

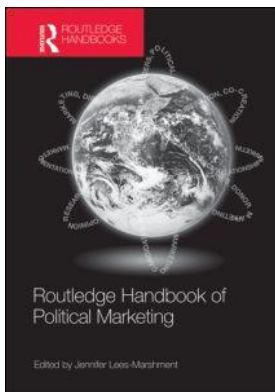
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Populism as political marketing technique¹

Georg Winder and Jens Tenscher

The topic: populism

Populism is a widely used communicative strategy in politics that seems to have become more and more important in recent years. Since the mid-1980s populism has entered the political stage of some established Western democracies; to name but a few: Jörg Haider (Austria's Freedom Party) in Austria; Jean-Marie Le Pen (Front National) in France; Silvio Berlusconi (Forza Italia) in Italy; Josef Blocher (Swiss People's Party) in Switzerland; and Geert Wilders (Freedom Party) in the Netherlands. Their success has been perceived by some scholars as a typical symptom of fundamental political transformation or political crisis (Taggart 2000: 5), or reflective of disenchantment with established, 'old-fashioned' political parties (Mudde 1996). However, populism is not only a symptom of crisis but also a strategy of managing communicative relationships.

Against this backdrop, it is time to reflect on populism as a political marketing technique. So far, this has neither been done in political marketing studies nor in populism research. Yet, we assume that populism is a political marketing technique in its own right, one that offers a specific form of political communication, organization and mobilization. This chapter will discuss the concept and contextual factors which facilitate or impede the introduction of populist actors and the development of populism as a political marketing technique. Furthermore, we will test its practical relevance by examining case studies from the US (long-time established democracy), Austria (relatively young but strong democracy) and Venezuela (emergent, unstable democracy).

Previous research

Political marketing research has not previously focused on populism (Lederer *et al.* 2005), although it is of course the subject of significant and controversial debate elsewhere in political science (see, for example Ionescu and Gellner 1969; Canovan 1981). There is very little consensus in this literature about how to define populism: some see it as a political ideology with roots in a cohesive social concept of the democratic society (Mény and Surel 2002: 40 ff.), while others tend to qualify populism as a 'thin centered ideology' (Freeden 1998; Mudde 2004: 544) that misses an elaborated vision of society and 'only gives a precise meaning and

priority to certain key concepts of political discourse' (Abts and Rummens 2007: 408). In this understanding, populism possesses an ideological core that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde 2004: 562). A second research strand emphasizes the communicative dimension of populism: here, populism is characterized as a communication instrument or a political style (Taguieff 2002: 80; Jagers and Walgrave 2007). Political actors make use of the same principles as in the ideological approaches to populism but deploy populist communication in order to be more successful while ideological concepts assume that the populist elements form an essential part of a political actor's policies. Both approaches to populism, as well as those that point at its organizational components (Weyland 2001: 12), refer to the two key criteria of 'the people' and 'the elites'. We therefore argue that *populism is a political communication style that is strategically deployed by political actors in order to mobilize potential voters and to establish stable relationships with specific target groups*.

Populism has two key dimensions: inclusion and exclusion. Inclusion refers to the fact that populist communicators claim to speak *for the people* in the meaning of 'representing the whole democratic sovereign' (Canovan 1999: 4). Jagers and Walgrave (2007: 3) explain that 'populism is a communication frame that appeals to and identifies with the people, and pretends to speak in their name'. When politicians are being inclusive, they frame their political messages in a way that conveys both the message of proximity to a broad range of potential 'clients' and the pretended advocacy for their needs and concerns. Exclusion is used to stress inclusion – if some people are 'in', then others must be 'out', and thus they are a perceived menace to those within the 'in' group. Populist discourse attempts to introduce, consolidate and frame such threats. Respective political leaders challenge the existing order and thus stigmatize 'the elites' as people's principal opponents. Thus, what we can draw from this literature is that populism is a communication style where politicians frame proximity to and identification with 'the people' and simultaneously purport to advocate their interests against a highly privileged elite that is out of touch with the citizens' needs. To reach their goals populist communicators routinely refer to notions of civic identity, including terms like 'the state', 'the nation' or 'religious feelings' – especially when branding threats from outside.

