Political marketing communications planning in the UK and Taiwan

Comparative insights from leading practitioners

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Abstract

Purpose – This study sets out to make in-depth comparisons between major political campaigns in the UK and Taiwan, and generate contemporary insights into the creative development process, the working relationships between campaign managers and professional agencies, and the "spin doctor" phenomenon, all through the eyes of very senior professionals.

Design/methodology/approach – Material gathered in "élite interviews" was subjected to interpretive analysis and synthesised with secondary data and the findings of an extensive literature review.

Findings – The putative Americanization of political marketing has not been as complete as some authors suggest, but one of its features was an important element in campaign development in both countries: the centrality of the party leader's *persona* in an image-building strategy. The culture and history of the party were an important determinant of the style of the campaigns examined. It was generally agreed that political marketing and advertising have been strongly influenced by commercial branding, though important differences remain.

Research limitations/implications – Despite the richness of the data and the authority of the respondents, the small number of willing participants in the study limits the scope for generalisation.

Practical implications – The findings offer usable insights into the creative development process and the nature of client-agency relationships, in political campaign planning.

Originality/value – The paper contributes the first expert-insider perspective in published studies and commentaries concerning political marketing literature. It cuts across disciplines of political science, communication, management, marketing and advertising, and may contain lessons for marketing planners in other non-commercial contexts.

Keywords Marketing, Politics, Consultants, Communications, Taiwan, United Kingdom

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There have been many studies of political advertising, but none thus far which has integrated the contemporary insights of leading practitioners with a historically contextualised comparative study of two election campaigns in two continents. This paper sets contemporary issues within a detailed review of the development of political marketing practice. In a research study conducted in 2005 and 2006, six leading practitioners of advertising, market research and political consultancy gave their views on the craft of political advertising planning, based on their direct experience of two election campaigns, chosen as the focus of the study for their pivotal significance for political marketing planning in each country. The paper thus contributes a comparative insider-perspective, which is currently lacking and which cuts across disciplines of political science, communication, management, marketing and advertising.

The rise of the political marketing profession

In democratic countries, election campaigns often catch the media spotlight. This is especially so in national-level elections. This high-media profile for political marketing has encouraged political parties to employ the skills of specialised practitioners from the advertising, public relations and marketing fields. The primary elections in the USA, the annual party conferences in the UK and political rallies in Taiwan are a few examples of settings in which these specialised practitioners can apply their political marketing techniques to influencing media coverage and commentary. Kavanagh (1995) calls this reliance on specialised practitioners "professionalization" and identifies several characteristic features. These include an increased emphasis on the function of media, a more complex and professionalized role for the campaigner, and a tendency to explain election outcomes with reference to the performance of the media and the responsible campaign manager (p. 10).

Sometimes, journalists, politicians and others will speak as if the marketing campaign alone delivered or lost an election. In the academic field, such outright claims are rare, but nonetheless debates on the relevance of a particular campaign to the election outcome are common. Currently, the jury is still out with regard to the efficacy of political marketing campaign planning. The consensus seems to be that the campaign is regarded as relevant and important, but of secondary importance to issues in the larger economic, social and political environment.

The news media, the public and academics all have an interest in the "spin doctor" phenomenon, though from differing perspectives. Political marketing and election communication campaigning literature often refer to this campaign consultant's role. They also acknowledge that these people will have a direct influence on campaign communication planning and execution, which may ultimately reflect on overall election performance (Kavanagh, 1995; Maarek, 1995; Trent and Friedenberg, 1995; Kinsey, 1999; Powell and Cowart, 2003). Furthermore, studies by researchers from the communication and media disciplines also recognise the campaign designer's ability to embed meanings in the message, notwithstanding the fact that audiences may not decode these meanings in a uniform manner (Moores, 1993; Nooris *et al.*, 1999; Morley, 2002; Stoke, 2003). Surprisingly, and unfortunately, there is limited academic research that leverages the insights of this class of political marketing communication professionals. Many of the studies that do exist are US-based. Others are either

bibliographies or newspaper interviews, which can be insightful as well as interesting, but in journalistic rather than academic in style.

