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U.S. President George W. Bush has had a stormy relationship with Europe. Bush campaigned on a theme of putting America's interests first and eschewing multi-lateralism when necessary. Since taking office, Bush has been true to his campaign pledges. Bush's style and substance have caused many in Europe to regard him as a "buffoon" at best and a dangerous cowboy at worst. What the Europeans do not seem to understand is that, for better or worse, George W. Bush's view of the world is held by a substantial portion of the American people, and even when the U.S. had a more Euro-friendly leader in President Bill Clinton, America's policies were often at odds with those preferred by its allies in Europe. This is due to a fundamental difference that has developed between Europe and the United States over the last century. Today, no matter who occupies the White House, American foreign policy is likely to be in conflict with Europe's. Far from being a liability, this difference is likely to be a political asset to George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election.

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found "political earthquake." After an analysis of the main features of Italian politics (party system, electoral laws, party organisations, campaign dynamics and actors), the authors seek to explore both constraints and opportunities of what they define as "reductionist" and "holistic" approaches to political marketing, drawing the conclusion that Italy is still living in a period of transition in which, however, a trend towards more "high-tech" and marketing-driven campaigning could be detected.

KEYWORDS. Italian political system, political marketing, political communication, political consultants, elections, parties

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KEYWORDS. Political debates, presidential elections, indirection, speech acts, directive speech acts, commissive speech acts

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ARTICLES

The Childhood of an Approach: Political Marketing in Italy

Angelo Mellone
Luigi Di Gregorio

LuiSS "G. Carli," University of Rome

ABSTRACT. This paper aims to examine the possibility that a political marketing strategy might develop in the Italian political system context, characterized in the last decade by a profound "political earthquake." After

Angelo Mellone, journalist and political consultant, is Lecturer in Political Communication at LuiSS "G. Carli," University of Rome, Italy. His main research fields are political communication, party organizations and populism in Europe. His publications include *Il partito di mass media* (1999), *Il circuito politico-mediale* (2002, with Pippa Norris, David Farrell and Paul Webb) and *L'apparenza e l'appartenenza. Problemi e prospettive del marketing politico in Italia* (forthcoming, with Bruce I. Newman).

Luigi Di Gregorio is Lecturer in Public Policy at LuiSS "G. Carli," University of Rome, Italy. His main research fields are public policy, comparative politics and electoral systems. His publications include *Democrazie in transizione* (2001, with Arend Lijphart and Raffaele De Mucci).

Angelo Mellone is responsible for paragraphs 1.1, 2.a, and 2.b of this article. Luigi Di Gregorio is responsible for paragraphs 1.2, 2.c, and 2.d of this article.

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1. FOREWORD

In Italy, unlike the English-speaking countries, the study and analysis of political marketing has so far met with little success. Quite the opposite, in fact: The very expression "marketing," when applied to political matters, is still distasteful to both academics and professionals in the sector, as if the market somehow contaminates the presumably nobler sphere of politics.

There are various reasons for all this. In the first place, in a country like Italy, with a solid tradition of political theory, the use of the market metaphor in studying political phenomena has never been very widely accepted, perhaps out of fear and reluctance to equate the political struggle with competition between brands and products, which are somewhat—but only somewhat—different from those of the world of commerce. In the second place, the structure and mechanics of our party system, sufficiently stable until a few years ago, with a low proportion of volatility and a solid base of party voters, discouraged the diffusion of an approach that, on the contrary, deals primarily with intercepting and limiting "turbulence" among issue voters. Last but not least, from 1994 onwards, the success of Forza Italia, and the important role played in this process by its business-firm DNA and by market analysis, has divided the opinions of experts over what marketing can "do" to politics (Diamanti 1995).

And yet we are looking at a research sector with a fairly long tradition, which has been recognised as a specific research sector in political science, too. Beginning with the pioneering work of Anthony Downs,

with Otto Kirchheimer's observations on "catch-all" parties and, in the marketing sphere, with the writings of Kotler and Levy (1969), the economic analysis of politics, the problem of the role of the parties in the face of an unstable public opinion, as well as the relationship between the elected and those who elect them as an exchange of "something-of-value" on the electoral market, have made their mark in scientific analysis. As Kotler and Kotler write, if a party or a candidate is marketing oriented, this simply means that "candidates recognize the nature of the exchange process when they ask for their votes" (1999, 3) and also, we might add, that the strategies of the individuals and organizations concerned are oriented towards this exchange process, which calls into play specific variables, such as image, reputation or trust (Scammell 1999), since the products and goods involved are immaterial.

1.1 Political Marketing: Reductionism or Holism?

When we say that the *marketing concept* "is a business (and political) philosophy that holds that long-term profitability (and electoral success) is best achieved by focusing the coordinated activities of the organization toward satisfying the needs of a particular market segment(s)" (O'Cass 2001, 1006), and that the *marketing orientation* means "developing and offering the political product about this insight" (Ibidem), what are we trying to say?

