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Political  
marketing

# Political marketing

## An investigation of the political marketing concept and political market orientation in Australian politics

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**Abstract** *The connections between political parties, the electorate (individual voters) and society at large, that may be achieved through applying marketing is an important area in need of research. Understanding such connections is vitally important for effective and efficient use of marketing in politics and also for improvement in the delivery of the political offering to society. This paper presents the findings of an exploratory research project carried out in Australia on the philosophical basis and operationalisation of marketing in politics. A survey and in-depth interviews were undertaken to explore issues related to the application of market orientation and its relationship to the marketing concept in political marketing. The results highlight unique dimensions and relationships of marketing in politics.*

### Introduction

According to Andrews (1996) a widening range of academic literature has commented on the growing dependence of politics on marketing. According to Kotler and Kotler (1999) political marketing is a major growth industry affecting every person and institution and the making of a successful candidate and cause is what political marketing is all about. Andrews (1996) also notes with some consternation that the focus of much of this debate remains fixed on the communication by political parties and candidates to their voters. However, there is also a growing number of researchers who are identifying key areas that are worthy of investigation apart from communications issues. Such areas include the application of marketing in politics, the structure and processes of political marketing and marketing management theory and its appropriateness for politics (Butler and Collins, 1994; O'Cass, 1996a; Wring, 1996). These issues appear to have at their nexus two important constructs; namely the marketing concept and market orientation. In a theoretical and empirical analysis the present paper examines the linkages between the marketing concept and market orientation. It is the view of Kotler and Kotler (1999) that candidates, to be successful, need to understand their markets. Just like Scammell (1999) the view is taken here that political marketing offers new ways of understanding and managing modern politics. O'Cass (1996a) also commented that the value of marketing is that it promotes and enable parties and voters to be part of a constructive dialogue. This paper focuses on examining the application of marketing in politics, with a specific examination of political parties' use of market orientation principles, and its underlying

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philosophy of the marketing concept as a method of understanding political markets by political marketers.

### **Market orientation and politics**

Over the past decade there has been a growing interest in market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993, Kohli *et al.*, 1993; Atuahene, 1996; Caruna *et al.*, 1999; Morgan and Strong, 1998). Such interest is not surprising since market orientation is argued to represent the foundation of superior marketing practice and enhanced performance in commercial enterprises. However, what is surprising and perhaps a little disturbing, is the lack of research on this topic in the area of political marketing. However, in a similar area there is some research occurring in the area of not-for-profit marketing as it relates to market orientation and this does have some relevance to political marketing. This dearth of theory and research needs to be remedied as has been already noted by some (Butler and Collins, 1994; O'Cass, 1996a; Andrews, 1996); with the broadening of marketing's boundaries, its growing prominence in organisations and its growing impact on society one ponders the influence and significance of marketing in politics. This is particularly so with regard to marketing's focus on products, exchanges and markets and politics' influence on government, society and campaigns. With this view of marketing and politics in mind, market orientation is of significant interest not only because of its potential impact on the structures and processes of political parties, but also the ramifications that such an orientation may have on the structures and processes of political systems.

The nature, scope and impact of marketing on an organisation's performance continues to be the focus of much debate, and the construct of market orientation has become an area of significant interest in academic and practitioner circles (Atuahene, 1996; Bhuian, 1998; Caruna *et al.*, 1999; Houston, 1986; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Webster, 1992). Quite problematically for political marketing Scammell (1999) notes that as yet there is no consensus about a definition of political marketing, nor even that it is the most appropriate label for the common focus of study. To provide a framework for examining the marketing concept and market orientation a useful starting point would be to define political marketing as:

... the analysis, planning, implementation and control of political and electoral programs designed to create, build and maintain beneficial exchange relationships between a party and voters for the purpose of achieving the political marketers' objectives (O'Cass, 1996b).

This is considered to be a useful definition and it is argued strongly that political marketing is the most suitable and encompassing discipline to examine the application of marketing in politics. Essentially, marketing's emphasis on customer needs and their satisfaction is argued to be a requisite ingredient for competitive success (Diamontopoulos and Hart, 1991) and is integral to the political marketing definition just outlined. Where there have been efforts to improve the definition of marketing, they have largely revolved

around the term the marketing concept which advocates identifying and satisfying customers' needs at a profit. Implicitly, this issue identifies two levels of marketing: a philosophical level and an operational level. On the one hand, the need to orient an organisation to its customers is an attitudinal commitment (organisational culture) and on the other hand, this orientation needs to be reflected in the organisation's operational activities (Diamantopoulos and Hart, 1991). Wring (1996) and O'Cass (1996a) also alluded to these two central issues (level) in political marketing, and identified a philosophical perspective and practical application of marketing in politics. O'Shaughnessy (1996) with reference to social marketing also identified the requirement for a research defined conception of audience wants. The views of O'Shaughnessy (1996), Wring (1996) and O'Cass (1996a) and others appear to direct attention to market orientation and the marketing concept as these are the philosophy and practice that provide a research defined and oriented conception of political marketing to understand and address voter needs and wants.

### **The marketing concept and politics**

Keith (1960) proposed that organisations go through an evolutionary process and move towards the marketing concept and Webster (1992) advanced this proposition even further by arguing that marketing becomes the culture of the organisation and is part of everyone's job description. Such a conception of marketing implies that the ultimate position or philosophy for an organisation is marketing or more importantly the marketing concept. One may then also conclude that this perspective would also be the evolution followed and outcome expected in politics.

