

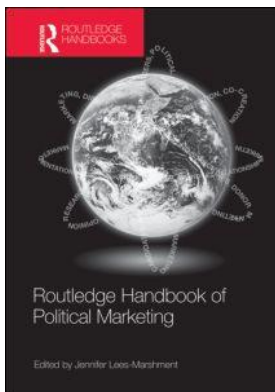
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 28 Nov 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Political Marketing

Jennifer Lees-Marshment

Selling Sarah Palin

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203349908.ch17>

Robert Busby

Published online on: 10 Nov 2011

How to cite :- Robert Busby. 10 Nov 2011, *Selling Sarah Palin from:* Routledge Handbook of Political Marketing Routledge

Accessed on: 28 Nov 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203349908.ch17>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Selling Sarah Palin

Political marketing and the 'Walmart Mom'

Robert Busby

The topic: selling candidates

The emergence of Sarah Palin as an iconic figure for the Republican party in the 2008 election was testament to the interplay of several issues central to an understanding of the contemporary nature of political marketing. Her personal brand utilised elements of her personal values and her lifestyle choices, the emotive use of the history of the Republican party to symbolise her as the inheritor of a distinctive Republican mandate, and the expression of populism through the exploitation of her autobiographical past and regional location. On its own the Palin brand was sufficient to create an identifiable and marketable political product which attracted attention on both a state and a national stage. However, other factors were significant. Palin's 'mediagenic' presence granted her a disproportionate amount of coverage in the 2008 election race in comparison with her opponents and indeed her running mate. Her brand of marketing, while targeting a perceived swing voting group in the form of the 'Walmart Mom', appeared to marginalise rather than expand the base from which she aspired to gain votes. While her marketing strategy in the first instance appeared to aspire towards a sales approach in an attempt to attract swing voters, it became clear as the 2008 campaign progressed, and indeed beyond its conclusion, that she became increasingly embroiled in a product-oriented approach, shoring up the right wing of the Republican party and advancing forcefully her personal brand.

Previous research: existing marketing theory and selling the individual

The US approach to political marketing is distinctive, increasingly candidate- rather than party-centred, and is highly dependent upon the interaction between polling information and media images (Lock and Harris 1996). Existing theory on individual brand marketing has concentrated on a range of attributes considered essential to effective political brand construction and marketing. Among the most important attributes of candidate branding are consistency of brand (Butler and Harris 2009), the manufactured image (Newman 2001), authenticity and consistency (Needham 2006; Holt 2002), the substance of the candidate (Henneberg *et al.* 2009), and market segmentation and appeal (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy 2007; Baines 1999). Of associated importance in terms of the branding of character are the integration of human characteristics and

brand identity (Smith 2009), emotional bonds between elector and elected (Newman 1999), and the integration of hard and soft political issues (Scammell 2007). These elements as individual components are instrumental to effective political marketing.

In addressing the dynamics of appealing to voters in the 2008 presidential election, market segmentation and targeting were important to creating a successful electoral coalition. As evidenced by Clinton's election wins, voters respond to the image and messages advanced by candidates in several ways, emotional, rational and social (Newman 1999: 263). Targeted messages to specific voting groups work to make campaigning more efficient and meaningful to the intended recipient. Voter breakdown goes beyond simple messages, however. Additional features include geographical identification, association with particular behavioural traits of a group, psychographic issues relating to lifestyle choice and beliefs, and demographic facets reflecting social locators (Smith and Saunders 1990). In modern election campaigns segmentation has been increasingly detailed and has worked to target sub-categories to further afford narrow targeted campaigning (Penn 2007). Segmentation works in partnership with the attempted mobilisation of voting blocks central to the creation of winning majorities. Existing understandings of a segmented electorate played an important part in the selection of Palin as a candidate, and in her marketing to narrow sections of the voting block in both a social and ideological manner.

Candidate branding receives mainstream media coverage and a reciprocal relationship between the two is evident. In addressing political marketing, Bruce I. Newman identified:

In politics, the application of marketing centers on the same process [as commercial marketing], but the analysis of needs centers voters and citizens; the product becomes a multifaceted combination of the politician himself or herself, the politician's image, and the platform the politician advocates which is then promoted and delivered to the appropriate audience.

(Newman 1999: 3)

Branding is multidimensional in its form and assists in the political positioning of candidates (Scammell 2008). Political figures are now increasingly, alongside political parties, considered as an individual brand in modern politics (Guzman and Sierra 2009: 208). Existing consideration of the importance of brands in politics suggests that they are important in creating positive images of leadership, instilling the values of a product, and 'are aspirational and evoke a positive vision for a better way of life' (Needham 2005: 347–48). Branding can also be used to create bonds of association with the electorate through the use of language designed to evoke emotional association in the political realm, for example Bush's use of "'moms and dads" in place of parents' (Fritz *et al.* 2004).

