

Ideal Types in Political Marketing

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Abstract: The collection of essays "Political Marketing – A Comparative Perspective", edited by Jennifer Lees-Marshment and Darren Lilleker, captures a considerable part of the evolution of ideal types of behavior regarding political parties. This review researches the developmental process by means of criteria set out by Max Weber for ideal types in social science. The later refinements of the criteria by the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz and sociologist Roger Carroll are also used. Sartori's methodological debate is deployed as a frame from the perspective of the applicability of the comparative model. Neither Sartori's rules for stretching, nor Schutz's consistency, compatibility and adequacy are satisfactorily fulfilled. The setting of the model also casts doubts on the rigour of political marketing as a discipline.

Keywords: ideal type, political marketing, methodology, political party, adequacy, political party behaviour model, overstretching

1. Introduction

This review essay attempts to examine consistency and utilizability of a recent model of political marketing- comparative political party behaviour. For this purpose, we use weberian ideal type as the canonical and universal methodological tool. The model is under development, but the process of its comparative proofing was depicted in Political Marketing- a Comparative Perspective. The volume was edited by Lees-Marshment and Darren Lilleker, the authors of the model. Though this essay attempts to draw general conclusions about the nature of some of the methods of political marketing, it does not have sufficient grounding to do so. The critical conclusions may therefore serve merely as a basis for forming a hypothesis about the discipline of political marketing as whole.

In the last decade or so, political marketing became one of the most cited and studied phenomena and concepts. It certainly has several distinctive reasons, mainly the need of response to reported Americanisation of European politics, namely the adoption of marketing techniques into politics. The first wave of the scientific reflection of these new phenomena

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was related to the study field of political communication. The debate raged around the alleged Americanisation of European politics and new styles of campaigning. The reviewed collection of articles on political marketing (Lilleker, Lees Marshment 2005a) is a signpost of the second, more ambitious wave of researching politics and political marketing. The book aspires to set fundamental principles to a new paradigmatic model of political party behaviour and party politics in general. There is a clear plan of action to the development of the political marketing “theory”, in which a major role is played by typology of political party behaviour.

Since a new approach towards comparative politics is to be implemented and used, it could be profitable to scrutinize the methodological structure of this new procedure. Repeatedly, the usage of marketing approach in political science brought a deluge of criticism due to its alleged lack of methodological rigour, but these objections are usually not grounded in scrutiny. One reason could be identified in the precarious nature of the methods of social science. We would therefore come back to the safe grounds of the methodological canon of social sciences-Weberian ideal type. Since the plain form of the ideal type theory seems to be unfinished and of an unanchored quality, we would make use of as revised by philosopher Alfred Schutz. This much underrated phenomenologist made an attempt to solidify the grounds of the social science by developing a general view on acquiring knowledge and constitutional elements of scientific character of social science. He therefore elaborates Weber’s proposal of ideal type. To add a specificity of comparative political science to the scrutiny, we would also deploy some outcomes of the work of Giovanni Sartori (Sartori 1970) and his later followers. Using Schutz’s words, we would attempt to check the “controlled inference” order (Schutz).

The collection comprises of three distinctive parts: a method remodelling and setting, method application and the conclusion derived from the results of the application. We aim our efforts at the first stage while looking at the structural and methodological compound, then briefly comment on the application phase and compare our findings with the conclusions drawn by the editors at the end of the collection. Even though the book is on the edge of the political marketing discipline, we would not be able to assess the extent to which the text is representative by the means of methodology. We have precedents for a shift¹ of both politics and its scientific perception- mass politics (and mass parties, mass democracy etc.). There are some similarities marking both the shifts and normative evaluations of the rotten and dehumanizing character of the new era (using terms like positive start etc.). The striking differences lie in the fact that marketing method is being deployed and in the way such an implantation is conducted.

