

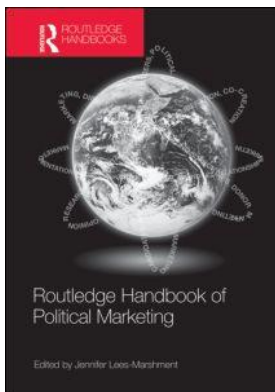
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Interacting leaders

Claire Robinson

The topic: interaction with leaders

For most people interaction with political leaders is not physically experienced. It is largely at a distance and mediated, generally through news and internet channels, but also through forms of advertising and by the opinions of others. While it would be ideal for every citizen to have a one-on-one relationship with their leader, this is difficult in contemporary politics. The greater the physical distance between an incumbent or aspiring head of government and others, the more likely it is that people's experiences of political leadership are influenced by what they see, hear and read about a political leader. How do people translate the messages they see, hear and read into attributes that enable them to form a judgment about a political leader? Bean and Mughan (1989: 1176) point to people receiving stimuli that trigger pre-existing mental images or schema of 'what a leader should be like'. To arrive at these schema 'voters abstract from their experience of past [leaders] those features and behaviors they associate with political success, and then evaluate other candidates with respect to these same characteristics' (Miller *et al.* 1986: 535). Leadership characteristics that have been found to matter to voters include effectiveness, trustworthiness, strength in leadership, attractiveness, likability, integrity, reliability, listening to reason, caring, sticking to principle and competence (Banducci 2002; Ballew and Todorov 2007; Bean 1992; Bean and Mughan 1989; Leathers and Eaves 2008; McAllister and Bean 2006; Miller *et al.* 1986). What is not widely understood, however, is how citizens arrive at assessments of competence or trustworthiness, for example, when so much of the stimuli they receive about a political leader or potential leader are messages about the state of their marriage, what brand of clothing they wear, or whether they cook and clean at home – personal, often trivial, information that on the surface has very little direct relevance to the qualities of leadership that matter. This chapter combines recent shifts in leadership theory with relationship marketing theory and research into nonverbal behavior and political persuasion to contextualize the importance of the leader image, defined here as the mediated presentation of a political party leader or leadership candidate. It offers a social interaction framework to contextualize how media audiences translate what is being observed in a leader image into a leadership judgment. The chapter proposes that leader image is fundamental to the offer, exercise and acceptance of political leadership in today's political environment.

Previous research

Over the past 40 years politics has become increasingly personalized. Television and other mass media changes including greater newspaper competition, tabloidization and the popularity of newer digitized forms of social networking have enabled the news media to give greater coverage and scrutiny to the appearance, behavior, private lives and narratives of political leaders and leadership candidates. Alongside this has been the rise to prominence of professional image consultants and brand strategists – people employed to manage the image of political leaders. Scholars have been increasingly worried that this ‘personalization of politics’ has become more important than ever before, to the point of taking precedence over principle, policy and the rational deliberation of objective information, in determining the outcome of democratic elections (Brader 2006; Dean and Croft 2009; Erickson 2008; Mutz 2007; Postman 1987; Street 2004). Despite the attention accorded leaders’ personal lives in the media, however, researchers have found that leadership personality factors are still not as significant an influence on voter decision-making as party predisposition and policy preference (Bean 1992, 2003; Bean and Mughan 1989; Hayes 2009; King 2002; Senior and Onselen 2008; Vowles and Aimer 2004; Poguntke and Webb 2005). Having said that, King’s (2002) study found that it is possible for even a small leadership effect to influence an election outcome in extremely close and competitive elections, and Poguntke and Webb found leader effects on voters significant and/or increasing in 11 out of the 14 countries examined in their 2005 study. Outside the campaign period leadership effects have the potential to inflict even more damage, with the public’s reported opinions of the traits and popularity of political leaders affecting leaders’ levels of support from within their own party. Over the past few decades, for example, a number of New Zealand and Australian party leaders (most recently Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd in 2010) have been ‘rolled’ by their own caucuses outside election campaign periods, with a decline in their personal popularity measured by public opinion polls often cited by caucuses as justification for the leadership change (Robinson 2009).

