

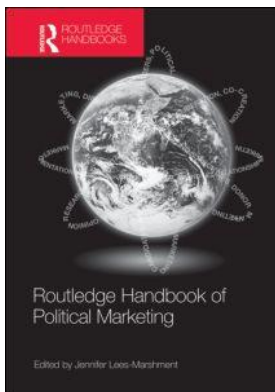
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 11 Dec 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

Underused campaigning tools

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203349908.ch21>

Nigel A. Jackson

Published online on: 10 Nov 2011

How to cite :- Nigel A. Jackson. 10 Nov 2011, *Underused campaigning tools from:* Routledge Handbook of Political Marketing Routledge

Accessed on: 11 Dec 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203349908.ch21>

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.

Underused campaigning tools

Political public relations

Nigel A. Jackson

The topic: public relations

The use of public relations (PR) enables the sender of a message to identify who to target, how to reach them and the appropriate message. It therefore constructs persuasive messages, enters into dialogue and builds relationships to raise interest in a product, organisation or idea. Political PR is not restricted to promoting a specific political product, but also includes building and maintaining positive relationships with key audiences. It can include developing dialogue, considering the receiver of the communication, raising interest in a candidate or party, and managing reputations. This chapter will outline a model of political PR and explore to what extent it was used during the 2010 UK general election at local candidate level. We will then suggest how it could be developed, assessing the broader potential of PR to create more positive long-term relationships between government and the public.

Previous research

Public relations is a well-established discipline in its own right, but Strömbäck *et al.* (2010) suggest that previous references to it in political marketing do not fully understand the concept. Where political marketing has addressed political PR, it has largely done so by equating it primarily with media relations (Gaber 2000; Esser *et al.* 2000; Xifra 2010). The focus on spin and media management (Heffernan 2006), suggests that the role of public relations is merely to gain visibility, and hence relegates it to a minor short-term tactic. A more useful approach is to divide public relations into marketing PR (MPR) and corporate PR (CPR) (Moloney 2006). MPR is the view of political PR outlined above, namely to gain visibility by using, for example, media relations, pseudo-events and events management to gain attention for what political actors have to say (Brissenden and Moloney 2005). This is a legitimate use of PR, but one that is narrow, tactical and short term. CPR supplements political marketers' use of MPR, because it is much more strategic, longer term and seeks to influence corporate reputation (Fombrun 1995) through tools such as issues management, crisis management and internal communication. Whilst there is a considerable body of academic work on the meaning and use of public relations in general, there is very little on how it applies to the political sphere.

Previous research has only explored a rather narrow conception of PR in the political sphere, hype and persuasion, with the latter the single most popular, with broader concepts such as relations in public and community building being largely absent within political PR literature. For example, Xifra (2010) interviewed the professional communicators for Spain's political parties and identified two key findings in their use of public relations. First, respondents stressed the tactical nature of their work, relying on MPR techniques. Such one-way, publicity-led tactical communication was, Xifra found, consistent with Grunig and Hunt's (1984) press agency model. Second, the other model that his respondents reflected was personal influence. This might imply a relational approach, but it did not because their focus was primarily with journalists. Both findings reflect that his respondents, all paid employees, viewed media management as their prime job. This chapter seeks to address this omission by creating a broader conceptual model of the tools or approaches that can be used in politics, drawing on non-political PR literature, and then testing it empirically.

New research: political public relations conceptually and in practice

Conceptual framework: a new model of political public relations

A number of definitions of public relations exist, with Harlow (1976) identifying 472, yet the meaning of political PR has attracted far less attention. Indeed, a number of authors have used the term political PR without actually defining it (Davis 2000; Strömbäck *et al.* 2010). Whilst media relations is stressed (Moloney and Colmer 2001; Froehlich and Rudiger 2006), some authors have attempted to construct a useable meaning of political PR. Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011) suggest that as a management process, political PR aims to shape relationships with key publics to help achieve political goals, so that Jackson (2010) notes that political PR reaches a much wider range of audiences than political marketing. Political PR presents the views of political actors to other political publics in a positive light. It does so by raising awareness, engaging in dialogue and building relationships.

To assess how political actors might use political PR, we shall apply Jackson's (2010) theoretical framework based upon eight different possible approaches (Table 21.1). To create a model of effective political PR we will identify and evaluate core concepts within this framework, using four features: purpose; tools used; where applied; intended effect.

Relations with publics

Public relations is about the relationship that political elites have with their publics, and thus public relations practitioners should identify, reach and manage the relationship with their key audiences. They can apply situational theory, to seek to identify who and why will be active communicators seeking information, and therefore more likely to respond to messages received (Grunig 1997). One obvious example of this situational-type analysis is market research, and political marketing literature has shown how political parties have increasingly sought to collect data on voters through polling and focus groups (Lees-Marshment 2001). The use of polling was believed to have helped re-position Clinton in 1994 (Worcester and Baines 2006), and make the UK Labour Party electable in 1997. Research can also be used to ascertain voter response to an existing position, so that Sherman and Schiffman (2002) suggest that in the US 2000 election this was not so much parties researching their key audiences, as trying to make sense of what the electorate were thinking and their likely voting behaviour.