This paper attempts to address this gap in the literature by drawing on a range of personal depth interviews with some of the top professionals in the field in the UK and Taiwan, including party spokespeople for the Taiwanese Kuomintang (KMT) and the in-house agency director for the Taiwanese Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), a former party marketing director for the UK Conservative Party, a former advertising agency director contracted to the UK Labour Party, and non-academic observers. Full details are given in the "Research method" section. The primary focus of attention in the wide-ranging interviews was a major election in which each of the interviewees had been personally involved: the 1997 British General Election and the Taiwanese Presidential Election of 2000.

These particular elections are unique in their own ways, and so are the cultures and contexts, but there are also some similarities. In each case, the respective party was trying to overcome negative historical baggage and to reinvent itself as a party of the moment. Each was trying to do this with a youthful, vibrant leader, extensive marketing effort and similar techniques of television advertising. They also shared a further similarity: a strikingly successful outcome that had major repercussions on the way people thought about the influence of political marketing.

Through interpretation of the interview data, the paper seeks to enhance existing political marketing knowledge in several areas. The first main emphasis is on the creative process of designing election communication campaigns. The second concerns both the effectiveness of the campaigns and, more generally, the Americanisation of political campaigning. The third is on the relationship between parties and agencies. The next section first reviews a short but essential literature relevant to this study, touching on a wide range of pertinent topics from the field of political communication and marketing. This necessary background extends to brief outlines of research in campaign effectiveness and the perceived functions of campaign consultants, all set within a context of the two major campaigns which acted as the foci for the larger study of which this paper reports a part.

The contexts of marketing communication in the two elections

It is important to understand something of the context in order to "read" communication activity in a suitably informed way. Hackley (2005) and Moores (1993) both summarised the definitions and applications of context in the consumption of media text, the former asserting that "appreciating the context of communication is an important part of understanding the way meaning is construed" (p. 41). This comment referred specifically to the interpretation of promotional texts with reference to the other social texts with which they are immediately juxtaposed, as in, for example, a political ad in a newspaper within a setting of other ads and editorial, or a TV spot among other commercials and the surrounding programme material. Of course, not all campaign activities are media-text based. Nonetheless, modern campaigns try to fit the mass media format (Kavanagh, 1995). Hence, the first part of this section reviews the respective campaign contexts, beginning with a brief account of the UK political environment preceding the Labour Party's historical election victory in 1997.

The UK general elections of 1992 and 1997
A late swing in voting delivered the UK Conservative Party a fourth consecutive victory in 1992 (Scamell, 1995; Gould, 1998a; Worcester and Mortimore, 1999; Wring, 2005). This was attributed partly to uncertainties regarding the Labour Party's ability to run the economy, but also to Conservative Leader and later Prime Minister John Major's "Honest John" image, in a highly presidential campaign. Between the then and the General Election of 1997, however, the situation began to change significantly. Neil Kinnock, the Labour Party leader during this dispiriting defeat (later Vice-President of the European Commission), was succeeded as party leader by John Smith. When he unexpectedly died shortly afterwards, Tony Blair was elected party leader. Blair continued party reforms begun by Kinnock, and started the "New Labour" campaign to modernise the party. The infamous "Clause Four" of the party constitution (committing the party to socialist economic policies) was redrafted and the party image modernized (Wring, 2005). Blair also continued Kinnock's use of political marketing techniques, but with additional subtlety and sensitivity (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Wring, 2005). Meanwhile, the Conservative Party's broken promise on taxation and the Exchange Rate Mechanism crisis (Black Wednesday) both undermined public trust in its economic competence, thereby weakening a long-standing advantage the party had held over Labour (Gould, 1998b, c; Powell, 1998; Wring, 2005). The true economic damage of these crises was in fact relatively small but the psychological effect on voters was significant (Norris *et al.*, 1999; Denver, 2003), and proved to be a powerful factor in the 1997 General Election, at which Labour won 419 parliamentary seats, and the Conservatives only 165. This represented the largest Labour majority in history and the lowest number of Conservative members of parliament since 1906 (Bartle *et al.*, 1998).

The Taiwanese presidential election of 2000
When the KMT retreated to Taiwan after being defeated on the Mainland by the Chinese Communist Party, they monopolised political power by declaring martial law. This situation began to soften during late 1970s and early 1980s, when the KMT recognised *Tangwai* (outside the party) members' political rights. These members and some other social elites formed the DPP in 1986 (Rigger, 2001; Roy, 2003; Zheng, 2004).