According to Webster (1992) and McKenna (1991) organisations ought to implement the marketing concept in its entirety to be successful. Thus, one may also include political parties within this broad description of organisations. On a similar note Jaworski and Kohli (1993) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) argue that the marketing concept, if it is to have practical value, requires effective implementation, via activities that translate the philosophical side into the practical or operational side. Such activities according to Diamantopoulos and Hart (1991) bring about a market orientation, which is the result of adopting the marketing concept. Essentially, a market orientation is the overt behaviour of an organisation that has adopted the marketing concept and is the means for implementing the marketing concept. Such views have quite significant potential impact for applying marketing in politics. However, we know little about adopting the marketing concept and implementing a market orientation in politics and party campaign activity.

In the context of the issues addressed here and directing research and application of market orientation and marketing concept theory development in politics, the following two definitions are provided as they are very relevant to the study of political marketing. The marketing concept is a business (and political) philosophy that holds that long-term profitability (and electoral

success) is best achieved by focusing the coordinated activities of the organisation toward satisfying the needs of a particular market segment(s) (Deng and Dart, 1994; O'Cass, 1996a). Adapting the views of Deng and Dart (1994) it is proposed that market orientation is the generation of appropriate market (electoral) intelligence pertaining to current and future needs; the integration and dissemination of such intelligence across departments; and the coordinated design and execution of the organisation's strategic response to market opportunities. O'Cass (1996a) also argued that the process of political marketing is (or in many cases should be) implemented through adopting the philosophy of the marketing concept, defining this philosophy as:

Political party decisions should be voter oriented to determine voter needs and wants and attempt to satisfy them within ideological bounds and parliamentary numbers rather than the percentage of the vote be the standard for evaluating marketing performance (O'Cass, 1996a, p. 60).

Therefore we may conclude that the marketing concept applied to politics follows that a political party will achieve its objectives more efficiently through a thorough understanding of its target voters and their needs and wants, and through a thorough understanding of the political costs associated with satisfying such needs and wants, and then developing and offering the political product about this insight. Such a philosophy requires a mechanism for adoption and it has been identified by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) as:

The organisation wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and organisation wide responsiveness to it (p. 6).

Together the definition of the political marketing concept (PMC) by O'Cass (1996a) and the definition of market orientation of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Deng and Dart (1994) provide a solid foundation upon which to examine political marketing.

### **The utility of market orientation and marketing concept**

Since the introduction of the marketing concept to the marketing literature in the 1960s many have raised questions concerning the utility and applicability of it as a philosophy of business. Discussion and research has been directed toward the meaning of the term (Barksdale and Darden, 1971; Houston, 1986; Webster, 1988) and others have focused on market orientation (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990) as the implementation aspect of the marketing concept, whilst some argue for discarding the marketing concept (Sachs and Benson, 1978). Two important issues are evident in the literature: first, even given the centrality of the marketing concept and the belief in the importance of being market oriented, little effort has been directed to this area of research in comparison with other subject areas that appear less critical (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Second, there is little consensus with respect to implementation of the marketing concept and what it really means to be market oriented (Kimery and Rinehart, 1998).



While the literature does provide insight into the adoption of the marketing concept and being market oriented in certain firms and industries, political marketing academicians have not empirically investigated these issues in depth (O'Casey, 1996a). Such issues and their resolution appear to be critical if marketing is to be fully understood and utilised in the political domain. As Lock and Harris (1996) validly point out "they are concerned to stress the importance of comparative analysis in the development of political marketing ..." (p. 29). Lock and Harris (1996) also highlight the paucity of work, which means that it is difficult to draw conclusions about political marketing.

### **Political parties in Australia**

Given the managerial focus of the market orientation literature, any study of political marketing perhaps needs to focus on parties, as they are to some extent the creators of modern politics. The Australian party system can most accurately be described as multiparty in form, but essentially two-partism in function. Certainly, until the formation of the Australian Democrats, competition for government, control of the legislature, was between the two major parties, Labor and Liberal. Largely, the National Party have over many years aligned themselves with the Liberal Party. This party system exists whether we speak of the federal parliamentary system or the state system. Historically, Labor and Liberal also dominate the electorate, consistently winning over 80 percent of the votes cast at elections. Therefore, any study of political marketing in Australia needs to focus on the parties (four major parties) as they have the major influence.

The ideal internal organisation of a political party in Australia seems evident as all parties have sought similar structures. Each party in Australia is trying to achieve a larger membership base, to be a larger party with the driving force behind such strategy being perhaps that more members will mean consistent financial streams, more consistency and numbers in volunteers for elections and in effect more committed consumers. Parties in Australia put a great deal of weight on party unity and cohesion and dynamism. Also, within the Australian political landscape parties devote effort to continual discussions of their own internal organisation, democracy and representation.

Basically, the structure of each major party can be described as a hierarchical pyramid, with individual members at the bottom level and the most influential decision-making body of the party at the top. The Labor, Liberal and national party and the Democrats are all federal parties, with roots in the states, and with more or less autonomy and authority in the state branches.

