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PACKAGING POLITICS

by

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Abstract

Packaging Politics

by

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The United States, with its early consumerist orientation, has a lengthy history of drawing on similar techniques to influence popular opinion about political issues and candidates as are used by businesses to market their wares to consumers. *Packaging Politics* looks at how the rise of consumer culture over the past 60 years has influenced presidential campaigning and political culture more broadly.

Drawing on interviews with political consultants, political reporters, marketing experts and communications scholars, *Packaging Politics* explores the formal and informal ways that commercial marketing methods – specifically emotional and open source branding and micro and behavioral targeting – have migrated to the political realm, and how they play out in campaigns, specifically in presidential races.

Heading into the 2012 elections, how much truth is there to the notion that selling politicians is like “selling soap”? What is the difference today between citizens and consumers? And how is the political process being transformed, for better or for worse, by the use of increasingly sophisticated marketing techniques?

***Packaging Politics* is dedicated to my
parents, Russell & Nancy Galloway &
to my professor and friend Jack Citrin**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Politics, after all, is about marketing – about projecting and selling an image, stoking aspirations, moving people to identify, evangelize, and consume.

- Ellen McGirt, *The Brand Called Obama*

Packaging Politics

While there is no doubt that the term “packaging” originated in the consumer realm, the United States has a long history of drawing on techniques used by businesses to market their wares to consumers in order to influence popular opinion about political issues and candidates. *Packaging Politics* looks at the historical development of a trend: how techniques from consumer marketing have influenced presidential campaigning and political discourse over the past sixty years. We also look at several contemporary manifestations of the trend, including:

Emotional Branding – which attempts to speak to people’s emotions or desires rather than their rational/conscious minds.

Open Source Branding – designed to make the consumer / citizen feel a part of the product / politician by allowing them to be involved in branding from the ground up.¹

Database Driven Targeting – whether in politics or the consumer world uses sophisticated databases that store a wealth of personal information about people and generate specific, detailed “profiles” used to target them in a variety of ways

Behavioral Targeting – which tracks individuals’ online behavior, gathering information about them and then communicating messages back that reflect their perceived interests/inclinations.

Drawing primarily on a systematic set of interviews with dozens of political consultants, marketing experts, political reporters and communications scholars - as well as on secondary literature - I explore these central questions:

How and when have trends and techniques that evolved in the consumer realm migrated to the political sphere?

What are some of the conditions – cultural, economic, demographic, and technological – that paved the way for these migrations?

How have some of the most prominent of these trends and techniques played out in contemporary campaigning - specifically in presidential races?

Are there implications of trends and techniques born of the consumer world for electoral politics and democratic discourse? If so, what are they?

As evidenced by Joe McGinnis's 1969 book *The Selling of the President*, packaging politics is an idea that has been around for quite a while.² Eye opening though it may have been for much of America when McGinnis detailed the modern television-driven presidential campaign and its reliance on consumer advertising techniques, the notion of "selling" a candidate – sometimes referred to as "political marketing" – was not a new concept.³ Consumer advertisers and marketers were turning their attention to political candidates as early as the 1920s. Sigmund Freud's nephew Edward Bernays, dubbed the father of American public relations, is one prominent example.⁴

The first so-called political consultants, Clem Whittaker and Leone Baxter, operated Campaigns Inc. in California beginning in the 1930s, pioneering extensive scripting and packaging of campaign messages, and working for both political and corporate clients. By nearly all accounts though, television, "the atom bomb" of electoral politics, led to the greatest surge in consumer marketing's influence on presidential campaigning. In the 1950s and '60s, with television's centrality to the political process becoming increasingly evident, many Madison Avenue advertising agencies accustomed to selling consumer goods and services on television began moving into the business of selling candidates. The politician - soap analogy was already in play during the Eisenhower Stevenson campaign of 1952, when Stevenson famously claimed that presidential candidates were being sold like "breakfast cereal" - a development he referred to as the "ultimate indignity to the democratic process."⁵

While Stevenson was among the first to bemoan the escalating influence of consumer marketing techniques on campaigning, he was far from last. But how seriously should the public take this well-worn concern that our politicians are little more than packaged products? If we accept that there is at least some measure of "packaging" involved in presidential campaigns, is it more prevalent or sophisticated now than it was at the dawn of the television age? And if so, what are the implications?

The Aim of this Project

The aim of *Packaging Politics* is to advance our understanding of some of the ways in which, since the birth of TV, consumer marketing techniques and trends have influenced political campaigning and political discourse in the United States. I argue that over the last sixty years, consumer marketing has increasingly influenced electoral politics, and that certain techniques and trends adapted from the consumer realm have been especially influential. I also consider the conditions that have paved the way for that influence, including demographic, economic, cultural and technological shifts leading to, for example, less face to face campaigning between candidates and citizens; an ever rising tide of money in electoral politics; shifting campaign structures and agents

of influence; and evolving cultural norms and expectations – specifically the dominance of the consumer vis a vis the citizen for the better part of the past 35 years and the implications those shifts had for how people understood themselves in relation to each other, their elected representatives and society as a whole.⁶

While the main empirical focus of this project is descriptive: the goal to understand what prominent consumer trends and techniques migrated to the political sphere over the past sixty years, when and how they migrated, and how they became embedded within the electoral realm - the project is animated by questions of implications: whether and how various forms of targeting and branding we look at here are likely to yield “good” versus “bad” decision-making in the political sphere or to facilitate or hinder democratic discourse or other forms of democratic engagement.⁷

While coming to concrete, empirically verifiable conclusions about implications is beyond the scope of this project, implications questions nonetheless inspire and motivate the research. Thus a key component of *Packaging Politics* is thinking through existing literature on democratic potential and decision making and considering how the electoral process is affected by marketing techniques born of the consumer realm. We turn to some of that literature now.

Democracy: A Contested Ideal

What constitutes (or should constitute) democracy has been disputed for thousands of years. Democratic theorists have spanned the range in terms of their perceptions of the democratic potential of average people and what sort of participation or engagement in government citizens should ideally have. At least as old as Socrates, the question of what democracy should be / look like / consist of is as hotly contested as ever.

Founding political myths tend toward the tidy and unambiguous, and one of the most storied is Athenian democracy. Among the Greek democracies of the era, Athens was best known for its robust democratic participation - its citizens' deep engagement with political affairs, from membership in assemblies and participation in often lengthy and nuanced discussions and debates, to serving on courts and taking the just application of the laws seriously, to Athenian democrats' storied capacity for equanimity and calm in the face of something as potentially volatile as direct democracy.

While the birth narrative of the United States has also been idealized over time, mapping the course to American democracy was clearly a complex and at times deeply disputed process. For those attempting to hammer out a vision of a new society and political structure in the immediate aftermath of revolution, liberty and equality were concepts both sought and feared. While some architects of the new democratic society felt that individual citizens and/or states should have strong, self-deterministic voices in national government – that the government should be no more than a reflection of the people and their interests – others felt that the government should be strong and somewhat independent, and should be able to guard against, as James Madison put it, “oppressive majorities taking over the reigns of power” and squashing individual liberties.⁸ “Ambition,” Madison argued “must be made to counteract ambition.”⁹ Thus

the founders had to negotiate a tenuous and sometimes conflicting collection of democratic ideals and aspirations as they worked to construct a new democracy.