Acting as a further element in the successful marketing placement of a candidate is the effort to place the individual in an appropriate market niche. The identity of the candidate conjoined with an awareness of their role and function in selling the political product is an important element in an appreciation of the realities of selling leadership to the electorate. In the case under consideration, the selling of Palin as a vice-presidential candidate, this is significant. Collins and Butler identified theories of market positioning with respect to candidates, challengers and leadership options. They pinpointed positions relating to the 'market leader', the position of the 'challenger', the 'follower' and the 'niche' (Collins and Butler 2002: 7–13). The role of a vice-presidential candidate in the contemporary election cycle presents theoretical challenges of brand placement and positioning. The role, dependent upon the variables employed to market the candidate, appears suited to the positioning of the niche; that is, it serves to address niche

market needs and complements the product position of the market leader who is best placed to appeal to a broad range of voters. The problem of the ‘niche’ placement is that it serves to cater to a narrow product identity in the electoral marketplace and can be limited in its electoral appeal. An additional feature of placement is a consistency of position, that it remains identifiable to the consumer in a sustained form (Bannon 2004). In the context of 2008 and the economic downturn, consistency of position, market placement and credibility were important variables in marketing a successful vice-presidential candidate.

New research: marketing Sarah Palin

McCain was aware, at an early pre-Palin stage of the election process, that the Republican party had a problem confronting Bush’s legacy, arguing ‘we’ve got a brand problem’ (Ramsay 2008). Incorporating Palin onto the Republican ticket offered an opportunity to address issues relating to branding, market positioning, segmentation, and to appeal to important social locators. On paper and in her prior experiences in Alaska, Palin’s selection appeared to fulfil many of the theoretical requirements underpinning political marketing and the selling of an individual candidate.

America Online identified the issue of personal market branding, familiar from business applications, and how this applied to Sarah Palin. It stated:

A person’s brand is their mission statement. What are your core values? When people hear your name, what do you want them to think? These are the questions brand consultants say Palin should be asking at this crossroads of her career.

(Pendlebury 2009)

On CNN John Quelch, a marketing professor at Harvard Business School, considered the McCain–Palin ticket to be ‘an example of what good marketing and brand-building are all about’ (Keck 2008; Ramsay 2008). Quelch considered that the 2008 election had a twist which accentuated the importance of the individual candidate brand at the expense of that of the political party. He observed:

What is relevant is the brand image of the candidate. I don’t think that there is a GOP brand issue relevant to the outcome of this presidential election. It is going to be a matter of McCain–Palin, Obama–Biden. Those are the brands in play for the swing voters, regardless of party affiliation.

(Keck 2008)

McCain worked in particular to distance himself from the past Republican brand of Bush, yet he was thought to have generally failed to offer the voter ‘a different direction’ (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2008a). Moreover, consumers expect there to be a consistent quality of product to be correlated under a brand name, in this case the Republican brand (Phipps *et al.* 2008). McCain also appeared to lack consistency of brand identity across the course of the campaign (Butler and Harris 2009). Bruce I. Newman argued:

Just as companies need to partner with each other to be effective, so too do politicians. A candidate must get all partners to share his or her vision of the future. The focus should be on what can be, not what is. One must never lose sight of one’s customer.

(Newman 1999: 85)

A problem for the Palin candidacy was that while in theory she could support McCain and fulfil a 'niche' position in market placement, in practice her brand became excessively narrow and her product limited in its appeal. McCain argued, when he introduced Palin as his running mate on the ticket, that she appealed as someone 'who reached across the aisle and asked Republicans, Democrats and independents to serve in government' (Thornburgh 2008). This proved to be increasingly erroneous as the election progressed and suggested a problem of brand and market placement.

Alongside her Alaskan politics, Palin's physical appearance became an issue which determined her brand. Newman identified the importance of the manufactured image as a core facet in the acceptance of a political candidate (Newman 2001). In parallel Needham identified the need for consistency of brand identity and authenticity, and the basis for success in this area: 'brands must be perceived as authentic and value-based, necessitating congruence between the internal values of the product or company and its external message' (Needham 2006: 419). The collision of these two elements ultimately caused problems in selling Palin's message. Her physical appearance was a focus of media attention from the outset. Susan Scafidi, a law professor from Fordham, perceived of Palin: 'In our image-based society, the packaging of a candidate requires strategic spending on visuals, from stage make-up to backdrops to podiums at a flattering height – and yes costumes' (cited in Thee 2008). The authenticity of Palin's brand was questioned when it was disclosed that she had received \$150,000 from the Republican Party for clothing. News of expensive clothes offered a stark contrast to Palin's brand as a 'hockey mom' (Stacy and Wangrin 2008). Ed Rollins, who ran Reagan's re-election campaign in 1984, argued on similar grounds, 'It just undercuts Palin's whole image as a hockey mom, a "one-of-us" type of candidate' (Healy and Luo 2008). This had the impact of confusing Palin's brand, creating division between the internal and external values of the brand, and presented an inconsistent message to the voter.