Within each party four distinct groups appear to have the potential of making a major impact on the management of political parties. These groups are labelled party executive managers, candidates (current politicians and new candidates running for office), branch chairman and electoral campaign directors (those who manage individual campaigns during an election). These

four groups are at distinct positions within the organisational hierarchy and act as facilitators of sound electoral campaigning or detractors of the same process.

### **Research foundation and background**

The two central areas of this study; "politics" and "marketing" play a significant role in society. Both politics and marketing have pervasive influence on society's everyday activity and directions and, as such, research that examines the nexus of these two major systems and phenomena is warranted. Importantly, politics in its various forms in Western society has become party politics, and modern democracy is party democracy, where political institutions and practices are in effect the essence of democratic government. Essentially, democracy as we know it, is the creation of political parties and would be unthinkable without them. Political parties are not only central to democracy, they are important for any study of political marketing management. Studies of political marketing should examine the organisational or party processes and perspectives as a primary concern for the implementation of marketing.

Whilst many marketers are keen to emphasise a gap between the practice and theory of marketing, one of the few issues upon which theorists and practitioners agree is the importance of developing an orientation towards the market. However, this issue is not fully understood, nor examined in the domain of political marketing with regard to the management of the marketing activities of political parties. This study explores the use of marketing management, especially the marketing concept and the processes and mechanisms that provide a market orientation within an area that has not been widely studied, political marketing. Specifically the following research questions have been developed to examine the relationship between aspects of the marketing concept and their relationship to market orientation in political marketing.

### **Research questions**

The literature review identified a hierarchical structure to parties in Australia. O'Cass (1996a) also identified various groups within a major Australian political party when examining applications of marketing to politics, showing that differences in perceptions exist within parties across party levels. Therefore the following research questions are posed:

*RQ1a:* To what extent will the definition of the PMC receive positive support? And to what extent will this support vary across the four organisational levels, within political parties?

*RQ1b:* To what extent will there be significant differences in perceptions of the marketing concept and market orientation between the four party positions?

As discussed above there is some debate about the implementation of the marketing concept in commercial organisations and managers' perception of its value (Kohli and Jaworksi, 1990; O'Cass, 1996a). Given the debate concerning

the application of the marketing concept and its perceived value as a business philosophy the following research question is posed to examine these issues in the context of political marketing:

*RQ2:* To what extent is there a strong relationship between acceptance of the PMC as a political philosophy and its perceived value and application?

There is a growing body of research on market orientation as discussed above and a small component of this literature has examined the nature of market orientation, its dimensions and their relationships (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Kohli *et al.*, 1993; Caruana *et al.*, 1998). There is a distinct gap in the literature addressing the dimensions of market orientation and their relationship in the context of political marketing. Therefore, the following research question is posed to address the dimensions and relationship between market orientation dimension in political marketing:

*RQ3:* To what extent is there a strong relationship between political market orientation dimensions?

The market orientation literature raises serious issues concerning the value and performance implication of business adopting a market orientation. For example, Caruana *et al.* (1999) and Jaworski and Kohli (1993) identify that market orientation has an impact of corporate performance. Others have questioned this or found equivocal support (Diamantopoulos and Hart, 1991). Also there has been clearly a debate within the literature regarding the exact nature of the relationship between the marketing concept and market orientation (O'Cass, 1996a; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Therefore an important issue in political marketing is the relationship between market orientation and party performance and the relationship between market orientation and the marketing concept; thus the following research questions are posed:

*RQ4a:* To what extent are perceptions of management performance significantly related to market orientation dimensions?

*RQ4b:* To what extent are perceptions of party management performance related to acceptance of the marketing concept (acceptance of the philosophy, its perceived value, actual application)?

*RQ4c:* To what extent is there a relationship between PMC dimensions and political market orientation dimensions?

The discussion above identifies a hierarchical structure to parties and some have discussed and found evidence that perceptions of marketing differ in parties across party hierarchical levels and positions (O'Cass, 1996a). What has not been extensively discussed nor researched in this area is the perceptions that the various party levels have on effectiveness and outcomes during elections. That is, do the identified positions within parties have differing views of the effect on performance and electoral success of the highest level in a party.



Therefore, the following research questions are posed to address such perceptions:

- RQ5a:* To what extent do the beliefs that headquarters should give marketing directions differ between party groups?
- RQ5b:* To what extent do beliefs that party headquarters has a negative impact on political success differ between party groups?
- RQ5c:* To what extent do beliefs that headquarters has a diminished role in getting candidates elected differ significantly between groups?

### **Research method**

To examine the research questions, data were collected via two techniques: first, a number of in-depth interviews were conducted with upper level political party managers and executives. Second, data were collected via a self-administered mail questionnaire to a sample of party members who hold managerial/decision making positions within parties.

#### *In-depth interviews*

The field research initially consisted of in-depth interviews with political party executives and managers in Australia. Because the purpose of the study was theory exploration (exploration of constructs and propositions), it was important to tap a wide range of experiences and perspectives in the course of the initial data collection. Therefore, a purposive or "theoretical" sampling plan (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used to ensure that the sample included marketing as well as non-marketing political party managers and decision makers and workers. Care was also taken to interview an adequate cross-section of party managers and those involved in marketing activities at various levels. All interviews followed a set protocol, with seven key questions forming the basis of the interview:

- (1) Describe your party's campaign processes and activities.
- (2) What does the term "market orientation" mean to you? What kinds of things does a market/marketing-oriented political party do?
- (3) What organisational factors foster or discourage this orientation?
- (4) What are the positive consequences of this orientation? What are the negative consequences?
- (5) Can you think of situations in which this orientation may not be very important?
- (6) What does the term "marketing concept" mean? How would such a concept work in politics?
- (7) What would be the positive and negative aspects of the marketing concept in politics?