New research: marketed populism

The theory: populism and the stages of political marketing

Populism as a communication strategy can be connected with political marketing concepts and market orientation. Market orientation discusses how techniques (such as market research and product design) and concepts (such as the desire to satisfy voter demands) can be used to reach specific goals such as winning elections, but lacks detailed ideas for an effective communication strategy, without which any political marketing objectives and any efforts to establish and stabilize external relationships are doomed to fail. This section puts forward new concepts by adapting Lees-Marshment's (2001) concept, which differentiates between product orientation, sales orientation and market orientation.

Product-oriented political parties tend to 'set policies and expect others to support the organization on the basis that the policy is right' (Lilleker and Lees-Marshment 2005: 7). Sales-oriented parties also start with well-established political products, i.e. a set of realistic policies, but additionally make use of 'market intelligence to design their communication strategy in order to persuade voters to support the party' (ibid.). In contrast, market-oriented parties first

turn to the ‘customer’s’ concerns, behaviors, needs and demands before designing a product that is delivered in accordance to specific market conditions. Obviously, such market orientation requires not only the highest degree of sophistication and professionalization within political parties but also a maximum of ideological flexibility to effectively mold political products and promises. We assume that populist parties hold such an ideological flexibility since they often lack a clear-cut, long-established profile and position within the electoral market. Furthermore, populist parties are keen to adjust their communicative strategies to their customers’ needs and feelings. Their organizational structure, normally hierarchical and leader-oriented, makes it easy to incorporate political marketing techniques. As a consequence, we argue that populism best suits market-oriented political parties and less suits a sales orientation. Product-oriented parties would not turn to populism as a communicative strategy. How populism and market orientation match becomes obvious when we refer to the nine stages of a political marketing process that Lees-Marshment’s (2010) model identifies. We merge those stages into three crucial phases (see Figure 18.1).

Phase 1 – market intelligence

Market research could be considered as the initial stage of every marketing process. Before developing and designing a product it is necessary for political parties to identify most prospective target groups, their needs, desires and feelings (Lilleker and Lees-Marshment 2005: 10). Even though this stage is crucial for all political competitors nowadays, populist parties do have a special interest in ascertaining potential customers’ orientations since their communicative strategy is explicitly supposed to procure ‘closeness to the people’. Such an approach asks for an in-depth-knowledge of ‘the people’s’ needs and worries. Actually, it is not ‘the people’ as a whole who are targeted by populist parties but especially the ‘ordinary, decent people’ (Canovan 1999: 5), who feel not sufficiently addressed by the governing elites and frustrated by the established parties. It is the common people, namely the ‘losers of modernization’, people who are or at least feel to be economically or culturally deprived, that are foremost open to populist pledges (Spier 2006: 36; Decker 2006: 13). These people are ‘counter-consumers’ (Butler and Collins 1994: 26) on the political market; they rather vote *against* than in favor of political supplies. The first step of