During the first direct presidential election in 1996, KMT candidate Li Deng-hui (or Lee Teng-hui) and his running-mate Lian Zhan (or Lian Chen) gained a majority with 54 per cent of the popular vote versus the DPP's 21 per cent (Central Election Commission, 2004a). The DPP had no experience of running a national government, a situation with some parallel to Labour's 18 years out of office in the UK. They were also hampered by a particularly negative image regarding the relationship with the People's Republic of China, based on the often violent demonstrations during the *Tangwai* period and the perception that the DPP would declare independence and promote Taiwan's separation from the Mainland (Peng, 1997; Guo, 1998; Roy, 2003). Just as the UK Labour Party had redrafted Clause Four of their constitution because it represented a major impediment to voter confidence, the DPP published the "Resolution on the future of Taiwan" in 1999 to reassure voters that they would not declare independence if elected. Additionally, DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian, who came from a poor family background in the rural part of the Taiwan, was young and popular (Rigger, 2001; Roy, 2003). This made his image quite different from the

previous *Tangwai* and DPP generations. On the other hand, the KMT also suffered from negative publicity between 1996 and 2000, especially on the issue of "Black Gold" (Rigger, 2001; Roy, 2003; Zheng, 2004). A form of kick-back, this was a by-product of the KMT's patron-client relationship with the local political powers (Zheng, 2004). The issue attracted much media and public attention after the 1996 election, which the DPP took advantage of this through the use of political communication initiatives (Roy, 2003). Furthermore, the KMT was divided into two factions prior to the 2000 election, due to Li Deng-hui's support of Lian Zhan as the presidential candidate, rather than the more popular candidate James Soong (Peng, 2005). Chen Shui-bian won the election with 39 per cent of the popular vote, Soong and Lian gaining 36 and 23 per cent, respectively, (Central Election Commission, 2004b). This was the first time the DPP had won a presidential election, and it was a major event in the political history and culture of democratic Taiwan.

Campaign communication effectiveness
The following section will examine research into the effectiveness of election campaigning, against the background of the elections in the UK and Taiwan.

According to Holbrook (1996), arguments regarding campaign effectiveness can be categorised into three themes: a campaign is decisive; it is not relevant; it has a limited role. Today, few professionals in the field would argue for the first point. There is a general consensus that election outcomes depend ultimately on factors other than campaign communications. Kaid (1976, p. 49) is adamant: "No classic study of voting behaviour (Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1948; Berelson *et al.*, 1954; Campbell *et al.*, 1960) has found political advertising an important determinant of voter decisions".

This view enjoys support among academics and some practitioners. Commentators have suggested that economic indicators are the single most important factor in election outcomes. When applied to British elections, this view is supported to an extent by the circumstances and outcomes of the general elections in 1983, 1987 and 1992, but not by the 1997 election described earlier (Holbrook, 1996).

The limited effectiveness model – see for example Kavanagh (1995), Scamell (1995), Holbrook (1996), Hilton (1998) and Powell (1998) – is sometimes made explicit in the assertion that election campaign communications will be able to influence between 3 and 5 per cent of voters. This is a proportion that can, of course, prove crucial when the race is close. Researchers and commentators arguing for the limited effectiveness of campaigning acknowledge that the campaign alone is unlikely to persuade and convert a voter, but is important in setting the election agenda and reinforcing other campaign activities. Campaigning is an important way for the parties to communicate with the public. In turn, the public can gain useful information from these events (Butler, 1995; Kavanagh, 1995; McNair, 1999; Denver, 2003).

The final section of the literature review will now examine the roles of professional campaign experts and advisers.

Working for the party
As Kinsey (1999, p. 113) puts it, "Having savvy [political campaign] consultants on board no longer is perceived as just a distinctive advantage; rather, it is perceived as a necessity" and yet "their [consultants'] influence on the political campaign process has not been the focus of much academic inquiry or theory development." His study found

several differences between the academic and practitioner perspectives. For instance, the former focused on building theory around campaign and voter behaviour, whereas the latter played out a normative agenda in seeking methods of using communications and campaign planning techniques to win elections. Furthermore, the academic objective is to share knowledge regarding the subject, while the practitioner perspective emphasises the needs of practitioners to gain and maintain competitive advantage. Kinsey found that practitioners often emphasised the persuasion effect and liked to persist with techniques that had proved effective in the past. Their attitudes towards negative campaigning were often quite different from academics' tending to treat it as simply a tactical tool.