One prominent perspective on democracy comes from economist Joseph Schumpeter. In his 1942 classic *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* Schumpeter argues against the archetypal “classical model” of democracy, disavowing its central premise: that direct democracy is likely to lead to the realization of the common good. Schumpeter argued that it was unreasonable to assume that a society could come to a consensus regarding what constituted the common good and - even if it were able to cohere – that it would be near impossible to agree on the means of achieving it. Schumpeter also recast democracy as a system of candidates putting themselves forth for consideration and vying for votes (as opposed to citizens being directly involved in governing or even in the selection of candidates). The minimalist democratic structure, for which Schumpeter owed a great debt to Max Weber, appealed to the economist because it seemed akin to a rational market model. In this Schumpeterian conception of democratic society the vigorous citizen participation that typified classical democracy all but disappeared.¹⁰

At essentially the other end of the spectrum on the question of whether there is value in citizens being more meaningfully engaged in governance is French political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau, who lived and wrote in the 1700s, argued that the formal (one person one vote) variety of democracy was akin to slavery while only egalitarian democracies (including individual-level political education, engagement, deliberation and decision making) have political legitimacy. Rousseau’s ideal society was thus characterized by broad and deep attention to, engagement with and education related to the political sphere - with citizens who would think nothing other than deep involvement with political life being and self-governance were possible.¹¹

I proceed with various democratic conceptions in mind, but on these I am not agnostic. I believe that the allure of democracy versus other political systems derives largely from key arguments in support of it: that in democracies decisions might be better informed for having a broad and diverse range of perspectives; that engagement with the democratic process may enhance citizens’ critical capacity and moral/ethical character; that by engaging with others in a broad public discussion people are likely to think more rationally and carefully than in other forms of rule and that, by being engaged in this broad public conversation, citizens will be acculturated to think beyond narrow self-interest to the common weal.

Together these arguments in support of democracy begin to approximate the sort of political culture or model, (albeit amorphous) that I will refer to as “robust democracy” throughout the project – a democratic conception that I consider preferable to some other models with much more restricted roles (or, depending on framing, less onerous roles) for citizens. And while I do not subscribe to the notion that there is a perfect democracy that can be chiseled and defined in every theoretical or empirical detail nor that there is some ideal or archetypal democracy of the past that we should aspire to recreate, I do believe that robust democracy stands in stark contrast with more anemic or impoverished versions of democracy present where a typical citizen has no time for political nor public life, but might occasionally vote in a presidential election and only

bother engaging with politics otherwise as a means of looking out for his personal material self interest. With the self-interested politically disengaged consumer citizen as the alternate (and even without) I will argue that robust democracy is by far the more inviting horizon toward which to move.

Robust Democracy: Habermas & the Public Sphere

A 20th century model that has something in common with Rousseau's vision of vigorous, participatory democracy is reflected in German theorist Jurgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere. According to Habermas the public sphere is composed of arenas where matters of mutual / public interest and concern are discussed and, where possible, common judgments are formed.

Contemporary political communications scholar Philip Howard elaborates on Habermas' conception by making clear that the spaces or arenas for public conversations to take place are not in themselves enough -- the conversation itself must take place. For a valuable conversation to be born out of the public sphere, Howard points out, there must be some genuine communal / political / social ground work involving ways of experiencing collective cultural / national identification as well as some shared text / measure of cultural / national identification. While the common identification need not be the transcendent feature of citizens' identities, writes Howard, it must compose enough of their identity to experience a sense of overlapping/shared interest.. Howard argues that essential to a healthy public sphere as well are shared texts / sources of information on which to base public discussions and debates.

Economic Theories of Democracy: Rationality Under Constraint

Much foundational work on electoral behavior has tended to cast voters as rational if constrained (by competition for their time, attention, etc.). A fair amount of thinking within political science about how politicians and citizens behave derives from economic theories of democracy that have tended, on balance, to reject classical notions of democracy with their calls for more informed, engaged citizen participation and the expectation that the "common good," would or should be a sought after outcome for the citizenry.

Instead economic theories tend to perceive political outcomes as more or less analogous to market share, emphasizing self-interest (more or less narrowly construed) as the primary mover of political actors.

The concept of the economic theory of democracy came from Anthony Downs, who penned a tract by the same name in 1957.¹² Downs argued for a rational calculus for voting that has inspired much later research.¹³ Perhaps best known for the concept that a rational voter should almost never bother to vote Downs, and many after him, have argued that politics can and should be understood primarily through the lens of economics. Such economic notions rest on a conception of citizens as lucid actors in the political marketplace who will tend to choose candidates closest to their policy positions.

To be clear, Downs did not claim that political views, behaviors and choices could be entirely reduced to a strict market model. While neither Downs, Schumpeter or other prominent thinkers connected to economic models of democracy (Robert Dahl or V.O. Key, for example) believed elections provided policy mandates - that did not mean they viewed outcomes as irrational or unpredictable. For while several theorists squarely inside or closely associated with economic theories of democracy readily acknowledge that political actors have less than perfect information (not knowing what the future will hold so voting based on the past, being driven at times by emotion, strategic voting or “throwing the rascals out” for example) outcomes could still be based on group relationships, past performance, party loyalty or other factors that may lead to “rational” outcomes.

Thus while Downs acknowledges constraints on political decision-making, he still views voters as essentially rational (in the self-interested and strategic sense – voters don’t spend their lives thinking about politics and so use shortcuts where they can to make political choices that suit them). These shortcuts did not indicate ignorance on the part of voters – on the contrary. Downs thought people could make good guesses about what served their interests by simply paying attention to party policy packages – positions, he argued, that were likely to get people reasonably close to what they might choose with full information and plenty of time to spend considering political options. Like Schumpeter, Downs viewed politics as similar to the consumer world, in that the market (political or commercial) would ultimately be likely to get people closest to the product (consumer or political) that they wanted. Eco-man could operate to his advantage in either realm.¹⁴

Are Citizens Up to the Task?

With his *Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*, Phillip Converse painted a somewhat bleak picture of the American citizenry in terms of democratic potential. Except for a relatively small percentage of “ideologues” or “near-ideologues” totaling about 10%, Converse found that citizens tended to be in pretty bad shape in terms of their capacity to meet any sort of ideal of robust knowledge, engagement in democratic participation and decision making. According to Converse’s findings, American citizens tend to be uninformed, unengaged, and without ideological constraint; they rarely seem to have many concrete issue positions in place, thus becoming potentially susceptible to clever emotional or direct appeals brought their way by modern political marketing.

Converse’s most troubling findings have long since been countered in various respects – especially considering a subsequent study / knowledge of party polarization and also a tendency for people to show more constrained beliefs than Converse envisioned, at least on key political issues. Still, Converse’s early findings were both disturbing and influential to many in political science; myriad researchers set about challenging them.