2. Political marketing thesis remodelled

The first part of the book is written by the editors to accomplish a twofold task. In the first layer, it should lay out the methodological device of political marketing paradigm to a set of rules for the successive application. It can partly build on the older stock of research done by the two authors, namely on the Lees-Marshment model of political party behaviour, but there is a difference in the particular usage required in the latter application. In the previous studies,

¹ The similarity increases our suspicion about the authenticity and „exigency“ for the new paradigm.

the model has been used as a heuristic device to study first and foremost British politics (even though the ambition to broaden the coverage of the model could be traced even in some of the older texts). The text about the model consists roughly of three components: a substantiation of the paradigmatic change together with a jargon glossary, the introduction of the typology of political parties and the remarks for the application of the concept.

The first task of setting the ground for a new approach seems to be very vague. Lees-Marshment and Lilleker argue (Lilleker, Lees Marshment 2005b: 1–3) that there is a major shift in the world of politics due to the transformation of the social sphere. According to the editors, the rationale of the application of a new paradigmatic approach is situated in these changes towards consumerism and a society of consumers. There are two consequences of that change: due to the culture of consumerism, politics became consumer driven and it is therefore appropriate to adjust what Schutz calls a “scientific model of a sector of social world” (Schutz 1971b: 88). The language of marketing should also be deployed to describe political processes. Citizens are seen as consumers that constitute a market, a fluid and open one as contrasting the “old” cleavage driven voters’ society. Parties and their distinctive features (leadership, MP’s, members, staff, symbols, constitution, policies) play the role of products. They are sold continually through mass media and their goal is to maximize the share of the market (or alternatively just political control). This “relocation” of concepts, is twofold: it is usage of marketing jargon as fitting description, but also a “translation” of a set of marketing methods to a new substance. Before proceeding to the exploration of the particular model set by the reviewed collection, we should pay some attention to the precondition of political marketing as discipline- the process of the aforementioned “translation”.

3. Marketing to Politics

The exercise of “translation” is building on the corpus of the relative discipline. It is repeated from previous texts so it is presented in an abbreviated form which sharpens questions about the translatability. In a different setting, Carroll (Carroll 1983) describes the problematic nature of communicating a message between different modes of knowledge. Despite the fact that Carroll is talking about the transformation of scientific knowledge to everyday life, we could use his cautiousness. The translation of the concepts of marketing into political science inquiry and furthermore a question the worth of a simple translation (and thus with minimum shifts and interpretations) being presented as paradigm change seem to be equally problematic. Moreover, a closer look reveals that similarities with the Carrolls problem are deeper: marketing could not be regarded as science, at least in compliance with the demands on science Weber has set out (Weber 1949: 49–112). Marketing has certain procedures that resemble a full science, it also meets Schutz’s requirements for verification of fellow researchers, but since it definitely does provide “ideals for immediate practical activity”, Weber would not assign to marketing a scientific character. We could trace that the marketing research using many of science such as a scientific discussion as the mean of controlling the inference, but at least according to Weber, it would still be a set of prescriptions, however sophisticated they may become. Therefore, the “translation” from marketing is de facto the equivalent process to what Carroll describes, the difference is “just” the direction.

We see the core argument for the demand of a perspective change of political science in the transformation of the perspective the political actors themselves have undergone. The notion of marketing approach towards politics being adopted by politicians is quite vague and it could be argued that signs of marketing approach have been essential to any stage of popular politics. However, a combination of improvement of the resources for marketing with the way it is deployed suggests that we could find arguments for a shift in congruence with Weber. The role of marketing praxis intensified, and became an available tool at hand with high level of technological complexity. And above all, politics itself is being “conducted” with awareness of these methods and to a distinctive degree under its influence. Both Weber and Schutz are building their constructs of social science implicitly on methodological individualism, and one of the core arguments are that social science has to take the way a social situation is perceived by each actor. Does it mean that once politics are perceived as marketing praxis, that it is justified to research it as such? We are not fully convinced that marketing perspective has a heuristic value of such a kind that it would be capable to become the dominant perspective, but at least a try is worthy and could help us better understand some of the motivation of the political actors, maybe in fact even more profoundly than through traditional idiographic study. Having the reason for the model and its jargon frame and the setting, the model itself could be set.