The consulting role in political campaigning
The interviewees in the study reported here included four professional consultants with different backgrounds and working in somewhat different areas of responsibility. Therefore, the following review will address several key issues relating to working for political parties.

The motives for doing so are important. Such work can bring prestige to the consulting firm but may also entail a risk of alienating other clients who hold differing political values. In addition, other clients may simply resent the considerable time and resources a consultant has to devote to a political party (Trent and Friedenberg, 1995, p. 289). Furthermore, if the election is subsequently lost, the result may be negative publicity for the consulting firm (Kavanagh, 1995). Nevertheless, many firms are eager to work with political parties, largely due to the potential for considerable publicity and the possible increase in business resulting. It can also be a unique and memorable experience for those who work in a campaign (Kavanagh, 1995). Other than the candidate, it is these consultants who often catch the media spotlight when the election is won (Kinsey, 1999).

Maarek (1995) listed several important positions and roles within the campaign team, including the campaign manager and outsourced specialists. In terms of the campaign manager, the main responsibilities are to: oversee the central campaign organisation; manage and co-ordinate the entire campaign team and its activities; co-ordinate and supervise the links with outside organisations such as advertising agencies (Maarek, 1995, p. 173). Under the campaign manager, there may be a subordinate role of media and advertising manager. This role entails "choosing precisely which media should be used to convey the campaign message" and working with the agencies in buying advertising time and space (Maarek, 1995, p. 193). Kinsey (1999) and Powell and Cowart (2003) also describe the media manager's role in terms of co-operation with the media consultant to develop messages. This may include scriptwriting.

Finally, recruiting outside media consultants is common in modern elections because they often bring with them long-term marketing experience, tried and tested up-to-the-minute marketing techniques, and fluency in conveying media messages. They may even be a cost-efficient resource, in that their expertise can prevent money-wasting and ineffective activities (Maarek, 1995, p. 201; Trent and Friedenberg, 1995). However, they can also bring problems to the team. As outsiders, they may not be familiar with the party policies and the candidate. They may introduce negative "personal chemistry" into the original team. Because their duties and roles are different

from the internal staff, they may focus too much on short-term effect and ignore long-term consequences (Maarek, 1995, p. 203).

While most researchers in the field are well aware of the influence of political campaign and political marketing consultants, few academic studies have examined their perspectives and influence closely. The study reported here has done so.

Research method

In order to study the roles of election campaign practitioners in separate but related national contexts, this study conducted dyadic depth interviews with some of the most highly regarded practitioners in the UK and Taiwan. Many requests for interviews were turned down for various reasons, but six prominent experts agreed to share their first hand experience on election campaign communication.

They fall into three categories: those who are still working on election and political communication campaigns, those who used to but no longer do, and those whose job responsibilities are to observe election communication campaigns. Personal profiles were compiled from information gathered before and during interviews. For the purpose of this paper, there names are disclosed in order to underline the authority of their comments, but also to thank them overtly for their invaluable collaboration. In accordance with research etiquette, however, verbatim comments are not attributed to individuals in the Findings section.

In the first category, Zheng Li-wen was the DPP regional representative before joining their rivals the KMT, and is now the KMT's party spokesperson. She is regarded by many media commentators and politicians as very image and marketing oriented. Also in the first category, Lin Feng-fei has worked within the DPP since his mid-1920s, designing mass-media and interpersonal campaign communication messages, and managing rallies and other public relations events. At the time of writing, he was still a consultant and campaign officer for the DPP.

In the second group, Chris Powell of the multinational advertising agency DDB' London office worked for the Labour Party as an outsourced media communication specialist and agency from the mid-1970s until the late 1990s. Will Harris was Marketing Director of the UK Conservative Party from 2003 to 2004.

In the third category, political news journalist Luo Guang-ren followed and reported the 2000 Presidential election campaign in Taiwan, and established close relationships with the three candidates' campaign team members. Nick Moon, a Director of the market research and public opinion polling agency GfK NOP, is a specialist in conducting and analysing political polls.

Table I lists the dates of the interviews, the names of the interviewees, and their positions at the time.