In *The Responsible Electorate* V.O. Key argued against Converse’s notion that inherited party identification drove most electoral behavior. Morris Fiorina argued that voters used both a retrospective and prospective calculus to make rational decisions based, at least in part, on issues. In *The Changing American Voter*, Norman Nie, Sidney Verba and John Petrocik argued that the relative banality of the period Converse

studied accounted for much of the story of what appeared to be democratic incompetence and that, once things got more politically interesting later on, citizens showed a more encouraging tendency to be motivated, informed, and ideologically constrained.

Robert Lane, working around the same time as Converse, argued that white working class males he interviewed in depth showed ideological constraint around issues not on the liberal conservative continuum that Converse relied on. Donald Stokes has also since argued against the use of a single continuum as a way of understanding ideological constraint, as have Paul Sniderman and Phil Tetlock (webs of associated ideas) and Jon Krosnick (associative networks).

Heuristics to the Rescue?

Some of the strongest counter-arguments to Converse's early findings have come from those who argue for the various ways in which heuristics can "save democracy." Among the earliest such views came from Samuel Popkin, who argued that uninformed citizens are capable of "low information rationality."¹⁵ On this view (which draws on both Anthony Downs' economic theory of democracy and Herbert Simon's idea of bounded rationality) voters are operating under great constraints. For Popkin, Converse's analysis is both misguided and elitist: it imagines that citizens both are and should be cognizant of an enormous amount of esoteric, political information - and should be making politics/political engagement center stage in their busy lives.

For Popkin's voter, this prescription does not make sense. Voters are busy, they have other things on their minds, and they are operating in a world with too much information, too little time, and other things that are important to attend to besides the minutiae of political policy. Thus, Popkin explains, citizens rely on a range of heuristics, from cognitive ("low information rationality") to affective ("gut-level rationality"), and, on Popkin's view, so they should. For Popkin and many other proponents of heuristics, useful shortcuts that get you where you were going anyway (in terms of votes matching political preferences) make good sense.

Similarly, Arthur Lupia has criticized the notion that we should be "walking encyclopedias" full of arcane and useless facts. "Citizens have reasons," Lupia tells us – reasons that often don't fall along a liberal/conservative continuum, but that are reasons nonetheless.¹⁶ For Lupia, it would be a tremendous waste of time and energy for citizens to spend their resources figuring out all the details of politicians' lives and voting records, their policy positions, and the political issues more generally, when they can rely on heuristics like institutional and social cues from trusted sources.

In *The Democratic Dilemma* Lupia and Matthew McCubbins give us a stoplight analogy. Without stoplights, drivers would have to know a great deal more information before going through an intersection: where other cars are going to or coming from, how fast they're going and so on. A stoplight makes all of these considerations unnecessary. With cues from trusted (or distrusted – as in Lupia's study of California auto insurance legislation) personal or institutional elites, voters, Lupia claims, should be just fine.

Shortcuts to the Same Result?

One of the strengths of heuristics, proponents argue, is that by drawing on them we wind up doing politically, with relatively little effort, what we would have done with full information. In some cases this can certainly be true. Party identification can be a very useful shortcut in terms of matching voting behavior onto previously held preferences. And elite cues often give such indications as well. Yet as an increasing number of theorists and researchers have been finding over the years, not all heuristics are so useful.

For one, there is mounting evidence that low information and high information don't get voters to the same place in terms of perspectives, beliefs or decisions at the polls. The work of Michael Delli Carpini and Charles Scott Keeter and also of Robert Luskin and James Fishkin suggests that people with more information and, in some cases, more deliberation, have different (and sometimes better) opinions. Or take Paul Sniderman and Henry Brady's likeability heuristic. In some cases it works well to get people at the polls close to their "true preferences" – yet there are situations where likeability can arguably mislead and get voters into trouble.

Doris Graber's study of the public response to Ronald Reagan shows that people were willing to set their issue preferences aside, or project them onto Reagan, or be persuaded to change them all together, because Reagan was so appealing to so many voting Americans in 1980 and '84.¹⁷ As we hear from Ted Brader and other affective intelligence theorists, emotional branding can lead to political motivation and participation beyond what those using a "rational" calculus might expect.¹⁸

While the Downsian/bounded rationality version of heuristics has been very influential in political science, there has of course been a powerful counterpoint: the ways in which heuristics often bias our thinking in detrimental ways. Thus, instead of counting on heuristics to make us "rational under constraints," we are sometimes, in Dan Ariely's words "perfectly irrational." And as Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky (and by now countless others) have taught us, we are often irrational in systematic ways.

Kahneman and Tversky outlined, in a series of elegant and often simple studies, biases such as the representativeness, availability and anchoring bias heuristics, among others. All of these heuristics have potential implications for individual political attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. Remember candidate Barack Obama, whose skin color, middle name and photo circulating with a headdress, was clearly threatened by a widespread reliance on the representativeness heuristic. There are myriad examples of the ways such heuristics play (and are played with) in politics – most of them not as reassuring as Popkin, Lupia and other proponents of heuristics suggest.

Heuristics and Marketing

Packaging Politics will consider the question of whether, in an era of unprecedented sophistication in political marketing, heuristics are likely to lead to democratic competence or something else. How likely are these heuristics to be manufactured and manipulated by political elites? There are certainly instances in which elites can create messages targeted at citizens that can be misleading and potentially move them away from their true preferences. On the other hand, there are certainly cases of heuristics enabling voters to realize their true preferences, or are effective in mobilizing and engaging people who might otherwise be unengaged in the political process.

Interestingly marketing language that originated in the consumer realm fits rather organically into existing debates on heuristics and even democratic competence.¹⁹ For example, if a brand is a heuristic (which it can easily be in both commercial and political realms) what does it communicate?²⁰ And where the brand relates to politics, is that heuristic likely to be good for democracy?²¹ How likely is a message or a brand to lead a voter to his/her “true preferences?” These are some of the tensions we will explore moving forward.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the production of *Packaging Politics* includes empirical, interpretive and qualitative approaches. In addition to a broad and deep review of marketing literatures in both the consumer and political realms, the core of this project involves conducting and analyzing approximately two-dozen interviews with political consultants, political reporters, marketing experts and communications scholars.

The interviews were conducted either in person or by phone between late 2009 and mid 2012. Beginning with a standard set of questions, I set out to explore how contemporary forms of branding and targeting migrated to the political realm and played out in campaigns, specifically in presidential races. Questions included the following:

- What are the formal and informal ways that marketing trends and techniques have migrated from the consumer-marketing realm to politics?
- Were there particular conditions, moments or campaigns wherein there was a tipping point or upsurge in terms of the use of specific methods in the political realm?
- How have these techniques and trends been adopted and deployed organizationally in the political sphere?
- Why do some techniques tend to migrate while others do not?

I also asked a collection of questions about implications, including the following:

- Has today's arsenal of political marketing techniques adopted from the consumer realm fundamentally changed the way campaigns are run – or is it still just business as usual – politicians trying to get votes?
- Which techniques work and which do not? How is efficacy gauged?
- How is the political process being transformed, for better or worse, by the increasing use of sophisticated consumer marketing techniques?
- In 21st century America, what is the relationship between the psychology of the citizen and the psychology of the consumer?