There were problems in accommodating Palin onto the Republican ticket in the election race. Accommodating her brand with McCain's brand as both a Republican and a political maverick created confusion. She served in part as a focal figure for the Republican right, but was presented as earthy and authentic so as to appeal to potential swing voters. Steve Schmidt, key campaign strategist for the McCain team, identified the requirements of the vice-presidential candidate. They had to support McCain's "'maverick" credentials', attract women voters, distance the ticket from the Bush presidency and mobilise the base of the core Republican movement (Brox and Cassels 2009: 352; Mohan-Neill and Neill 2009: 24) There was some success in this realm. Chris Cillizza, writing in the *Washington Post*, observed:

There is no brand in Republican politics as powerful – or as tenuous – as that of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin. She is simultaneously the hottest commodity on the Republican fundraising circuit and a figure of ridicule among the Democrats (and even many independents) who believe that her status as a national figure is entirely undeserved.

(Cillizza 2009)

Palin's position as a vice-presidential nominee, however, made the attainment of Schmidt's objectives demanding, particularly as she perceived herself to be constrained by the mandate of the McCain agenda. She aspired to imprint her own brand as she desired during the campaign. She appeared to err towards a 'market leader' concept as opposed to the 'niche' position that she had been selected to fulfil.

The selection of Palin initially aspired towards co-branding alongside McCain on the Republican ticket. Howard Belk, co-president and chief creative officer at branding agency Siegel and Gale in New York, observed:

Each partnered a complementary personality who would overcome their own shortcomings and reach new audiences. It's a good strategy, but it panned out very differently for each ... McCain's appointment of Sarah Palin, on the other hand, looked smart initially – she is young and a woman – but she became a bigger focus of media attention than McCain himself, which was confusing.

(Simms 2008)

In this instance the fusion of two distinctive brands created confusion as to the identity value and meaning of the party ticket. In this instance media coverage acted as a variable on the balance of the co-branding strategy.

Palin's individualism made the relationship with the Republican party and McCain difficult to sustain across the duration of the campaign. The manufacturing of the McCain–Palin brand revolved around political and cultural populism and a rejection by the Republicans, and Palin in particular, of any trappings of elitism. This went hand-in-hand with an anti-intellectual platform. This was the bedrock for Palin's preferred style of political marketing. It was instinctive, revolved on an appealing personality and valued emotion above reason. Palin's interaction with the voter was to have a relational approach to the overall construct of political marketing, utilising social media as a route through which to interact with her consumer groups. However, as identified by Henneberg *et al.*, there are problems with this approach as it 'has to go beyond the cosmetic and superficial' (Henneberg *et al.* 2009: 170).

McCain was identified as a 'maverick' candidate – giving him an ill-defined ideological position within the race. Palin ultimately followed a similar path. She declared that she was 'going rogue' and forged her own identity within the campaign. This, however, blurred further her brand image and that of the party. An unnamed McCain source complained that Palin:

is a diva. She takes no advice from anyone. She does not have any relationships of trust with any of us, her family or anyone else. Also, she is playing for her own future and sees herself as the next leader of the party.

(Bash *et al.* 2008)

Increasing disputes and overt tensions between Palin and McCain created a campaign where the precise nature of the party brand became unclear (Palin 2009: 318–21). It was relatively easy to pinpoint individual ideas and political aspirations, but as a singular entity the brand became ill-defined and problematic, suggesting tensions between party identity and the contemporary branding of individual candidates.

Palin's marketing brand during 2008 became heavily interwoven with an identification with a perceived swing voting group, the Walmart Mom. This was testament to an understanding of market segmentation and the use of Palin's background as a marketable commodity. Market research underpinned an appreciation of the importance of the Walmart Mom as a pivotal swing group with split electoral loyalties. Walmart Moms represented a distinctive brand of their own during the campaign. Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy identified that market segmentation allowed an identification to cater to 'what voters want, and how they want it ...' (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy 2007: 18). With an ongoing economic recession, a directed appeal to an identifiable consumer group on the grounds of gender and socio-economic status appeared to be of strategic benefit to the Republican party, catered to swing voters who received concentrated media attention, and addressed microtargets in marketing.

The Walmart Mom was defined as a lower-middle-class white woman who shopped at discount retailer Walmart at least once a week. *Business Week* identified the statistical bracket within which this group fell:

They're not as well off as average Americans: Some 41% of frequent Wal-Mart shoppers have incomes below \$35,000 vs. 25% of the population at large. They're less educated than their neighbors: 31% of U.S. voters have a high school education or less, vs. 39% for Wal-Mart Women. Those characteristics set them apart from the firmly middle-class Soccer Moms so closely tracked in past election.

