Perceptions of Political Marketing in Sweden:

A Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

The political marketing academic literature is largely an Anglo-Saxon one, with the main European contributions coming from Ireland and the UK. Comparatively little has been written explicitly about political marketing in Sweden. We offer a brief overview of the key characteristics of the Swedish political system, together with a commentary on the apparent use of political marketing in Sweden drawing upon concepts developed in the American and British literature. We present the results of a study of perceptions of political marketing in local elections in Norrkoping, a middle-sized Swedish town of 90,000. Firstly a series of structured interviews were carried out with the party leaders of the 5 largest parties and with the journalists who report local politics in the town. These included questions aimed at establishing their level of understanding of political marketing. Secondly, two focus groups were carried out with voters in the town, which included an exploration of their experience and perceptions of electoral campaigns.

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1 Introduction

In the political science literature in English, political marketing as a term has been used in the past primarily to describe certain forms of political communications within electoral campaigns. Despite the involvement of marketers and market researchers in political campaigns, it is only recently that a distinctive well-founded marketing literature on political marketing has emerged. Butler and Collins (1996) provide a good summary of the basic content of political marketing. Lock and Harris (1996) discussed some of the features, which differentiate political marketing from the mainstream of consumer marketing. In the UK since the 1997 election campaign there has been a considerable interest in political marketing with widespread public awareness of its impact in terms of image creation, focus groups and the use of spin doctors. The political marketing literature in Europe as a whole is relatively undeveloped, being largely confined to the UK and Ireland.

As a multi-party democracy based on proportional representation, Sweden offers a marked contrast with the UK and the USA, the countries which have spawned much of the literature. There is a paucity of Swedish work in the area. The Swedish election research literature is dominated by a limited number of researchers whose central interest is in general voting behaviour. There is little work focussed directly on election campaigning and associated communication techniques. There is an increasing interest in political marketing combined with some concerns about what is sometimes seen as the influx of brash American electioneering. Thus a study of perceptions of political marketing in Sweden is both novel within that country's political literature and contributes to the understanding of political marketing within proportional representational systems as a whole. The second distinctive feature of the study we report is that it is concerned with politics at the municipal or local level. We are aware of little work at this level in any European country. The focus on the local level gives the study an internal completeness within a manageable time frame as interviews were conducted with all the local party leaders and all the journalists who report political events in Norrkoping, the town in question.

2 Political Marketing

Kelley (1956) is generally credited with the first use of the term political marketing. The US literature identifies John Beckley, a member of the campaign team around Thomas Jefferson as one of the first political consultants, though similar roles can no doubt be identified much earlier in other societies. The rise of political marketing in the recent past has been attributed to the development of an investigative press, declining party loyalty, and changes in the political and electoral systems (Newman, 1994). In particular, scholars (e.g. Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1995) have identified the expansion of the media, particularly television as having had a significant impact. There is evidence to suggest that political marketing has contributed to improved communication between the politicians and voters (e.g. Harrop, 1990; Newman, 1994). Especially apparent in the popular and academic literature on both political marketing and political communication is the occupation with image and how much or little it affects the voter. Often the phenomenon of image in politics is said to have risen because of television (e.g. Cutlip, 1994; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995). However, image has almost as many meanings as the number of people who use it (Grunig, 1993:124).

Newman and Sheth (1985) combined concepts from consumer behaviour and political science to create a model of voting behaviour in political marketing terms. So far it has only been tested in a primary election in the USA, so its applicability outside such settings has yet to be shown. Most of the literature is concerned with what marketers would view as tactical issues, though Butler and Collins (1996) show the impact of strategy and its importance in governing the direction of the campaign.. Most electoral markets

in the West are mature, the players are established and the positions are set. Butler and Collins (1996) summarise the strategic directions at hand for the campaign manager as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Market position, characteristics, strategic directions

Position	Characteristics	Strategic directions	Examples
Leader	Highest share Acknowledged orientation point Continuous attack	Expand total market Expand share Defend share	National Congress (India) PRI (Mexico)
Challenger	Chosen to depose leader May be several challengers	Attack leader Attack similar competitors Attack smaller competitors	Partido Popular (Spain) Labour (UK)
Follower	Purposeful concentration on target market Imitative rather than innovative Local/regional strengths Broad line	Clone Imitate Adapt	Centre Party (Norway) Progressive Democrats (Ireland)
Nicher	Leader in narrowly defined market or niche Specialist appeal	Create niche Expand niche Defend niche	Les Verts (France) Yisreal Ba-Aliya (Israel)

Source: Butler and Collins 1996:36.