These questions yielded a more complex and subjective set of responses that we will consider in detail in chapter 3. I chose this primarily interview-based method in part because it plays to my strengths. As a long time journalist and filmmaker with more than twenty years interviewing subjects under my belt, I was very familiar with and comfortable in conducting interviews. In most cases my subjects and I managed to have easy, meaningful and often illuminating conversations that I definitely experienced as a sum greater than its parts, especially when patterns began to emerge.

Goals / plan for research included:

- **Thick description at the individual level**
 - Across a variety of questions
 - Across roughly two dozen interviewees
- **Comparisons between interviewees**
 - Where do interviewees verify each other's perspectives to greater or lesser degrees
 - Pronounced distinctions that existed and why that might be

The approach was ideal. It has allowed me to get to know the individuals and what makes them tick fairly well over all. It has enabled me to glean trends and make more general statements about subgroups within my subject population, without sacrificing the rich detail and nuance provided by individual perspectives.

The shortcomings of this approach are none the less real. In part it is the inevitable reverse side of the (qualitative) theoretical coin: it is difficult if not impossible to the quantify the results in very specific, detailed and concrete ways.

Plan for Dissertation

Chapter 2: *Historical Background*

Though it undoubtedly goes back further, the story I will tell about the influence of consumer marketing on politics begins with the emergence of television in the 1950s. In an astounding single election cycle, the numbers of televisions in American homes jumped from approximately 400,000 in 1948 to 19 million in 1952, transforming the way in which campaigns were run.²² By the early 1950s, Madison Avenue started thinking seriously about bringing advertising to politics. After convincing Eisenhower that running short commercial spots during popular TV shows would be the best use of his campaign dollars, advertising executive Rosser Reeves developed the first political ad strategy for television.²³ From that point on, political campaigns were transformed. Chapter 2 takes a close look at how the rise of television moved politics ever closer to consumer marketing - and shows how early television campaigns set the stage for the carefully crafted and mass-marketed campaigns later epitomized by Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

Chapter 3: *Trends & Migrations*

While the invention of television serves as a historical starting point for this project, the bulk of my research and analysis will focus on the past 30 years, during which time campaigns have become increasingly professionalized, and the movement of techniques from the consumer realm to the political realm has escalated, in part because campaigns have raised increasingly large sums of money and so can – at least in some cases – afford to market like high end consumer brands. Chapter 3 looks at the birth and growth of the most prominent and influential trends to have moved from the consumer realm to the political realm over the past 30 years: emotional and open-source branding and micro- and behavioral targeting. What are the moments or periods in politics (and generally these are specific campaigns) where there was an upsurge in terms of the adoption of certain consumer marketing techniques, and why? Chapter 3 also looks at how the specific techniques are implemented in terms of campaigning. Once these trends and techniques make the jump to the political sphere – how do they embed within the electoral realm? How are they deployed politically?

Chapter 4: *Divergences*

While interview subjects have tended to coalesce around the idea that consumer marketing has had a huge influence on political marketing, and that the influence has grown over the past 60 years, few argue that these spheres are essentially one in the same (though there are exceptions). After looking at overlapping trends and techniques in chapters 2 and 3, chapter 4 shifts course – exploring the differences between consumer and political realms by investigating questions like: why do certain marketing strategies work well in one sphere but not the other? And is there a difference between the psychology of the citizen and the psychology of the consumer?

Chapter 5: *Implications*

In the final chapter we consider the implications of the increased use of consumer marketing techniques in politics. After briefly reprising several paradigmatic normative conceptions of democracy ranging from the highly formal (one person one vote) to those that hinge on an engaged, informed, educated and deliberative citizenry, we will consider our techniques one by one to investigate what implications their use has in politics. One of several questions I'll be considering: If politicians are increasingly sending specialized messages to different individuals or groups (zip codes or precincts, for example) is it possible for the public to know where politicians stand on a range of issues?²⁴

Importance of Project

The core of this project involves conducting and analyzing personal interviews with political consultants, political reporters, marketing experts and communications scholars. What I found, and what I develop in the following chapters is that, on balance, interview subjects concur on most of the mechanics of what, when, where, how and why these marketing tools and trends have migrated from the consumer to the political realm.²⁵ Interviewees tend to agree, for example:

- That consumer marketing has had a major influence on political marketing and that the influence tends to run consumer to political rather than the other way around.
- That there have been certain tipping points - generally a campaign where one candidate does something strikingly new – wherein a technique has taken electoral politics by storm.
- That new technologies (television, large databases that store our personal information, the internet) have often been conduits for migration of consumer marketing tools to the political sphere.
- That as money has grown in electoral politics (and it has done so increasingly over the past 60 years), politics has adopted more and more trends and technologies from its wealthier cousin: consumer marketing.
- That, with the dramatic growth of consumer culture and the corresponding shift in individual orientations toward consumerism, political elites have been forced (or at least inclined) to respond by speaking to our consumer identities.

Responses to a certain set of questions thus yield a coherent narrative about a constellation of techniques that developed first in the consumer realm and migrated to politics (broadly speaking the nuts and bolts of migration, timing and direction of influence). On another set of questions however, there is a range of responses that sheds light on how significantly perspectives of those exquisitely attuned to electoral politics (whether practitioners, journalists or scholars) diverge, including questions of how similar or different today's methods are from the past, how to know which techniques work and which do not and how contemporary marketing techniques help or

hurt democracy (differences that will be explored in detail in later chapters). These responses are sometimes fascinating snapshots of the minds of political insiders that give us a sense of what unites or divides them in their perspectives.²⁶

Undertaking a project based primarily on in depth interviews with a constellation of professionals for whom politics is absolutely central has produced a sustained opportunity to hone my understanding of certain aspects of democratic politics. I hope the evidence I gather and analysis I provide will be useful to others interested in pushing research forward on any of several question engaged by but certainly not resolved within my work here.

Packaging Politics has also created the space to think through normative questions about democracy that can be maddeningly elusive but are of course enormously important and relevant. Though specific empirical claims regarding implications of the trends and techniques I've examined are difficult to pin down in concrete terms, the opportunity to engage them myself and with my subjects has been crucial to the vitality of the project.

It should perhaps be no surprise that the clear majority of my interviewees seemed to share, at least to a substantial degree, my impression that reaching toward vital "robust" democracy is a pursuit worth aspiring to: one in which democratic competence might be thought of in a fuller incarnation, where citizens are engaged, informed and motivated to participate – armed with a sense of the centrality of both rights and duties associated with democracy in the United States.²⁷

Chapter 2. THE RISE OF THE LIVING ROOM CANDIDATE

No single medium has ever transformed American politics the way television has.
–Larry Sabato

“Democracy”

In 1939 Edward Bernays – the father of modern American Public Relations – created a vision of a future world in which the consumer was king. It was at the world’s fair in New York, and Bernays called it “Democracy.”²⁸ A massive white dome that was the fair’s central exhibit, Democracy was a model for America’s future, emphasizing the connection between American democracy and American business. The exhibit was one of the earliest and most dramatic portrayals of a consumerist democracy – a society in which the needs and desires of individuals were presented as being read and fulfilled by business and the free market.²⁹ With Democracy, Bernays managed to portray corporations as the wellspring of democracy – consumerism and democracy mutually reinforcing.