These questions provided a structure for each interview, but it was sometimes necessary to explain and clarify some of the questions, as well as probe deeper with additional questions to elicit examples, illustrations, and other insights. The personal interviews typically lasted about 45 minutes to one hour and were audio taped, unless the interviewee requested otherwise. The information obtained from these interviews afforded novel insights into the meaning, causes, and consequences of a market orientation and marketing concept. The taped interviews were subsequently transcribed and coded. Analysis was based on a content analysis of the transcriptions to identify key themes and issues that focused on the research objectives relevant to the research questions being studied. The interviews were examined making linkages between concepts and noting regularities with which key themes were appearing in the data. The interview results identified 12 key areas within political marketing that related to the marketing concept, market orientation and performance. Though a large number of new insights emerged from the data collection, the focus here is on those that focused on the research questions and the seven interview questions and would aid in generating items for a larger scale data collection in the form of a survey.

#### *Self-administered mail survey*

The relevant literature and preliminary interviews with party executives guided the development of the survey instrument in a similar manner to that adopted by Atuahene (1996) and O'Cass (1996a). On the basis of the interviews and the existing literature a list of items were generated for measuring the 12 key issues. From these efforts 50 items were initially selected for their appropriateness and uniqueness in a similar approach to that used by Kohli *et al.* (1993) in tapping the issues related to the research questions. Each item was scored on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". All items were assessed by a panel of expert judges to determine content validity by providing the panel with a set of definitions and the research questions. The panel rated each item against definitions and the items ability to tap the issues.

The pre-test followed a similar procedure to Jaworski and Kohli (1993) in that the centrality of the marketing concept and market orientation scale components and items were tested for clarity and appropriateness in personally administered pre-tests. These tests were undertaken with those participants that completed the in-depth interviews. Based on the results some items were modified slightly and four were deleted. Table I identifies the 12 key areas identified via the interviews and a total of 48 items were developed and included in the final survey.

Four major parties in Australia were contacted and participation sought. Within each party four distinct groups were identified as having a major impact on the management of political parties. These groups are labelled party executive managers, candidates, branch chairman and electoral campaign directors. A mailing list was developed and a stratified disproportionate

Constructs and dimensions	Items
1. Marketing concept philosophy	3
2. Marketing concept application	2
3. Marketing concept conflict	2
4. Marketing concept value	3
5. Market orientation customer focus intelligence generation	3
6. Market orientation responsiveness to customers	6
7. Market orientation dissemination of information	3
8. Market orientation to competitor responsiveness	4
9. Management performance perceptions	8
10. Voter focus on needs	7
11. Competition orientation	2
12. Market orientation organisational synergy	4
13. Party position	1

**Table I.**  
Constructs measured

sampling technique used (O'Cass, 1996a). A total of 350 questionnaires were sent and 160 were returned and usable.

### Data analysis and results

The questionnaire was analysed to establish descriptive characteristics of responses and provide facilitation and summarisation of the data via univariate analysis such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations which indicate the central, average or typical scores on the items/scales. Analysis was also performed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with *post-hoc* multiple comparisons of means between responses across four levels within Australian political parties (party executive managers, candidates, party branch chairman and electoral campaign directors), to determine if there was any significant differences between the responses of the four decision-making categories within political parties. Factor analysis was also performed to establish if the items loaded on the underlying constructs that they were developed to tap. Correlations were computed to examine relationships between dimensions and constructs.

*RQ1a:* To what extent will the definition of the PMC receive positive support? And to what extent will this support vary across the four organisational levels, within political parties?

*RQ1a* focused on the degree that political marketers accept the proposed PMC. Initially mean scores were computed to determine the mean level of support for accepting the PMC. The results indicate that the mean score for acceptance of the PMC was 4.06 and all mean scores were above the median score 2.5 (out of 5) for all four positions and the party executive mean score was 4.20,

candidates' mean score was 4.06, branch chairman was 3.80 and campaign directors' mean score was 4.41.

The findings indicate a high level of agreement for the philosophical basis and objectives of the PMC across all party positions. The majority of respondents agree with the definition of the PMC. Largely, the basic tenets of using the marketing concept received positive support.

*RQ1b:* To what extent will there be significant differences in perceptions of the marketing concept and market orientation between the four party positions?

To test for differences in perception of the PMC and political market orientation a series of analyses of variances were computed. The independent variable was party position and dependent variables were PMC dimensions and political market orientation dimensions in the first column of Table II. The results indicate significant differences in acceptance of the PMC, its perceived value and moderate significance in the conflict it may cause and the perceptions of party management performance were approaching statistical significance. However, there was no statistical differences between party positions on any of the PMC dimensions, indicating all four party positions had similar perceptions of market orientation dimensions. It should be noted, however, that ANOVA can mask actual significant differences between individual groups.

To further examine these differences *post-hoc* multiple comparison tests were computed. Table III indicates the significance level for the analysis of differences between the political party positions and shows only groups where differences were found to allow clarity.