Table 21.1 Model for effective political PR

<i>School of thought</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>PR tools used</i>	<i>Application</i>	<i>Intended effect</i>
<i>Relations with publics</i>	Identify, reach and communicate with key audiences. The management of relationships between an organisation and its publics.	Research – the focus is not on the PR tools but matching the most appropriate message to the correct segmented audience.	To support all forms of PR activity, both strategic and tactical.	To use finite resources efficiently and effectively. Neutral in terms of effect on wider society.
<i>Grunigian paradigm</i>	Mutual understanding. Mutual benefit?	Symmetrical two-way communication based upon feedback.	Research-focused. Relational. Strategic.	Win-win. Develop conversations. Encourage a strategic approach to PR. Inclusive culture (internal and external). To benefit society as well as the organisation.
<i>Hype</i>	Reaching consumers by 'making a noise' through publicity.	Media relations. Online PR.	MPR. Getting bums on seats. Press agency.	Increase awareness. Increase sales. Short term. Benefit essentially the organisation.
<i>Persuasion</i>	To inform and then change attitudes and/or behaviour.	Media relations. Promotional campaigns. Lobbying. Community affairs/ CSR. Issues management. Uses both logic and emotional messages.	MPR – tactical CPR – strategic.	To represent an interest. To inform the wider public. To primarily benefit the organisation, but logic-based campaigns may also benefit wider society.
<i>Relational</i>	Develop influential relationships. Mutual benefit.	Target key influencers. Build networks. Personal interaction. Sponsorship. CSR. Online PR. Media relations. Lobbying. Corporate communications. Quanxi.	Issues management. Crisis management.	Long-term benefits. Build reputation. To benefit wider society as well as the organisation.

Table 21.1 (continued)

<i>School of thought</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>PR tools used</i>	<i>Application</i>	<i>Intended effect</i>
<i>Reputation management</i>	Manage corporate image, brand and reputation. Shape public opinion.	Corporate communications. Investor relations. Lobbying. CSR. Community affairs. Issues management. Crisis management. Media relations. Online PR.	CPR – shape all audiences’ perspectives of an organisation.	Build reputation. Create competitive advantage. Enhance profitability. Ensure long-term survival. A side-effect of enhancing reputation may be benefits for wider society.
<i>Relations in public</i>	Relations in the public (sphere) and of the public (sphere). Encourage a free flow of information to society. Development of the public sphere.	Issues management. Internal communications. Persuasion based on negotiated connection between audiences. Boundary spanning role. Uses both communication and relational tools.	Strategic – internal and external communications (but probably not customers). Business ethics.	Increase the public sphere. Free flow of information. Encouragement of freedom of speech. Minority opinion is heard. Reflective.
<i>Community building</i>	By helping to create a broad sense of community, this in turn benefits organisations.	Concept of ‘general public’. Interaction. Community affairs. CSR. Issues management. Two-way symmetrical communication.	To subjugate interest and segmentation to enhancing community. Globalisation. Multicultural societies.	Enhancement of a communitarian approach. Increased social capital. Improved commercial sector within a more stable community.

Grünigian paradigm

PR can also be used to establish mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics (Newsom *et al.* 2000), and also, to create mutual benefit (Grünig and Hunt 1984). This involves not so much communicating to the public, but developing dialogue. Despite the dominance in the generic PR literature of the Grünigian paradigm, there is as yet limited evidence of dialogical PR in politics. The one exception is the internet (Jackson and Lilleker 2004).

Hype

Hype is perhaps the most commonly known aspect of public relations, creating publicity that makes ‘noise’ through media relations to generate interest and therefore reach consumers. As

a result, it is mostly associated with unethical ‘press agency’, but the internet can be another means of gaining publicity through viral marketing, as can MPR. Hype can help increase the visibility of products (see Grunig and Hunt 1984; Xifra 2010), but without it having to be simply spin, which attracts criticism (see Esser *et al.* 2001; Heffernan 2006).

Persuasion

The purpose of persuasion is to reach, inform and then change the attitudes/behaviour of key audiences, and to make it effective, practitioners consider the source of the message, the message itself and the personality of the message receiver (Perloff 2004). Persuasive techniques and messages need to be ethical to be distinguished from propaganda (Messina 2007). Whilst clearly political actors seek to use rational argument to persuade, there is evidence that they use a much wider range of persuasive techniques. Many political messages are couched in emotional terms. Indeed, Westen (2007) suggests that the emotional side of the brain is more influential in determining voting behaviour than the rational side. Within a plural system, political actors use persuasion to represent an interest.

Relational

Public relations can also be used to build relationships with key, influential stakeholders (see Ferguson 1984) to help build the reputation of an organisation (Ledingham and Bruning 1998). This approach is often used by pressure and lobbying groups who seek to influence government policy (Kovacs 2001). A relational approach, by maximising ideas, contacts and political ‘muscle’, can be the means by which individual activist groups become part of the policy community. It could also be used by government, political parties and individual politicians.