But in reality Democracy was an elaborate piece of propaganda designed by Bernays and his corporate clients.³⁰ Privately Bernays did not believe that average citizens were capable of self-governance. He subscribed to his uncle Sigmund Freud’s theories that humans were governed by dangerous unconscious desires and impulses, and believed it preposterous to think that true democracy was possible. Consumerism, Bernays thought, was a way to give people the *illusion* of control while allowing a responsive elite to manage society.³¹

Though he is not very well known today, Bernays was arguably as influential on twentieth century American culture as his uncle. Major political and business leaders in post WWII America came to believe, via Bernays, Freud’s underlying premise - that human beings were driven by irrational and dangerous impulses.³² These elites became convinced that dark, powerful instincts had led to the horrors of Nazi Germany, and believed that the only way to make democracy work and to create a stable society was to repress the dangerous impulses that lurked beneath daily American life.³³

A rebirth of interest in Freud’s ideas about the economic, political and social applications of psychoanalysis followed, ultimately leading to the establishment of the hugely influential Institute for Motivational Research (IMR) at Stanford University.³⁴ Under the leadership of Freudian analyst Ernest Dichter the IMR (like Bernays’ marketing firm Bernays & Co.) provided big business with data regarding the motives and desires of consumers.³⁵

IMR had a major effect on twentieth century advertising. Its influence is well documented in the 1957 best seller *The Hidden Persuaders* by Vance Packard. Packard outlines ‘The Depth Approach’ used by Dichter, Bernays and other early marketing experts, who drew on insights gleaned from psychiatry and psychoanalysis to influence “daily acts of consumption” products, but also “ideas, attitudes, candidates, goals, or states of mind.”³⁶

Under Dichter the IMR conducted the first focus groups - used as a means of eliciting deeper levels of information by getting people to discuss their personal feelings and desires rather than their rational thoughts.³⁷ These focus groups were modeled on psychoanalysis in that they explored people's irrational and unconscious motivations. The resulting information was then fed into corporate and, later, political marketing campaigns.

Use of the depth approach is one piece of the story of the rise of American consumer society / increasing tendency toward consumption – but two other developments played large roles as well: a thriving peacetime economy and the widespread use of television beginning in the early 1950s. With this convergence of circumstances consumer values soon dominated the American economy and quickly became bound up with political culture.³⁸ Marketing and advertising from the commercial realm influenced how political campaigns were run (in large part because the same people were running marketing campaigns in both realms) and how average citizens - whose identities and orientations increasingly shifted toward consumerism - engaged with the political arena.

As we know from our discussion of Bernays, the tools of advertising and marketing were being deployed in American politics well before the rise of television. But for a number of reasons explored in this chapter including the growth of consumerism in the United States, the declining influence of political parties, and the corresponding rise of professional political consultants, the widespread use of television in the U.S. was a game changer in various ways – including the degree to which consumer marketing influenced presidential campaigning. As television helped move American consumerism skyward in the 1950s, those experienced in consumer advertising seemed a natural fit to help sell TV's "living room candidate."

Media Influence: Early Views

The influence of mass media on mass politics – and media's capacity to promote or inhibit democratic life – was being debated long before the rise of television. Some were optimistic about media's democratic possibilities (as many have been more recently regarding the internet) while others warned of mass media's potential for dangerous propaganda and persuasion.

In the early 1920s journalist Walter Lippmann and democratic philosopher John Dewey engaged in a famous debate about the relationship between the media and the public – and the capacity of this relationship to foster a healthy democracy. For Lippmann, people in the then modern media age were far from the "omni competent" citizens expected by some versions of normative democratic theory – but were more akin to "deaf spectators" sitting in the back of a sports stadium, who couldn't see, hear, or understand what was happening in the political world, and had little if any capacity to shape it. For Lippmann, public opinion was simply "manufactured consent" generated by elites through the media, and democracy in mass society was a hopelessly utopian and dangerous notion. Dewey, by contrast, had faith in the media's capacity to support

democracy. For Dewey media had the potential to create a “culture of communication” – linking citizens’ ideas in the public sphere in such a way that democracy could be a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

By the late 1920s into the ‘30s, Lippmann’s dark view of the media had won the day, at least among political scientists. Studies at Princeton University focused largely on the power of propaganda around both world wars (Goebbels’ deft use of the media in aiding Hitler’s rise was influential), and on Orson Wells’ War of the Worlds broadcast which caused widespread panic in the United States in 1938. This was the brief era of the “hypodermic needle model” of media influence.³⁹ On this view members of the public were viewed as empty, passive vessels likely to adopt whole the media messages they received.

By the early 1940s Columbia School researchers began to challenge the hypodermic needle model. Hadley Cantril attacked the theory head on by studying The War of The Worlds broadcast itself, and finding that individual reactions actually tended to be quite diverse, depending on personal and environmental factors. In consumer research as well as in election studies, Paul Lazarsfeld discovered little evidence for direct influence of media. He and Elihu Katz developed the notion of the “two – step flow,” arguing that media was not all-powerful but that it instead influenced select “opinion leaders” who acted as filters for broader publics. The Columbia school, with its sociological perspective, emphasized the role of social groups in determining people’s beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. On this view, the media could have some measure of influence – but could not be seen as anything close to all-powerful.

Lazarsfeld’s student Joseph Klapper found media effects to be even less impressive than Columbia School researchers before him, and today his name is most readily associated with what is known as the “doctrine of minimal effects.” Like his predecessors, Klapper argued that people’s minds are seldom changed by media messages. In his doctrine of “selective exposure,” (essentially a theory of cognitive dissonance), the media’s role was perceived as simply reinforcing people’s own previously held beliefs. Media may have some crystallizing influence, Klapper argued, but rarely if ever persuaded people to change their minds.

The work of the Columbia School put a damper on media research in political science for at least a decade, yet some continued to question its widely accepted research and conclusions, and continued thinking about various ways in which the media might exert more influence on citizens than minimal effects theories suggested.⁴⁰ Beginning in the late 1960s, a chorus of voices began to rise on priming, framing, agenda setting and more that, on balance, have bolstered political scientist Larry Bartels’ proclamation that minimal-effects research is “one of the most notable embarrassments of modern social science.”⁴¹

By way of contrast, consider John Zaller’s 1999 paper *A Theory of Media Politics*. Zaller begins the paper with a story of Lyndon Johnson as he is departing public office. A young reporter asks what has changed from the time he was a new congressman until that point. “You guys,” says Johnson. “All you guys in the media. Everything has changed because of you.”⁴² As Zaller points out, the back room deals and party politics

of Johnson's heyday had given way to a different system. "In the new environment," writes Zaller, "disagreements are fought out in the mass media and settled in the court of public opinion. The weapons of combat are press conferences, photo opportunities, news releases, leaks to the press, and 'spin.'" At the turn of the millennium media politics, Zaller argued, had replaced party politics.