4. The Model of Political Party Behaviour

The core of the Lees-Marshment (Lilleker, Lees Marshment 2005b: 7–11) model is grounded in identifying three distinctive strategies political parties may be carrying on. The criterion is in general preference towards the central political marketing principle, market, product or sale orientation. Therefore, there are three distinctive ideal types of product oriented party, sales oriented party and market oriented party.

The product oriented party seeks voter support on the basis that voters would realize the worth of the party stance and would follow it. Lees-Marshment (Lilleker, Lees Marshment 2005b: 9) argues that usually, such a model is not successful in the western political systems.

Sales oriented party works on extensive political communication and it simply “makes people want what it offers”. Its communication means are centralized and unified. According to Lees-Marshments predictions, such a strategy would fail because it is not responding fully to the consumers needs (Lilleker, Lees Marshment 2005b: 10).

Market oriented party initially needs “to know market before the product is designed”. The product is adjusted to achievability, internal, intra-party, and external electoral reactions and therefore outcomes. Lees-Marshment predicts that the market oriented party is potentially the most successful strategy and any party that would adopt such an orientation should become a winner of elections. These core constructs are then applied to what Lees-Marshment calls marketing process behaviour (Lilleker, Lees Marshment 2005b: 6) and what would be called campaign politics process in the traditional jargon of political science.

5. Party Marketing Orientation as Ideal type

The model raises numerous methodological questions concerning the relation between these party types and ideal types. The nature of the relationship between these three models, namely supposed classificatory nature that could possibly contradict the fundamentals of Weberian ideal type concept is also in question. No less disquieting is the question of stretching, i.e. generalizing the model.

Weber presents two distinctive sets of criteria to the way the ideal type should be formatted and standards of its shape. The formative process should follow two steps, first includes “accentuation of one or more points of view and synthesis of great many individual phenomena” (Weber 1949: 213), the second consists of synthesis of phenomena and its arrangement into unified analytical construct according to these views. Lees-Marshment constructs her ideal type overtly on two main pillars, the consumerism culture and British politics with stress on the 1990’s, political marketing plays here a role of the point of view. Inherently, a system based approach to the political phenomena is deployed. Her analytical constructs are then unified, but do they fulfil the criteria of logic consistency, compatibility, adequacy and relevance that Schutz prescribes?

Schutz himself does not elaborate these four postulates for the ideal type, and as Carroll shows (Carroll 1983: 392–398), at least adequacy is a highly problematic concept in terms of practical consequences. Logic consistency does seem to be a valid attribute of the Lees-Marshment ideal types, the view and the description seems to be clear, rational and in accord with the principles of formal logic. Relevance as an undertaking that the ideal type would remain in the scheme of reference it was created for, is discussed in the section on stretching the ideal type and compatibility as a guarantee of verifiability (or falsification), would be examined in the section on application.

6. Adequacy

Adequacy should mean that the ideal type is understandable for the actor in his terms in the common sense world. One of the problems Carroll perceives (Carroll 1983: 395) in such a notion is the subject of validation of such an adequacy. Putting aside the problem of methodological individualism in contrast to systemic approach to the behaviour of political parties, a striking problem in general appears with the idea of the actor of political marketing being informed about the scientific perception of his own action. The obstacle to scientific research is inherent perhaps to political science in general: even if one of the main weberian prerequisites of scientific research- detachment and what Schutz calls “just cognitive interest” and “detached equanimity” (Schutz, 1973a: 20:) is met in the sense of the actor having no direct interest in the object of his study, that would be just one side of the detachment.