Reputation management

This approach focuses on identifying, managing and changing the reputation of an organisation. Whilst it is a rather intangible concept, it could have a tangible effect (Fombrun 1995; Griffin 2008). In politics, political parties that have lost a series of elections often turn to reputation management as the solution to their problems. Studies of political market orientation and campaigning have observed how the UK Labour Party, for example, sought to repair its image, which could be seen as reputation management (Lees-Marshment 2001). Having lost four elections, Wring (1998) suggests that the Labour Party developed new policies and organisational reforms to make it electable by changing its corporate reputation. Individual elected representatives also seek to develop their reputation (Negrine and Lilleker 2004), driven by a belief that it may help develop a personal vote, and so buck any national voting behaviour trends. Reputation management may be particularly useful in politics where there is crisis, scandal and delivery problems.

Relations in public

The historical background to this approach is discussions in the 18th and early 19th centuries concerning political representation. This European approach, therefore, is consistent with pluralism (Ihlen and Van Ruler 2007), and is closely associated with the concept of the public sphere (Vercic *et al.* 2001). The purpose of relations in public is to encourage the flow of

information within society, and consider relations within the broader public sphere (Ruler and Vercic 2002). There are few examples of this in politics.

Community building

Community building is about creating and maintaining a sense of community, and enhancing and improving society by reducing conflict (Kruckeberg and Starck 1998). There is limited evidence that political PR has been used to encourage community building. Taylor (2000) noted that media relations was used to assist relationship building between groups and individuals within Bosnia. She suggests that media relations, by encouraging a free press and debate, can help developing countries to build civil society. Thus, so far at least, the ability of public relations to build political communities seems to be more one of potential than actuality.

These concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and political actors could apply several at the same time. Considering the literature on political PR, only some of the approaches have been applied to public relations activity within the political sphere. The two most dominant approaches, in terms of amount of literature, are hype and persuasion, with the latter the single most popular. Four of the approaches appear to occupy a political niche: relations with publics, Grunigian paradigm, relationship management and reputation management. These four approaches tend to be applied for either specific purposes, or to meet the needs of those who have limited political power and influence. Two approaches – relations in public and community building – are largely absent within political PR literature.

Empirical application: political PR in practice in a local campaign in the UK 2010 election

In terms of methodology, a pilot study was conducted during the 2010 UK general election of parliamentary seats in the county of Devon. Interviews of prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) were conducted from July to September (see the list of interviewees at the end of the chapter). There were 75 candidates standing in the 12 Devon seats, and Table 21.2 shows that the 14 interviewed, representing just over one in five of the total, reflected a range of factors. The sample was slightly weighted towards the bigger parties and marginal seats. Marginality was decided using Finer *et al.*'s (1961) percentage of majority model, where seats were divided into those that were safe (11 percent of votes over the next highest candidate), near-marginal (5.1 percent to 10.9 percent) or marginal (5 percent or under). The interviewer was unable to arrange interviews with any of the candidates from the English Democrats (1), British National Party (5), Communist Party of Great Britain (1), and Socialist Labour Party (2). This did limit a little the ideological range of parties, but in all cases none of these candidates generated enough votes, or had a presence, to effect either the campaign or its results.

The data were operationalised using Jackson's four features: purpose; tools; application; intended effect. Factor analysis was applied to respondents' communication objectives, communication channels used and impact on their campaign.

Purpose of communication

Not unsurprisingly, two approaches appear to dominate: hype and persuasion. Several candidates made reference to gaining visibility or making noise. For example, Peter Milton, challenging to

Table 21.2 Breakdown of sample interviewed

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Incumbent	3
Conservative	3
Labour	5
Liberal Democrat	2
Green	2
United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	1
Independent	1
Marginal	5
Near-marginal	1
Safe	8
First	3
Second	5
Third	2
Other	4

Note: Devon Central, a new seat, was based on the notional 2005 result provided by ukpollingreport.co.uk.

win, said ‘This reflects the belief, especially in close run contests, that reputation of the candidate may have an effect’. Luke Pollard used noise to help another candidate: ‘I wanted to use symmetric communications as much as we could to make noise, and to appear bigger than we were. We wanted to detract some Conservative activity moving into Linda Gilroy’s seat’. A theme common to most interviewees, irrespective of whether they could expect to win the seat, was the desire to win votes. Therefore, candidates tried to persuade voters to actually vote, and then to choose them. For example, Oliver Colville, who beat the incumbent MP, noted that ‘I had to communicate with the electorate in order to give them a reason to vote for me’. Persuasion was not just to external audiences, but also to motivate activists, so Darren Jones wanted ‘to build up a local organisation’. Essentially, candidates sought to gain attention as an important component in persuading people to vote for them.