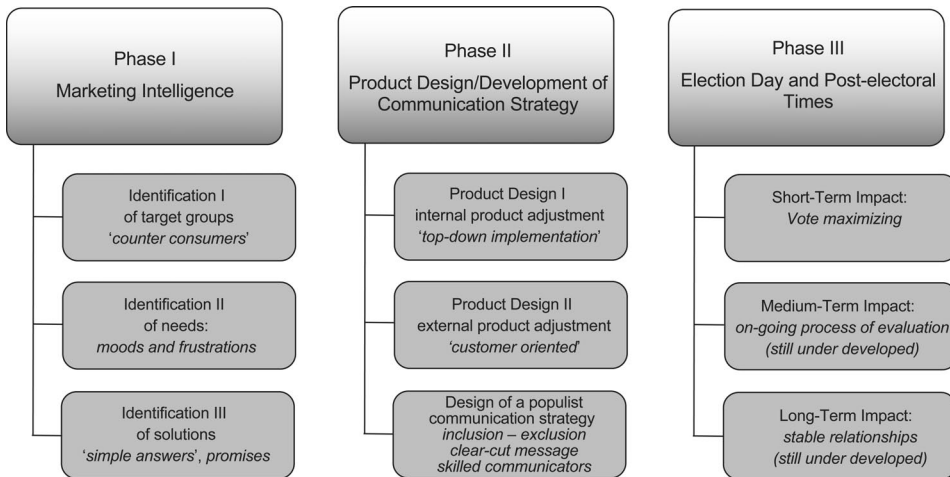


Figure 18.1 Model of marketed populism (populism-specific elements are in italic)

populist market intelligence is to locate these people and to get detailed information about their moods, feelings and policy demands. At this stage, populist parties and candidates, like their competitors, make use of a broad set of opinion research instruments, including opinion polls and focus groups.

Phase 2 – product design and development of a communication strategy

Based on marketing intelligence data about prospective consumers, political parties develop a product, adjust to it and implement it internally, i.e. within the political party. Afterwards, a strategy on how to communicate the (new) product externally to prospective supporters, voters, competitors and media, has to be designed. Compared with other parties, the process of product development, adjustment and implementation seems to be much easier for populist parties because they are to a large extent exempt from ideological or policy-related standpoints, which makes it easier for them to react to current moods and to design products that are easy to grasp and to communicate. While established parties have to take care of their party history and former political decisions, populist actors have the edge over their competitors in simply *being against* (the elites, the other parties, etc.) and *being in favor* of something/somebody (the underprivileged, frustrated ‘counter-consumers’). Consequently, populists usually turn to *position issues* (Stokes 1966) that are most important for their potential voters and in which established parties’ records or promises are non-satisfying. Populist answers to burning problems are for the most part rather vague and simplistic, and populist products usually appear as simple solutions to complex problems. This is where positive role models, leaders, frontrunners and skilled communicators to whom people can refer as being the product come in. Therefore, populist products are basically composed of two main components: clear-cut (and mostly just a few) messages covering the most prominent issues, plus the image of a strong and charismatic frontrunner or party leader. Other aspects of political products that are crucial for the success of competing political parties – namely the political party and its ideology (Butler and Collins 1994: 21) – are of minor importance.

When it comes to product adjustment and its internal implementation, populist parties benefit from their hierarchical structure: party members, candidates and parties’ representatives do not have to be *convinced*, they just have to *accept* and follow the parameters and decisions of the party leaders. In this process the leaders of populist parties (and their advisors) play a crucial role as they do when it comes to developing a campaign strategy. Obviously, populist parties are privileged concerning the centralization of strategy development and strategy conducting, often regarded as a key element of successful political campaigning (e.g. Plasser and Plasser 2002; Strömbäck 2010). They have always and inherently focused on communicating externally with ‘the people’ and not on internal discussions. This focus usually unfolds as a ‘pro/con’ or a ‘good/bad’ strategy reflecting the two dimensions of inclusion and exclusion. The charismatic leader thereby serves as focal point between framing of closeness and comprehension towards the people (*inclusion*) and framing of the advocacy for the people’s concerns against the ruling establishment and perceived menaces (*exclusion*).

In sum, a populist communication style is characterized by simplified standpoints, primarily communicated through a charismatic, rhetorically skilled and supposedly credible character. Such an approach has to be perpetuated – during an election campaign and beyond – to have a lasting impact on potential voters and consumers. That includes permanent observation of contextual campaign dynamics (e.g. issue cycles, public mood, oppositional strategies, political decisions, etc.), which are essential for a cyclical process of readjusting and communicative implementing of product-related standpoints. In this campaign-related perspective populism as a

political marketing technique also requires continuous proactive communication efforts and the ability for short-term reactions. Once again, we assume that the organizational, leader-focused, hierarchical and lean structures (Taggart 2000: 102) of populist parties facilitate this process of continual modulations and quick reactions.