The Pre-Modern (Pre-TV) Campaign

Today more than a half-century of academic discussion and debate exists on the influence of television on presidential campaigning. But when "the atom bomb of electoral politics" exploded, what did it leave behind? Pippa Norris lays out what she contends are the three dominant characteristics of the "pre-modern campaign" which, she writes, fall between the late 1800s and the early 1950s, when the use of television skyrocketed: direct communication between citizens and candidates at the local level, a highly partisan press, and the heavy influence of political parties in campaigns.⁴³

In pre-modern, party-driven campaigns, candidates relied heavily on traditional, face-to-face politics for getting out their messages. They campaigned door to door and around the country, attempting to make personal connections with enormous numbers of citizens. They reached the electorate with parades, by giving keynote speeches before large crowds and by whistle-stop campaigning off the back of railroad cars.⁴⁴

As Johnson pointed out as he departed office, before television became the dominant medium through which Americans acquired their political information, parties played a more significant role in presidential elections. During the second half of the 19th century especially (a period known as "the golden age of parties") party machines were disciplined and energetic – and voters' loyalty was driven largely by the promise and delivery of material rewards and aid: jobs, housing, gifts and, for new immigrants, invaluable socialization into their new environments.

The *raison d'être* of parties during the "gilded age" was to win elections – elections largely driven by party influence. An important source of control parties had during that period was over the nominating process: party leaders had a decisive role in choosing which candidates would run. Parties shaped campaigns and political platforms, and they printed and distributed ballots. They were also critical to getting out the vote on Election Day. In short, which candidates ran, what issues they ran on and whether they were successful had an enormous amount to do with the power of parties.

The waning influence of political parties is sometimes cast as a direct result of the spread of television, but the truth of how and why party decline unfolded is far more complex. Parties reached their peak of power around the turn of the twentieth century, but by the early 1900s their authority began to be chipped away. Crucially, the invention and spread of the direct primary election took control of nominations away from party leaders. Another significant blow was the birth of the civil service system that removed many essential patronage jobs from party control. Welfare legislation passed during the New Deal meant that the federal government was more likely than parties to provide aid to the needy. Well before mid-Century it was clear that the heyday of parties had passed.

But while party influence was diminishing, it was not over – especially in certain pockets around the country. During the first half of the twentieth century, urban bosses in Chicago, Kansas City, Boston, Philadelphia and elsewhere controlled local politics and, in some cases, could claim a hand in national political outcomes. For the majority of the country not controlled by machines, parties had shifted roles somewhat: while their role as campaign organizations had ebbed with the new legislation and reforms of the first half of the twentieth century, citizens' party loyalties remained robust -- and government was still clearly organized along party lines. Throughout the pre-modern period legislators of the same party as the President tended to follow their leader – and Presidents generally filled all their posts from within their party.

While parties were largely replaced as campaign organizations over the first half of the twentieth century, they remained the primary conduits through which presidential hopefuls connected with the public, organizing public speaking engagements and meet-and-greet events, but also acting as critical liaisons between candidates and citizens in other ways: finding common ground, defining collective needs and priorities, and articulating those to candidates were all key to hanging on to party influence.⁴⁵

With parties occupying a shifting but still vital role in pre-modern elections, professional campaign staffs were modest. Up through the 1948 race presidential candidates relied on a small handful of salaried advisors. Harry Truman had just twenty paid campaign staffers, including speechwriters, secretaries and security, a small fraction of campaign staff post television.⁴⁶ So long as parties still had a strong hand in the electoral game, for candidates to employ extensive staff seemed expensive and redundant at best, contentious and self-defeating at worst.

Clearly the first half of the 1900s was a time of party decline – but also of adjustment and, in some cases, assertion of power in niche roles not fully impacted by the legislation and reforms that had weakened party influence. With the spread of television beginning in the late 1940s, the already precarious status quo was shaken once again – and dramatically. The next decade, with the rapid spread of TV, saw big changes for parties. Where they once controlled the nominating process and candidates were essentially creatures of parties, now candidates began to establish and run their own campaign organizations, exhibiting diminished need or desire for party involvement. As television use grew, the old party system where power was accrued from the bottom up through party loyalty, and parties functioned as essential middlemen, conduits and translators between candidates and constituents, continued to break down. And where politics was once dependent on a combination of personal, face-to-face contact with voters, and the enormous support of parties in so many aspects of campaigning, candidates were increasingly connecting with voters via electronic communications -- first radio, then television.

Birth of “The Living Room Candidate”

The idea of the living room candidate is generally associated with television, which, by

the mid 1950s, occupied a prominent place in the American family home and had become the primary means by which presidential candidates connected with voters. But the term was first used in reference to radio – and it was with the prevalent use of radio in the United States in the 1920s and ‘30s that candidates first entered American homes virtually. Presidential hopefuls’ ability to project an appealing image directly to individual citizens in a personal way - and on a mass scale - became an important factor in elections. From that point on the individual *personal* appeal of candidates became critically important to winning campaigns.⁴⁷

Radio’s potential as a political tool was brought into high relief with Roosevelt’s fireside chats beginning in 1933, but according to his speechwriter Judge Clinton Sorrel, Roosevelt gave his first radio address roughly four years earlier, as Governor of New York in 1929.⁴⁸ As Governor, (elected in 1928), Roosevelt faced a conservative state legislature frequently hostile to his policy goals. He began to address citizens directly over the radio, asking that they support his policies. Roosevelt’s charisma and persuasive power was almost immediately apparent. After his Gubernatorial radio addresses letters of support for him and his positions would pour in to the state legislature. Roosevelt moved New Yorkers with his personal appeals, and the vocal support of citizens statewide in response enabled him push through several pieces of contentious legislation. Little surprise that he used radio to such powerful effect as president. Substantial portions of his fireside chats (which ran between 1933-1944) were devoted to waging political and public relations battles in an effort to enact New Deal legislation.

At the height of radio’s “golden age” (from 1930 to the mid-1950s), the medium allowed presidential candidates potential “one to one” relationships with up to 90% of American citizens -- that many already owned radios by the late ‘30s. Yet despite its clear influence as a tool of political communication and persuasion (Orson Welles’ War of the Worlds broadcast and Roosevelt’s fireside chats being two prominent examples), radio did little to fundamentally change the way campaigns were organized and run. For a variety of reasons discussed below, the much more significant changes to campaign organization and structure would come from television’s massive makeover of presidential campaigning.

The Living Room Candidate Redux: TV

In the 1970s David Broder popularized the idea that parties were in serious decline with his book *The Party’s Over*. Broder described dozens of major and minor causes for the rusting of party machinery and the shift away from party loyalty. But one of the main reasons he cites was the influence of television’s living room candidate.