After hype and persuasion, the next most used approach is reputation management, where several candidates suggested that they wanted to promote particular aspects of their character. Typical of this was that candidates wished to stress that they were local, so, for example, Vernon Whitlock noted that ‘our communication was primarily about promoting myself as someone who was born and bred in the local area, and understood local issues’. Similar sentiments were also stressed by John Underwood, Peter Milton, Luke Pollard and Gary Streeter. The three incumbents all stressed the amount of constituency work in which they had engaged during the previous five years or more. There was limited evidence of both relations with publics and the Grunigian paradigm. Whilst it may be inherently implied that candidates will seek to identify, reach and manage their relationship with their publics using finite resources, this was not mentioned overtly by the sample. In terms of identifying and reaching publics, candidates seem to have divided these into two different types. First geographically, so that they would focus on particular wards, towns or villages in the seat, usually where their strength was. Second they focused on voting behaviour, for example Alison Seabeck commented that they ‘wanted to reach out to core Labour support’, though it is worth noting that Labour candidates reflecting that they represented the incumbent government were more likely to focus on their core vote. Some candidates were also aware of publics in future elections, so that Lydia

Somerville focused her efforts in two target wards for the 2011 local county council elections: 'so I was trying to find out how many people would vote for the Green Party'. The purpose of communication for candidates was weighted towards being heard rather than listening.

Tools used

We might expect that if the tools used are indicative of hype and persuasion, media relations might dominate. In fact, all candidates believed that the two most important means of communication were knocking on doors and putting leaflets through doors, suggesting little evidence for hype. The next level of tools, but lagging far behind, was the internet and media relations; moreover, there was a consistency of view on face-to-face communication and leaflets, which was not the case with the second-level tools. Some candidates, typically in the more rural seats, where the local print media showed an active interest in the campaign, did invest time and effort in media relations. However, an almost equal number, especially in the suburban and urban seats with different local media, did not. Similarly, candidates' use of the internet varied from the pioneers, such as Luke Pollard, Linda Gilroy and Peter Milton, through to the laggards, including two who did not even have a website. Candidates relied upon a small range of channels that they could control.

Given the focus by candidates on direct communication, the two most commonly found approaches were the Grunigian paradigm and persuasion. All candidates knocked on doors or telephone canvassed, but this was especially important for those hoping to win, do better than in 2005 or build up their strength in targeted areas. For example, Phil Hutton's parliamentary agent believed that his candidate knocked on 9,000 doors during the four weeks of the campaign. Although canvassing might appear a form of opinion polling, it inherently encourages two-way symmetrical communication. As Alison Seabeck notes, it is 'about finding out ... people's voting intention, what issues are important to them'. Luke Pollard made such sentiments central to his campaign: 'the message (on the doors) was we are here and listening'. Indeed, all of the candidates who invested time in knocking on doors recounted examples of in-depth, two-way conversation. At a far lesser level, the internet encouraged some interaction, but candidates suggested that this was essentially at the margins. For example, a typical response of those using Facebook was from Darren Jones, who stated 'a lot of people on this were family and friends, but it did help me engage with some people'. Similarly, Twitter does not appear to have encouraged significant levels of mutual understanding, so that Colin Matthews said: 'I tweeted on issues I thought were interesting, and hoped would build up dialogue. But they did not lead to much dialogue, which was disappointing'. The levels of interaction encouraged by canvassing, and to a lesser extent the internet, were inherently persuasive as candidates tried to get core voters to vote, or undecideds to vote for them. Indeed, Linda Gilroy appeared to suggest that her key role was a persuasive one: 'the job of the team was to work across the constituency and to get our voters to turn out on the day. My role was to speak to the swing voters'. Dialogue was at the heart of candidates' campaigning; the difference was whether this encouraged mutual understanding, or sought to 'sell' the candidate.

Hype is at best the third most identified approach, reflecting the fact noted above that media relations and the internet were a secondary channel. There was evidence of relationship building from most candidates prior to the campaign. For example, when selected, Oliver Colville deliberately sought to have a presence with the civic and business community in his local church, the local professional rugby club and a yacht club. Yet, once the election campaign

began such targeted relationships were less important, whereas number of individual voters contacted mattered. Labour candidates tended to build relationships with those within trade unions and local community groups. All of the serious candidates who were running an active campaign, as opposed to ‘paper candidates’ (candidates who although they may do some work locally, are by and large standing just so that the party has a presence), also sought to build relationships with local print journalists. Only one respondent – Colville – explicitly made reference to relationships during the campaign, but we can assume that it was based on work beforehand.

There is evidence of relations with publics amongst only a few candidates, such as Luke Pollard, Oliver Colville and Linda Gilroy. The last two used software (Mosaic) to identify possible supporters, though with more financial support from headquarters Colville probably made the most use of it. Prior to the election Pollard conducted surveys to identify where best to focus his efforts, and as a result changed his target both geographically and socially. Reputation management can be inherently assumed to be present and we return to this shortly, but in terms of communication tools the main evidence is that of internal communications to mobilise supporters and activists. There is virtually no evidence for relations in public and community building.

In terms of the six tools we identified that might indicate either an MPR or CPR approach, there is very limited evidence. Of the three MPR tools on which we focused, only media relations is a common tool, but even here only six of the respondents took an active approach and sent out press releases. Most waited for the media to contact them. Whilst all candidates attended hustings (where all the candidates are brought together in one meeting to discuss their policies and answer questions from members of the public), organised by local civic groups, very few organised events themselves during the actual campaign. One held a rally in a local shopping centre and several had candidate launches for party members, intended to raise funds. Only Dr Steven Hopwood appears to have given a high priority to events, when he arranged a number of public meetings. This probably reflects the fact that as an Independent he had no party organisation. Only two appear to have constructed pseudo-events designed to gain media coverage. Lydia Somerville paddled in a canoe to canvass some constituents as a photo opportunity, and Dr Hopwood ‘stormed’ the local castle to launch his campaign, and gained considerable local media coverage. In terms of CPR, there is no overt evidence of either issues or crisis management, though we note the importance of reputation management. All the party candidates viewed their internal audiences as very important; this was especially the case with those who needed to mobilise volunteers for leafleting and canvassing.