What does political marketing offer to this discussion? Where political leader image is discussed in the literature it is principally in the context of political marketing management (Henneberg and O’Shaughnessy 2007); that is, in relation to the processes and tactics political parties and strategists devise to satisfy voters. Leader image is regarded as part of the marketing mix, a ‘tool’ in the armory of political strategists (Kotler 1975; Lees-Marshment 2001; Newman 1999); a product controlled, packaged and styled to appeal to the electorate (Campus 2010; De Landtsheer *et al.* 2008; Scammell 1995; Smith 2009). Somewhat problematically, this concept of packaging implies that there is no intrinsic content in a leader image. This devalues the contribution that political marketing can make to an understanding of contemporary political leadership, a subject that is normally claimed for study by political science. Henneberg and O’Shaughnessy (2007: 21) have called for more theory and concept development in the area of leader image, writing that ‘political marketing can succeed with repackaging, repositioning, and makeovers ... but we lack a clear conceptual understanding of how this affects voters, the media and other stakeholders. Political marketing theory needs to address this issue and the specific impact that leadership perceptions have.’

Relational leadership

However, recent business leadership studies literature does provide a way to conceptualize the link between the political leader image and leadership judgment. For a long period leadership studies was dominated by the need to define the qualities and characteristics that business leaders

should have: the traits, behaviors, intelligences, skills and competencies needed to lead, and the extent to which certain leaders possess these qualities. While this shed light on the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘who’ of leadership, researchers and scholars have recently begun to question the ‘how’ – how leaders enact leadership behavior, and how those experiencing leadership recognize and judge leadership qualities from that behavior. Studies have focused on such areas as the practice of leadership (Carroll *et al.* 2008; Crevani *et al.* 2010), aesthetic leadership (Duke 1986; Hansen *et al.* 2007; Ladkin 2008; Smith 1996), relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006) and embodied leadership (Sinclair 2005). While nuanced differently (and there is not the space here to detail each area), there are commonalities in the way these researchers and scholars conceptualize leadership. There is a social constructivist view (Fairhurst and Grant 2010). They argue that the behavior of a leader does not constitute leadership until it is perceived to be so by a follower. That perception is generated in the interaction between people and a leader over time. There is a relational aspect to this interaction that will be embodied, experienced and/or sensed through communicative practices.

There are parallels between this conception of leadership and theories of relationship marketing (RM) and customer relationship management (CRM). The field of marketing has in recent times shifted to a greater appreciation of the relationship between suppliers and customers – equivalent to leaders and followers – as it recognizes that customers rather than suppliers determine the long-term worth of a product or service. According to these theories customers look to a supplier’s desire and efforts to enter into a relationship with them before they put their trust in, and make a long-term commitment to, that supplier, their product or the services they offer. It is the quality of interactions between customer and the supplier over time that determine the extent of a customer’s satisfaction with a product or supplier. Businesses that are alert to this put effort into the development of long-term relationships with existing customers, considering this to be of greater economic value than constantly chasing new customers (Aurier and N’Goala 2010; Finne and Grönroos 2009; Grönroos 1999; Gummesson 2008; Harwood *et al.* 2008).

What happens when these ideas are applied to political leader image and political leadership? Political leadership is more commonly thought of as a power, rather than a social relationship, so considering it through the lens of social interaction is a novel approach. However, social interaction provides a useful framework for appreciating the significance of the images that citizens are observing and from which they are generating leadership meaning. A cursory scan of leader images in any media channel will show that audiences are in constant exposure to images of leaders interacting with and relating to others: be it with a child, a partner, a voter, another politician, a celebrity, an official, a journalist, a photographer, a world leader, a competitor, an audience, party members, colleagues, or protestors. Most leader images also have a relational aspect, be it as friend, foe, guest, guide or messenger, and most images contain a sensed aspect: whether it be a leader listening to someone speaking to them, chairing a meeting, talking down the barrel of a camera to an audience at home, or shaking hands with people at a rally. Framing leader image in terms of social interaction enables evidence-based research into nonverbal behavior to be drawn upon to help explain how people relate their understandings of the rules and conventions of social interaction with political leadership schema when processing and negotiating meaning from leader images. The next section will set out a new framework, building on this literature.