The strategic component of politics causes the environment to be base for a strategy of any political actor encompasses the scientific research on his former strategy as well. That simply means that the strategy of the political actor is informed by the results of the research and therefore makes the research attached to its strategic purposes. If this, at least potentially, applies to politics, the impact of such reactivity must be multiple in the segment of direct strategy

research, as is the case of political marketing. So is adequacy in the sense of comprehensibility to the actor desirable in political marketing, if we have suspicion that a case of inverse proportion principle is in the play? The original intent Schutz wanted to express through the demand for accessibility, in other words the scientific world to remain in contact with the life world. But what if such a connection changes the examined life world substantially? Such a question goes clearly beyond the assignment of this essay, but it should be examined more thoroughly.

7. Classificatory ideal type

Uncertainty about suitability of analysing the three party marketing orientations as ideal types is aroused by Weber's distinction between concept and ideal type. Ideal type itself is perhaps the widest used thought object in social sciences and in fact a thought object par excellence. In his interpretation, Weber specifies (Weber 1949: 90) the term "concept" as (contrary to ideal type) either classificatory tool or as a tool that is divergent from reality. It could also be an example of vaguely formed or unconsciously used ideal type. However, Weber then also states (Weber 1949: 91) that due to the discursive nature of knowledge, limiting ideal cases and concepts are needed for the empirical data to be related to. Despite the classificatory character of the three types of orientation, there is a clear ambition to cover all major possible stances towards the political marketing. Does that after all contradict the ideal type Weber is constructing? In our opinion, Weber does not answer this question clearly, so we could look at the methodological reflections of comparative political science itself. That unfortunately would not clear the problem up.

Guy Peters sought (Peters 1998: 93, 103–106) the ideal type as opposite to the taxonomy, i.e. classificatory praxis of categorization. On the other hand, he admits that "any intellectual construct possesses some features of ideal-type analysis or a developmental concept" and he deploys incidentally the same example for both the typology and ideal type, Lijphart's "consociational democracy". Sartori, a classic of method reflection in comparative political science, distinguishes (Sartori 1970: 1036) between taxonomy and gradation concepts. The principle of taxonomy is difference in kind whereas gradational concepts are reflecting quantity. Sartori sees taxonomical classification as a prerequisite to any comparative work (Sartori 1970: 1037). The prominent representatives of comparative methodology are inconsistent, so since Sartori is an authoritative source for Guy Peters whose otherwise rigour text shows his internal inconsistency, we would rely on Sartori's conception of taxonomical classification as being a preliminary stage of setting up ideal type for comparative research. But to become universal, limiting ideal cases through which a reality would be measured, some steps have to be taken.

8. Stretching the Ideal type

Lees-Marshment originally developed the types of orientation of parties as tailored products to analyse the national level of politics in Great Britain. Among Schutz's postulates (Schutz

1971a: 49) for the ideal types, the relevance is set to “means that the problem once chosen by the political scientist creates a scheme of reference and constitutes the limits of scope” within which relevant ideal types are based (Schutz 1973a: 19) and he suggests that we must “indicate the reference scheme within which this ideal type may be utilized, that is, the sake for which the problem was constructed.” (Schutz 1973b: 83) This means that once these types are to be used as universal ones, some adjustment has to be done. Sartori extends the considerations on this matter further by the effects and connections both generalizing and applying general to particular. He reminds us that there are some major regularities while moving on what he calls “the ladder of abstraction”. “Climbing up” means that while one enlarges class of the covered, attributes have to be reduced.

There are however some limits of comparability and “physical” limits of concepts and theories (and ideal types). The term can travel too far and be thus overstretched. The obvious problem of the collection by Lees-Marshment lies in the underestimation of these processes. There is neither explicit decreasing of specificity of the ideal types nor are there any conditions for application of the concept. If a milieu of consumerism culture is a precondition for the marketing-oriented party to emerge and for the entire shift of perspective both on politics and in politics, then we should ask which countries or regions are counted as cultures of consumerism? If we have a look at more specific consequences of comparing the milieu, the assumption that originally class based structuration of the political market became more fluid, that certainly is not a universal feature.