The results indicate differences in perceptions between some groups. The most significant differences appear to be between the campaign directors

Constructs	F-value	Sig.
1. Political marketing concept acceptance	4.129	< 0.005
2. Political marketing concept perceived value	6.259	<0.001
3. Political marketing concept application	0.453	ns
4. Conflict cause by political marketing concept	2.206	< 0.1
5. Voter focus intelligence generation	2.084	ns
6. Responsiveness to voters	0.566	ns
7. Focus on voter needs	0.632	ns
8. Competitor responsiveness	1.799	ns
9. Competition focus and orientation	1.344	ns
10. Dissemination of information	1.797	ns
11. Party synergy and integration	1.150	ns
12. Party management performance	2.264	< 0.1

Note: ns = not significant

**Table II.**  
ANOVA results for  
differences between  
party positions



Constructs and group differences	Sig.
1. <i>Political marketing concept acceptance</i> Chairman (3.8) and campaign directors (4.41)	< 0.05
2. <i>Political marketing concept perceived value</i> Candidates (2.86) and campaign directors (3.32) Campaign directors (3.32) and branch chairman (2.75)	< 0.05 < 0.05
3. <i>Political marketing concept application</i>	ns
4. <i>Conflict cause by political marketing concept</i> Candidates (2.91) and campaign directors (2.37) Branch chairman (2.8) and campaign directors (2.37)	< 0.005 < 0.1
5. <i>Voter focus intelligence generation</i> State executive (2.97) and branch chairman (3.53)	< 0.1
6. <i>Responsiveness to voters</i>	ns
7. <i>Focus on voter needs</i>	ns
8. <i>Competitor responsiveness</i> Candidates (2.85) and campaign directors (2.61)	< 0.05
9. <i>Competition focus and orientation</i> Campaign director (3.64) and state executive (3.1)	< 0.1
10. <i>Dissemination of information</i>	ns
11. <i>Party synergy and integration</i>	ns
12. <i>Party management performance</i> Candidates (4.04) and state executive (3.77)	0.05

**Table III.**  
ANOVA *post hoc*  
group comparisons

**Note:** values in ( ) are mean scores, ns = no difference between groups

groups and the branch chairman group. As indicated there were no differences between application, voter responsiveness, focusing on voters needs, disseminating information and party synergy and integration perceptions. The state executive body in parties appears to differ on intelligence generation and performance perceptions.

*RQ2:* To what extent is there a strong relationship between acceptance of the PMC as a political philosophy and its perceived value, application?

Research question 2a sought to examine whether there is a strong relationship between political party managers and candidates' acceptance of the marketing concept as a political philosophy, and the perceived value derived from such a philosophy and its actual adoption by parties. The survey posed a number of statements regarding the PMC, its value for political parties and whether such a philosophy was evident in the respondent's party. Table IV presents the mean scores across the four party positions.

The mean scores indicate all means were higher than the median. Even the mean scores for conflict are above the median. Mean score for acceptance of the PMC was 4.06, for perceived value of PMC the mean was 2.95, for application of



the PMC the mean score was 3.6 and for conflict caused by the PMC the mean was 3.33. To examine this research question, correlations were computed to test the relationship between the dimensions of PMC. Table V indicates a significant relationship between the respondents' acceptance of the PMC, its perceived value for campaign and marketing activities of the party and its actual application.

The results indicate that the more respondents saw the marketing concept as potentially valuable the less they perceived conflict would be created within their party by its adoption. With regard to the application of the PMC the results indicate that the more they applied the marketing concept the less conflict they actually saw. Again, the mean scores indicate that application was more significant than perceived conflict. Largely, the results indicate a strong relationship between PMC dimensions.

RQ2 also sought to examine whether within political parties there would be a sufficient understanding of the political processes and nuances to believe that the PMC, if adopted, would create some conflict and that such conflict would often be resolved by favouring party political needs over voter needs. As indicated in Table V there is a negative correlation between the conflict that would be perceived to be created from applying the PMC and the value derived from adopting such a philosophy. What is interesting, however, is that the relationship between the PMCs acceptance and conflict generation was actually positive, not negative as one might have expected.

RQ3: To what extent is there a strong relationship between political market orientation dimensions?

RQ3 sought to examine if a positive relationship exists between the elements that, according to the literature, enable the fulfilment of the marketing concept

	State executive	Candidate	Branch chairman	Campaign director
1. Political marketing concept acceptance	4.2	4.06	3.8	4.41
2. Political marketing concept perceived value	3.27	2.86	2.75	3.32
3. Political marketing concept application	3.45	3.65	3.68	3.68
4. Conflict cause by political marketing concept	2.7	2.91	2.8	3.3

**Table IV.**  
Mean scores of party positions across political marketing concept issues

Concepts	1	2	3
1. Political marketing concept acceptance			
2. Political marketing concept perceived value	0.239**		
3. Political marketing concept application	0.268**	0.193*	
4. Conflict cause by political marketing concept	0.183*	-0.465**	-0.193*

**Table V.**  
Correlation results for PMC dimensions

Note: \* significant at 0.05 level; \*\* significant at 0.01 level

and thus provide a party with a market orientation. As indicated above, the in-depth interviews identified a number of additional dimensions that appear to be important in the market orientation of political parties. The marketing literature identifies customer orientation, intelligence generation and dissemination and inter-functional coordination (organisation synergy) as key dimensions. This translates in political marketing terms to voter focus, intelligence generation and party operational synergy. As well as these dimensions, the interviews also identified voter responsiveness, competitor focus and competitor responsiveness as important issues.