In the case of political marketing, we must start by making a series of distinctions. The first concerns the *objectives* of the approach. In this connection, O'Shaughnessy (2001, 1047) correctly distinguishes between descriptive and prescriptive components in the study of political marketing: With this kind of theoretical equipment, are we merely willing and able to observe political phenomena and to describe related trends with reference to a structure of concepts taken from the world of commerce, or are we also in a position to charge our perspective with values and, for example, indicate, moving into the operational sphere, how political subjects ought to behave in order to attract more support or improve their performance? It is clear that even if we stop here, political marketing (like the *policy approach*, for example) can take two possible directions: academic analysis or professional consulting. In effect, works such as those of Newman (1999)—or the special issue of the *European Journal of Marketing* published in 2001—include essays, both by academics studying the subject and by hands-on operators, which point out that we find ourselves on slippery terrain where it can be very difficult to separate the one from the other.

The second distinction concerns the *object* of study: What spectrum of phenomena should be included under the semantic heading "political marketing"? Generally speaking, from this point of view we can classify those who have dealt with political marketing according to two different approaches: one rooted in political science and communication sociology, which we might define as *reductionist*, and one deriving directly from nonprofit marketing and management studies, which we can call *holistic*. The differences, which in this case, too, call into question judgments about the value of the role of marketing, are subtle, while the suggested applications vary considerably among the authors that can be ascribed to one camp or the other.

The reductionist approach limits the concept and extent of political marketing to the use of new technology for election campaigns in the "third era" of political communication. We come across this idea again in those who define it as the adaptation of campaigning activity by the use of "the latest techniques and ideas in effective communications and persuasion" (Kavanagh 1995, 8) or as an effective rough description covering modern media techniques and expertise imported from the world of commerce into political campaigning (Scammell 1995, 5).

Seen from this point of view, political marketing is essentially limited to a specific line of research within the field of *campaign studies* (Scammell 1999), which tries to comprehend the new method of conceiving and managing campaigning at a time when the postmodern idea of communication, according to Plasser (2002, 69-70), is quite clearly parting company with that of previous "eras"—premodern and modern. In this "sequential" historical view of communication, as it is called, the "marketing revolution" is the ultimate goal of a process involving the coagulation of technological development, social change, media-isation and the evolution of organised politics. The protagonists of the political system, therefore, find themselves operating in an environment with specific characteristics, a good proportion of them new ones: the key role of media communications policy; the comparatively marked dependence of politics on the intermediation of the media; the transition from *labour-intensive* forms of political communication to *capital-intensive* ones (Farrell 1996); the diffusion of *spin control* practices, by which information streams are strategically managed by the political protagonists; and the conflict between politicians and journalists for control of the agenda (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995); the fragmentation of the mass media; and the transition from *party logic* to *media logic* (Mazzoleni 1987) in political communication processes. Against this background, and also in view of the greater volatility of the electorate, the importation of marketing

techniques into the political arena is a competitive necessity for the political protagonists, who need to sell themselves better (Scammell 1999) and therefore rely on outside professionals and on the most innovative forms of communication. The reductionist approach is adopted, as we said, in most works published in the field of political science, including those of Scammell (1995), Kavanagh (1995), Bowler and Farrell (1992), Norris (2002) and Plasser (2002).

The holistic approach to political marketing is more ambitious than the reductionist one, and definitely betrays a more dogmatic attitude, often laying down guidelines for the way in which political protagonists should act and behave. In other words, it is thought wrong to limit political marketing simply to the development of tools for the use of parties and candidates—advertising, opinion polls, focus groups, etc., as well as communication techniques—in order to sound the mood of public opinion or improve their performance in election campaigns. To some extent, this objection can be overcome if we take it for granted that the concept of the "permanent campaign"—or "total campaign," as Nimmo calls it (1999)—has become well established in all democratic systems, so that there is little point in making too marked a distinction between electoral and non-electoral periods, since the campaigning phase has been *absolutized*, so to speak.

It is said—to adopt one of the most widely accepted definitions—that political marketing consists of the "application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations" (Newman 1999, xiii); but, as Wring writes (1999, 41), "political marketing and its tools have invaded the electoral environment in which competitive political organizations must operate," and they are occupying it in a "total" fashion (Nimmo 1999, 84).

It is one thing to extend campaigning to cover entire political cycles; it is another to extend the object of political marketing analyses beyond election campaigns. The difference between the reductionist approach and the holistic approach then becomes clear: Whereas, in the first case, political marketing substantially comes down to importing marketing techniques into the political and electoral arena in the various stages of a more or less "permanent" campaign; in the second case, marketing ceases to be simply a collection of techniques and expedients relating to technology and communications and becomes either an authentic analytic framework, which can be used to analyse the system of relationships "between a political organization as a 'product' and the demand of its market" (Lees-Marshment 2001, 23), if we look at it from an economic perspective, or else a sort of alternative way of considering parties and political protagonists in general.

Basically, the theory goes, marketing is something more than a simple "showcase" or a strategy for placing and selling a product. In its function as the adoption by political organizations of the concepts and techniques of commercial marketing "to help them achieve their goals" (Ibidem, 22), which undoubtedly go beyond competition for votes, it involves an organisation as a whole, beginning with its organisational philosophy and the basic concepts of its programme and ending up—but only right at the end—with the moment of selling. For this reason, according to Butler and Collins (1999, 56), "political marketing exhibits both 'structural' characteristics, such as the nature of the product, the organization, and the market, and 'process' characteristics that define, develop, and deliver value" inside and outside the political organizations.