Interviewee and date	Position at the time of interview
Chris Powell 1 June 2006	Director of DDB London, advertising agency
Zheng Li-wen 28 July 2005	Spokesperson for the Taiwan KMT Party
Luo Guang-ren 28 July 2005	Political journalist, Central News Agency, Taiwan
Lin Feng-fei 23 August 2005	Chairman of NeoApex, political consultants, Taiwan
Will Harris 19 September 2005	Chief Executive of 'The Bank' consulting company.
Nick Moon 28 September 2005	Director of GfK NOP, market research agency

Table I.
The interviews

Gathering data through "elite interviews" certainly has its shortcomings (Christy, 1995; Bobbie, 2004; Hackley, 2003a, 2005). For instances, the interviewee may lead the discussion powerfully in a desired direction, sidestepping the difficult questions. The interpretation of the transcript can be influenced by interviewer's subjectivity and cannot be used as the basis for generalised claims. On the other hand, a semi-structured or unstructured interviews can uncover rich data, and the interpretive approach can deliver deep insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Hackley, 2003a, 2005). In the case of this study, semi-structured dyadic interviews were considered to be the ideal choice. These participants have many valuable experiences to share. Therefore, the interviewer's aim was to allow them to do most of the talking, after a short briefing, only asking for clarification and posing follow-up questions when necessary.

A large volume of data were gathered and transcribed, yielding valuable insights into the design of election communication messages and providing further understanding of the professional roles. The analysis draws on the transcribed interviews, and verbatim extracts are used to illuminate the points made. All transcripts made in Taiwan were translated by the first author.

Findings

Many topics were discussed at length by the interviewees. They touched on a wide variety of issues of interest to researchers and practitioners in political communications planning. The findings will be structured in terms of three major themes: the creative development process and the role of the political *persona* of the party leader; campaign effectiveness; and the agency-party relationship.

Candidate-centred creative development of political campaign TV spots

The importance and effectiveness of building the campaign around the image of the main candidate and other senior party figures was agreed upon by several interviewees. When asked about the rationale behind the 1997 Political Election Broadcast (PEB) for the UK Labour Party one noted that: "People like to focus on celebrities. To show Tony Blair in an informal setting without disturbance is the objective of that PEB . . . ". From the poll data, it was also noted that Tony Blair was an important asset for the Labour in 97's victory: ". . . it [featuring the party leader in the campaign] can be a major positive, as it was for Blair in 1997".

A similar view was expressed by the DPP's campaign staff in Taiwan. The ability of party leader Chen Shui-bian to rouse the crowd and galvanize support was exploited by featuring him prominently in the DPP advertisements. When one participant was asked about the influence of his image on the creative development of political TV spots, it was suggested that: "Some parts will be based on your observation of him, what role is he more comfortable with. You cannot come up with something that is way out . . . Of course we have to push him sometimes, but a lot is just following the real him and his emotion . . ." Another interviewee also commented on how the DPP had used the leader's image to build their ad campaign:

They put a lot of effort into making the ad campaign with a sensitive appeal. That's why you see Chen Shui-bian's home town and his childhood, interview-like conversations . . . He is like the "boy next door" that people can see growing up. A decent guy who worked his way to the top . . .

These extracts from the interview transcripts demonstrate clearly that the respective political and personal personas and televisual appeal of Blair and Chen were central to the creative development of the communication. The opinions cohere with the findings from other studies on the development of political campaigning and the Americanisation of political marketing. Kavanagh (1995) identified one element of the American model as candidate-centred campaigning. McNair (1999) also suggested that the increasing importance of focusing on construction of the candidate's image is one of the characteristics of modern political election campaigning. Powell and Cowart (2003) not only recognised the impact of a candidate's image on voting behaviour, but also noted that campaign consultants regularly used it to shape the campaign, and vice versa.