Table VI indicates that there was a strong relationship between political market orientation dimensions (varying from + to -).

The results indicate a significant relationship between most dimensions, but the direction of the relationship varies. Interestingly, dissemination of information had the most significant negative correlation with other dimensions. Further, the competition responsiveness aspect and political market orientation was not related to any of the intelligence generation or voter oriented dimensions. Further, competition orientation and competitor responsiveness were negatively related. The results suggest dissemination of information on competitors, but not voters. Thus it appears that political marketing may have some unique market orientation characteristics that have not been found in the general market orientation research in commerce/business organisations.

*RQ4a:* To what extent are perceptions of management performance significantly related to market orientation dimensions?

Table VII indicates that all correlations are significant and that performance perceptions of party management are positively related with all dimensions of market orientation, except for competition focus and dissemination of information, which were negatively related to perception of party management performance.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Voter focus intelligence generation						
2. Responsiveness to voters	0.729**					
3. Focus on voter needs	0.573**	0.725**				
4. Competition focus and orientation	0.422**	0.558**	0.564**			
5. Competitor responsiveness	0.006	-0.079	-0.067	-0.174*		
6. Dissemination of information	-0.373**	-0.297**	-0.165*	0.221**	-0.140	
7. Party synergy and integration	0.289**	0.604**	0.567**	-0.248**	0.513**	0.023

Note: \* significant at 0.05 level; \*\* significant at 0.01 level

**Table VI.**  
Political market  
orientation dimensions  
and their correlations

	Management performance
1. Voter focus intelligence generation	0.375**
2. Responsiveness to voters	0.610**
3. Focus on voter needs	0.564**
4. Competition focus and orientation	-0.202*
5. Competitor responsiveness	0.500**
6. Dissemination of information	-0.241**
7. Party synergy and integration	0.715**

Note: \* significant at 0.05 level; \*\* significant at 0.01 level

**Table VII.**  
PMO dimension  
relationship to  
performance  
perceptions

*RQ4b:* To what extent are perceptions of party management performance related to acceptance of the marketing concept (acceptance of the philosophy, its perceived value, actual application)?

The results indicate that performance was related to PMC acceptance and application, but not value. The correlation between the acceptance of the PMC and party performance was 0.324 significant at 0.01. The correlation between the perceived value of PMC and party performance was 0.009 and was not significant. The correlation between application of the PMC and party performance was the strongest at 0.579 significant at 0.01.

Initially this result was troubling; however, further examination of the correlations indicates that acceptance would lead to application, and perhaps value, but need not be related to perceived performance. But application should affect performance.

*RQ4c:* To what extent is there a relationship between PMC dimensions and political market orientation dimensions.

Correlations were computed for all dimensions of the PMC and political market orientation. The results presented in Table VIII show that largely there is a strong relationship between all dimensions. Some relationships were, however, not significant.

The results indicate fairly strong correlations between most marketing concept dimensions and market orientation dimensions, except for marketing concept value. Market concept value was negatively correlated with market orientation responsiveness and positively correlated with organisational synergy to the same degree.

*RQ5a:* To what extent do the beliefs that headquarters should give marketing directions differ between party groups.

*RQ5b:* To what extent do beliefs that party headquarters has a negative impact on political success differ between party groups.



**Table VIII.**  
Market orientation  
dimension relationships

	PMC philosophy	MC value	MC application	PMC conflict
1. Voter focus	0.441**	0.133	0.555**	-0.056
2. Voter intelligence generation	0.344**	-0.007	0.471**	-0.062
3. MO responsiveness to voter	0.348**	0.123	0.669**	-0.158*
4. MO competitor orientation	0.358**	0.115	0.399**	-0.189*
5. MO competitor responsiveness	0.060	-0.205**	-0.144	0.181*
6. MO intelligence dissemination	0.037	0.120	-0.184**	-0.085
7. MO organisation synergy	0.336**	0.205**	0.487**	-0.204**
8. Management performance	0.324**	0.009	0.579**	-0.054

**Note:** \* significant at 0.05 level; \*\* significant at 0.01 level

*RQ5c:* To what extent do beliefs that headquarters has a diminished role in getting candidates elected differ significantly between groups.

A number of issues pertinent to political marketing relate to issues of competency of party management to direct the activity of its lower level groups at elections. There is also some concern about the impact of party upper management impacting negatively on local campaigns, and the perceived dominance of party operations dominating the activity of local campaigns in getting candidates elected (O'Casey, 1996a). As part of the study these issues were addressed in the survey to establish the views of the party and its various constituent levels. Table IX presents the mean scores across beliefs about headquarters impact and role across party groups.