According to Lees-Marshment (2001), who uses a sequential model to trace the evolution of political parties, there has been a shift over the years from *product-oriented* organisations, distinguished by a high ideological temperature and the aim of imposing their own view of the world on the electorate (in other words, the mass parties), firstly towards *sales-oriented* organisations—a definition that is very reminiscent of the *catch-all party* and its ability to "sell itself well"—and then towards *market-oriented* organisations, which aim to intercept voters' interests, opinions and expectations as effectively as possible in order to translate them into political programmes and government action, developing "a competitive offering to help realize organizational aims and satisfy groups of electors in exchange for their votes" (Wring 1997, 1133). The latter change, from selling a product to focusing on consumers, is the hard core of the "marketing revolution" described by the authors who adopt the holistic approach. To put it simply, the dogmatic, holistic version of political marketing contains a precise message for the political protagonists: They should abandon their ideology and their didactic attitude, offering instead a programme drawn up because of the results of a preliminary survey of their potential market niches.

1.2 Political Marketing: Americanisation or Hybridisation?

In this context, marketing remains fundamentally ambiguous, poised between the sovereignty of the voter-consumers and, in daily practice, the need to "manipulate" their behavior.

The aim of political marketing is effectively to allow individuals and organisations to attain their goals, which, in the case of parties and candidates, means winning the elections to form a government. A cam-

paign strategy must therefore take into account a large number of factors and conditions that must be respected in order for it to be managed successfully: from fund-raising to the management of the team of volunteers (or party militants), from a thorough analysis of voters' "needs and desires" (for which interesting models have been suggested) to the development of the campaign "inside" and "outside" the news media, from an examination of the various levels of competition to the role of focus groups in electoral procedures and in government, through to the relationship between marketing and democratic governance. With regard to this last point, as Newman rightly points out, one question remains for the most part unanswered, i.e., "what needs to be done to ensure that we, as a society, do not lose *control of the forces of political marketing*" (1999, xxiii), bearing in mind crucial themes such as so-called negative publicity and, above all, the role of money in democracy.

Another factor closely linked to political marketing, its development trends, and its potential concerns the physiognomy and destiny of the political party, especially in a European and Italian context. Italy has undeniably known mass parties among strong, solid and well-rooted parties of "believers," channels not simply for a programme of proposals but also for their own reciprocally conflicting political subcultures and *Weltanschauung*. There is still an ongoing debate about the fate of parties that have become "professionalized" (Panebianco 1982; Mancini 2001a): Will communication and polling specialists, marketing gurus and spin doctors be the heroes of a "silent revolution" that changes the way election campaigns are conducted and also, even more radically, the very way in which parties are organised?

The crucial theme is that of the "Americanization" of politics or, as Plasser and Plasser write (2002), the "standardisation" of campaigning on a global scale. After tracing a profile of political consultants in all the democratic regimes and examining the different "universes" in which election campaigns take place,¹ they conclude that despite the existence of "macro-tendencies" of this kind in almost all the contexts examined—the professionalisation, media-isation and "negativisation" of campaigns, the personalisation and leaderisation of politics—we find ourselves faced by the "hybridisation" of election campaigns, that is to say a fusion of the most advanced campaigning techniques with the traditions of the politics, parties and institutions of the individual countries in which the politicians and their consultants operate. This means, for example, as Lees-Marshment herself admits (2001), that the market-oriented party model might not work properly in contexts too far removed from those of the English-speaking countries.

It is clear that there are many issues involved, and they implicate a number of factors, particularly in a context such as that of Italy, which has traditionally been distinguished by a society with little state and little market (Bechelloni 1995), by a political class refractory to excessive contact with public opinion, by ideologically oriented parties, by the institutions of Parliament and proportional representation and by highly restrictive legislation on political communication. For this reason, the following paragraph endeavors to highlight and tackle the main problems relating to the utilization of political marketing in Italy, looking at the drawbacks and opportunities of this approach one by one.

2. POLITICAL MARKETING IN ITALY: PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

(a) *Less restricted electoral competition.* During the postwar period in Italy, competition between different parties began as competition between organisations representing class interests (the Communist Party, Pci), religious creed (Democrazia Cristiana, Dc) or, at any rate, strong subcultural components (the Partito Socialista Italiano-Psi, or the neo-Fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano-Msi), and was based on what has been defined as an "imperfect bi-party system" (Galli 1973): a coalition of parties forming the government, with the DC occupying the key role of "political center" of the executive and the Pci, the only other party force with a significant number of supporters, condemned to perpetual opposition. As it is easy to imagine, a party system that functioned in this way blocked any possibility of alternating government for almost fifty years. The end of East-West bipolarity and the so-called "earthquake" which, for reasons linked chiefly to corruption scandals,² brought all the politicians in the government under attack between 1992 and 1994, upset this equilibrium,³ making way for new political protagonists and for more "open" competition between coalitions that all had equally legitimate claims to power. The birth of Forza Italia, the movement founded by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi (Poli 2001; Mellone 2002), is the most patent demonstration of the representative vacuum that had arisen in the post-*tangentopoli* period. From 1994 onwards, Italy too experienced what has been defined as the "season of alternation": a diachronic examination of the governments that followed Berlusconi's first brief adventure (not considering the so-called "technical government" of 1995) shows that the victory achieved in 2001 by House of Freedom—the coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi—was no fluke.