(Sasseen 2008)

This target group had three attributes. They were squeezed by the prevailing downturn in the economy, they were likely to vote, and polls indicated that they, as an aggregate grouping, were undecided about who to vote for. This is important to the theory on segmentation and microtargeting. The targeting strategy was overt. This segment was given a niche label, it was talked about openly in the campaign and it shaped the interpretation of Palin's candidacy and brand appeal.

The Palin product dovetailed with this target group. Palin was presented as a political manifestation of the Walmart Mom. Although wealthy, she was by far the poorest of the four candidates competing for office. The *New York Magazine* considered the rationale for the prominence of Palin in the race:

in picking Palin as his V.P., McCain had introduced into the electoral equation a set of variables – gender, class, celebrity, ideology – at once powerful, combustible, and unpredictable. They presaged a fall campaign in which the most wretched sort of identity politics will apparently prevail. And they reflected a new strategic dynamic that may well determine the outcome: the fierce and frantic pursuit by sides of this year's 'It' demographic, the so-called Wal-Mart moms.

(Heilemann 2008)

For example, a single mother from Florida who worked as a waitress argued that there were connections between her prior support for President Bush and her new-found support during the campaign for Palin: 'He [Bush] was really good for my family ... We're hurting financially, but he shares our values just like Sarah Palin does' (Bosman 2008). Thus, it was not just the case that Palin targeted key groups, but that she was marketed, with pronounced psychographic meaning, as the embodiment of the social group she sought in part to represent. The integration of the political product with consumer identity was transparent and marketed prominently.

In addressing market segmentation there were problems of Palin's appeal becoming limited rather than fulfilling the broader brand considerations desired by campaign strategist Schmidt. Her product became intrinsically linked to a narrow target segment. It fulfilled a 'niche' role in this context, but worked to narrow her appeal. Conservative columnist William Kristol, writing in the *New York Times*, mused over the political considerations used to pick vice-presidential running mates and how this impacted on the selection of Palin:

McCain didn't just pick a politician who could appeal to Wal-Mart Moms. He picked a Wal-Mart Mom. Indeed he picked someone who, in 1999, as Wasilla mayor, presided over a wedding of two Wal-Mart associates at the local Wal-Mart. 'It was so sweet' said Palin, according to the Anchorage Daily News. 'It was so Wasilla.' A Wasilla Wal-Mart

Mom a heartbeat away? I suspect most voters will say, ‘No problem.’ And some – perhaps a decisive number – will say, ‘It’s about time.’

(Kristol 2008)

The justification of Palin’s placement in targeting a narrow market segment appeared to be ratified by poll statistics. Alignment between product identity and market outcomes appeared to initially work. McCain experienced pronounced alterations in demographic support across the period of the Republican convention in 2008. The benefits of targeting a market were evident. *Time* reported:

where 55% of white women voted for Bush in 2004, only 50% voted for Republican candidates in the 2006 midterm elections, which was one of the reasons the party lost both houses of Congress ... as much as Palin pleased the conservative base of the party, white women were the real target audience McCain was aiming at with his surprise pick of the Alaska governor. The campaign hopes female voters will relate to her thoroughly modern and complicated everywoman story, even if they don’t agree with her on the issues.

(Tumulty 2008)

Through the Republican convention, according to a *Washington Post/ABC News* poll, ‘McCain enjoyed a 20-percentage point turnaround against Obama among white women, going from an eight-point deficit before the Republican National Convention to a 12 point advantage after it’ (Tumulty 2008).

Across the longer term Palin made little inroad into solidifying a female vote. She was viewed in a similar light by men and women in poll samples. In September Pew reported, ‘Men and women offer nearly identical ratings of Palin; 56% of men and 53% of women say they have a positive view of the vice presidential candidate’ (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2008b). Over time Palin appealed less and less to women voters, especially those identified as Walmart Moms. By the third week of October, 38 percent of women sampled by Pew had a ‘favorable impression’ of Palin, as contrasted with 50 percent of men. The early poll figures, where Palin fared best, indicate that she appealed, in socio-economic brackets, mostly (61–34 percent) to those who earned between \$50,000 and \$75,000, and much less (46–35 percent) to those who earned less than \$30,000 (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2008c).

Interpretation of candidate personality is important to the creation of brands and in marrying human characteristics with brand identity (Smith 2009). Furthermore, Palin’s Alaskan identity allowed geographic segmentation in the marketplace. Her candidacy and personality did not have to be reinvented to play to a national audience. Marketing involved subtle refinement and accentuation on aspects of her background which had already proven to be viable and electorally popular in Alaska. Early poll evidence suggested that the selection might bode well. Following her acceptance speech, Palin was viewed favourably by 58 percent of a Rasmussen poll sample, a rating which put her ahead, albeit marginally, of both McCain and Obama (Rasmussen Reports 2008).