3 The Changing Patterns of Swedish Elections

Sweden is a two chamber parliamentary democracy with a titular monarch. Elections at all level are by proportional representation and there are five major parties. Election dates are fixed. According to Holmberg and Esaiasson (1988), election campaigns were very limited after the establishment of the two parliamentary chambers in 1866. Members of the Parliament (Riksdag) were responsible for their re-election themselves. There was almost no party organisation and attempts to influence public opinion were mostly local. The members of the Riksdag usually presented, at a nomination meeting, what they had done during the year in the Riksdag. Occasionally, they wrote letters to the local newspapers. Campaigning was very low-key. Agitation for the party or oneself was seen as ungentlemanly behaviour. From the beginning of the 20th Century, the campaigning procedure began to change. Campaigning became more centralised and intensified. It was the Social Democrats, Socialdemokraterna, who took the lead and were soon followed by the Liberal party. The Social Democrats went for the popular vote for obvious political reasons. For this they had to become a party of the people (Holmberg and Esaiasson, 1988). Universal male suffrage and proportional representation, were introduced by the Conservatives before the First World War during which Sweden was neutral. Party organisation became essential. It was now impossible for the members of the Riksdag to refuse to participate in the election campaign. The members of the Riksdag proved effective speakers at both small and big meetings. This formed the basis for the parties' campaign work. An important change came around 1970 when campaigning shifted from a party to a media focus. After the Second World War the parties had a firm grip on their voters and the media were dependent on politicians for news (Esaisson, 1992). By the end of the sixties, journalists had become more critical and the party press weakened, thus making the media more independent (Peterson, 1995). As in other countries, the last thirty years have seen a marked decline in voter loyalty. Esaiasson (1992) identifies three reasons for its decrease in Sweden: the breakthrough of radio; the growing

importance of television; and independent, investigative journalists. To these we might add higher levels of education and social mobility.

4 Political Marketing and Campaigning in Sweden

There is very little literature in Sweden, which can really be called political marketing as it would be understood in the UK and USA. Swedish accounts of election campaigns are mainly descriptive with a focus on political explanations of events. Apart from Stromberg (1967) there is only limited research on local election campaigns.

4.1 Swedish Political Campaigns

Asard and Bennett (1995) argue that political rhetoric is dying, both in Sweden and the United States, and that, when politicians do not feel in control they turn to technology and political marketing consultants. Parties compete over voters in the middle of the ideology spectrum. Loyal party voters no longer hear messages aimed at them and the media are the principal vehicle for communicating party messages. However, public speaking remains important in Sweden, where town square meetings are a tradition, especially in local elections. Swedish writers have identified an increase in the use of political marketing consultants as a trend, but they have not been studied so far. Peterson (1995) identifies four factors that account for the increasing importance of the campaign itself: increasing electorate volatility; the decrease in the proportion of voters with strong party allegiance; the decline of class-based voting and the increase of issue-based voting; and lastly, final voting choices being made closer and closer to the election day.

Kjellander (1984) is critical of the Swedish political parties' election campaign aims ,suggesting that their principal concern is to point out the party's superiority over the other parties.

Swedish parties have strong grip over campaigns based on strong hierarchical organisations. Election campaigns are organised at three levels; central, regional, and local. The central party committee has the responsibility for organising the national campaign as well as the strategic planning. The regional and local organisation committees work together with the central committee in developing different themes in the campaign. The members of the Riksdag may be involved at any of the levels but their main task is to work at the local level establishing direct voter contact(Esaiasson, 1992).

The campaign is seen as a team effort, so the work is divided between the party committee, a few famous politicians, and ordinary members of Riksdag. Since the local media closely scrutinise politicians and the campaigns, the members of the Riksdag have a greater responsibility than previously acknowledged in Swedish research (Westerstahl, 1993). Campaign planning is heavily centralised in order to not lose control over the local politicians and the party programme. There is no official start date for the election campaign. Unofficially it starts a year in advance when nearly all the parties have their party conferences and where the platform is established. Doorstep canvassing is seen as an intrusion of privacy, so the parties use personal contact in the work place, particularly the Social Democrats with their close trade union links (Esaiasson, 1992).

4.2 Party Profile

Osterman's (1986) study found that the Social Democrats and the Conservatives (Moderaterna) had the most distinct party profiles. Political debate was dominated by slogans, which only found support among party loyal voters. Most of the electorate held opinions that are not ideologically grounded. Osterman, concluded that political ideology plays a minor role in voting decisions.

4.3 Political Communication and the Media

Historically, there have been three distinct forms of political communication: Direct contact between voters and parties and politicians; word of mouth (Holmberg and Esaiasson, 1988); and finally communications through broadcast and print media (Petersson, 1995). The importance of the latter has grown enormously in the last 30 years. Swedish voters now become familiar with politicians and their politics principally through the media. Politicians dominate over parties as a collective in news reporting. The national focus is increasingly on small and exclusive political elite, particular members of the Government and the other party leaders. Ordinary Riksdag members have good contacts with the local media and more often interviewed in the local media than on national, television (Westerstahl, 1993).

Politicians as people are better treated than parties in the media. There no longer appear to be differences between different types of the media. Distinctive positions are more evident on 'hard' questions, e.g. economy, than on 'soft' ones like equality (Bennulf and Hedberg, 1993).

For many years, journalists usually reported meetings and speeches without comment and politicians were treated with the utmost respect. Increasing critical and investigative journalism has changed the campaign work of the Riksdag members. The national media are mostly interested in a few well-known and powerful politicians. Local media offer greater opportunities for the politicians to reach the electorate. Press conferences and interviews in the local radio have become more frequent. Election campaigns use mass media to spread knowledge about the party programme (Holmberg and Esaiasson, 1988). The media are now seen as not only the distributors of information but also important influences over the social life of its readers, listeners, or viewers (Kelly, 1965).