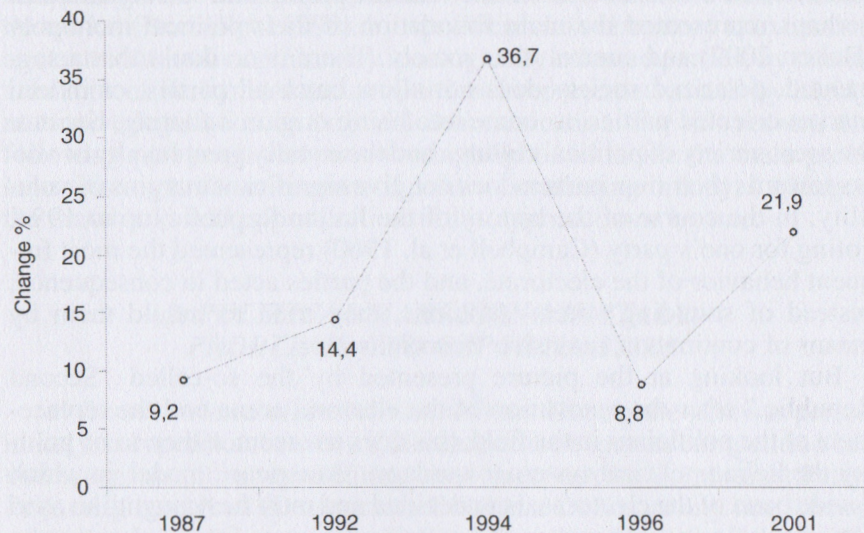
(b) *Erosion of political subcultures.* Italy, like other countries, went through a long period that saw the erosion of those political subcultures that acted as a cohesive factor between the parties and society and thus perhaps represented the main foundation of their political monopoly (Dalton 2002) and control over society. There is no doubt that a segmented, polarized society does not allow catch-all parties, or indeed market-oriented parties, to come into being or gain a footing, because the great variety of political cultures and the equally great loyalty of voters towards their own parties does not give significant margins of volatility. In the course of the history of the Italian Republic, up to 1994, voting for one's party (Campbell et al. 1960) represented the most frequent behavior of the electorate, and the parties acted in consequence: Instead of sounding voters' opinions, they tried to mould them by means of continuous, intensive "resocialisation."

But looking at the picture presented by the so-called "Second Republic," after the renovation of the electoral arena and the replacement of the politicians in the field, this does not seem, either, to be guiding the Italian political system towards an "American" model, in which a wide band of the electorate is undecided and must be "caught" so as to obtain a majority of the votes and seats necessary to form a government (Natale 2002). The power of image in politics and greater policy orientation by parties and leaders (Egan 1999) are features that certainly seem to have become institutionalised in Italian political competition, but before we can speak of an authentic "shift towards the market" one strategic factor is still lacking: the willingness of voters to practice issue voting, and therefore their readiness to transfer their votes from one coalition to another over a period of time.

Two graphs can help us follow this reasoning. The year 1994 marked an authentic turning point in the trend of the Italian party system: As can be seen from Figure 1, in 1994 the rate of electoral change registered a sudden increase that is absolutely atypical for a fundamentally "static" party system. Still looking at this graph, if we examine the subsequent elections, too, the increased volatility of Italian voters appears to have become systematic.

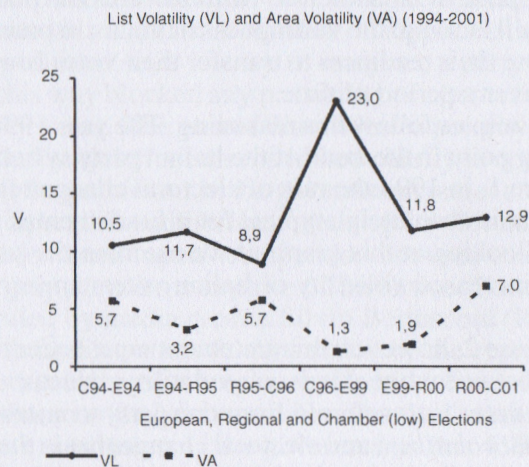
If we look at Figure 2, however, this statement must be rectified. We must distinguish between two kinds of volatility: electoral change where a number of votes is transferred from one party to another within a given coalition (*list volatility*) and electoral change that is the result of an authentic "about-turn" of voters' preferences, when they choose to vote for a party of the opposite coalition from the one they previously supported (*area volatility*). These graphs therefore seem to confirm

FIGURE 1. Electoral Change 1987-2001 (Low Chamber, Proportional Representation)



Source: Chiaramonte (2002)

FIGURE 2. Volatility Percentages 1994-2001 (Proportional Representation)



Source: Chiaramonte (2000) Updated
C = General Election, Low Chamber; E = European Election; R = Regional Election

what we said above: Significant pockets of party votes, or at least expressions of “moderate loyalty” (Natale 2002), still survive, and these prevent the Italian political system from reaching the levels of competition of an open political market and lend weight to the theory of “clear and constant impermeability between the two poles, with increasingly marked loyalty towards the coalition” (Ibidem, 313).⁴ This means that even if voters no longer seem to be tied to a certain political formation at a subcultural level, most of them still choose a “non-contradictory” vote, making it far more difficult for the parties to attract support among the voters of the opposing coalition, since the proportion of “true” issue voters is limited.⁵ Even if the “vote from the heart” (Ibidem) no longer goes to the party, it still goes to the coalition.