Palin’s authenticity was central to her brand. She was portrayed as a person who genuinely represented the person she was in real life. In looking for a distinctive brand identity within the ticket, the Pew Research Center asked poll respondents for a single word that best described the vice-presidential nominees. Although ‘inexperienced’ was the highest one-word response for Palin, there were additional issues which contributed towards the positive branding of Palin. Pew observed, ‘For Palin “strong”, “fresh” and “interesting” are among the most commonly mentioned terms. Voters also say Palin is “smart”, “confident” and “energetic”’ (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2008b).

Underscoring Palin's market placement for a targeted socio-economic group, her candidacy was imbued with populist attributes. It was sold as a clear and distinct form of her appeal, and contrasted with the more subtle populist mandates of her opponents, including Obama (Greenberg 2009). Modern populism embodied 'a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as a self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter' (Kazin 1995: 1). Eleanor Clift in *Newsweek* identified the challenges facing voters when considering the information presented by the vice-presidential candidates of each party: 'Palin is wooing the same working-class constituency that could decide the election in battleground states like Ohio and Pennsylvania with her pro-gun, family and religious down-to-earth values' (Clift 2008). Her life story afforded her many advantages in branding herself as a populist, serving to fuse psychographic segmentation with demographic and behavioural elements. She reflected in her autobiography on what she and her husband conveyed: 'We felt our very normalcy, our status as ordinary Americans, could be a much needed fresh breeze blowing into Washington D.C.' (Palin 2009: 220–21).

The major television networks labelled her as a 'perfect populist' (Bauder 2008), her rhetoric was consistent to this end, and her opponents criticised her for celebrating the merits of ordinariness at the expense of elites and political leaders. Selling her as a person worked effectively. Selling her as a prospective political leader proved more problematic. Pew reported that:

By a wide margin (70% to 50%), more swing voters say Palin is down-to-earth. While nearly identical percentages of all voters see both candidates as honest, more swing voters say this trait describes Palin (67%) than say it applies to Biden.

(Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2008a)

Marketing the person as an individual brand was an important element in selling Palin to the Walmart Mom; however, she was strongly linked to the right of the Republican Party and this proved more difficult to present as a marketable asset during the campaign (Salam 2009).

In summary, the impact of Palin's candidacy in the 2008 presidential election was pronounced and significant. A range of elements central to the modern campaign were used and exploited to good effect by Palin and her campaign strategists. Her authenticity, psychographic profile and the exploitation of geographic and behavioural elements of her background and character fused to great effect in presenting her as a product of appeal and market impact. The gender component was utilised to provide contrasts with Hillary Clinton and suggested that Palin's experiences as a woman were relevant to her ability to sell herself as a political product. Individual brand elements were strong. However, such strengths also created weaknesses, or were undermined during the campaign:

- Her prominence in the span of media coverage far surpassed that generally afforded a vice-presidential candidate. Her position as a 'nicher' in the formation of a working ticket which had a target audience morphed into a scenario where she appeared to be the market leader, and this changed the dynamics of media campaign coverage, and thereafter popular interpretation.
- Her brand proved controversial and divisive, thus losing as well as attracting support. Her ability to sell herself as the embodiment of the contemporary working woman had pronounced limitations, because despite her emotional appeal she appeared unable to mobilise her target market into actual votes.

Robert Busby

- The emphasis on her personal life cast doubt on her leadership ability and thus suitability for vice-president. Scammell (2007) pinpointed the importance of interweaving hard politics and soft social attributes into the building of a political brand and the challenges afforded by this fusion.
- Media exposure of issues, such as her clothing choices and their cost, lent credence to beliefs that Palin's image was manufactured and thus created confusion about her brand identity.

Advice for practitioners

The marketing of Palin's political brand has distinctive lessons for leadership and strategy:

- Do not allow vice-presidential candidates to become the market leader as their position is then vulnerable to attack.
- Avoid developing a brand that only appeals to a distinctive psychographic populism, which whilst successful initially, can also alienate mainstream supporters and thus lose votes overall. The integration of personal attributes and a populist mandate, where the candidate is presented as being a mirror of the target voting segment, builds ultimately superficial support in elections.
- Take care to protect initial brand strengths, and do not let them be undermined by other presentational tools or campaign activities.
- Exhibit both leadership and personal attributes; both skills and emotional connections with voters.
- Caution should be exercised with market strategies that interweave economic variables with the social and lifestyle characteristics of candidates.
- Gender can have a positive role in creating a distinctive brand identity, but also changes the type and tone of coverage afforded a candidate.
- The difficulties of incorporating individual brands into an embedded party brand identity are pronounced, and suggest that short-term rebranding of both candidates and party is difficult to accomplish.