Detailed analysis of the responses to these issues indicated that the only significant difference between groups was related to the issue of headquarters having a diminished role in getting candidates elected and local campaigns dominating this outcome. The ANOVA indicated that the difference in group perceptions related to headquarters giving directions was not significant, with an *f*-value of 1.977. Also the difference between group perception of headquarters having a negative impact of local campaigns was not significant, with an *f*-value of 0.542. The only significant group differences, were found in

**Table IX.**  
Mean scores for groups  
perceptions of HQ's  
impact at elections

	State executive	Candidates	Chairman	Campaign directors
Headquarters should give directions on marketing	4.4	3.97	4.06	4.1
Negative impact of headquarters on local campaigns	3.8	3.79	3.83	3.55
Headquarters has diminished role in getting candidates elected	3.2	3.4	3.71	2.73

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the perception that headquarters has a diminished role in getting candidates elected with an *f*-value of 4.328 significant at  $< 0.05$ .

The groups differed in perceptions or beliefs that headquarters has a diminished role between local electorate campaign directors and political candidates (sig at 0.092) and also between local electorate campaign directors and party branch chairman (sig at 0.003). It indicates that the branch chairman holds the strongest perceptions of a negative impact by headquarters, whilst local electorate campaign directors hold the perception that headquarters does not negatively impact on winning elections.

### Discussion of findings

The findings of this research provide initial evidence of the relationship between marketing philosophy and application in politics via the PMC and political market orientation. Essentially, the findings indicate that marketing's emphasis on voter needs and their satisfaction appears to be important in the minds of political party managers. In the past where there have been efforts to improve the definition of marketing, they have largely revolved around the term the marketing concept which advocates identifying and satisfying customers' needs at a profit. This was also the case here, focusing on the PMC to examine perceptions and adoption (utility). However, there is a distinct lack of empirical work related to the marketing concept. The results indicate that those who are in decision-making positions within political parties in Australia do have a degree of understanding and positive view of this philosophical basis of marketing applied in politics. Interestingly, however, the results indicate that acceptance does vary according to one's position in party hierarchies. Overall, the relationship between the PMC and its perceived value and application was quite strong. It also appeared that a strong negative relationship between the PMC and its application and value exists causing some conflict. This means that the more it is applied and seen as delivering value the less conflict is seen (internally) within parties.

A significant focus of the study was political market orientation and it appears that when it comes to market orientation perceptions there are no identified differences in perceptions between hierarchical levels in parties. That is, all party decision makers are consistent in their views about voter focus, intelligence generation, dissemination, competition focus and responsiveness and party synergy. Such commonality may be a key driver behind consistent efforts to understand voters, the competition and deliver a sought after political offering at all hierarchical levels within parties. There was only minor difference in such perception of market orientation and its individual components, with the two prominent groups being campaign directors and brand chairman.

Overall, in the minds of party decision makers there is a significant pay-off when adopting the marketing concept and implementing market oriented process and systems. They saw a distinct performance benefit from the philosophy and mechanisms that drive the voter side of market orientation.



However, there was not the same relationship between competition and dissemination of information. The results that addressed the relationships between the dimensions of the PMC and the political market orientation were mixed, with some strong relationship being found, but also some surprisingly weak and negative relationships between dimensions existing.

Overall, the results allude two levels of political marketing, a philosophical and operational level within parties. On the one hand, the need to orient a party to its voters (electorate) is an attitudinal commitment (expressed as party culture) to a philosophy and on the other hand, this orientation is reflected in a party's operational activities and mechanisms of political marketing via market orientation. The beliefs of party decision makers toward the marketing concept and its utility appear to be an important dimension. Its operational adequacy via market oriented processes are also key issues in addressing adoption and implementation of the marketing concept by political parties and their own performance assessment as evidenced in the findings.

This can be seen in the results related to the definition adopted in the more conventional marketing literature of the marketing concept when it was reformulated to make it more amenable to politics. Specifically, the redefinition stated that:

... political party decisions should be voter oriented to determine voter needs and wants and attempt to satisfy them within ideological bounds and parliamentary numbers rather than percentage of the vote be the standard for evaluating marketing performance.

And the definition of political marketing which stated that:

... the analysis, planning, implementation and control of political and electoral programs designed to create, build and maintain beneficial exchange relationships between a party and voters for the purpose of achieving the political marketers' objectives (O'Cass, 1996b).

The definition of the PMC and political marketing posed to respondents received a high level of acceptance as a philosophy to guide the development and conduct of marketing campaigns.

Whilst not significant the results indicate the potential existence of some barriers to implementing the marketing concept: first, an incomplete or misinterpretation of the marketing concept among some sections in political parties; second, internal conflict between political objectives and voter needs again among some party sections; third, the management's own values and perception of the importance of voter needs and their input in the development of the political product; and finally the short-term focus of politics and the use of percentage of the vote obtained in elections as the ultimate measure of success.

It appears that if the PMC is to have practical value it requires effective implementation, via activities that translate the philosophical side into the practical or operational side. Such activities bring about a political market orientation, which is the result of adopting the PMC. The political market orientation is the overt behaviour of a party that has adopted the PMC. In effect the results indicate that political market orientation is a narrow set of mechanisms that appear to provide a rich picture of the conduct of political

parties. The findings extend our understanding of political parties adopting the marketing concept and their market orientation mechanisms.

The results indicate that political parties may be moving toward a more in-depth and richer understanding of marketing, particularly with regard to the philosophy that directs their marketing activities and the mechanisms that provide impetus to the philosophy. Consequently there appears to be a growing awareness and acceptance of the PMC and what it means to be market-oriented. Whilst actual performance was not directly measured, perceptions of performance appear to have been significantly influenced by the underlying philosophy and practice of marketing within parties. The results indicate the importance of a market orientation to political party managers' assumption of an underlying direct link with improved performance. However, performance measurement is somewhat problematic in politics and this study focused on subjective assessments by the respondents. This implies that they framed their responses within their own understanding of what their party's objectives were, how they attempted to achieve them (via marketing) and what the outcomes were.