(c) *The incomplete plurality system.* The liberalisation of the Italian political market was undoubtedly given a boost by the reform approved in 1993, which modified our electoral system, formerly of a purely proportional kind, pushing it towards a plurality system. As we know from literature on the subject, a plurality system ought bring about a series of changes: firstly, a reduction in the number of parties (Duverger 1961; Rae 1971); secondly, a “convergence towards the center” of parties and political alliances, in the direction of a catch-all strategy (Duverger 1961; Sartori 1982, 1994), also promoted by a fall in the ideological temperature of political competition following the end of the Cold War; thirdly, a greater proportion of issue voters, who can be decisive for a candidate’s victory in competition in the individual constituencies (Sartori 1982); fourthly, a clean break with the past in favor of more candidate-oriented⁶ competition, which is affected to a greater extent by the personal characteristics of the contenders (Calise 2000); fifthly, a more homogeneous stock of politicians at a national level, moving towards the establishment of only two coalitions (and eventually, some would hope, only two parties) led by a single candidate for the post of Prime Minister,⁷ with the creation of new symbols for parties and coalitions, marking a clean break with the previous system, which in Italy was known as a “party-crazy.”

All these prospective changes, linked to electoral reform, are definitely likely to be congenial to a marketing perspective. Let us look at them one by one. Ideological homogenization could lead to greater emphasis on leaders—both national and local—and on programmes as the basis of competition; the greater weight of issue voters might induce the parties to adopt strategies for monitoring these electors in particular, by setting up research and polling teams and developing communications strategies able to “catch” their votes; the shift of electoral competition to

the peripheral level and the prominence given to candidates rather than parties could also make it necessary to set up appropriate "war rooms" in the individual constituencies, so as to promote the candidate's image effectively; in the same way, if the fragmentation that has always typified the Italian parties is reduced to a bipolar system of coalitions and leaders, this would allow competition to give more weight to programmes and images, generating the need to set up central "war rooms" able to effect constant monitoring of the political market, so as to understand the needs and expectations of the electorate and to identify the best ways of promoting the images of the coalition leaders, in the all-embracing context of the "permanent campaign" (Nimmo 1999).

In practice, only some of these predictions have come true. On the one hand, as demonstrated for example by the last elections—in which the two main contenders, the House of Freedom (center-right) and the Olive Tree (center-left), both entered the fray with symbols incorporating the names of the coalition leaders⁸—the process of leaderisation and the greater emphasis on programmes seems to be bringing the Italian political system nearer to a competitive model typical of a plurality system and, at a local level, the personalisation of political competition seems to be putting down roots. On the other hand, however, some signals appear to point in the opposite direction: The power of the parties within the coalitions, particularly in the post-election phase, seems to be practically unchanged, resulting in a significant fragmentation of parliamentary representation that seriously obstructs the development of a coherent communications strategy on the part of the coalition leaders;⁹ furthermore, the power of the parties is still evident at a local level, too: in the elections of 1994, 1996, and 2001, in which the plurality formula was used, there were a considerable number of cases of candidates being "parachuted in" from the center, for example, by obliging individual constituencies to put up candidates from a different geographical area.¹⁰ Finally, yet importantly, as we shall see more clearly below, with the exception of Forza Italia during the initial period, no party or coalition¹¹ has chose—partly because of the above-mentioned factors—to adopt a market-oriented strategy or to set up the structures necessary for an operation of this kind.

From this point of view, then, the situation in Italy still seems confused, with "modernizing" thrusts that come up short against the survival of product-oriented strategies (Lees-Marshment 2001) linked to political cultures founded on a common ideology and on the key role of the party as a subject that shapes voters' preferences rather than intercepting their needs.

(d) *Semiprofessional parties.* The above considerations lead us to examine the organisms that still constitute the hub of Italian political competition, namely the parties. Starting with the pioneering work of Panebianco (1982), a number of experts have observed that the Italian parties, for years organized as authentic "machines for ideological warfare," equipped to tackle a political conflict as a total conflict not between different programmes but between different views of the world, have in the last twenty years undergone a radical process of structural and functional renewal (Wolinetz 2001). The Italian parties, like those of other European countries, are experiencing a progressive fall in their membership, which is equivalent to a decline in their function of social integration (Katz & Mair 1995), an area in which other collective subjects that have emerged in the political system over the last few years are challenging them.¹²