The putative Americanisation of political campaigning
Practitioners and academics seemed to agree about the importance of candidate image in the creative processes of campaign communication, but differences arise when it comes to the Americanisation of political campaigning. Authors commenting on the campaigns conducted by the UK Labour Party (McNair, 1999; Wring, 2005) and the DPP in Taiwan (Rigger, 2001; Zheng, 2004) suggest that both parties tried to adopt US campaign styles in one way or another. The academic literature also cites US influence on campaigning in other democratic countries. The practitioners among the interviewees seemed more circumspect about the issue, however. One, in the UK, suggested that:

> "You could say yes in the earlier days, but today everyone is learning from everyone else and people have the tendency to focus on the key politicians. That's why it seemed more presidential ..." Another UK-based practitioner expressed similar views. In his opinion there are aspects of the creative processes in which Britain is stronger, and could export its expertise to the USA: "billboards and newspaper ads are more advanced and creative, when compared to the US ..."

This comment reflects a view, expressed by advertising professionals in both countries, that British commercial advertising is also more creative than its US counterpart (Hackley, 2003b). A Taiwanese practitioner, on the other hand, offered two perspectives when asked the same question with regard to the situation in Taiwan. His comment on the campaign method prior to the lifting of martial law in Taiwan suggested that Americanization was not possible under those conditions:

> Under oppression, the environment does not allow them to think about Japanese or American [styles of campaigning]. There is not even enough time to run for their life, let alone for transferring or learning ... it is an action-reaction-action-reaction-kind of process.

When the interviewer mentioned that many DPP staff had been educated in the USA, and suggested that this may have had an influence on campaign style after the abandonment of martial law and the emergence of competitive elections, the same interviewee felt that American influence only affected two areas:

> If you say "pollster" there is a transfer of technique. There is a knowledge within that you need to learn, but you can't take a class on America's primary or campaigning on the primary. But if there is a transfer, how? From watching TV: "Hey, this looks nice, let's try it next time". [It's just] that simple. If you want to talk about Americanised campaigns, then these [are the] two examples.

This practitioner evidently felt that "Americanization" was no more profound than a selective transfer of specific techniques, such as opinion polling. This contrasts with some views that it has a deeper influence on domestic political culture. The interviewee also mentioned that another country in South-east Asia was trying to hire him for a campaign, and that US campaign managers were interested in his work in the design and management of mass political rallies:

> Even countries with a dictator are interested in the control of mass rallies. I had a case from [Country X] . . . an invitation from them. The offer was tempting, but I just feared that I might not return alive. It is scary to do it in a third world country . . . when we first introduced our onstage keyboard player to campaigners from the US, they kept saying 'incredible, incredible'.

The impression gained from the interviews is that practitioners' views about US's influence on the political culture and political campaign planning are somewhat defensive. There has been no specific study on this topic, but the reason is perhaps that practitioners wish to emphasize the creativity and originality of their own political culture and campaign expertise, rather than suggesting that they are copying US practice.

Campaign effectiveness
The effectiveness of particular campaigns and creative executions is as important a topic for political marketing practitioners as it is for commercial brand marketing planners. This topic was extensively discussed during the interviews. The views expressed seemed to cohere around the "limited influence" model (Holbrook, 1996) explained earlier. Political campaigns could be important to an election outcome in the right circumstances, but other key variables such as economic factors, the quality of politicians and the quality of party policies would usually be much more important.

One UK participant, discussing the effectiveness of advertising during the UK Labour Party's historical election victory, made the point that party competence and political campaign effectiveness are regarded as separate things by voters: ". . . but people can often differentiate how good your communications are from how well can you run things . . . It is true in political ads as well as commercial ads, and in 1997 there was no need to convert, but only to make sure they followed their original decision". Another UK practitioner, asked how political marketing and advertising might recover the lost image of competence for the UK Conservative Party, responded that ". . . not much can be done; it is the end of an era and political marketing and advertising is not going to turn things around . . . they can't create something that is not there".

A Taiwan-based interviewee addressed this point from a different angle, speaking about how he and the DPP had mobilized the electorate for campaigns: "The most important thing [in the campaign] became controlling these participants and their emotions through some sort of mechanism." After speaking about the campaign itself, he added that:

> . . . it [the campaign] is a boring thing, no matter what we do. There has to be something for us to start with. If there is nothing to start with, we can't create an emotion. Emotion can't be produced, it can only be echoed, be deduced. If there is no phantom within you, there is no wizard can call upon you.

These two observers' opinions are similar. They agree that campaigns can be effective, although the relationship between election outcomes and campaign performance can be hard to establish. On this point, the practitioner-interviewees seemed to share the general opinion of published academic researchers with regard to the limited influence of political campaigning.