Phase 3 – election day and post-electoral times

Due to the pivotal importance of elections within liberal democratic systems and political markets, populist parties' success and acceptance is essentially measured in electoral votes: votes obtained for their product and counter-votes 'stolen' from established parties. Vote-seeking is the primary imperative of populist parties while most of their opponents strive for policy-making as well. That might explain why populist parties are extremely focused on electoral campaigns and why they tend to concentrate on short-term success instead of long-term sustainability. Therefore, political marketing's cyclical dimension (Lees-Marshment 2010: 8), i.e. the process of building up stable relationships with consumers, seems to be underdeveloped.

That explains both rapid uprisings and electoral successes of populist parties, and their abrupt disappearances (Heinisch 2003). In addition to that, populists' propensity to 'anti-communication', especially against competing political parties and the governing class, casts their potential for a pragmatic parliamentary oppositional role and, even more, for governing positions into doubt. Ironically, populists' electoral success therefore often stimulates their parliamentary disappearance at the next elections. The rationale behind this up and down with which populist parties are universally confronted is that parliaments inherently constrain politicians both with respect to policy standpoints and their communicative performances. Therefore, populists in parliament often become what they initially pretended to stand against: a part of the political elite. As a consequence, populist parties habitually tend to become less populist or even show a tendency to collapse as a result of internal frictions. However, there is one structural feature that impedes populist parties' rupture: namely, once again, a strong, internally undisputed, charismatic leader (Canovan 1999: 5) who takes the chance of an oppositional role to present himself and his party as solitary advocate of people's needs in parliament.

Such a strategy repeatedly malfunctions if transferred to governmental roles. At least in well-established democracies with multi-party systems and a politically independent press, long-term reigning populists are still exceptions that prove the rule (e.g. Italy's current prime minister Silvio Berlusconi). The lack of enduring success of most populist parties might, however, not only result from their disqualification and unwillingness to form coalitions with political opponents (and vice versa), rising frictions between pre-election promises and post-election performances and tangible deficits in political decision-making. It is, as we argue, not least a consequence of weak cyclical marketing efforts and populists' self-reduction to sales-orientation.

Contextual impacts on the applicability of populism as a political marketing technique

Although populism might be universally applied to any political markets, there are some intervening factors – beyond the political product itself discussed above – that have an impact on the probability of successfully relying on populism as a political marketing technique. Such factors are located both on the meso level of the political party involved and on the macro level, i.e. the 'environment' shaping the political market conditions. The latter ones primarily result from a country's (a) political system (including its institutional framework, electoral system and party system), (b) social and cleavage structure and political culture, (c) media system and journalistic

culture, and (d) situational contingencies (issue cycles, public mood, etc.). These contextual factors do not only affect political marketing orientations in general (Strömbäck 2010), but we assume that they also have a significant impact on the emergence and success of populist parties incorporating political marketing techniques.

When we first look at the meso level in particular, there are numerous factors that facilitate a party's turn to populism as a communicative, marketing-oriented strategy. As mentioned above, these factors root in a party's internal structure and culture on the one hand and its governmental and parliamentary role on the other hand. In short, political parties with a top-down structure and a leader-focused hierarchy are privileged to turn to populism.

Long-established political parties with clear-cut ideological profiles, deeply rooted in the cleavage structures of societies, are insufficiently flexible to turn to populism – even more so if they reflect rather (in a Western sense) left-wing, socialist or post-material positions which somehow contradict business-type practices of marketing (Kavanagh 1996).

Catch-all parties are less prone to use populist communicative strategies – which might alienate large portions of their prospective voters – than niche or clientele parties attracting specific voter segments.

As a consequence, young parties, lacking ideological burdens and expectations, with strong, internally undisputed leaders who publicly 'stand for' the party almost exclusively, and with a strong marketing or sales orientation (Lees-Marshment 2001), backed by sufficient financial resources, are most likely to turn to populist techniques. Even more so if they start from an oppositional, at best non-parliamentary position, which facilitates the use of attack strategies, undifferentiated simplifications and popular critique against 'the political class'.