At the same time, the complex process of mediatizing politics (Mazzoleni 1999) has further undermined the key role of the party and its structures, shifting much of the activity of political vote-catching directly onto the media stage (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999) and further promoting the leaderization process, by which the leader of a party, who represents it in the media, becomes the key political figure, to the disadvantage not only of territorial activities (which used to focus on the local party headquarters), once of fundamental importance for condensing social consensus in electoral terms, but also of the party's own programme. It is no accident that analyses carried out in this field (Farrell & Webb 2000) show a growing trend towards the centralisation of resources in the leader's office, which has an unprecedented degree of control over the life of the party, corresponding to a decrease in the power of the intermediate party cadres¹³ and an increase in staff working directly for the leader. As far as a more detailed study of the object of this paper is concerned, various experts (Panebianco 1982; Kavanagh 1995; Scammell 1995, 1997; Farrell & Webb 2000; Mancini 2001a; Plasser 2002) have related the structural and functional changes and transformations in the social base of the political party to the rise of political consultants (Sabato 1981), with the dual function of "technicians" who assist the political class and put their own accumulated know-how at the service of their client, but at the same time experts who assume a political role in running a campaign and in the "permanent management" of party communications.

We might, therefore, expect that in Italy, too, there would be an increase in "technical" skills outside the party, in order to support the communications strategies of both leaders and "peripheral" candidates.

But if we take as our reference framework the prerequisites defined by Scammell (1997), not only does Italy have no institutionalized consulting industry,¹⁴ but so far—even if research in this field is lacking—the relationship between consultants and political class has been episodic, intermittent, and marred by the instrumental and “manipulatory” use made of the results of most of the surveys commissioned (polls, focus groups, research on positioning, but also electoral advertising).¹⁵ Even the most optimistic analyses on the future of political consulting in Italy (Rodriguez 2001) confirm this impression.¹⁶

There can be many causes of this distortion. Here are some of them: firstly, the presumption by politicians that they understand public opinion and interpret “what people think” better than surveys; secondly, the survival of certain characteristics typical of the mass parties, such as the key role of the ideological-pedagogic element; thirdly, a sort of “inertia” linked to the difficulty and expense of modifying the programme, structure or positioning of a politician or leader.¹⁷

We can therefore say that the Italian parties are not entirely of the “professional-electoral” type described by Panebianco (1982), and that their organisational and electoral activity does not have the features of the “third phase” of electoral campaigning (Farrell & Webb 2000; Norris 2002): In effect, no Italian party has departments consisting of experts and professional advisors on campaigning, communications and market research, and consultants, at least up till now, still do not represent the “strategic intelligence” behind campaigns.¹⁸ A partial exception to the above could be Forza Italia (FI), the party founded by Silvio Berlusconi, during the initial phase in which it was founded, launched and positioned on the market in 1993-94 (Diamanti 1995; Mellone 2002). FI was in fact founded as the result of a series of public opinion surveys, which had revealed, after the downfall of the Democrazia Cristiana, the need for a new center party to inherit its support; on the basis of these results, with the aid of a preexistent structure of consultants and publicity agents scattered throughout the country, Publitalia (Poli 2001), in the space of a few months Berlusconi set up a club structure—to which he gave a name, Forza Italia, evocative of football slogans—formed a coalition with the federalist party Lega Nord and the right-wing party Alleanza Nazionale, won the elections and took up government, FI having become the first party in Italy as far as the number of votes was concerned. The use of marketing and an extremely powerful television campaign¹⁹ played a decisive role in the rise of FI (Diamanti 1995), but its subsequent development has taken Berlusconi’s invention farther from the original market-oriented model and nearer to

the classic model of the institutionalised party (Poli 2001; Mellone 2002). So in Italian politics, the “pure” use of marketing techniques still remains limited to only one party, and even then only to the phase of its “coming into being” (Alberoni 1968).²⁰

3. CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction, we mentioned the difference that exists, as we see it, between the “reductionist” approach and the “holistic” approach to political marketing. Bearing in mind this distinction and applying it in the context of the Italian political system, we are in a position to make a series of observations with regard to each of these approaches.

From a “reductionist” point of view, Italy, like other European countries, is going through a phase of “hybridisation” (Plasser 2002) in political campaigning, where technological innovations are being combined with characteristics peculiar to the political system and its protagonists. The last ten years have undoubtedly seen the consolidation of the processes of leaderisation and personalisation, helped by the media-isation of politics, the trend towards an increasingly massive use of market surveys, polls and other forms of quantitative analysis has been confirmed and expenditure on publicity has likewise shown a marked increase.²¹

While marketing technologies, generally speaking, have become a constant in Italian political competition, the same is not true of the institutionalisation of the presence of political consultants as the natural complement to the use of these new forms of technology, either in the context of election campaigns or in that of everyday party life: As we explained above, in Italy the existence of a consulting industry is far from being a reality, and the use of new communication techniques is marred by extemporaneity and manipulation (voluntary or involuntary) on the part of the clients themselves, i.e., politicians. Furthermore, parties’ and leaders’ offices are still almost entirely lacking in departments or other structures responsible for monitoring the political market.²² Even where there are structures similar to American-style “war rooms,” they are merely a reformulation of the old press offices.²³

Some people are of the opinion that it is “the objective state of the development of political competition (the rules governing election and communication) that do not as yet allow the emergence of a mature market, and therefore, the adequate development of the profession. If we exclude the national level, local candidates are decidedly lacking in the financial resources indispensable for building an organic team with

proper professional expertise (Rodriguez 2001, 84): This is certainly true, but we must not forget that the political class still has an attitude of presumed "superiority" with regard to professionals in the fields of communication and market research, deriving both from their conviction that they know how to interpret "what people think" without any need for intermediaries (whether consultants or market surveys) and from their obstinate persistence in conceiving their activity in terms of political-ideological didactics. We may also add that Italian legislation on political communication, both during election campaigns and in the intermediate period of the political-electoral cycle, is inspired by an egalitarian reasoning that aims to give the political protagonists "equal access" to the media channels (*par condicio*),²⁴ imposing precise limits on both election spending and political advertising: So we find ourselves faced by another factor that is crucial in explaining the delay in the development and institutionalization of the political consulting industry in Italy.