Overall, the results shed new light on the relationship between the PMC and political market orientation. They indicate that some differences exist in politics compared to commercial enterprises (businesses) and such relationships are in need of further research.

### **Future research**

The findings of this study provide an initial move in a positive direction to combat the dearth of empirically based literature on political marketing management. However, more research is required on political marketing. More research should be directed to understand the workings of political parties and how they apply marketing theory and techniques not just in election campaigns, but also in their day-to-day operations. Effort should also be directed to understand the impact on individuals and society of the use of specific theory and concepts such as the marketing concept, market orientation and how these theories direct the development of policy and its implementation. Future research could also examine the structural and process changes that are occurring as a direct result of marketing's growing influence in politics.

### **Conclusions**

Parties' traditional target markets are shrinking dramatically and significant pressures are being placed on political parties and politicians by voters, business and lobby groups. Many parties are now facing increasing pressures as they approach the middle ground in politics and ideology becomes a minor foundation for the development of policy and political utterings. With the reduced emphasis and reliance on ideology to campaign and govern, there has potentially been a corresponding increase in emphasising marketing to target specific groups within the community via policy offerings.

Whilst many marketing academics often emphasise a gap between the practice and theory of marketing in politics, one of the few issues in which agreement can be reached between academics and practitioners is the growing importance of developing an orientation towards the political marketplace. In general the link between market orientation and performance has led researchers to focus on two issues. The first is the theoretical working and definition of the marketing concept and market orientation. The second is the relationships and impediments of developing a market orientation and adopting the philosophy of the marketing concept. This paper has attempted to contribute to both these issues by focusing on the PMC and political market orientation and their influence and application in politics. In a similar thrust to that of Kotler (1972) and others this study sought to expand the practical application of marketing from profit-driven commercial businesses to political parties. The results indicate that the perspective of the political market as containing marketers and consumers who both engage in exchange is valid. Therefore, the findings do not seek to force marketing frameworks into politics but imply that they are seen already as valid approaches to campaign management.

The use of marketing type activities by political parties in their electoral campaigns has been discussed by various authors over quite a lengthy period of time (Glick, 1967; McGinniss, 1969; Nimmo, 1970; Shama, 1973; Kotler, 1975; Kotler and Kotler, 1981; Mauser, 1983; Newman and Sheth, 1985; Smith and Saunders, 1990; Butler and Collins, 1994; O'Cass, 1996a). Examining political processes and electoral behaviour from a marketing perspective may offer additional insights into the electoral behaviour and performance of political parties and democratic processes beyond that gained via political science.

There are suggestions in the literature that parties must understand marketing's central elements to be successful, not only in the short term but also in the long term as well (Mauser, 1983; O'Cass, 1996b), and adopt appropriate philosophical and practical marketing orientations that direct and assist in managing the marketing of party offerings (O'Cass, 1996a). However, the political marketing literature does not provide conclusive evidence to show the extent of use of, attitude toward or the perceived effectiveness of these techniques by party managers themselves. Examining political and electoral processes from a marketing perspective as carried out here provides insights into methods and philosophies that are theoretically valuable in connecting parties and candidates to their electorates and society.

Marketing techniques and theories have the potential to offer political parties and candidates the ability to analyse and address diverse voter concerns and desires in a more programmatic and strategic manner. Marketing has the ability to help determine resource allocation much more pragmatically than the *ad hoc* gut feel approach that often dominates decision making in political parties. More importantly, a marketing orientation allows a party a mechanism to understand and address the basic needs and wants of voters and attempt to deliver an offering effectively via sound marketing management.

The marketing concept as a philosophy and market oriented processes are argued here to provide value as a tool or mechanism for stronger and more definitive connections between political parties and their electorate. In general a stronger orientation toward the electorate through being market-oriented is something marketing academics need to investigate. The objective of meeting voters' needs through a party's offering is to build brand loyalty and repeat voter exchanges by satisfying identified voter needs better than opponents. The PMC and political market orientation cannot guarantee winning at every election; however there is potential for improved performance, and more appropriate ways of making decisions and managing campaigns through this philosophy and its operationalisation. The difficulty appears not so much in getting political parties to accept the philosophy and practice, but instead overcoming the inertia bred of individual party culture – because creating a marketing community involves changing the fundamental way in which a party and its members see themselves, their political environment and their future. The connection a party has with its constituents is potentially weakened by a lack of market orientation and substantive marketing orientation.

The purpose of the present study was to explore market orientation issues in the domain of political marketing. This was important, as little prior research has attempted to examine these issues in the domain of politics. The issues surrounding the PMC and political market orientation raise significant implications for politics and the conduct of electioneering and the management of political parties and government.

Political parties operate in an intensely competitive environment, that changes continuously. Such characteristics may be the drivers for adopting modern marketing philosophies and practices. The role and sophistication of marketing in politics is now gaining momentum. We are starting to develop a better understanding of marketing in politics, its influence, impact and positive as well as negative consequences of such a philosophical and practical foundation for the nexus between politics and society.

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