Application

If we assume that ‘strategic’ includes seeing the bigger picture and putting each individual campaign in context, then there is some evidence for it. For example, the two Green Party candidates were clearly following national party strategy in two key areas. First, their messages deliberately stressed non-environmental issues, because the party was less well-known for these. Second, following the party’s Target to Win strategy, both focused their efforts in target wards for local elections in 2011. Several candidates, irrespective of their result in 2005, saw this campaign as part of a much larger one. For example, Jonathan Underwood, in second place, wanted ‘to build up our strength for future campaigns’. There is also clear evidence that Gary Streeter, Luke Pollard, Darren Jones and Peter Milton had half an eye on the effect of their campaign on another key target seat, with at least three sending helpers to campaign in nearby seats. Conversely, if

'tactical' means focusing on immediate issues of vote winning, then clearly this was the norm for all candidates, as it effectively comes with the territory. All candidates appear aware of tactical issues, and most also considered strategic issues.

There is some evidence of MPR, in terms of seeking to get their voters out, so Oliver Colville was typical when he stated: 'our first priority was to identify who our supporters were, and then the second priority was to get them out to vote'. However, as noted above, few candidates relied upon press agency high-visibility tactics. There is evidence of CPR in terms of trying to manage overall reputation. This was fairly obviously the case with those hoping to win, so that incumbent Gary Streeter noted:

the reputation of Gary Streeter PLC is very important to me. I think I know what it is, that I am local, works hard, is a committed Christian and people know what this means in terms of principles and he gets things done.

Reputation was also important to other candidates, so challenger Phil Hutty commented that, 'as a candidate there is a lot of pressure as the face of the party'. Candidates also sought to tackle long-held images of their party, so Lydia Somerville said: 'I do think that people tend to label the Green Party, and have this view of sandals and beards. So I wanted to address this'. This implies that party candidates believe that their own personal reputation impacts voting behaviour.

Overall, the level of activity amongst our sample appears weighted towards the tactical and MPR, yet a number of candidates also took a strategic and CPR approach. Overall, this suggests evidence of relations with publics, persuasion and probably the strongest being reputation management, and there is less evidence for hype and the Grunigian perspective. Whilst clearly an election campaign encourages participation and may support enhanced communities, there is very limited evidence of relations in public and community building. It could be argued that Dr Hopwood's whole 'outsider' campaign was based on ethical objectives which would enhance communities, but only Darren Jones, when he mentioned in his election address that he wanted people to vote whether for himself or not, might be taking an overtly ethical approach.

Intended effect

The two strongest approaches are hype and persuasion. All candidates clearly seek to raise awareness of themselves and their policies; this is an inherent component of being a candidate. They certainly all want to gain votes and although several, as noted above, have long-term goals, all are concerned with the immediate campaign. Whilst all candidates would argue that their policies would ultimately benefit society, they view the impact of their communication primarily in terms of the benefit for themselves and their party, not wider societal concerns. We can assume that candidates are largely concerned with using finite resources effectively, implying some use of relations with publics. Several candidates view reputation management as providing them with a competitive edge. It is arguable that within a pluralist society candidates' use of direct communication (leaflets, canvassing and the internet) does help to increase information within the public sphere, though this may only be at an individual not a community level. There is no evidence that social capital will be enhanced. The intended effect is on candidates' own campaigns, rather than any wider questions affecting the body politic.

Conclusion

Political PR essentially represents an interest, but it also encourages a rich interaction at a range of different levels between those active, interested or even uninterested in political discourse. As Figure 21.1 shows, the data support existing literature that there are three categories: the dominant, the niche and the unused. Far and away the dominant approach is persuasion, which is either the single strongest or in the strongest group on each of the four features. This suggests that candidates view elections as essentially a battle in which there is one winner, and so political PR is