We can uncover a developmental sequence idea among the three types of orientation, from the product oriented party through the sales oriented one to the market oriented one. But that does not seem to fit societies with other than class cleavages. Is Switzerland underdeveloped just because its politics are based on the cleavages by language and remains of religion? It is quite obvious that something as marketing could be traced in association with any political behaviour in any country, but that is exactly the reason for which Sartori asks (Sartori 1970: 1038) for limits not to overstretch the ideal type. On the other hand, the book overtly positions itself at the beginning of the process of ideal type development. Nevertheless, we would come back to the milieu and after a section on the actual application we would scrutinize the evaluative part where at least some of these opacities should be addressed.

9. On application and assessment

Editors of the reviewed collection admit that there is no clear selection criterion for the objects of application of the model apart from the accessibility of certain regional experts. That resulted in a colourful mix of states and regions (Scotland is the only sub-state entity) from Anglo-American countries with long established democratic tradition and historically dominant class cleavage through current democracies with formerly authoritarian regimes of Austria, Germany, and Brazil to an emerging democracy of Peru. There are different “mechanical” connections in these regimes thanks to the different constitutional systems. In effect, there are nearly no commonalities in any sense that would be relevant to politics or polity apart from quite vague notion of certain degree of democratic rule based on regularly elected representative organs and executive bodies. From these countries, just perhaps Great Britain, United

States, and New Zealand would conform the original milieu. All these new attributes of the model that were initially not taken into account are logically derived from the constitutional arrangements (both formal and informal), such as the form of government, i.e. coalition or one party, responsible directly through directly elected president or elected by parliament and so on.

Through the articles, most of the aforesaid problems of generality are encountered and the concluding closing contribution by the editors does identify the weaknesses of the model. In an honest appraisal of the outcomes of the model transformation and application, the editors admit the weaknesses.

Perhaps the most important impetuses for the revision of the model are the evolutionary character of the three orientation types, which comes together with denying the former championing of the marketing orientation as the most successful one. Coalition government makes the model less usable, because of the logical influences on both participants in the coalition and the potential partners. Moreover, the editors revise the market oriented party model as such to become comparative one. But what about the serious objections about the milieu of Schutz's "reference scheme"? The editors admit that in the universal comparative ideal type, there would be nearly no original attributes of the milieu left. Even though the losing of attributes is inherent to a process described by Sartori as of climbing up the ladder of abstraction, such loosing should be under control.

The researcher should be aware of the fact that in order to establish a new, more abstract but full flesh ideal type, a new milieu has to be built up. Thus even though the vision of universal model seems to be set up, it is being done in fact on the grounds of just a trace of marketing method in behaviour of political party in the respective political system. For a future research on the behaviour of the political parties, a general thought by Jan Van Deth about equivalency (Deth 1998: 3–5) should be taken into account: equivalence does not always mean similarity in the indicators, in this case patterns of marketing methods. Do these similar patterns really constitute a bearing environment for ideal type of certain political behaviour? The precariousness about the core thought this book aimed to establish through ideal type, is perhaps not a coincidence.

The assessment that has been done through the concluding article reflects many of the problems. But are these problems "curable" in the sense of transforming the model in order to solve them? In our opinion, the stretching went too far. What originally could have been a useful heuristic device if applied to clearly defined set of objects, became a vague imitation of ideal type that does not comply with those requirements of Weber, Schutz and Sartori that are operative for the comparative political science. What remains are doubts about grounding of the political marketing as a discipline (a task beyond the potential of this essay). We expressed concern about the "translation" process, however the main task is to use this separate finding in a larger frame in order to assess the extent of obfuscation and serviceability of the discipline. Due to the fact that the political marketing as a research discipline is broadening its extent and impact, such study should be a matter of exigency.

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