Let us now look at the "holistic" approach to political marketing. Without dwelling on the criticism that has always accompanied the economic theory of democracy (Pappalardo 1990) and, more generally, on criticism of rational-choice approaches (Green & Shapiro 1994), and even if we accept in part their theoretical premises, there are still a certain number of veto-points and veto-players (Tzebelis 1995) with regard to demand (voter-consumers), supply (leaders and political parties) and political-institutional rules, all representing obstacles that prevent Italian political trends from fully adhering to a market-oriented analytical model. Basically, while voters still show a marked reluctance to adopt voting behavior that is issue-oriented or candidate-oriented,²⁵ imbuing their electoral choice with elements reflecting emotional ties and "moderate loyalty" or image (always linked, however, to subcultural factors), at the same time politicians remain bound to a product-oriented strategy rather than a market-oriented one, further minimizing the effects of the (partial) acceptance of the world of market research and political consulting. Examples of veto-points²⁶—besides a legislation which, as mentioned above, imposes great restrictions on political communication—are the parliamentary form of government in Italy, which, despite electoral reform in the direction of a plurality system, still produces extensive fragmentation in parliament, confirming the partial self-reference orientation of the political class, and the relationship between the power of the executive and the power of legislation where, unlike Anglo-American political systems, the balance is still in favour of the latter.

In this paper, and above all in our conclusions, we have deliberately emphasized the definition of a series of conditions likely to prevent the idea of political marketing from taking hold in Italy. Since this approach and methodology have only recently been introduced to this country, we thought it useful to highlight, in the various spheres examined, those characteristics—in part peculiar to the Italian political situation, in part common to other systems, particularly in Europe—which have up till now caused the "hybridisation" of Italian political culture and campaigning to be relatively far removed from the prerequisites necessary for a marketing approach to be effective.

All this is by no means intended to lead us to draw pessimistic conclusions, of course: The Italian political system is still going through a phase of radical transformation, which began in 1993, with the reform of the electoral system, and continued in 1994, with the emergence of bipolar competition and an increase in the use of the most up-to-date communications and market survey techniques, and which has not yet come to an end. Without doubt, Italy represents fertile and, to a large extent, unexplored terrain in which an authentic political consulting industry will be able to put down roots, and the political culture of the electorate and the political protagonists is slowly adjusting to the conditions of a majoritary democracy. What is certain, however, is that the theoretical and operational equipment offered by political marketing represents a definite benefit, both for those studying the Italian political system and for the protagonists of the political contest.

NOTES

1. Electoral legislation and the characteristics of the party systems, the frameworks regulating campaigns, the media infrastructures and political communication practices, access to political advertising on television.

2. The mass media attached the label "*tangentopoli*" to the period 1992-1994, during which the vast majority of the main political exponents of the parties forming the majority (but also, to some extent, of the Pci) came under investigation for crimes linked to corruption (*tangenti*).

3. We should also mention the electoral reform of 1993, which modified the Italian system of proportional representation, making it more like the Anglo-American first-past-the-post mechanism but leaving in place a proportional quota of 25% as a hangover from the old electoral system.

4. See also Itanes (2001), Legnante and Corbetta (2000).

5. This factor obviously leads to a reduction in the potential of a fully market-oriented strategy, although a marketing strategy aimed at reinforcing an image or market

share can be equally successful, as is well illustrated by literature on the subject (Egan 1999; Scammell 1999).

6. It should be remembered that in Italy, under the proportional system, competition took place on a national scale between parties, and not at a local level between individual candidates, as is (partially) the case nowadays under the plurality system.

7. Here, too, it should be emphasized that government in Italy is of the parliamentary kind: Proposals for changing to a presidential or semi-presidential system have so far produced no concrete results.

8. This is not the only indication of the growing leaderisation of the parties: Politicians such as Gianfranco Fini (leader of Alleanza Nazionale and Vice President of the Cabinet), Sergio Cofferati (former leader of CGIL, the strongest left-wing trade union), Romano Prodi (President of the European Commission and former Prime Minister of a left-wing government in 1996-1998), to mention only a few, have acquired autonomous support with respect to the parties to which they belong. Furthermore, one of the most innovative communication campaigns, carried out by the Radical Party (a small party outside the two major coalitions) for the European elections of 1999, centered on the figure of Emma Bonino and was entitled "Emma for President!": In this case, the reference to the figure of president was totally unrelated to the nature of the elections (European, with proportional voting), but the campaign was nevertheless tremendously successful and the "Bonino List" (the name chosen by the PR in this election) attained the highest percentage of votes in its history. This success did not repeat, however, revealing the limits of a marketing strategy devoid of roots.