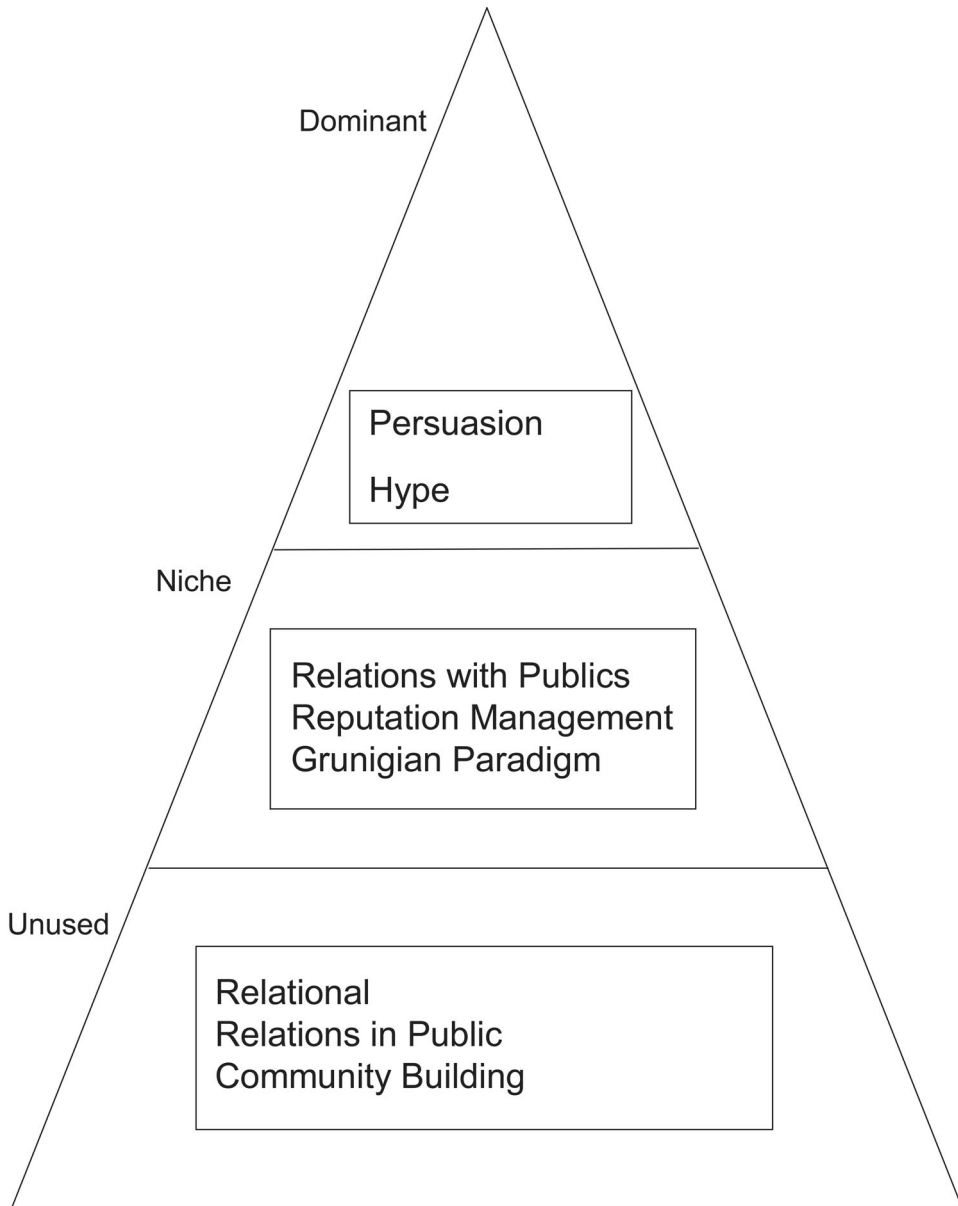


Figure 21.1 Political PR hierarchy

used to support one interest at the expense of another. Just below persuasion is hype, which is clearly limited by the fact that media relations plays less of a role at a local as opposed to a national level. The second niche level is relations with publics, the Grunigian paradigm and reputation management. There is evidence that candidates seek some understanding of their audience, but respond with asymmetrical communication to enhance their brand. The third grouping, with very limited evidence, is the relational: relations in public and community building. However, it would be too simplistic to suggest that candidates use only one approach. It could be argued that relations with publics and the Grunigian perspective by focusing on the needs of the audience is the direct opposite of the persuasive. Yet there is clear evidence that candidates follow a number of different strategies and these may appear contradictory.

The data suggest that at a local level politicians have an awareness of the value of CPR. With an absence of a reliance on mass media channels, local politicians have to be more adaptive in how they reach their audiences. Hence, they appear more likely to use a wider range of approaches. They use MPR, but are also aware that some CPR approaches, especially reputation management, open up a space that they control in which they can reach voters. The enhanced use of direct communications at a local level has two effects. First, it changes the nature of persuasion as it is primarily one to one, rather than one to many. Second, it also encourages candidates to consider a wider range of approaches. Local candidates may be leading national campaigners in their application of political PR.

Xifra's (2010) sample at a national party level, encompassing a narrow role and with limited freedom of action, leads to very different conceptual findings from our data. There may also be a cultural and political difference between Spain and the UK. A more local nature, during elections and with politicians who are effectively their own boss, leads to a much broader and strategic use of political PR to reach a wider range of audiences directly. This suggests that our understanding of political PR will be shaped, to some degree, by the nature and role of the sample, the characteristics of the political and electoral culture and systems they inhabit, and the political context. However, we can assume that there is common ground between both samples, in that they view political PR as essentially persuasive.