New research – proxemic interaction framework

The framework presented here provides for analysis of the nonverbal messages conveyed by leader images. Nonverbal messages are the primary method by which relationships are communicated in the still or moving media image (Adler *et al.* 2007; Remland 2004; Surawski and

Ossof 2006). Recognizing this is an increasing body of research into the connection between nonverbal cues and political perception and decision-making, particularly the link between appearance-based trait inferences and voting (see Grabe and Bucy 2009; Olivola and Todorov 2010; Riggio and Riggio 2010; Stewart *et al.* 2009).

The framework is divided into four categories based on proxemic zones, or the distances people maintain between each other in social situations that signal their degrees of interest, involvement and attraction to others in Western cultures. Each of these spatial zones lends itself to the enactment or embodiment of different social behaviors and actions and each carries a distinctive set of meanings that people interpret using their understanding of the conventions of social interaction (Adler *et al.* 2007; Leathers and Eaves 2008; Remland 2004). The idea of proxemics was developed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1966). Hall identified four types of proxemic distance: intimate distance – beginning with skin contact and ranging out to about 18 inches (0cm–45cm); personal distance – defined as anything from 1.5 feet to around 4 feet (45cm–1.2m); social distance – extending from approximately 4 to 12 feet (1.2m–3.7m); and public distance – running outwards from 12 feet (3.7m). Hall's proxemic definitions were devised in the 1960s as a method of understanding relationships when people were in the same physical vicinity as each other. To apply them to the messages of social interaction presented by political leaders in a mediated environment, awareness of the actual physical distance between leaders and observers has to be suspended, and in its place a mimicry of interpersonal distance has to be applied. This is a phenomenon created by the moving or still camera shot length minimizing the actual distance between audience and presenter (Meyrowitz 1985). Once a mimicry of interpersonal distance is applied, it is possible to equate each proxemic zone with the social situations in which a Western political leader will be most commonly observed in mediated images interacting with people – in face-to-face, one-on-one, small and large group contexts.

In the section below the following questions are examined for each proxemic zone: How is the leadership message enacted nonverbally? Through what form of communication and media channel is the message transmitted? What is the mimicked interpersonal distance and role of the observer? How much control does a political leader have over their image? Between whom is the observed relationship? What is the leader's/strategist's intent? What are audiences looking for? How does this translate into a leadership judgment? What is the relative importance of this? Each proxemic zone is illustrated with an empirical example.

Intimate distance: face-to-face

How is the leadership message enacted nonverbally?

At face-to-face distance, the leadership message is most commonly conveyed in a close-up head and shoulders image of a leader making a direct appeal to the audience down the barrel of a still or moving image camera. Messages are primarily communicated through eye contact, appearance, clothing, facial expression and body posture.

Through what form of communication and media channel is the message transmitted?

The image may be found in a television address or election broadcast, a web video, social networking site, poster, billboard, newsprint advertisement, brochure, newsletter or book cover. In the 2010 British general election campaign, leader of the Conservative Party David Cameron

utilized the face-to-face address as his primary means of communicating with British voters in two of the party's five election broadcasts. He spoke direct to camera in a front-on head and shoulders camera shot. He wore a blue shirt with no tie and the top button undone, suggesting a conservative but relaxed and friendly nature. He was located in a tidy backyard with symbols of middle-class domestic aspiration – children's wooden play equipment and trees in blossom – visible in the background. He also utilized the direct address in videos posted on the Conservative Party website, under the heading 'webcameron', where he would pull aside from events on the campaign trail and talk to viewers about matters of the day (see www.conservatives.com/Video/Webcameron.aspx). It was a significant point of difference between Cameron and Labour leader Gordon Brown, who did not engage in any face-to-face address with voters in Labour's election broadcasts, and very little in any other social media.

