

'The consumption of political communication within a marketised society'

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It is a recognised fact that a key feature of modern post-industrial democracies is that they are also highly marketised, consumer societies. The implications are that citizens face a multitude of highly persuasive messages on a daily basis from a range of commercial, charitable not-for-profit and political organisations. Studies of the effectiveness of advertising and marketing communications suggest an increased sophistication in the decoding of such persuasive communication and [note to some extent, and within certain sectors, a shift towards the more subtle tools of public relations using social media and ICT.](#) The consumerisation and sophistication of the marketplace has been a key driving force behind the marketisation of politics. Political marketing is a highly contested definition, in terms of whether it refers to the development of a product (party brand, leader and policies), whether it is the communicational aspects of political behaviour that have become marketised and professionalized, or whether perspectives of marketing can simply used to explain phenomenon such as voter choices or evaluations of parties and their communication.

This paper adopts a mixture of all three perspectives and approaches the subject of the decoding of political communication by suggesting that political communication is perceived as part of the clutter of the consumer society. Using data collected during a research project conducted in the weeks following the 2001 and 2005 UK General Elections, we find that there is an increasingly consumerist perspective used to evaluate political messages. Therefore promises made are often judged using a range of values and expectations that fit within our understanding of consumerism; however there are equally a range of values and expectations that are markedly different. Understanding the complexities of the voter-consumer, and the extent to which there is both a conflation and separation of the two spheres of life aids a more detailed understanding of how politics needs to be communicated and what political marketing, as a practice, should endeavour to achieve.