Asp and Esaiasson (1996) identify factors which have changed Swedish electioneering: the growing independence of Swedish voters; the professionalisation of the parties and the mass media; and the increasingly media-drive nature of politics. Kjellander (1984) argues that these are superficial signs of deeper information flows which affect every one: decentralisation, and changing family structures and gender roles. However, the nature of the political system is also important. Riksdag members run election campaigns as a team. In contrast, in the USA, senators and congressmen organise their individual election campaigns with limited party financial and technical support. According to Petracca (1989) political consultants are used even in the local campaigns bringing new professionalism to the amateurism of local politics. This trend is not evident in Sweden. TV advertising is little used in Swedish politics. However, just as in the United States, debates in television are common and important (Esaiasson, 1992).

4.4 Local campaigning

Denver and Hands(1992) argue that local constituency campaigning in UK general elections is important even though neither the national media nor the national parties acknowledge its significance. It is evident that in a close election, the local and regional party efforts may determine the outcome. Local campaigns have less resources and may find it difficult to raise name recognition and issue-positions (Howell, 1980). Maarek (1995:211) point out that coexistence with national campaigns, which often take place simultaneously, and the restriction of communication choices, given the limited geographical scale of the campaign, present problems for local election campaigns. In Sweden, most people know the names of the local politicians but few know the names of the members of the Riksdag from their local area (Johansson, 1993).

4.5 Swedish Voter behaviour

Swedish election research started in the mid 1950s, investigating both a municipality and a parliament election. Granberg and Holmberg (1988) found many differences when they compared the United States and Sweden. Agreement with the party or the candidate is much more common in Sweden Swedish parties are easier to grade from left to right. Level of education influenced voting behaviour in the United States but not in Sweden. Granberg and Holmberg conclude that Swedish voters vote ideologically and not on personality and that it is easier to predict voting behaviour in Sweden than the US because the voters put their trust in a party, though attitudes towards the party leaders are difficult to predict.in Sweden. The area is dominated by a few scholars (e.g. Asp, Esaiasson and Holmberg) who have not looked at political marketing.

5 Campaigning in Norrkoping

Norrkoping is a medium-sized Swedish town of 90,000 people. It was chosen because one of us (Nievelt) was familiar with the area and had access to both politicians and media. It was decided to focus on a single town for reasons both of the feasibility of a limited study and also to try and present a complete microcosm of Swedish politics in a local setting, by interviewing all the major parties and all the journalists engaged in reporting local politics. The study had two objectives: firstly, to examine the understanding of politicians, journalists and voters of political marketing and their attitudes towards it, and secondly, to study the actual impact and experience of campaigning and political marketing in the

previous municipal elections in 1994. It was recognised that the delay between 1994 and 1997 (when the interviews were carried out) presented problems of recall, but it was considered important to be able to relate questions to a specific setting.

There were eleven parties in the 1994 Norrkoping local elections. Some achieved reasonable media coverage, some parties were effectively invisible. It is especially difficult for small parties. The media were striving to construct the election campaign as a battle, a race. It emerged that voters in the focus groups also wanted the election campaigns to be more exciting; more like a battle or a fight between two equally strong parties. Resources are scarce and journalists few, the result is that only the biggest parties receive coverage. A paradox is that the conservative parties are four (Moderaterna, KDS, Centern, Folkpartiet) against the Social Democrats, making it difficult to present as a direct contest.

5.1 Study Method

It was decided to use structured individual interviews for the studies of journalists and politicians and focus groups for the study of voters. All interviews and focus groups sessions were taped. The interviews were conducted between August and November, 1997 and the focus groups were held in early September, 1997.The interview questions, the focus group questions, and a list of the interviewees are available for scrutiny. The interviews and focus group sessions were designed, structured and planned on the basis of both the Swedish and English (including US!) literatures on the subject (see for example, Holme and Solvang, 1991, Patel, 1987, and Ekholm and Fransson, 1992). Non-verbal communication was also taken into account (Dimbley and Burton, 1995). When the researcher is analysing information with a qualitative perspective, he or she is trying to interpret the meanings and implications of what the respondents have said in the interviews. This can not be done mechanically but must be subjective by weighing statement against statement in the context of the interview situation. The problem is to estimate the validity of the analysis and to avoid it not being the researcher's private opinions. To clarify the validity another researcher may investigate the same material (Larsson, 1986).

5.2 Interviewees

The politicians chosen were the leaders of the five biggest parties, Socialdemokraterna, Centern, Folkpartiet, Kristdemokraterna, and Moderaterna. The contest was between the four conservative parties and the Social Democrats for control of the municipality council. One of the politicians interviewed was more involved in the regional council. However, he was heavily involved in the governing of the local party. All politicians agreed to be interviewed. The politicians were promised that their names would not be used in any published work, or presented in a way for a reader to identify who gave which answers. The same applied to the journalists and focus groups.