What is the mimicked interpersonal distance and the role of the observer?

The actual distance is between the leader and the camera lens, and the transmitted/published image/screen and the receiver. The mimicked distance is directly between the leader and the audience in their homes or offices.

How much control does a leader have over their self-presentation?

Leaders and their media strategists have total control of the leader's appearance, words, setting, length of broadcast and choice of transmission channel.

Between whom is the observed relationship?

It is a direct relationship between a leader and individual members of an audience. At this distance the audience is both an active participant as well as an observer, which makes it harder for audiences to be detached.

What is the leader/strategist's intent?

To convey the leader's desire for an honest, friendly and trusting relationship with individual members of an audience (Messaris 1997). They want audiences to like them.

What are audiences looking for?

Subconsciously, audiences are looking for physical signs that establish whether a leader is benign. The more attractive the appearance of the leader, the less of a threat they are perceived to be.

How does this translate into a leadership judgment?

Researchers have found that people use appearance to make instant and instinctive trait judgments of politicians and that physical attractiveness exerts a major influence on impression formation, strongly affecting the personality traits and qualities that are attributed to people (Leathers and Eaves 2008). Attractiveness has a 'halo effect', causing observers to infer other positive behavior and personality traits like competence from a good looking political candidate (Ballew and Todorov 2007; Riggio and Riggio 2010; Surawski and Ossof 2006).

What is the relative importance of this?

While appearance is perhaps the most contentious aspect of personality politics because it attracts much public attention and has the least direct connection to issues or policy, it is not as influential on most people's voting behavior as is assumed. Researchers have found that, when faced with no information, when partisanship is weak and when voters are low involved, appearance may be used by audiences as a heuristic so that they can make instant and instinctive trait judgments of leaders. When an election becomes more controversial and contentious, however, and with greater voter involvement and partisanship, appearance becomes less important as an influence on voter behavior (Ballew and Todorov 2007; Miller *et al.* 1986; Riggio and Riggio 2010; Riggie *et al.* 1992).

Personal distance: one-on-one

How is the leadership message enacted nonverbally?

At personal distance relationships between political leader and others are manifest in one-on-one television interviews. The interviewer and leader will usually be facing each other, both at the same height. The background setting is usually visible. Camera shots are mid to close-up. Tone of voice, facial expression and hand gestures help carry the message.

Through what form of communication and media channel is the message transmitted?

Interviews may take place in a television studio, on a talk show set, or at a radio station; they may also take place in informal or stand-up press conferences. Interviews may be published on news media websites and may virally spread to blog and social networking sites. Edited versions will appear on television news.

What is the mimicked interpersonal distance and the role of the observer?

Individual members of an audience are normally at a substantial physical distance from the event (except for members of a live studio audience). However, they will observe a relationship enacted at personal distance between interviewer and leader.

How much control does a leader have over their self-presentation?

At this distance there is substantial media framing of context, and control over timing of broadcast. Leaders and strategists have little control over interviewer attitude, production and editorial decisions, which camera shot is used, what is edited in and out, and what happens to the media clip after publication. They do have control over the leader's appearance, verbal and nonverbal responses to questions. They also exercise control over acceptance of interview and interviewer, time, location and subject areas for discussion, and will often agree to interviews when it suits their longer-term objectives. In July 2010 US president Barack Obama agreed to appear on *The View*, a US daytime talk show broadcast on ABC. This was the first time a sitting US president had appeared on a daytime talk show. Obama presented himself as relaxed, and engaged in much friendly banter with the female presenters. It was a strategic move on Obama's part, who needed to re-engage with a demoralized US public dealing with the

aftermath of the BP oil crisis, the worsening of the situation in Afghanistan and the faltering US economy. It became the most-watched episode ever, with 6.59 million viewers, and the most watched telecast of any daytime show on ABC, CBS or NBC (Buckman 2010).