With regards to the macro level, the most important factors facilitating populism are:

- *Candidate-centered democracies* (i.e. presidential and semi-presidential systems): a high degree of polarization and a weak fragmentation of the political party system supports the rise of populist actors. In such an environment with only small numbers of political competitors the probability of getting a spot on the political landscape is much bigger compared with already crowded, highly fragmented and extremely polarized party systems (Wring 2002; Strömbäck 2010: 20). However, there are some exceptions that prove the rule, such as Jörg Haider (FPÖ) in Austria, who managed to enter the political stage, backed by a clear-cut populist communicative strategy in a parliamentary system with proportional representation and a seemingly established and polarized multi-party system.
- Countries with strong traditions of a *subject culture*, i.e. societies with a dominating focus on the political output (achievements and performances of the political elite) and low levels of internal or external efficacy of the people (Almond and Verba 1963; Balch 1974) such as Austria, tend to be much more open to populists than participation or civic cultures. Ultimately, as recent victories of populist parties in the Netherlands or Belgium have shown, even post-industrial and democratically stable societies are not immune to rising populism, especially when growing skepticism towards established political elites and parties, declining partisanship and growing electoral volatility come together with strong national or regional sentiments and latent fears of being overrun by globalization or modernization processes (including rising immigration, unemployment, etc.).
- In liberal, highly *competitive media systems* (e.g. the US, UK), in which political actors are exceptionally urged to adjust to media logics, populist communication strategies would have a better chance to prevail than in democratic corporatist media systems (e.g. Germany) or polarized pluralist media systems (e.g. Spain). In such media environments governmental actors can directly control the media organizations (and sometimes even their coverage). In

addition to that, *television-oriented societies* (e.g. the US, Italy) tend to be more open to populist communicative strategies than newspaper-oriented societies (e.g. Scandinavian countries) because of the specific constraint of the audiovisual medium which asks – more than other media – for personalization, simplification, visualization and reduction (Mazzoleni *et al.* 2003; Mazzoleni 2008): the exact components of populist leaders' communicative strategies. With the advent of the Internet they have gained yet another audiovisual platform – independent from journalistic gatekeepers – which has been rapidly sprawling throughout society. As a consequence, it is likely that the dissemination of populists' thoughts will become easier in the future.

Populist political marketing in practice

To test the impact of each of such a broad set of party-related and environmental factors we rely on three case studies that cover not only three different geographical regions (North America, South America and Europe), but also three kinds of political cultures – respectively, three stages of democratization. The US is a long-established democracy and 'civic culture', Venezuela is an emerging, still unstable democracy and 'subject culture', and Austria is a relatively young, but fairly stable democracy, with a political culture somewhere between civic and subject. While the two American countries represent presidential systems, Austria is a parliamentary political regime (with a tendency to semi-presidentialism). Finally, with regards to media systems, these countries cover the whole spectrum from liberal (US), democratic corporatist (Austria), to polarized pluralist (Venezuela).

The US: the Perot phenomenon

In the US, the majoritarian electoral system has been an important obstacle to the establishment of a national populist party, as it has been for the emergence of other parties beneath the Democrats and Republicans. Populism has therefore always been located primarily on the individual level of candidates and not on the meso level of political parties, which are traditionally weak in the US. However, a recent exception to this was Ross Perot, an entrepreneur and self-made billionaire from Texas who ran as an independent candidate for president in 1992 and as frontrunner of his own Reform Party in 1996. It was above all Perot's electoral campaign in 1992 that caught public and academic attention (e.g. Post 1995). It had a direct impact on the campaign as a whole and especially on Bill Clinton's campaign and first presidential election victory. Ultimately, Perot's campaign affected and mobilized 18.9 percent of voters in a presidential system with two historically strong parties.