The journalists were selected on the basis that they worked for the local media and that they investigated the governance of the municipality. All seven journalists approached agreed to be interviewed. Specifically, one worked for Norrkoping Tidningar, the main local conservative newspaper, one for Folkbladet, a small Social Democratic newspaper, two from the public service regional TV editorial office, one from the public service regional radio editorial office, and two from the commercial regional TV editorial office.

Even though the interviews were spread over four months it did not present problems. It allowed time for reflection and re-evaluation of drawn assumptions and conclusions and time to discover any logical or methodological mistakes.

5.3 The Interview Format

The chosen method or methods had to be able to measure the subjects understanding of the concept of political marketing as well as measuring the usage of political marketing. Considering that Norrkoping is quite small, there are few political players and journalists to investigate, so the subjects were not many, they were situated in a small area, and they were positive towards being interviewed. There were not sufficient to justify the use of a questionnaire and were sufficiently few for a full in-depth structured interview with each respondent. The result was also a rather richer information set than could have been achieved with a questionnaire.

5.4 The Focus Groups

The two focus groups were used as to provide a comparison of public views with those of the politicians and the journalists. The questions asked were checked by an independent source, ensuring that they were not too complicated or illogical. There were 15 subjects in each group, all of whom were studying civics part-time at the adult education college in Norrkoping. This strategy was chosen for reasons of access and to provide a sample of electors who might be interested in politics. Refreshments were provided and college staff were not present.

It was important for both the reliability and validity of the focus groups work that they should be representative of the broad electorate, even though the numbers of participants were small. All participants in the focus groups had voted before, at least in the election of 1994. The youngest were around 20 and the oldest about 50, covering a large group with different backgrounds and experiences. The following results emerged from a study conducted by the biggest daily newspaper, Dagens Nyheter, in 1994. Of 1.000 students who were first-time voters and spread around Sweden, 82.3% answered they would vote in the coming election, 10.9% said they would not, and 6.8% said they did not know (Valboken 1994). This corresponds well with the results from the focus groups.

5.5 Cross Validity

Our view is that the validity of the results is strengthened by the comparison between the focus group results and the structured interviews. The research is divided into three groups, independent of, and dependent on, each other at the same time. The statements of the politicians are compared to the statements of journalists interviewing them and scrutinising them. The efforts of the politicians in political marketing, are compared to the findings in the focus groups. The role of the media in the election campaign is also examined in the focus groups. Therefore, the investigator may not be fixed in a certain perspective because there are three different sources which will point in one single direction or in three different directions. There is of course the common factor of the single interviewer, which was not possible to address in a study of this scale, except in so far as the questions were checked by a third party before being used.

6 Results and Analysis

We have summarised the results from the different groups below, picking out contrasts between different groups' perceptions where appropriate.

6.1 The Interviews with Politicians

All respondents had been involved in politics since their youth. Their interest in politics had been encouraged by their parents and their choice of party stems from the beliefs of the parents. In several cases one parent, usually the father, had been active in the same party as the respondent. Most of the politicians saw elections as a fight or race between the two biggest parties, Socialdemokraterna and Moderaterna. The smaller parties has sought to become niche players, which is peculiar considering that in a proportional representative system no vote is a wasted vote, so the incentive is there to fight for every one. Also, the more support the parties receive, the more monetary support they receive from the state.

The parties started to plan the election campaign about a year before the election day. However, there are great differences in what and how they plan. Most of the parties plan tactics, for example when to have meetings and to print the posters. The Social Democrats and Moderaterna had a more strategic approach looking at neighbourhoods; identifying sympathisers, what issues to push, and analysing the situation. Those involved in the planning of the campaign and party programmes are all from the party, especially from the inner circle of the party; the party leaders and their closest supporters. Ideology plays a part in the development of a party programme. However, the current situation and trends in society play a greater part than any political respondent would acknowledge directly. Even though the party congress establishes the national party programme, the local party adapts it to fit the situation locally. The party organisation for young party members is used very little in order to reach young voters. The young party members are used for mainstream activities.

The election campaign was planned to reach its heights in the last two weeks. The goal of the election campaign was to strengthen the party's position in the minds of the voters. The grass roots members are used to carry material and to assist at meetings. Party election campaign plans did not use the workplace or interpersonal contacts of grass roots members.

"We aim at everyone. We exclude no one".
(Local politician)

The party leaders divided voters into socio-economic groups. The Liberal party, Folkpartiet, had difficulty in identifying their voters. As the journalists' answers corroborated, the parties had difficulties in focussing on particular groups of voters in the election campaign. It was only the Social Democrats who specifically targeted special selected groups. The other parties wanted to reach everybody, whether sympathisers or not.

Great power is ascribed to the media by the politicians. Competition between media is fierce. There are two television channels, two newspapers, and one far reaching radio channel. Since they are regional or local, they need to find regional and local news. This gives the politicians an excellent opportunity to place news.

Party leaders are responsible for the media management. They work with press releases and press conferences. The party leaders' definition of media management was to call the journalists they knew and try to convince them of some idea to an article or ask to comment on an article. The relationship between politicians and journalists is of a functional nature. The politicians are suspicious of the journalists because they see them as trying to discredit them. The journalists, on the other hand, think that the politicians always try to use them. The politicians know that they need the journalists as much as the journalists need them.