Between whom is the observed relationship?

Despite the interaction taking place between leader and interviewer, the relationship that conveys the meaning is between the leader and the viewing audience.

What is the leader/strategist's intent?

The leader wants the audience to consider them as relaxed, credible and knowledgeable about the subject matter, prepared for difficult and unpredictable questions. Leaders sometimes invite interviewers into their homes to demonstrate their affinity with the lives of ordinary people.

What are audiences looking for?

Audiences are looking for reassurance that the leader is able to select appropriate coping behaviors in a situation they do not ostensibly control (Stewart *et al.* 2009). As they observe interviews over time people will look for signs that the leader is able to retain a sense of balance and awareness of appropriate behaviors, despite the pressures of office.

How does this translate into a leadership judgment?

Assessments of a leader as socially aware lead to judgments of strength in leadership, sticking to principle and competence (Stewart *et al.* 2009).

What is the relative importance of this?

After the direct address, one-on-one interviews are any leader's primary means of communication with a mass audience. While audiences may learn a lot about a leader in a single interview, and may find a leader's characteristics on that day endearing or appalling, the overall impact or relevance of the interview is a longer-term phenomenon. The more an audience is exposed to leader interviews, the more familiar they will be with the leader's body language, verbal language and facial expressions. As time goes by leadership judgments are more likely to be based on signs of change from the norm – out-of-character behaviors and responses that might signal a lack of coping with the responsibility of leading the nation.

Social distance: small group

How is the leadership message enacted nonverbally?

At social distance leadership is enacted in images of political leaders meeting with small groups of people: usually family, members of the public, staff, colleagues, supporters and other leaders. The small group could number anything from one to ten, depending on how many people can fit within the camera frame. Leadership will be communicated through the leader's use of hand gestures (like handshaking, waving), physical contact (patting a shoulder or knee, hugging, kissing), and facial expressions (smiling, laughing together, frowning) (Bucy and Grabe 2008; Knapp and Hall 2006).

Through what form of communication and media channel is the message transmitted?

The mediated image will most commonly be a full or three-quarter body camera shot, most commonly transmitted in a still image in a newspaper, on a media website, on a party or social networking website. It could also be in a political campaign advertisement, or on the television news.

What is the mimicked interpersonal distance and the role of the observer?

Audiences are observers of a relationship enacted between leader and small groups of people.

How much control does a leader have over their self-presentation?

Leaders and strategists have significant control of appearance, verbal and nonverbal behavior; who and where the leader meets people; who is permitted to photograph or film them and from which angle; and which images are published on their own party websites and advertisements. Leaders do not have control over editorial choice of which image or clip or part thereof is used by a news outlet or what happens to the media clip after publication. They do not have control over the response of some of the people they meet.

Between whom is the observed relationship?

On the face of it this is a relationship occurring between leader and people in small groups, but this is still very much a presentation of themselves for evaluation by their more distant audience.

What is the leader/strategist's intent?

The leader wants to convey their ability to have empathy, to relate socially to and to care for others.

What are audiences looking for?

Humans are instinctively primed to look for caring body language to assess whether a leader is friend or foe. They are seeking reassurance in a leader's ability to relate to 'real' people. Touch becomes an important signifier of this.

How does this translate into a leadership judgment?

Small group relationships communicate important information about a leader's affinity with and orientation towards people. These assessments translate into judgments of caring, likability, trustworthiness and effective leadership (Riggio and Reichard 2008), compassion and benevolence (Grabe and Bucy 2009).

What is the relative importance of this?