Relationships between practitioners and political parties

The relationship between a political party and its advertising or public relations agency is a topic discussed in the political marketing literature from time to time, though arguments are seldom supported with first-hand information from party members and practitioners. Several authors have noted the importance of separating party ideology and policy from the political campaign planning process. In other words, agencies and consultants should not get involved in party policy, they should simply advise on how best to express and communicate it.

One Taiwan-based interviewee expressed a view on what the respective responsibilities are for the agency and the party:

> They [the agency] can give professional advice to the party and politicians on how to best communicate and to promote through activity planning and execution ... A party must set the course and general principle on what is the message they want to communicate; they can't let the agency to decide it for them. An agency is only there to help to develop the tactics and the best way to accurately deliver the message to the target audiences.

Another practitioner, who used to work within the DPP on campaigning and now has his own agency also expressed an interesting point of view: "If you are still working for the party, usually they don't like you to talk about it ... Like myself, I am still the contracted from the DPP's party centre. It is my client's business. How dare I comment on their policies?" Discussing the party-agency relationship in general, he further commented:

> I don't feel there is a lot difference [between commercial and political campaigning]. It is because I have a political background, that's why I don't feel a lot of differences ... [If you are working for them], P&G will give you a briefing on what is our marketing, such and such. In DPP no one will give you these ... SWOT? Why can't you do it yourself? Then you will realise, only very few agencies will be able to capture this essence. It is hard to cross over these entry barriers. You don't have enough understanding of the product. That's why people think the political product is hard to work with.

By contrast, two UK-based practitioners who came from commercial backgrounds and worked for the party as, respectively, outsourced and in-house experts, did experience a certain level of strain during the transition from commercial to political campaigning. They seemed to imply that that the distinct responsibilities of the agency and the party were not always mutually understood but, rather, emerged through negotiation. This might reflect a common view among UK advertising professionals that, while commercial clients know their brand, they do not understand communication.

One interviewee in the UK participant suggested that:

> At the beginning of the relationship, they [the Labour Party] knew nothing about talking to the public, strategy or anything. In the early days, we were quite central, we were like teaching schoolboys how to do it ... as they get more confident, they make the call more, partly due to Peter Mandelson. He was very sure on how to run things.

Another added that: "As an employee, you have fewer allies and you are less important than the MPs and the politicians; therefore, it is sometimes difficult to get the message across …"

These practitioner comments suggest that knowing when to be in charge and when to stay behind the scenes is an important element in the maintenance of a healthy relationship between the agency and the party. As Kinsey (1999, p. 116) put it, "it is the media consultant who tends to be featured in the popular press and in post-Election Day interviews". Kavanagh (1995) and Maarek (1995) have remarked that this publicity, though beneficial to the agency and the individual, can be irritating to the party and to some of the campaign staff who work within the party. The agency, then, is in a delicate position, since good agencies seek to help their clients by becoming strategic partners, but need to know when to defer to the client as the ultimate guardian of its brand.

Party culture and campaigning
Lastly, the relationship between the party and practitioner is affected by the cultural attitudes to political marketing within the party. Party leaders can be an important element within this equation. In a quote reported in the previous section, one senior UK participant mentioned how the influential British politician Peter Mandelson had influenced Labour's mindset with respect to political marketing. The literature on the topic (Kavanagh, 1995; Wring, 2005) also suggests that successive Labour Party leaders, Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair, held different views from previous Labour leaders, who rejected the notion of political marketing entirely. Labour's traditional roots are of course, in socialism and, prior to the 1990s, many of the party faithful were anti-capitalist. Consequently, they felt strong antagonism towards use of the methods of capitalism (especially advertising) to garner votes. This position changed partly because of the modern vision of these party leaders, and partly because a senior advertising practitioner, working at a major agency, was sympathetic towards the use of "social marketing" communication techniques to support non-profit, public policy and political interests. It is well-known that Chris Powell, a Labour Party supporter, and his agency DDB were able to work effectively with the new Labour leadership when some other senior advertising executives might not have been able to find enough common ground to do so.