"The party leader personalises the party, the voters identify with him and like the person. In the end it could be a determining factor."
(Local politician)

All party leaders saw the national party leader as very important. At the local level, the team is much more important. Even for the election campaign, the party leader is seen to be most important at the national level. The ideal party leader for the politicians were very similar to that of the voters: able to speak to anyone, a believer in the ideology of the party, and with personal charm. Interestingly, the voters in the focus groups considered issues to be much more important than the personality of the party leader on the local level as well.

The parties did not hire any marketing or public relations consultants on the local level. If they hire consultants it is for advertising which seems to be what the local politicians consider marketing to be. They believed they were very advanced because they advertised in the local press. Also, they believed that hiring external help would somehow undermine democracy and especially the power of the party. Public relations was seen as promotions, like bumper stickers and pseudo-events, not strategically planned media management or internal communication.

The local party leaders were aware that the national parties and party leaders are using political marketing, but showed no intention to want or need to use political marketing themselves. The local party leaders saw themselves as entrepreneurs, close to the voters. However, that belief was not confirmed by the focus groups.

6.2 Results of the Journalist Interviews

In the local and regional media, there are few journalists working with politics full time, especially in the public service media, where journalists must investigate and cover several municipalities. The bigger the municipality, the more coverage, resulting in differences in the political marketing and media management of the parties. The politicians in the bigger municipalities receive more coverage and therefore are able to campaign through the media. All the journalists believed that the political stance of the editor should not have any impact on the news coverage of the media. But, those in the broadcasting

media see the political colour as evident in the print media, those working in print media see no effect at all. The journalists did not believe that they should stimulate interest in politics. They viewed their task as to inform the reader, listener, or writer. Then he or she should think for him or herself.

All journalists recalled the municipal political situation in Norrkoping in 1994 in the same way. Before the election campaigns started, the outcome was clear to the journalists; the conservative parties would lose. This pre-supposed election outcome may arguably have affected the journalists' coverage of the election campaign. The election campaign of 1994 was no different from previous years, according to the journalists. Most evolved around local finances and deficits.

Most coverage was given to the main protagonists, the conservative parties versus the Social Democrats. The summer holidays interrupted the campaigns, therefore most interest from the media began in August, a month before the election. The coverage of the campaigns, both in the municipality and regional councils elections was ad hoc. The journalists did not plan in advance how to cover, when or where, only to give as equal shares of coverage to all parties. Those working in the media covering more than just Norrkoping had to choose which municipalities to cover. They concentrated on those municipalities where most of the 'fighting' was deemed to be.

All responding journalists showed a knowledge of the development of political marketing on the national level. They were not able to define political marketing, but they disliked it any way. The parties failed to position themselves according to the journalists and the respondents in the focus groups. One journalist said this of the political parties' attempts at media management:
"If I was working with the party strategy or promotion I would push issues that are working in the media. They [the parties] are amateurs. They make too ordinary and boring attempts. Single-minded and repetitive. I would try to vary myself more and to try to find out what the media would find interesting."
Moderaterna and their campaign were well received by the journalists. More generally, the criticism was that the parties by and large followed the national party election campaign. But; "Moderaterna used party strategists but not at the local level. The reason may be that they are still living in the 1960s, thinking that the media should come and account for what they say and do. They do not understand that it is competition [for the time of the media]." (Journalist)

The journalists representing both the print and broadcasting media stated they did not think that the politicians know what target groups the media have. Even though the local media focussed on the local politicians, they are still very little known in comparison to the national politicians. There are both advantages and disadvantages with the concentration on a few politicians. The advantages are that the politicians become much more 'media-attractive', they know how to behave and what to say. On the other hand, many journalists seek the same politician at the same time and the pressure is great on the politician to speak knowledgeably on all issues. It also leads to the party being identified with only one person, making it difficult to replace him or her.
In the debates arranged by the media, the politicians were criticised for knowing too little or even too much resulting in an overly complicated debate. Full-time politicians who work on a daily basis with politics in the municipality council showed great talent in debates and interviews. But, the part-time politicians who only work with politics on their spare time in the municipality council, showed great insecurity when handling the media. There were many mistakes made in debates and interviews which force the journalists to interview 'professional' politicians in order to obtain fuller answers. Therefore, the focus on the local party leader increased even more.
Most journalists saw the politicians as unprofessional in their media management. The lack of resources forces journalists to rely on press releases to a great extent. However, this was not understood by the political parties. The party workers were unaware of how journalists plan their work, particularly during election campaigns. The journalists lacked time and money to investigate the politicians and political parties. It is clear that the party leaders understand the importance of the media, but not how to use them. Television was seen to be of much greater importance than the print media, giving disproportional power to the television stations. The focus on the party leaders was further strengthened when party leaders were

also the spokespersons for the party. Party leader were expected to have information and knowledge of all issues, even though this was unrealistic. The easy access to the party leader was greatly appreciated by the media. All journalists in the interviews emphasised the importance of being independent, especially at the local level. All journalists identified the two main issues for the political parties: employment and the finances of the municipality.