Perot's communication strategy in 1992 fitted perfectly into a time in which Americans were disillusioned with their political elite and frustrated after 12 years of Republican governance. Against this backdrop and respective market intelligence efforts, Perot repeatedly stressed his and 'the American people's' disaffection with the way the 'political class' exercised their political power (Black and Black 1994: 162). His anti-establishment discourse primarily focused on economic and financial policy issues that he claimed were urgent and needed action on. As a successful businessman he could present himself as a strong leader, who was indisputably competent in economic and financial affairs and thus capable to balance the national budget. Issue and candidate image were perfectly integrated into one message. In addition, Perot benefited from his politically fresh, aggressive, but rhetorically skilled appearance. This made it easier to enter free media platforms such as the CNN talk show *Larry King Live*, in which he announced his candidacy, presumably motivating Bill Clinton and subsequent candidates to enter this free media platform too.

Despite his personal wealth, Perot's campaign was effective in presenting him as in touch with ordinary people's needs and fears (inclusion) and against the ruling class (exclusion). This case illustrates the potential for populist marketing techniques even in traditionally 'closed', polarized electoral markets, and especially on the federal state level. His messages well reflected the growing dissatisfaction and cynicism among the people. However, Perot's campaign also stands for a rather sales-oriented approach, as it did not have an enduring impact, either for him or in the political landscape, as a market-oriented approach might have had.

Venezuela: populism as a presidential phenomenon

Populism in the Latin American context dates back to the 1930s and 1940s when the first populist leaders, namely Getulio Vargas (Brazil), José María Velasco Ibarra (Ecuador) and Juan Perón (Argentina), entered the political stage in response to deep-felt social and economic crises and political deadlocks (Coniff 1999: 7). Their early success, partly supported by military upheavals, was not least a consequence of not yet established democratic structures and missing democratic traditions. Since then, populism has remained an integral part and omnipresent phenomenon of Latin American politics.

One of the most prominent examples is the rise of a new 'anti-party movement' (Hawkins 2003: 1137) built around the figure of Hugo Chávez. Although the way in which Chávez came into political power in 1999 (military coup) cannot be considered related to any marketing techniques, the efforts that he has made to maintain and institutionalize his political power since then do meet the criteria. Hugo Chávez Frías undoubtedly comes close to what can be described as the epitome of a populist charismatic leader (Weyland 2003; Roberts 2003). Since the first day of his reign, his rhetoric has combined elements of an anti-elite discourse (against the economic elites within Venezuela) and an anti-system discourse (mainly directed against capitalism and US imperialism). In addition, he has repeatedly presented himself as an instrument ('the humble soldier') that will unselfishly fight for the rights of the people (he refers to them as 'el pueblo') in Venezuela and in other Latin American countries. Claiming to represent the voice of the people, Chávez has called several times for voter support in referenda that fundamentally target the institutional setting of the Venezuelan political system, including the annulment of the president's limited term of office and a strengthening of governmental rights. Although not all of these constitutional changes gained sufficient support, overall Chávez was successful in strengthening his own position as president. Accordingly, both national and international criticism about the democratic progress in Venezuela has been increasing (Hawkins 2003: 1156).

Chávez's popularity and three electoral victories have been based strongly on his capacity for gaining support and mobilizing voters in a kind of 'permanent campaign'. In that campaign, the political product, i.e. policies, promises and constitutional transformation, has been connected closely with the leader himself. It has been Chávez and a handful of his advisors who have designed the product and developed the campaign strategy that gained public support. In a political marketing sense, Chávez's approach has slowly turned from product orientation to sales orientation. There are three main factors that have facilitated his ongoing success:

- The political culture in Venezuela, as in many other Latin American countries, is rather subject-oriented and is not yet consolidated. Venezuelans traditionally ask for a strong state, they look for strong leaders, they are mainly focused on the political output and are seldom party-aligned (Lagos 2006; Dalton *et al.* 2007). As a consequence, the floor is wide open to charismatic, populist leaders.

- Chávez has successively expanded control over the most important media in Venezuela. Therefore, large, constant and mostly positive coverage has been guaranteed.
- Chávez's political record has been convincing due to enormous investment in social programs funded by earnings of the state-owned oil company.

In sum, Chávez's populism can be considered highly successful. The Venezuelan presidential system, media control, a sedated opposition and the country's political culture have simplified a product- and sales-oriented marketing approach for a strong leader. In such a democratically transitory and unstable context, clear-cut marketing orientation seems unnecessary and inappropriate.