By the late 1940s the new technology was just emerging in the political spotlight. Party conventions were first covered on television in 1948, as were appearances by presidential candidates Harry Truman and his opponent Thomas Dewey. At that time fewer than a tenth of American households had television; the vast majority still relied on more traditional outlets: newspapers, magazines and radio, to acquire their national campaign information. The post war consumer boom drastically changed the landscape: in a single election cycle, the number of televisions in American homes jumped from

approximately 400,000 to an astonishing 19 million – a nearly 5000% increase between 1948 and 1952.⁴⁹

The rapid ascension of television quickly began to shake up the status quo of electoral politics – especially Presidential campaigns. The visual dimension of the new medium was, almost immediately, a political force to be reckoned with. Psychologist and political consultant Drew Westen asserts that television “gave viewers a kind of multisensory connection with candidates” such that “the personalities of candidates became increasingly important.”⁵⁰ Significantly, citizens developed the perception of familiarity and personal connection with candidates and their issues, decreasing the necessity and perceived value of parties as conduits.⁵¹ Parties were no longer needed to the same degree, and citizens’ psychological attachments to parties soon began to wane – along with party influence.

Television also shifted the focus of presidential campaigns toward style, personality and presentation/appearance over more substantive issues. In their book *Celebrity Politics*, Darrell West and John Orman describe television as a “magic lantern” that altered the types of qualities Americans looked for in their leaders. As American audiences now primarily experienced presidential candidates via television it was critical that contenders be “telegenic” and personally appealing to broad swaths of the electorate.⁵² Doris Graber makes a similar case: that television’s centrality in national campaigns led to the soaring influence of candidate personality, trumping issues of substance. Her study of several presidential campaigns since the introduction of television lends support to Gresham’s Law: the idea that candidates’ personal qualities often move issues of substance off center stage. Among those campaigns Graber examined was Ronald Reagan’s. While Reagan’s successes in 1980 and 1984 cannot be attributed entirely to his charisma and comfort in front of cameras – there is little doubt that it made it easier for him to find support among the “Reagan-Democrats.”⁵³ There have also been a handful of studies over the past two decades indicating that “looking like a winner” actually helps candidates to victory, largely through voters’ psychological snap judgment. As researchers discovered in a recent study: “Simply knowing which candidate scored better on the appearance ratings allowed us to correctly predict the winner in 66 percent of the contests...”⁵⁴

The Television-Consumption Connection

Since television began to play a prominent role in presidential politics, a well-worn analogy has been drawn. Selling politicians, it is said, is a lot like selling soap. While the parallels only go so far (what distinguishes politicians and products will be discussed in chapter 4) there is certainly some genuine overlap between the marketing of each. For when candidates started “selling” themselves on television, they were entering a world already driven by consumer advertising. The earliest television programs were designed (as they are today) to bring eyeballs to advertisements in a country where consumerism was in rapid ascent, and for politicians to succeed in the brave new world of television, they would inevitably look to those with experience, those with backgrounds in consumer advertising on television.

Consumerism has a variety of overlapping meanings in 21st century America. It is by

various common definitions **a social and economic order** “based on the systematic creation and fostering of a desire to purchase goods and services in ever greater amounts”; **a theory** “that a progressively greater consumption of goods is economically beneficial”; and **a condition**: “an inclination toward the buying of consumer goods.”⁵⁵ Another prominent definition of the term has a different take: it has to do with promoting consumer’s interests in the form of consumer protection or consumer activism. The common understanding of the term in the United States today is one of critique stretching back to the criticisms of consumption present in Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), which was among the first detailed critical accounts of consumerism.

As historian Gary Cross explains in his book *An All-Consuming Century*, the triumph of consumerism in twentieth century America was not inevitable. The United States has been home to some of the most aggressive and persuasive criticisms of consumption, including Puritanism, Prohibition, the simplicity movement, the counterculture of the 1960s, and, the consumer rights movement. Yet none of these arguments and movements was strong enough to hold back the tide. As Cross explains: America is unique in the degree to which the market has dominated other social and cultural institutions:

The absence of an established national church, a weak central bureaucracy, the regional division of the elite, the lack of a distinct national “high culture,” the fragmentation of folk cultures due to slavery and diverse immigration, and finally the social and psychological impact of unprecedented mobility all meant that market values encountered relatively few checks. Americans have had a strong tendency to define themselves and their relationships with others through the exchange and use of goods.⁵⁶

Recall the discussion of “Democracity” earlier in the chapter. Democracity depicted a society in which people’s needs and desires could be fulfilled by free market. It was meant to be a model for America’s future, generating a connection in the popular mind between American democracy and American business. Why did fairgoers seem to buy into this idea – that business was a wellspring of democracy? Cross explains that, between 1900 and 1930, a distinct consumer society had emerged in the United States in which goods offered new meanings of freedom, progress, individuality and democracy, laying the foundation for a dramatic rise in consumerism in the 1950s. “Consumerism repeatedly and dynamically reinforced democratic principles of participation and equality when new and exciting goods entered the market.”⁵⁷ The purchase of particular goods allowed the adaptation of new identities for immigrants, the working class and people making the move from rural to urban communities. “Consumer goods allowed Americans to free themselves from their old, relatively secure but closed communities,” writes Cross. Mass produced products, Cross argues, provided freedom from the past and a notion of liberty based less on democratic participation than on expression through consumer goods: cars, clothes, appliances and

much more.

If increasing exposure to consumer ads primed the public for similar bite sized, appealing, consumer-friendly representations of politicians, there were other ways in which television promoted/facilitated consumerism as well. Anthropologist and media studies scholar Eric Hirsh recognizes a paradox of the time: while television allowed for socialization into and, to a degree, homogenization of citizens of countless backgrounds in a nation of immigrants, it simultaneously led to an increased orientation toward self and home vis a vis the broader community or society that began with radio and grew significantly with television.⁵⁸ From the 1950s on, Americans spent an increasing amount of their time at home, watching TV.⁵⁹

By mid-century it was already abundantly clear to business and media elites that, with more people spending more time in front of programming, television could systematize advertising and marketing in ways that could make consumption more central to and ubiquitous in the lives of everyday people. And while Cross makes a good case that the origin of American consumer culture was from 1900-1930, it was post World War II fears of over production and under consumption that made many government and business leaders feel most compelled to boost consumerism.⁶⁰ Television had the potential (later fully realized) to play an important part in large-scale efforts to effect “our daily acts of consumption” but also our “ideas, attitudes, candidates, goals, or states of mind” in ways that could make us “better consumers.”⁶¹ Thus during the post war period, which mapped on to the rapid spread of television across the country, Americans were sold on consumerism in various ways, many tried and true. Consumption was framed by the world of marketing and advertising as:

- Patriotic, because it allows people to support the American economy
- Empowering, because it allows people to express themselves
- Sensible, because Americans were entitled to and should expect a higher standard of living
- Necessary. Marketers in the 1950s infamously focused on how to create “psychological obsolescence” -- the idea in the minds of consumers that things that were perfectly good were old or outmoded.⁶²
- Capable of producing happiness, love, freedom and other desired emotional experiences⁶³

Television, until then an unparalleled vehicle for advertising, became central to everyday, ever growing patterns of domestic consumption in the post war United States.