Impact on politics

Marketing individual candidates is not straightforward, but both the success and the difficulties faced by the candidate in this case study suggest positive implications for democracy. The success of authenticity in this case suggests that politicians need to be 'normal' and reflect ordinary citizens. Populism is important in branding, but it has limits in its market appeal. Whilst tools such as branding, positioning and targeting offer politicians the means to attract support at the early stages of the campaign, and connect emotionally with the public, voters still require to be shown leadership skills and that a candidate can connect with a range of support groups, not just one target market. This may be good for democracy, because it shows the limitations of pragmatic strategising to win support.

Individual candidate brands are clearly an enticing realm for media coverage, with evidence of elongated coverage on personal considerations throughout election campaigns. Yet candidate-centred coverage appears to demonstrate limitations on the willingness of the voter to accommodate wall-to-wall coverage on individuals as central components in election races. Voter exhaustion suggests that candidate branding, while important in informing voters of election choices, can be detrimental to popular engagement with politics and create weariness during election cycles.

The fusion of multiple individual brands with a party brand, particularly one that is entrenched, is a challenging task. In seeking to alter brand identity the consumer requires time to accommodate and understand new identities and to appreciate consistency of the brand product. Multilevel branding, if not delivered with precision and clarity, runs the risk of presenting the voter with a range of competing identities which acts to the detriment of the political party and candidates. Long-term rebranding is evidently an important consideration for candidates who aspire to, or have to, modify the underlying party brand.

The failure of a strong recognisable brand to generate the support it was chosen to target suggests that the current means by which political organisations, with sophisticated techniques of market research, make decisions may need reconsideration. The appeal of candidates at local or state level of government may not necessarily be transferable to a national stage, and the variables that propel candidate branding at the sub-national and national positions evidently demonstrate different challenges in mobilising voters and presenting a legitimate brand identity.

The way forward

There exist clear avenues for further exploration in the field of candidate branding and political marketing strategies. Further research is needed on party and candidate branding, and how the two interconnect. After the election Palin extricated herself from the limitations of a tight party brand and took steps to place herself in a political position where she could develop her own personal brand via media devices which cut the linkage with the mass media. Separation between candidate branding and party branding is clearly necessary. Yet they are inevitable bedfellows in the pursuit of political office. In political coalitions, and in scenarios where minor parties or political individuals are able to sell themselves with more effectiveness than the prime candidate, there are similar conundrums. The challenge faced by Cameron and Clegg in representing themselves as party leaders, as prime minister and deputy prime minister in the UK, and as individual political figures in their own right, poses questions about how political balance can be successfully achieved. While individual candidate branding is clearly evident and of importance in the contemporary campaign, how internal candidate brands are accommodated alongside one another in both campaigns and government is an aspect of importance, particularly given the increasing focus on individuals as candidates and the slow diminution of party brands as prime product locators.

Gender remains an important consideration in political branding. Continued attention given to gender-related candidate branding underscores a need for further research into whether differing expectations of brands across male and female candidates are generated by the candidates themselves, the media or the voter. Similarly, the presence of men and women on the same political platforms presents issues about brand balance. In the case study evaluated here the female candidate's brand received disproportionate coverage and attention. The increasing number of women in pursuit of high political office creates opportunities for comparative analysis about whether there are similar gender-skewed brand mechanisms in place in comparative democratic systems.

Market intelligence and product placement have become increasingly sophisticated in the contemporary era. Market segmentation and microtargets suggests that the selection of candidates who can appeal to swing voters have a pivotal place in influencing voter choice and election outcomes. Yet it is clear that selecting a candidate on this account has limitations and that while market placement is important, there exist peripheral market spheres which have to be addressed to ensure a breadth of appeal. How non-target groups can be engaged and mobilised in the context of leadership and candidate-centred brand politics remains a pressing marketing concern.