Images of leaders interacting at small group distance are important for the communication of a leader's ability to relate to real people. Although strategists like to control these situations, it is the

gaffes and unscripted moments that often convey more meaning: when the leader meets someone on the campaign trail who says something unexpected, when they make an inappropriate gesture, when someone throws something at them. In the 2010 British election campaign, a television station caught then Labour leader Gordon Brown with his microphone still on, in his car, calling a member of the public a ‘bigoted woman’ after a chat on camera in the street, surrounded by a large media entourage. Brown visibly crumpled, head in his hands, when he learned of the gaffe as he was being filmed taking part in a live interview at a radio station later that day. Although the British media described the episode as a disaster for Brown, Labour’s percentage vote did not decline further as a result of this particular incident. While some observers would have seen his behavior as duplicitous, others would have appreciated that the ‘real’ Brown was simply expressing his frustration at having to regulate his behavior in a situation in which he had been tested by someone with whom he did not have empathy.

Public distance: large group

How is the leadership message enacted nonverbally?

At this distance leadership messages are conveyed in images of public events like leaders’ debates during an election campaign, and large public meetings, to which audiences choose, are invited or pay to attend. Camera shots move between long range, at which members of the audience are seen, and medium close-ups on the speaker.

Through what form of communication and media channel is the message transmitted?

Debates will be televised and streamed live on television and internet news sites. Public meetings will be covered in news stories or included in campaign advertising.

What is the mimicked interpersonal distance and the role of the observer?

Camera length of shots and angles will mimic the point of view of a viewer actually attending a live event. Audiences at home have the added benefit of being able to see close-up camera shots of leaders that live audiences may not see in detail. In a debate, the audience’s role is not as benign observer. Audiences at home are active participants judging the competition.

How much control does a leader have over their self-presentation?

Leaders and strategists have significant control over the clothes leaders wear, the tone and manner in which they deliver an address, the setting and presence of cameras. In a debate they have control over their self-presentation and acceptance of the debate format. They will have advance knowledge of question themes and will have rehearsed their performance, but they will not always know in advance the precise questions asked. They will not have control over the actions and responses of the other debaters, nor of the audience.

Between whom is the observed relationship?

In public addresses the relationship observed is between the leader and the live audience. In debates the relationship observed is between a leader and their competition.

What is the leader/strategist's intent?

In debates leaders want to communicate that they have the confidence and strength to fight off any 'pretenders to the throne'. Ultimately they want to be judged the debate winner. In public addresses the leader's intent is to communicate their popularity – that they have the charisma to attract and control a large group of followers.

What are audiences looking for?

Debate audiences will be looking for signs of how leaders respond to threat from a competitor; who handles a complex and stressful social confrontation the best (Baker 2009; Leathers and Eaves 2008) in a situation where there is a live audience and nowhere for the leader to hide. In the 2008 US presidential debates Obama, on the whole, demonstrated better control over his nonverbal responses to threat than his Republican rival Senator John McCain. Summarizing this in a post-debate analysis on CNN, communications coach Bill McGowan explained:

what you've seen from [Obama] in the first two debates is no great risk-taking, no big chances he's taken. I think he's played it pretty safe, he's not trying to fix what's not broken, and what I think he's done extremely well is, when he's under attack from Senator McCain he's sat very serenely, very placidly on the front of his chair, not twitching, not fidgeting, not wincing, not scribbling notes, but looking him directly in the eye with a confident look on his face. He has seemed really unflappable under attack ... Obama has a strategy on what to do physically when he is under attack.

(CNN 2008)

How does this translate into a leadership judgment?

Presentation of a confident self in relation to competition directly influences assessments of credibility, strength in leadership (Leathers and Eaves 2008; Remland 2004), competence, character, composure and sociability (Seiter *et al.* 1998 cited by Remland 2004).

What is the relative importance of this?

Relationships are not always benign. They can also be threatening. Just as people make trait assessments from the direct address about whether a leader is going to be a personal threat, they also want to know if the leader can be trusted to protect against threat to themselves and others. Being judged as not coping with threat, manifest in assessments of who lost a political debate, can be very damaging to someone's political leadership aspirations.