9. To mention only one example, attempts by the current opposition to create a shadow cabinet or have a single spokesman have repeatedly failed.

10. These phenomena lead us to think, however, that the reasoning based on the party vote has not disappeared in most of the electorate, which remains for the most part party-oriented rather than candidate-oriented. And we cannot say that people vote on the basis of the parties' programmes, either: Surveys carried out to determine how well the alliances' policies are known have shown that voters have very little "confidence" in the programmes drawn up by coalitions and parties.

11. In addition, even no candidate at a local level.

12. For example, movements such as the ecologists or the no-global movement. But the populist parties, too, which have been able to attract a significant amount of support even in Italy, with the Northern League, were originally founded under the auspices of anti-partyism (Biorcio 1997).

13. Moreover, corresponding to the promotion of a direct link between leaders and the militants of the party base.

14. In Italy, in effect, all three prerequisites that Scammell considers necessary for speaking of an authentic consulting industry are still lacking: collective control over entry into the profession, a self-policed ethical code and core skills, and definable, theoretically based bodies of knowledge (Scammell 1997, 2). In this connection, we only have to think that the only postgraduate course in Italy for political consultants was held in 2001 at the Management School of the Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali (LUISS) in Rome, or that there are no associations or magazines relating to political consulting.

15. It could be held that the political class, with regard to both statistical surveys and qualitative methods, still has an attitude that we might define as that of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Merton 2002): i.e., marketing analyses are used not—as in the market-oriented party model—for investigating the political market, with the aim of

studying voters' needs and expectations, but to try to find a sort of scientific legitimacy for preestablished theories. In this way, the entire market analysis procedure is biased.

16. The history of "professional" political communication in Italy is quite swinging. With regard to the use of surveys, this field of inquiry erupted in early '70s, during the abortion and divorce referenda, but it is only in the '90s that their large-scale use has become more or less "institutionalized" (Ballini 2002). Furthermore, the employment of advertising agencies started in the 1983 general election, considered the first "high-tech" political event in Italy (Mazzoleni 1992), but in a sporadic way, in that this kind of recourse is limited to the strict electoral period, involves only some governing parties (especially Dc and Psi, in this period led by the charismatic leader Bettino Craxi, one of the first examples of personalized party leadership in Italy) and is coordinated by professionals who are not *strictu sensu* "political," but are simply communication experts "loaned" to the political world for a short period. See also footnote 13.

17. Much of the literature that has analyzed the life of the organizations has highlighted just this tendency to inertia and self-preservation as one of their main characteristics (see, for example, March 1994).

18. We need only consider the absolutely marginal role played by a famous American consultant, Stan Greenberg, in the coordination of the election campaign for the center-left (Olive Tree) coalition led by Francesco Rutelli in the elections of 2001 (which they lost). Greenberg was hired when the polls showed that the coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi (House of Freedom, comprising Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale, Northern League and CCD-CDU) was leading by over 10%, and the strategy that he proposed was not followed: We can say, then, that the sole aim of calling in Greenberg was to give the center-left coalition an aura of "modernity," without having any concrete strategic effect.

19. As Rodriguez maintains (2001, 80), Berlusconi's "coming onto the field" was an event that transformed so-called "American-style" communication (to paraphrase a professional approach to communication) from an optional extra into something essential.

20. As we have already pointed out, it must be remembered that the elections of 1994 represented an exceptional phase that marked the complete renovation—in terms of trends, protagonists and legislation—of the Italian party system. At the same time, the period 1992-94 also marked a turning point in the relationship between the political system and the media. The news media, formerly a "fragile system" (Mancini 2001b), began to compete with the parties as a political "quasi-power," supporting the campaign to overthrow the governing political class and creating an opportunity for the birth of new political formations. Without both these conditions, it is likely that the history of FI would never even have begun.

21. These new techniques have combined with a return, to some extent, to older forms of political communication, such as election posters.

22. It is no accident that the only existing departments are "propaganda departments," where the use of such antiquated terminology reveals how distorted a view of communication is often held by the political elite.

23. Even Websites do not seem to go beyond the function of "showcase" for a candidate's propaganda, little space being given to the interactive possibilities of the Internet, even if the elections of 2001 saw a slight change of direction (Bentivegna 2001).

24. "Par condicio" (equal access) law (legge 28/2000, "Disposizioni per la parità di accesso ai mezzi di informazione durante le campagne elettorali e referendarie e per la comunicazione politica") imposes a set of very restrictive rules not only to political

campaign communication, but also to media political communication in general. In fact, it defines: (1) a 15-day ban on the diffusion of political surveys before Election Day; (2) the ban on purchasing of airtime for political spots on national televisions; (3) an "equal access" criteria that provides for an equal distribution of free airtime on national TV channels (public and private); (4) a implicit ban on negative advertising. As we can see, this law represents a serious obstacle to the development of any marketing electoral communication strategy.

25. In the latter case, at local level.

26. A factor linked to a political culture far removed from the concept of competition and permeated with institutional viscosity.

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