Advice for practitioners

Our model of political PR, although essentially descriptive of current practice within a narrow set of political circumstances, may provide political practitioners with a template. The model suggests two key lessons which might direct political actors' communications behaviour. First, whilst they may rely on a particular approach, they would be wise to supplement this with a niche strategy which might add to any dominant approach. Second, we suggest that the hierarchical structure identified within the confines of this research project will be different within different political contexts. In an election situation candidates and political parties may well be advised to focus on using PR to present their campaign in the best light in a primarily monologic way. In such a situation the purpose of political PR is essentially to provide information and persuade. However, between elections the same actors would be better advised to use political PR in a very different way, in encouraging long-term dialogue. Political PR would then utilise more interactive two-way communication as with relationship building and the Grunigian paradigm. For governments, political PR also offers a range of opportunities based on purpose. Where governments try to build support for their policies, then the relational and dialogic approaches should be dominant, to build-up support for policies. This implies that governments should encourage, listen and respond to such feedback. However, once governments are seeking to implement agreed policies where the purpose is to inform and bring about changes in behaviour, then persuasion and hype

should be dominant. By using the appropriate dominant and niche strategy at the right time, political actors are more likely to gain political support at key times, and at the same time avoid unnecessary crisis.

Impact on politics

Political PR used by prospective parliamentary candidates is primarily persuasive in nature, reflecting their need to gain competitive advantage. It provides politicians with a means of reaching, and sometimes interacting with, citizens and voters in a range of different ways. Political PR encourages political actors to reach a wider audience including internal audiences, competitors and even those not necessarily overtly interested in politics. As a result, candidates recognise the value of combining both the tactical (MPR) and strategic (CPR) uses of public relations. Political PR is perhaps more capable of presenting the human side of politics than political marketing alone. Where political marketing tends to use MPR as a means of shouting in a loud voice, political PR can also use CPR to effectively apply a 'softer' approach to communication.

The impact of political PR, then, is centred upon a human face to politics, namely understanding the impact of policies on individuals, and then knowing how best to communicate this. We would suggest that most politicians are unlikely to fully follow the political PR model. They may in the context of elections, but potentially lack the sophistication to switch approaches to non-election situations. Political PR is not then a single rigid model; rather it can help politicians consider what is the appropriate communication approach in different situations. Using the right combination of political PR approaches may not just help win elections, but also potentially encourage better governmental decisions and ultimately build trust in politics.

The way forward

This is a small exploratory project designed to test a new conceptual framework. As such, there are limitations to the project. First, it was of a small sample, and a much wider one geographically would open up new data. Second, it focused at the local level, and a comparative with national-level strategies would provide a clearer picture. Third, it was conducted during the 'wartime' of an election campaign, and the results in 'peacetime' may well be different. This might explain the slightly surprising fact that the relational approach played such a limited role, as might addressing other political actors such as pressure groups. Fourth, although an initial comparison was made with existing data from Spain, a comparative study is required across political and electoral systems. Further tests of the model are required to apply it to different political situations such as policy development and implementation, different countries and at different levels. However, overall this project suggests that political actors, in trying to reach key audiences both during peace and wartime, should make greater use of political PR.

Bibliography

List of interviewees

- Colville, Oliver (2010) British Conservative Party MP, Plymouth Sutton and Devonport. Interviewed 9 August.
- Gilroy, Linda (2010) British Labour Party, Plymouth Sutton and Devonport. Interviewed 7 September.
- Hopwood, Stephen (2010) Independent, Totnes. Interviewed 19 August 2010.
- Hutty, Phil (2010) Liberal Democrat, Devon Central. Interviewed 17 August 2010.
- Jones, Darren (2010) British Labour Party, Torridge and West Devon. Interviewed 10 August 2010.

- Matthews, Colin (2010) British Green Party, Devon Central. Interviewed 29 July 2010.
- Milton, P., private correspondence, 7 September 2010.
- Pollard, Luke (2010) British Labour Party, Devon South West. Interviewed 13 August 2010.
- Seaback, Alison (2010) British Labour Party MP, Plymouth Moor View. Interviewed 26 July 2010.
- Somerville, Lydia (2010) British Green Party, Totnes. Interviewed 11 August 2010.
- Streeter, Gary (2010) British Conservative Party MP, Devon South West. Interviewed 30 July 2010.
- Underwood, Jonathan (2010) Liberal Democrat, Tiverton and Honiton. Interviewed 30 July 2010.
- Whitlock, Vernon (2010) British Labour Party, Tiverton and Honiton. Interviewed 17 August 2010.
- Williams, Hugh (2010) UKIP, Devon South West. Interviewed 15 July 2010.