Advice for practitioners

Recognize that enacting leadership behavior requires a leader to relate and be seen to relate to people

Leader image is much more than simply packaging. It is fundamental to the establishment and maintenance of a relationship between leader and people, which is necessary if people are to put

their trust in, and make a long-term commitment to that leader or their party in today's mediated political environment. It is through the leader image that most people experience leadership, and recognize and judge leadership qualities. Political parties will increasingly need to select leadership candidates for their ability to sustain meaningful interactions with publics.

When relating to people, ensure that all proxemic zones are covered

As social beings audiences are attuned to reading social behavior in all proxemic contexts. The more the leader is seen to relate in each context, the broader and deeper the leadership impression will be. Leader images at intimate distance convey information about whether the leader is a personal threat; at personal distance leader images demonstrate the leader's ability to relate to another, allowing observers to choose whether they, too, want a (mediated) personal relationship with that leader; leader images at social distance convey the leader's ability to relate more widely to and care for others; and public distance images allow audiences to gauge how well the leader is able to fend off challengers, and assess whether they have the skills to overcome threats and become leader. Leaders need to demonstrate their ability to relate to people in all four proxemic zones, in a wide variety of media contexts, in order to be accepted by as wide an audience as possible.

This is a long-term phenomenon

To be properly appreciated the expression and impression of leadership needs to be considered as something that builds over time and is experienced in a wide variety of contexts, not simply in election campaigns. Those who consult on leaders' images need to accept that their task is a long-term process to create and maintain a positive relationship between leader and people over time, rather than see it in terms of singular events and the use of certain tools. As leaders become busier with the business of running countries, they tend to become less focused on being seen out and about. It is a gift for challengers because they can present themselves as being more 'in touch'.

Don't try to control everything

Ironically, the greatest barriers to leaders benefiting from the meaning that audiences attribute to leader images are their own strategists. So aware are they of the importance of their employer making a good impression that they spend a large amount of time trying to avoid a leader being seen in contexts that cannot be controlled easily. The more the leader image is managed, the more audiences will look for signs of the 'real' leader in the way they respond to unmanaged moments. If the commitment to the relationship is not genuine, the public will read this in their nonverbal behavior, and shift their attention to a candidate or party that is showing more desire for a relationship.

Don't worry about the odd gaffe

The reality is that gaffes are rarely sustained, and peoples' deeper impressions of political leadership are not formed over a single incident, or even a few. The longer audiences are exposed to the behavior, careers and personalities of political leaders and leaders in general, the more likely they are to appreciate single incidents in context – the incidents may be amusing, unusual, embarrassing even, but not always terminal to the protagonist's career.

Impact on politics

Critics of political marketing will need to reassess the relative importance of what they are observing in the media, so the next time a leader changes their hair color, goes on a daytime talk show, or uses a social networking site it can be better appreciated in the context of the exercise, perception and acceptance of political leadership as a longer-term phenomenon, and not as something heralding the end of democracy and rational choice, or as a symptom of the dumbing down of politics!

The way forward

Further cross-disciplinary research should combine marketing theory with recent leadership theory to enable a broader discussion about political leadership, and increase the value that a marketing perspective can make to a subject normally considered as belonging to the more established field of political science. The relationship concepts discussed here could be taken further into the study of social media. Facebook and Twitter, for example, are newer vehicles for the communication of a social relationship at intimate or personal distance. Observation to date suggests that these channels are not well used to sustain relationships once a leader is incumbent, so there is un-mined potential for the study and practice of relationship-building in social media spaces.

Practitioners are advised to prepare for further predicted technological changes in large-format, high-definition (Bucy and Grabe 2008), 3D and eventually holographic in-home media display systems. Relationships that are currently perceived at a tele-mediated distance will soon be perceived through immersion in an experience that realistically and intimately mimics an embodied relationship between political leaders and individual citizens. Expressions and impressions of a relationship enacted between a leader and others are going to become more, not less, important as time and technology march on. This will not enthuse scholars and commentators, who think that there is too much emphasis on personality politics already in the media. However, the potential for new technologies to lessen the physical distance between leader and others is far reaching.

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