One journalist said about the political parties' media management that: "If one [the political parties] consciously aimed to be seen and heard, if it hired experts, it would be seen in the local media much more than today." The journalists define a professional politician as someone who knows how the media work and how to talk in order to create a head-line. He or she must also be able to talk sense, in a way that ordinary people understand. A journalist stated that "it is new ground for a marketer who knows that the media want to get news out quickly. We are much more easily deceived than they think."

6.3 Results of the Focus Groups

The two focus groups differed in several ways but particularly in the level of activity of the respondents during the sessions. However, the results of their answers pointed in the same direction and to the same conclusions. The similarity in the responses was striking, which gives us some confidence in what are cautious generalisations.. The subjects took the voting process in the municipal elections very seriously, though this may reflect their interest in civics

All respondents agreed that to vote is to be a good citizen. They expressed a desire to vote, to feel part of the democratic process. This indicated a continuation of the high voter participation even among the young electorate. However, the respondents failed to see the connection between their voting behaviour and the way the country or municipality is governed. This pointed to a lack of knowledge of the parties' programmes and their ideology. They expressed disappointment after the election day. The findings showed the parties were largely unknown to the respondents.

The influence of the parents' voting behaviour was great on young voters. Parents' discussions of politics, their view of society, and their faith in politicians or lack of it heavily influenced their children, especially in their first election as a voter. Gradually, the influence may wear off depending on the continuing relationship between the young adults and their parents.

The subjects voted every fourth year and then they lost touch with politics between elections. Few of the respondents had a particular interest in politics and parties. They had no knowledge of who were representing them in the Riksdag, in the county or the municipality councils. The lack of knowledge might result from list rather than candidate elections. In Sweden, the electorate did not need to know the names of the politicians they elect, only the name of the party. (This changed in the 1998 elections.) Respondents wanted greater control over who represented them, e.g. where the politicians came from, their education, family and so forth.

"Raise the child benefits, lower the taxes! More jobs! Heigh-ho! Vote for us!"
(A respondent's view of the parties' election slogans)

The subjects in both focus groups did not feel particularly important to the parties. The respondents saw the politicians as slick and that all parties tried to appeal to everybody in the society. The contempt for politicians was strong, particular among the younger voters. Respondents thought they were only noticed by politicians when they want power or want to keep it. Trust in politicians is very weak. The younger respondents trusted the politicians less than the older. The findings match those of Skops (1994)

There were different opinions about the importance of the party policies and issues versus the personality of the party leader. One group thought that in national elections that personality was crucial. Men were more reluctant to admit the influence of appearances and personality than women. In the municipal council election, interestingly, party policies were seen as more important than the personalities of party leaders. This may be linked to the levels of awareness of local party leaders.

Those subjects interested in personalities were very aware of the influence of the media. They questioned the images they had of the leading national party leaders, even though they actually believed in those stereotypes. However, they said that the issues were the most important thing, and the issues are strengthened if the party leader is deemed as serious and trustworthy. The subjects wanted to be seen as

rational creatures, making a choice based on facts; policies of the parties. There were signs that the younger voters were more interested in the appearance of politicians than the older ones. The electorate watch election campaigns in Europe and the United States. Arguably, they become influenced or at least affected by what they see, for example in the American presidential campaigns where the candidate is in focus. The effects could be that the established parties are forced to move from picking the party leader because of his service record in the party and instead turn to those within the party who have strong personalities and charisma.

The respondents up to 30 years of age practiced ticket splitting. They saw no reason to vote for the same party in the three elections to the municipality and the county councils, and to the Riksdag, stating that it was more important to look at what the different parties have done in the municipality than to make an easy decision to vote for the same party in the three elections. The young respondents did not consider ideology when they vote. The choice of party was based on party programme, past actions of the party, and the party leader. It is therefore quite possible to vote for a conservative party in the municipality council election and to vote for the Social Democrats in the national election. However, respondents above about 40 voted for the same party in all three elections.

"The cliches are doing something about unemployment and lower taxes. If one look at small issues it is very difficult to understand [the parties' reasons for their policies]."
(Respondent in focus group 2)

The respondents failed to see how ideology effects the party programme. They could not identify any particular issues that the different parties stood for or their ideologies or positioning. This lack of knowledge might be attributable to lack of interest. Local politics were seen to be tangible; more understandable. The respondents felt they could influence the local politicians if they wanted to. However, the local parties were considered as puppets of the national parties.. The respondents disliked the level of cooperation between parties: "On the local level they co-operate so much that it becomes some damn hotchpotch."(Respondent in focus group 1)

Both focus groups had little knowledge of the local politicians. They could hardly name any of them. After some discussions they reached the names of the leaders of the two biggest parties, Socialdemokraterna and Moderaterna.. Apparently, local advertising has not increased name recognition. Also, as party media management is mostly concentrated getting articles or comments or letters-to-the-editor in the papers, politicians are not visible to the electorate.

Unemployment and the environment had important issues to the respondents in the focus groups in the municipality election of 1994. The campaign was seen to have lasted too long and that the media were seen as concentrating too much on what the politicians do and say at the national level. The respondents were well aware of the influence of the media. However, it was difficult to draw any conclusions as to how much or little the respondents were influenced by the media. The respondents thought that the parties are too obvious in their hunt for votes. The respondents expressed a concern that the politicians did not take them seriously. One explanation may be that the parties in Norrkoping did not segment the electorate into subgroups.

