	.105	-.018	**.779**	-.023	.095	.104	-.164	.050	.060	-.090	-.061
	Rallies before election	-.118	.109	**.765**	-.026	.032	.002	.175	.286	-.163	.038	-.122
	Continuous media advertisements	.186	.189	**.617**	.138	-.134	-.048	.268	.269	.067	.045	.155
	Controversial words by leaders	.035	.173	**.593**	-.018	.070	-.059	-.068	.002	-.086	.237	.254
4 Political communication dimension	Mode of talking of leaders	.176	.153	.196	**.733**	.139	.172	-.067	-.058	-.053	.147	.079
	Promise in manifesto	.132	.106	-.158	**.698**	.093	-.220	.062	.315	.215	-.012	-.074
	Improvement of law and order	.455	.245	.025	**.636**	.235	-.021	-.011	-.025	.197	.012	-.010
	Deliberations by leaders in media	-.183	.083	.198	**.617**	.254	.072	.080	.123	.169	.307	.264
5 Cadre preparedness dimension	Training to party workers	.236	.110	.045	.134	**.803**	-.165	-.092	.049	.106	.193	.054
	Communication with electorate	.259	.121	-.155	.082	**.720**	.259	.224	.173	-.009	-.083	.067
	Party conferences	-.082	.087	.379	.155	**.718**	.160	-.113	-.055	.000	.150	-.081
	Contact with electorate through organisation	.438	-.016	-.158	.337	**.577**	-.075	.091	.020	.191	-.113	.067
6 Political guidance facet	Leaders of the party	.141	.100	.168	.010	.066	**.798**	-.057	.055	.210	.102	.091
	Help by party activists	.150	.152	-.132	.036	-.007	**.709**	.265	.269	-.129	.133	.283
	Separate promotional strategies	.450	.116	-.062	.001	.058	**.573**	.403	.169	.006	.035	-.103
7 Brand contact dimension	Symbol of party	-.049	.043	.145	.045	-.077	.120	**.769**	-.027	.139	-.026	.155
	Personalised contact	.189	-.023	.016	-.007	.199	.066	**.694**	.102	.018	.445	.040
8 Effectual communication dimension	Creative ad agencies	.030	.305	.222	.005	.199	.252	.150	**.703**	.091	.061	-.102
	Opinion convergence of leaders	-.002	.195	.125	.037	.088	.086	-.147	**.658**	.148	.289	.243
	Attitude of party activists	.402	.184	.156	.290	-.140	.165	.098	**.566**	-.095	-.061	-.036
9 Credence dimension	Credentials of rank and file	.139	.282	.032	.156	-.047	.161	.075	-.037	**.792**	.193	.101
	Content of manifesto	-.010	.223	-.015	.172	.338	-.018	.139	.232	**.715**	-.116	-.102
10 Innovative promotions dimension	Innovative promotions	.140	.080	.056	.206	.104	.187	.208	.181	.072	**.778**	-.060
11 Leader's 'way of life' dimension	Leaders using expensive products	.152	-.005	.022	.096	.033	.186	.170	.046	.018	-.019	**.873**