Similarly, our Taiwanese expert spoke about how the DPP had come to understand the value of brand marketing communication techniques applied in a political context: "The DPP is a party for the battle. Even the party chairman started from doing propaganda. The DPP is like a propaganda machine. It is an election fighting machine, so they are sensitive toward how to conduct propaganda". The KMT's party spokesperson agreed:

It [the DPP's campaign effectiveness] is strongly related to the culture of the party and its effect on the agency. In a way, you can say there was only one reason for their existence in the early days, which was to win elections. Therefore, the party itself is like an election machine. Communication was never their primary focus until recently. We do have this awareness now, but we're still working on enhancing it.

One UK-based professional expressed an alternative view when asked about how the Conservative party had used marketing concepts in their political campaigning:

[It] sees political marketing and advertising as important, but is not brave enough to test innovative ideas and methods; therefore, the pluses and the minuses cancel each other out ... They [the campaign platforms] are developed and specialised ... Three major parties are actually on the similar page in terms of techniques and knowledge.

This last point raises the issue of whether relative expertise in political communication planning can cancel out the efforts of two rivals. Jones (1997) found that successful campaign effects can be reduced or even cancelled out by an opponent's campaign. If that is so, then such other factors as the macro-environment play a more important role. Interviewees broadly agreed with this view in discussion of campaign effectiveness, and the academic also concurred with it, as noted above. A supportive party culture is important for the building of a strong campaign, but is not enough to win an election on its own. Just as is the case of much brand advertising and marketing, one major motivation for engaging in political marketing and advertising is the knowledge that one's opponent will certainly do so. It is therefore a compulsory activity, even though there is no guarantee that a campaign will deliver the election victory.

In the final section, discussion will move to the possible implications of the findings and interpretations presented here.

Concluding comments

The emphasis of this paper has been on integrating the views of leading political marketing practitioners on issues arising in two elections which took place some seven and ten years ago, respectively. Nevertheless, we suggest that there is much here of contemporary import. Not least, it is instructive to look back at the reasons why aspects of political marketing evolved in the way that they did, in order to better understand current practice. Moreover, we combine a review of academic research with leading practitioner insights to generate some guiding principles that can act as loose marketing intelligence heuristics in political campaign planning.

Several general insights have emerged. A key issue was the importance of the image of the leading politicians, and especially the party leader, in giving a focus to political communications planning. This was the case for both a parliamentary and a presidential political system. The finding implies that a party adopting marketing concepts in an election campaign should not only consider its candidate's image within the party but also take account of the views of the public in the earliest phase of the campaigning process. The two elections discussed in this paper were a watershed, which defined the role of the party leader for the future: those without a strong media *persona* cannot carry the hopes of their party faithful, now that political marketing has come of age.

On the other hand, the party leader or candidate cannot simply be Mr or Ms Popular, without a clear stance on ideological issues. The problems of developing a primary selection process that can balance the two deserve further attention from academics and practitioners.

A useful insight for academics researching in this area concerns the practitioners' views on the much-touted but nebulous "Americanization" of political campaigning. The USA is still regarded as the innovator in political marketing communication tactics and is the largest exporter of political marketing strategy, but local context invariably drives the campaign planning process. Furthermore, the transfer of

techniques has now become two-way: one Taiwanese expert spoke of how interested practitioners from the USA and other countries had become in his managing of political rallies.

Practitioners are aware of the limits of the campaign effect. Carefully designed and executed campaigns can echo and enhance certain existing emotions, but they cannot create an attitude from a vacuum. A party that wants to maximise campaign effectiveness also needs long-term planning. For example, changing Labour's name to New Labour would not be enough if Tony Blair had not redrafted Clause Four and modernised Labour Party from within. Academics who emphasis the importance of this long-term planning called it the "permanent campaign" (Ornstein and Mann, 2000). In this process, party, politician and practitioner have to constantly be aware of public opinion, and often have to link campaigning with governing.

A climate within the party of support for marketing and campaigning activity is essential to building long-term success in internal and external communication. In this process, practitioners with a political background might grasp the party's culture and operations more quickly than outsourced advisers, but external expertise can also provide valuable alternative views from time to time. Therefore, the question of how to balance the two without affecting morale is important for the relationship between the agency and its political client.

Finally, it can be argued that campaign strategists are useful only for communicating an image, values and ideologies which themselves originate within the party. The views collected during the study imply that effective political communications planning demands a political integrity at the core of the relationship between the party and its agencies. In other words, core party policy and ideology should be political, not marketing, decisions.

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