.The respondents did not want to have American-style election campaigns. They saw an American-style campaign as superficial, lacking issues, and selling the candidate. They did not think that it would work in Sweden where the culture is putting the team or the group before the individual. The respondents wanted to see more debates where the party leaders argue for their party, making it more of a contest. They thought parties were using the wrong campaign techniques with door to door canvassing and town square meetings.

In the square meeting, a Swedish tradition, politicians make speeches to the electorate in town squares or similar venues like shopping centres. The respondents saw no reason to stop and listen to what they see as propaganda. If they wanted information, they preferred to find it in the party manifesto, though they did not trust any sort of information coming from the parties. Leaflets and other information materials were

never read by the respondents if they came through the mail box. They had more faith in the media which they saw as objective and trustworthy.

Door-to-door canvassing, has been employed for a couple of years by parties and is growing in importance. It was not liked by the respondents in the focus groups. Nor was telephone canvassing. The respondents preferred the parties to come and visit them at their work. The work place was seen as neutral grounds where the politicians and the voters could be equal and be able to discuss policies.

One respondent quickly said "McDonalds" when political advertising was mentioned. Most respondents felt that advertising was too commercial for the political world. Advertising was seen as a tool to fool the voters to believe in a facade and to forget what the party has done, or has not done. Many respondents expressed anger over political advertising and felt that the parties that are using advertising are selling themselves like soap.

The respondents did not understand some of the use of opinion polls. They preferred polls about the level of party sympathisers instead of the popularity of the party leaders.. Polls were seen as more important to the media than to the voters. The respondents did not believe the polls influenced voters' behaviour..

As was seen earlier, neither group were clear about what the individual parties stood for. Both groups were convinced that there was little difference between them, that all parties were clustered in the political centre..

None of the respondents wanted to be active in a political party. Working within a party was not seen as a way of influencing the development of society. It was believed that one had to be a particular kind of person to be able to work in politics; someone that likes to organise and who has no opinions of his or her own. Most respondents believed that those involved in politics are doing it for the money, not because of ideology. This is striking considering the high voter participation. Despite such high levels of contempt and distrust, the respondents still voted for people they do not believe in.

The party leader was important to the voters when they vote. The ideal party leader should have had a job outside politics, with experience in the 'real world'. Media focus on party leaders was not seen as dangerous. On the contrary, the respondents clearly felt it important for a party leader to be 'media-attractive'. However, respondents disliked the personalisation of policy issues in the media.

The media were seen as the most important source of information. However, focus group subjects expressed suspicion of the media. They believed that the political stance of a paper colours the way journalists report about the parties. Television was criticised because of the short clips in the news bulletins. The respondents saw emphasis on the party leaders' personalities as positive in the sense that it made the politicians more human. They apparently wanted fierce debates and clear contests, though they also said that debates should focus on issues rather than trading insults.

6.4 Contrasting the Interviews with the Focus Groups

There seemed to be a widening gap between the politicians and the electorate. The focus group respondents did not believe politicians were communicating with them. The respondents in the focus groups wanted the election campaign to be more of a fight, a contest in which they feel important. The politicians in their turn regard the focus on image and personality as something for the national politicians, not for them on the local level. Political marketing was seen by both politicians and journalists as something alien even if it was not understood. The politicians knew that their national parties were using political marketing. However, they saw no reason to use it in the local election campaign. However, the focus group respondents were clearly concerned that they did not understand the relative positioning of the different parties. Journalists complained about not being used enough, that the politicians do not know how to use the media and not how the media work.

The main campaign techniques were not working in the opinion of the focus group subjects. The growing trend of telephone and door to door canvassing annoyed them, though the politicians thought they worked. Subjects saw the election campaign as boring because it lacked fierce debates. The respondents were very negative about political advertising and American-style campaigns. In a sense they were inconsistent

because most of the respondents were also in favour for a more candidate-centred campaign and placed importance on personality and appearance.

7 Local Elections and Political Marketing

Published research on political marketing in local elections is very limited, whether in the UK, USA or Sweden. There are considerable possibilities even at a simple level in Sweden. Grass roots members could be used much more effectively. Media management is generally poor. Most importantly, if we can believe the focus group subjects, voters do not have a clear idea of what parties stand for. There is a lot of work to be done on positioning of parties and, with the changes in Swedish electoral practice, on candidates.

None of the groups in our study had a clear idea of what political marketing is. The most common misinterpretation was that political marketing equals advertising, or external communication aiming to win the election.. It is notable that the politicians saw it as an external communication activity, used tactically, if used at all. There was no evidence of the strategic use of political marketing as summarised by Butler and Collins (Table 1 above). This is also reflected in the Swedish literature, in which political marketing is largely absent. The ambivalence of voters about the issues involved suggests that political marketing in Sweden and, perhaps, in other list-based electoral systems will have to develop its own national cultural characteristics before it becomes accepted and effective.