Austria: the Haider phenomenon

In the European context, populism is a rather new phenomenon that emerged in the late 20th century as a result of an increasing number of constituents who no longer felt represented by established political parties (Taggart 2000: 73). The majority of the European neo-populist parties have taken rightist and often nationalist positions. This also applies to the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), one of the most successful and persistent populist parties in Europe ever. Founded in 1956, the FPÖ initially positioned itself as a protest party against the two catch-all parties, the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the conservative Austrian's People Party (ÖVP). Until the 1980s, however, the FPÖ's impact on Austrian politics remained marginal (Betz 1994: 11; Riedlsperger 1998: 32).

That changed substantially when Jörg Haider took over the FPÖ's leadership in 1986. He immediately started a process of rebuilding and centralizing the party's organizational structure. Lean and hierarchical structures, led by Haider himself and a handful of his loyal associates, made the introduction of modern political marketing techniques easy. Step by step, Haider transformed the FPÖ from a formerly product-oriented party to a market-oriented one (Lederer *et al.* 2005: 132). With regards to issue positions, Haider's FPÖ trusted in a variable mix of anti-establishment and anti-EU discourse in combination with nationalist-xenophobic standpoints. Haider, a young, charismatic and rhetorically skilled politician, set a new tone in Austria's political discourse. He was successful in presenting himself as advocate of the people, pointing out the most important socioeconomic and political grievances. A strategy of continuous, but unreckoned populist communication including simplifications and personal attacks finally led to the best result a populist radical right party in Western Europe could ever achieve (Mudde 2004): it was in 1999 when the FPÖ got 26.9 percent of the vote in the national elections, coming second (after the SPÖ) and entering into a coalition government with the ÖVP – an unprecedented event that caused national and international protests. In its governmental role, which was prolonged in 2002, the FPÖ had to readjust some of its original populist ambitions giving concessions to its governing partner, and it lost significant support in state and European elections. Finally, Haider and his associates separated from the FPÖ and founded a new party, the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) in 2005. While the FPÖ's new party leader, Heinz-Christian Strache, copied Haider's leadership style and market-oriented populist strategy, Haider received a last and unanticipated victory in the snap elections of 2008: the FPÖ gained 17.5 percent of the vote and the BZÖ – basically a leader-oriented, sales-oriented movement at that time – got 10.7 percent. However, just two weeks later Haider died in a car accident. Not surprisingly, this marked the beginning of the BZÖ's rapid disappearance from the political landscape, culminating in internal conflict between leading members in 2010.

In conclusion, the Austrian political environment turned out to be a fertile ground for the rise and enduring success of populist parties. Its political culture is still a mixture of subject and civic orientations, with strong xenophobic tendencies including a widespread aversion to the European Union. Those tendencies have become even more vivid in the 1990s due to the parallel processes of modernization and Europeanization (rising numbers of unemployed, immigrants, etc.). Relying on up-to-date market intelligence, a long-term strategy and a handful of professional marketers, the FPÖ has turned into a marketing-oriented party and it has been successful in filling the gap that the SPÖ and ÖVP left open (Kickl 2008). In doing so, Haider and Strache, two strong, charismatic and eloquent leaders, have put populist discourse on the political stage in Austria. A media system in which the tabloid *Kronen Zeitung* possesses a universally unique scope has alleviated this process. Today, it seems very likely that the FPÖ will hold its position as the third strong force and that the FPÖ's techniques of populist political marketing could serve as a role model for other populist parties in Europe.

Advice for practitioners

Although it is widespread, populism is still not a universally applicable marketing technique. It is a universally reoccurring, non-lasting phenomenon. There are numerous environmental factors that have to collude both on the macro level and on the meso level. Still, we assume that chances for populists are increasing, even in consolidated liberal democracies. There are three main factors that might facilitate a rise in populism: (a) people are departing from 'old-fashioned' political parties, instead opening themselves to short-term influences and convincing products; (b) fundamental changes in the media environment have just begun and in future rhetorically skilled populists will be able to reach consumers directly and interactively via hybrids of mass and new media (Mazzoleni 2008); (c) marketing strategies are becoming more accepted in politics, and political actors have started to look for approaches that have proven successful.