Academic references

- Brissenden, J. and Moloney, K. (2005) 'Political PR in the 2005 UK General Election: winning and losing with a little help from spin', *Journal of Marketing Management* 21, 9–10: 1005–20.
- Davis, A. (2000) 'Public Relations, News Production and Changing Patterns of Source Access in the British National Media', *Media Culture & Society* 22, 1: 9–59.
- Esser, F., Reinemann, C. and Fan, D. (2000) 'Spin Doctoring in British and German Election Campaigns: how the press is being confronted with a new quality of political PR', *European Journal of Communication* 15, 2: 209–39.
- (2001) 'Spin Doctors in the United States, Great Britain and Germany: metacommunication about media manipulation', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 6(1): 16–45.
- Ferguson, M. (1984) 'Building Theory in Public Relations: inter-organisational relationship', paper presented to Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, FL. August.
- Finer, S., Berrington, H. and Bartholomew, D. (1961) *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons, 1955–59*, New York: Pergamon.
- Fombrun, C. (1995) *Reputation: realizing value from the corporate image*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Froehlich, R. and Rudiger, B. (2006) 'Framing Political Public Relations: measuring success of political communications strategies in Germany', *Public Relations Review* 32, 1: 18–25.
- Gaber, I. (2000) 'Government by Spin: an analysis of the process', *Media, Culture and Society* 22, 4: 507–18.
- Griffin, A. (2008) *New Strategies for Reputation Management*, London: Kogan Page.
- Grunig, J. (1997) 'A Situational Theory of Publics: conceptual history, recent challenges and new research', in D. Moss, T. MacManus and D. Vercic (eds) *Public Relations Research: an international perspective*, London: International Thomson Business.
- Grunig, J. and Hunt, T. (1984) *Managing Public Relations*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Harlow, R. (1976) 'Building a Public Relations Definition', *Public Relations Review* 2, 44: 34–42.
- Heffernan, R. (2006) 'The Prime Minister and the News Media: political communication as a leadership resource', *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, 4: 582–98.
- Ihlen, O. and Van Ruler, B. (2007) 'How Public Relations Works: theoretical roots and public relations perspectives', *Public Relations Review* 33, 3: 243–48.
- Jackson, N. (2010) 'Political Public Relations: spin, persuasion or reputation building?' paper presented at the Political Studies Association annual conference, Edinburgh.
- Jackson, N. and Lilleker, D. (2004) 'Just Public Relations or an Attempt at Interaction? British MPs in the press, on the web, and "in your face"', *European Journal of Communication* 19, 4: 507–34.
- Kovacs, R. (2001) 'Relationship Building as an Integral to British Activism: its impact on accountability in broadcasting', *Public Relations Review* 27: 421–36.
- Kruckeberg, D. and Starck, K. (1998) *Public Relations and Community: a reconstructed theory*, New York: Praeger.
- Ledingham, J. and Bruning, S. (1998) 'Relationship Management in Public Relations: dimensions of an organisation–public relationship', *Public Relations Review* 24, 1: 55–65.
- Lees-Marshment, J. (2001) *Political Marketing and British Political Parties*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Messina, A. (2007) 'Public Relations, the Public Interest and Persuasion: an ethical approach', *Journal of Communication Management* 11, 1: 29–52.
- Moloney, K. (2006) *Rethinking Public Relations*, second edn, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Moloney, K. and Colmer, R. (2001) 'Does Political PR Enhance or Trivialise Democracy? The UK general election 2001 as a contest between presentation and substance', *Journal of Marketing Management* 17, 9–10: 957–68.

- Negrine, R. and Lilleker, D. (2004) 'The Rise of a Local Media Strategy in British Political Communication: clear continuities and evolutionary change 1996–2001', *Journalism Studies* 4, 2: 199–211.
- Newsom, D., Turk, J. and Kruckeberg, D. (2000) *This Is PR: the realities of public relations*, seventh edn, London: Thomson Learning.
- Perloff, R. (2004) *The Dynamics of Persuasion*, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Rose, R. (2008) 'Political Communication in a European Public Sphere', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, 2: 451–76.
- Ruler, B. and Vercic, D. (2002) *The Bled Manifesto on Public Relations*, Ljubljana: Pristop Communications.
- Sherman, E. and Schiffman, L. (2002) 'Political Marketing Research in the 2000 U.S. Election', in B. Newman and D. Vercic (eds) *Communication of Politics: cross-cultural theory building in the practice of public relations and political marketing*, London: Haworth, 53–68.
- Strömbäck, J. and Kioussis, S. (eds) (2011) *Political Public Relations: principles and applications*, New York: Routledge.
- Strömbäck, J., Mitrook, M. and Kioussis, S. (2010) 'Bridging Two Schools of Thought: applications of public relations theory to political marketing', *Journal of Political Marketing* 9, 1/2: 73–92.
- Taylor, M. (2000) 'Media Relations in Bosnia: a role for public relations in building civil society', *Public Relations Review* 26, 1: 1–14.
- Vercic, D., Ruler, B., Butsch, G. and Flodin, B. (2001) 'On the Definitions of Public Relations: a European view', *Public Relations Review* 27: 373–87.
- Westen, D. (2007) *The Political Brain: the role of emotion in deciding the fate of the nation*, New York: Public Affairs.
- Worcester, R. and Baines, P. (2006) 'Voter Research and Market Positioning: triangulating and its implications for policy', in P. Davies and B. Newman (eds) *Winning Elections with Political Marketing*, New York: Haworth Press, 11–32.
- Wring, D. (1998) 'The Media and Intraparty Democracy: "New" Labour and the clause four debate in Britain', *Democratization* 5, 2: 42–61.
- Xifra, X. (2010) 'Linkages Between Public Relations Models and Communication Managers' Roles in Spanish Political Parties', *Journal of Political Marketing* 9, 3: 167–85.