The current apparent failure of parties to segment the electorate is striking. Political marketing could be very useful for smaller parties in identifying their voters, where they live, and how they would prefer to receive information about the party and the party programme. All parties could use their grass roots members more effectively.

Journalists were less aware of the usage and concept of political marketing than expected. What the journalists are identifying as signs of political marketing are changes in hair-style and clothes, cosmetic surgery, and stunts. If the parties hired a media manager, the journalists only observed that the telephone rang more than usual. However, they also confessed that if the parties' media managers were more professional, the managers would be much more effective. The journalists were not in fact hostile to the usage of political marketing, though they clearly rejected what they thought was the underlying concept.

The voters were also ignorant about the concept of political marketing. In practice, they saw political marketing as both good and bad for democracy. The positive aspect of political marketing is drawn from what the respondents have seen on television from the American election campaigns - more enthusiastic voters and more of a party mood than the modest meetings in Sweden. However, the respondents fear that if political marketing was used in Swedish politics, it would trivialise it.

No political consultants were used in the 1994 local election campaign in Norrkoping. The national party offices in Stockholm handle the parties' contacts with advertising or public relations consultants. The local parties were sent the printed party programmes and posters. However, the bigger local parties have themselves some funds to finance posters of the local leader and a few more known politicians from the municipality council. Local party programmes are printed in the local Xerox shop. The difference between the big local parties, which are the biggest on the national level as well, and the smaller parties came down to the amount of resources. The local politicians were not quite sure what a political consultant would do for them and if the voters would accept it. The political respondents in this research also thought that they and the party had done well in earlier campaigns. Therefore, they could manage without any external help. However, if the focus groups broadly reflect local voter opinion, this view of their performance is not shared by the electorate. There were no significant signs that Swedish local politics were becoming 'Americanised'. Americanisation is defined as a marketing philosophy putting television in the centre of media management; images and personality more important than issues; and professionalisation of the political actors (e.g. Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Negrine, 1996). The majority of the interviewed journalists complained that politicians were using the media too little. The political parties have very little or no media management. During the non-election years, the politicians are most often waiting for the journalists to make contact with them. During the election year, the parties have largely ad hoc media management. The normal process is that one or a group of politicians write an article

in the biggest local news paper, Norrkopings Tidningar. That article upsets the opposition, who in their turn demand to be allowed to answer the allegations made in the article. They write an article answering the allegations and make some of their own. The first set of politicians want to answer back in their turn, and so on. This bores the respondents as readers of the news paper, who do not read these sections or the letters to the editor. The political parties media management extends further than the editorial and comment pages of newspapers.

It should noted that in Sweden, television is under state control. Of the three terrestrial channels reaching over 90% of the population, two of them are public service channels. TV political advertising does not exist. Since the democratic political parties seated in the Riksdag receive monetary support from the State, there are rarely any contributions from individuals or companies and when offered most parties refuse them in order to preserve their independence.

The media tended to focus on the party leader, therefore, the names the respondents mentioned were those of the party leaders. However, this study could not find any deliberate move by parties to put emphasis on the leader of the party. In most cases, the party leader has the responsibility for the most important issues in the municipality council, such as finances, which puts him in the focus of the media. That the political parties are putting great emphasis on issues instead of party leader is evident since the interviewed journalists identified the same issues of concern in the election campaign of 1994 as the parties stated. However, the voters in the focus groups were unable to identify their issues of concern and could not state what issues the different political parties had pushed. In conclusion, the political parties have poor media management, and profiles and party programmes that are not apparently understood by the electorate.

There were no signs of an increase in professionalisation of politics on the local level. It was the party leader and occasionally two or more full-time politicians. Most of the members in the municipality council were politicians on their spare time and are employed elsewhere. External consultants were not used in advertising, marketing, or public relations on the local level. The politicians have been active in the parties for a long time and their political careers developed through party work. They have been members of the party since they were young, and are now middle-aged.

Conclusions and Reflections

There were clear opportunities for increased professionalism in local politics in Norrkoping. Journalists thought that they could be used more effectively, which suggests considerable possibilities for training or external consultants in political marketing, public relations, and media management.

The parties' strategies in trying to appeal to all sectors of the electorate appeared inefficient in resource terms and were poorly received by the focus group respondents. Segmentation offers the possibility of communicating more effectively with different voters sub-groups. Whilst it is dangerous to generalise from a study in one town, the consistency of the results clearly points to a need for change in approaches to campaigning, media management and communication with voters. The research was conducted three years after the election which meant that the respondents probably remembered selected parts of the campaigns. However, it could also mean that the respondents have had time to reflect over their actions and feeling, giving more depth to their answers. In addition, many of the questions were about political communication and political marketing in general, set in the context of local elections. The provides an insight into the election campaign process in local elections, which is a little studied area. It shows that there are distinct opportunities for political marketing techniques in proportional representation electoral systems in Sweden and that voters may be looking for such developments, though their concern about Americanisation may mean that their introduction will be most effective in a form that is customised to respond to Swedish cultural norms. Whilst the politicians thought they were doing well, the focus group interviews showed levels of distrust of politicians that are familiar elsewhere, and the journalist interviews suggested that media communication was also poor. Political marketing could assist greatly in bridging these gaps.

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