Populism has repeatedly turned out to be an efficient way to get the message out and to attract a notable share of voters. However, in most cases populism has been a short-term phenomenon and populists have failed to build up stable relationships with their supporters. We assume that such failures reflect the insufficient information held about potential supporters and their needs, the inadequate way in which cohesive and convincing political alternatives are developed and implemented, and – probably most important – the continuous effort needed in market orientation, self-reflection and evaluation. Thus, if we were to advise politicians on how to use populism as a political marketing technique, we would suggest starting with professional market analysis. As a next step, qualitative research (i.e. focus groups) might help to create the right 'products' and develop the most appropriate communication mix. A special focus should be placed on the political leader himself/herself – you simply need an internally undisputed and externally assertive politician with charisma and excellent media skills. Finally, as the Austrian case demonstrates, populist actors are able to build lasting relationships if they do not cease their activities on election day. Backed-up by market and opinion research, a continuing process of product readjustment has to be structurally guaranteed.

Impact on politics

An evaluation of the impact of populism as a political marketing technique depends on the political context on the one hand (i.e. the political system and political culture) and our understanding of democracy on the other hand. Taking the position of participatory or deliberative theory, populism must be considered dysfunctional, since it undermines equal participation of the people as well as rational discourse. Only the liberal, representative model of democracy, which

stresses the importance of intermediary forces such as political parties, would consider populism as a generally acceptable mode of political communication. In that sense, the effects of rising populism are ambivalent. On the one hand, it could spoil democracy and political culture, as it threatens not only established political parties but also public cultures of constructive controversy which are vital to any liberal democracy. On the other hand, rising populism might have a positive impact on politics: populist parties have always been an integral element of modern democracy and they are often seen as a necessary barb for competing political parties, which tend to readjust in response and thus move closer to people's demands more quickly (e.g. Decker 2006).

The democratic issue for the future will be whether populist parties move closer towards the market-oriented model and thus achieve longer-term success. Populists' adjustment to market orientation could prolong their existence compared with product- or sales-oriented populist parties. In the long run, we would argue, it is only market orientation that could guarantee lasting success for populist parties here too, particularly when control over the media is fading. After all, compared with 'old' democracies, populism is not only more accepted in most transitory societies, but it is also one of the biggest obstacles to democratization. Ultimately, it is this normative dimension for democratization and the people that has to be taken into account when we look at the spread of populism as a political marketing technique in the future.

The way forward

Although we assume that populist actors have been increasingly keen to adapt political marketing techniques, our assumption has been until now primarily based on single case studies. There is a major deficit in empirical analyses that would either longitudinally or cross-sectionally compare culture-specific variants of populism (e.g. Betz 1994; Mény and Surel 2002; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). This deficit becomes even more obvious when we look at populism from a political communications or marketing perspective. Therefore, our integrative approach is rather novel. To back our argument, some empirical research would have to be done. Such research should take the complexity of potentially relevant macro and meso variables into account. Thus, we need empirical studies that use a *most dissimilar design* when looking at the independent variables. Ideally, those studies would look at the dependent variable, i.e. the development and transformation of political communication of populist parties within and between countries. We are not interested in explanations for the rise and disappearance of populist actors, but we need to sharpen our understanding of the impact that communication matters have on populist parties.

Such empirical findings are indispensable when it comes to the practical applicability of our concept. Practitioners simply need reliable information about the conditions under which a populist approach to political marketing might ensure political success. They have to be aware of the risks with which successful populists are confronted, both politically and publicly. Therefore, we not only have to strengthen our empirical research in that field, but also our ethical and normative considerations. It will not be enough to provide practitioners with a 'how to do populism as political marketing technique' kit. What is also desperately needed are theoretical, ethical and normative discussions about the practical relevance of populists and their marketers' actions. We hope that this chapter has opened the field for further research and discussion.

Note

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