Bibliography

- Baines, P.R. (1999) 'Voter Segmentation and Candidate Positioning', in B. Newman (ed.) *Handbook of Political Marketing*, New York: Sage.
- Bannon, D. (2004) 'Marketing Segmentation and Political Marketing', paper presented to the UK Political Studies Association conference, University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK.
- Bash, D., Hamby, P. and King, J. (2008) 'Palin's "Going Rogue", McCain Aide Says', CNN, 25 October. Online, edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/25/palin.tension (accessed 21 July 2010).
- Bauder, D. (2008) 'Palin Provides a "Perfect Populist Pitch"', *USA Today*, 4 September. Online, www.usatoday.com/news/politics/2008-09-03-2226980962_x.htm (accessed 20 April 2010).
- Bosman, J. (2008) 'Palin Plays to Conservative Base in Florida Rallies', *New York Times* 8 October. Online, www.nytimes.com/2008/10/08/us/politics/08palin.html?scp=1&sq=Plays%20to%20Conservative%20Base%20in%20Florida%20Rallies&st=cse (accessed 12 July 2010).
- Brox, B.J. and Cassels, M.L. (2009) 'The Contemporary Effects of Vice-Presidential Nominees: Sarah Palin and the 2008 Presidential Campaign', *Journal of Political Marketing* 8, 4: 349–63.
- Butler, P. and Harris, P. (2009) 'Considerations on the Evolution of Political Marketing Theory', *Marketing Theory* 9, 2: 149–62.
- Cillizza, C. (2009) 'The Protectors of the Palin Brand', *Washington Post*, 17 March. Online, www.voices.washingtonpost.com (accessed 13 July 2010).
- Clift, E. (2008) 'Palin Reignites The Culture War', *Newsweek*, 3 October.
- Collins, N. and Butler, P. (2002) 'Considerations on Market Analysis for Political Parties', in N. O'Shaughnessy and S. Henneberg (eds) *The Idea of Political Marketing*, London: Praeger.
- Dowd, M. (2008) 'Sarah's Pompom Palaver', *New York Times*, 5 October. Online, www.nytimes.com/2008/10/05/opinion/05dowd.html?scp=1&sq=Sarah%E2%80%99s%20Pom%20Pom%20Palaver&st=cse (accessed 13 May 2010).
- Fritz, B., Keefer, B. and Nyham, B. (2004) *All the President's Spin: George W. Bush, the Media, and the Truth*, New York: Touchstone.
- Greenberg, D. (2009) 'The Populism of the FDR Era', *Time*, 4 July.
- Guzman, F. and Sierra, V. (2009) 'A Political Candidate's Brand Image Scale: Are Political Candidates Brands?' *Brand Management* 17, 3: 207–17.
- Healy, P. and Luo, M. (2008) '\$150, 000 Wardrobe for Palin May Alter Tailor-Made Image', *New York Times*, 22 October. Online, www.nytimes.com/2008/10/23/us/politics/23palin.html?scp=1&sq=%91%24150,%20000%20Wardrobe%20for%20Palin%20May%20Alter%20Tailor-Made%20Image&st=cse (accessed 14 March 2010).
- Heilemann, J. (2008) 'The Wal-Mart Frontier', *New York Magazine*, 14 September. Online, nymag.com/news/politics/powergrid/50277 (accessed 21 July 2010).
- Henneberg, S.C. and O'Shaughnessy, N.J. (2007) 'Theory and Concept Development in Political Marketing', *Journal of Political Marketing* 6, 2: 5–31.
- Henneberg, S.C., Scammell, M. and O'Shaughnessy, N.J. (2009) 'Political Marketing Management and Theories of Democracy', *Marketing Theory* 9, 2: 165–88.
- Herbert, B. (2008) 'Palin's Alternate Universe', *New York Times*, 4 October. Online, www.nytimes.com/2008/10/04/opinion/04herbert.html?scp=1&sq=Palin%E2%80%99s%20Alternate%20Universe&st=cse (accessed 15 March 2010).
- Holt, D.B. (2002) 'Why Do Brands Cause Trouble?' *A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding* 29, 1: 70–90.
- Kazin, M. (1995) *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, revised edition, London: Cornell University Press.
- Keck, K. (2008) 'Palin Power Recharges GOP Ticket', CNN, 17 September. Online, edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/09/17/mccain.palin.marketing/index.html?iref=allsearch (accessed 22 July 2010).
- Kristol, W. (2008) 'A Heartbeat Away', *New York Times*, 8 September. Online, www.nytimes.com/2008/09/08/opinion/08kristol.html (accessed 12 February 2010).
- Lock, A. and Harris, P. (1996) 'Political Marketing – Vive la Difference!' *European Journal of Marketing* 30, 10/11: 14–24.
- Mohan-Neill, S. and Neill, I. (2009) 'Executive Decision-Making and Marketing Research: The Choice of Sarah Palin as 2008 Republican Vice-Presidential Nominee', *Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Studies* 14, 1: 23–28.
- Needham, C. (2005) 'Brand Leaders: Clinton, Blair and the Limitations of the Permanent Campaign', *Political Studies* 53, 2: 343–61.

- (2006) 'Brands and Political Loyalty', *Brand Management* 13, 3: 178–87.
- Newman, B.I. (1999) *The Mass Marketing of Politics: Democracy in an Age of Manufactured Images*, London: Sage.
- (2001) 'Image-manufacturing in the USA: Recent US Presidential Elections and Beyond', *European Journal of Marketing* 35, 9/10: 966–70.
- Noonan, P. (2008) 'A Servant's Heart', *Wall Street Journal*, 5 September. Online, online.wsj.com/article/SB122059352189503479.html (accessed 21 June 2010).
- Palin, S. (2009) *Going Rogue: An American Life*, New York: HarperCollins.
- Pendlebury, S. (2009) 'Will Sarah Palin Reinvent Herself?' *AOL News*, 25 July. Online, www.aolnews.com/story/sarah-palins-brand/588403 (accessed 21 July 2010).
- Penn, M., with Zalesne, E.K. (2007) *Micro-Trends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes*, London: Twelve.
- Pinker, S. (2008) 'Everything You Heard Is Wrong', *New York Times*, 4 October. Online, www.nytimes.com/2008/10/04/opinion/04pinker.html?scp=1&sq=Everything%20You%20Heard%20Is%20Wrong&st=cse (accessed 15 March 2010).
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2008a) 'Obama Boosts Leadership Image and Regains Lead over McCain: Growing Concerns About Palin's Qualification', 1 October. Online, people-press.org/2008/10/01/obama-boosts-leadership-image-and-regains-lead-over-mccain (accessed 21 March 2010).
- (2008b) 'McCain Gains on Issues, but Stalls as Candidate of Change', 18 September. Online, people-press.org/2008/09/18/mccain-gains-on-issues-but-stalls-as-candidate-of-change (accessed 20 March 2010).
- (2008c) 'Growing Doubts About McCain's Judgment, Age and Campaign Conduct', 21 October. Online, people-press.org/2008/10/21/growing-doubts-about-mccains-judgment-age-and-campaign-conduct (accessed 23 March 2010).
- (2008d) 'Many Say Press Has Been Too Tough on Palin', 9 October. Online, people-press.org/2008/10/09/many-say-press-has-been-too-tough-on-palin (accessed 21 March 2010).
- (2008e) 'Palin Fatigue Now Rivals Obama Fatigue: SNL Appearance, Wardrobe Flap Register Widely', 29 October. Online, people-press.org/2008/10/29/palin-fatigue-now-rivals-obama-fatigue (accessed 22 March 2010).
- Phipps, M., Brace-Govan, J. and Jevons, C. (2008) 'The Duality of Political Brand Equity', *European Journal of Marketing* 44, 3/4: 496–514.
- Ramsay, K. (2008) 'McCain: If the Election was Tomorrow, GOP Would Lose', *CNN*, 26 June. Online, politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2008/06/26/mccain-if-the-election-was-tomorrow-gop-would-lose/www.cnn.com (accessed 21 July 2010).
- Rasmussen Reports (2008) 'Palin Power: Fresh Face Now More Popular than Obama, McCain', *Rasmussen Reports*, 5 September. Online, www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/elections/election_2008/2008_presidential_election/palin_power_fresh_face_now_more_popular_than_obama_mccain (accessed 14 July 2010).
- Salam, R. (2009) 'The Last Culture Warrior', *Forbes*, 4 July. Online, www.forbes.com/2009/07/04/governor-alaska-republican-white-house-opinions-columnists-sarah-palin.html (accessed 13 March 2010).
- Sasseen, J. (2008) 'The Wal-Mart Sisterhood', *Business Week*, 17 April. Online, www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/08_17/b4081089044593.htm (accessed 17 April 2010).
- Scammell, M. (2007) 'Political Brands and Consumer Citizens: The Rebranding of Tony Blair', *Annals, AAPSS* 611, 1: 176–92.
- (2008) 'Brand Blair: Marketing Politics in the Consumer Age', in D. Lilleker and R. Scullion (eds) *Voters or Consumers: Imaging the Contemporary Electorate*, Cambridge: Scholars Publishing.
- Simms, J. (2008) 'What UK Marketers Learn from the US Presidential Election', *Marketing*, 11 November.
- Smith, G. (2009) 'Conceptualizing and Testing Brand Personality in British Politics', *Journal of Political Marketing* 8, 3: 209–32.
- Smith, G. and Saunders, J. (1990) 'The Application of Marketing to British Politics', *Journal of Marketing Management* 5, 3: 295–306.
- Stacy, M. and Wangrin, M. (2008). 'Palin Says Expensive Clothing not Her Property', *Breitbart*, 26 October. Online, www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D942H6SO0&show_article=1 (accessed 14 June 2010).
- Thee, F. (2008) 'Palin Clothing Bill Up, Poll Standing Down', *Boston Globe*, 22 October. Online, www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2008/10/palin_clothing.html (accessed 26 June 2010).
- Thornburgh, N. (2008) 'Mayor Palin: A Rough Record', *Time*, 2 September. Online, www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1837918,00.html (accessed 12 June 2010).
- Tumulty, K. (2008) 'Can Obama Win Back Wal-Mart Moms?' *Time*, 9 September. Online, www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1839930,00.html (accessed 12 June 2010).