The Professionalization of Campaigns

Before long those behind the marketing of consumer goods and services on television and presidential hopefuls grappling with a new and quite foreign method of campaigning would find each other. Paid media consultants quickly became an essential part of every serious presidential campaign, forming a significant contingent of the relatively new (but quickly growing) field of professional political consultants. A few people were ahead of the curve: the earliest known professional political consultants in the United States were Clem Whitaker and Leone Baxter, who opened shop in California in the early 1930s under the name "Campaigns Inc." Also known for their work in corporate communications and public relations, Whitaker and Baxter believed that political messages should be geared toward entertaining rather than informing and should also be strictly controlled: they were known for heavily scripting political messages of their mostly Republican candidates, including Governor Earl Warren and Presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower.⁶⁴

During the first twenty years that Campaigns Inc. was in business, presidential campaigns were clearly still the domain of party operatives. But by the early 1950s, Madison Avenue (which had been home to advertising and marketing agencies for nearly a century and had become synonymous with consumer advertising since the 1920s) started thinking seriously about bringing advertising to televised politics.

For those normally focused on selling consumer goods and services on television, getting into the business of selling candidates on TV seemed like a natural move. Rosser Reeves was among the pioneers of consumer television advertising. Famous for catchy campaigns that worked well on TV, such as M&Ms "melt in your mouth, not in your hand," and Anacin's "Fast Fast Fast!" Reeves favored simple repeat messages that stuck (often annoyingly) in the brain.⁶⁵ Reeves was also credited with, and criticized for, the first major "packaging" of a presidential candidate for television: Dwight Eisenhower's 1952 race.

After convincing Eisenhower that running short commercial spots during popular TV shows would be the best use of his campaign dollars, Reeves developed a series of spot ads featuring the candidate. On a fall day two months before the election, Eisenhower sat in a studio and recorded forty commercials for a series Reeves conceived and called "Eisenhower Answers America." The candidate was filmed without his glasses (which Reeves believed made him less telegenic) and read from giant cue cards. The "common folks" who appeared in the commercials asking Eisenhower scripted questions were tourists who the producers recruited outside of Radio City Music Hall. The commercials were programmed to run just before or after popular television programs in order to get maximum exposure. The slogan "I like Ike" was the most memorable of the lot.⁶⁶

Adlai Stevenson, who ran against Eisenhower in '52, roundly criticized the commercials put out by his opponent. He refused to appear in advertisements himself during the campaign, famously declaring that the "idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process."⁶⁷ Stevenson viewed commercials as showing "contempt for the people's intelligence, common sense and dignity."⁶⁸ Yet the Eisenhower campaign (which branded Ike "The

General” and Stevens an “egghead”) was a huge success; it arguably broke the Democrats’ historic hold on southern votes since the Civil War (the “Solid South”) by winning Florida, Virginia, and Texas.⁶⁹ The Eisenhower commercials modeled directly after consumer ad campaigns, were a harbinger: since then, spot television advertising has been central to campaign strategy for all presidential candidates.

Another prominent early example of the influence of consumer advertising on political campaigning is an episode that might well have cost Richard Nixon his political future had his image not been rescued by the consumer advertising world. In September 1952, the New York Post ran a front-page story with the headline “Secret Nixon Fund: Secret Rich Men’s Trust Fund Keeps Nixon in Style Far Beyond His Salary.” The story reported that wealthy Californians had given more than eighteen thousand dollars to a secret Nixon campaign fund in return for political favors. At the time Nixon was Eisenhower’s vice presidential running mate, and Eisenhower suggested that Nixon go on television to respond to the charges directly (or likely be dropped from the ticket).

The Republican Party put up \$75,000 to buy 30 minutes of prime-time television right after the top-rated Milton Berle Show, hiring an advertising agency to produce the live broadcast. The agency that directed Nixon’s famous “Checkers speech” flew in soap opera directors from Hollywood and rounded up the best make-up artists and prop people from advertising for the job. Nearly 60 million people watched the broadcast, the largest TV audience ever up until that point. The “Checkers speech” was an early example of what would become an increasingly prevalent trend: politicians guided by people from the consumer-advertising world to craft and re-craft their images on television. Since Stevenson protested against what he saw as an unholy trinity: television, presidential campaigning and advertising in 1952 – no major presidential candidate has ever dismissed its power. And since Nixon’s pooh-poohing of advertising gurus, make up artists and others he ignored at his peril during the Nixon Kennedy debates (those who heard the debates on radio believed Nixon had won – but those who saw it on television claimed Kennedy was the victor) all major candidates have understood that, to present well on television, media consultants were required to help them negotiate the demands of the new medium.

Rise of Paid Political Consultants

As Dennis Johnson writes in his book *No Place for Amateurs*, The United States is the land of elections. We hold more elections, more frequently than any other modern society. Altogether there are well over 500,000 popularly elected officials in the U.S. and more than a million elections are held in every 4-year cycle.⁷⁰ The United States is also the land of political consultants. The American Association of Political Consultants, a national network of media consultants, pollsters, campaign managers, fund-raisers, lobbyists, and others now approximately 7,000 strong was first formed in 1969.⁷¹ With presidential campaigns being played out on television, campaign organizations / staff inevitably shifted further away from political parties whose specialty was the face to face politics of the pre-TV era, to the increasing influence of media savvy consultants who knew how to handle TV. As Larry Sabato wrote in his landmark book on the subject, political consultants quickly replaced party leaders in key campaign roles and inflicted

incredible damage on the party system. It would have been difficult, Sabato writes, “for ward leaders and political bosses ... to imagine how completely they would be replaced by professionals independent of the party.”⁷²

Professional consultants are found in virtually every campaign for president, senator, representative, big city mayor and governor, and in many other elected offices. The increase over the past half century has been exponential: as late as 1960, eight years after Rosser Reeves ran his “I like Ike” commercials, there were very few full time professionals in the field. By the 1980s every serious presidential candidate, nearly every statewide candidate and large numbers of congressional candidates were using the services of professional political consultants.

By the mid 1990s, aspiring political consultants were seeking out graduate level skills based training from various places around the United States: The University of Florida, American University and George Washington University all had (and still have) schools of “political management.” Thousands of consultants in the United States manage or assist in around fifty thousand campaigns a year.

Political consultants advise campaigns on virtually all activities and play a variety of roles. Consultants conduct candidate, voter, and opposition research. They oversee telemarketing and direct mail. Consultants stay in contact with and tailor messages to particular sub-audiences (targeting). They envision and coordinate field strategy and social media strategy. They also play a critical role as fundraisers. The AAPC estimates that in 2008 political candidates for state and federal offices raised almost \$7.7 billion, an increase of more than 50 percent since 2000 – and points out that it is political consultants who steward that spending. A Center for Public Integrity study found that about 600 political consultants and firms earned more than \$1.85 billion in the 2004 election cycle. That number rose in 2008, and is expected to continue to rise in 2012. More than any other single aspect of campaigning, consultants tend to be focused on media – and largely on television, even today (though that is shifting). The most influential role of political consultants in electoral politics has arguably been advising on and production of campaign media. While the forecast of former Michigan Democratic Party Chairman Neil Staebler: “Elections will increasingly become contests not between candidates but between great advertising firms” may be a stretch, there’s little doubt that, consultants have looked to and borrowed from techniques of consumer advertising in much more significant ways than in the pre-modern, pre-television era.

Since Rosser Reeves ran Eisenhower’s campaign, many other presidential candidates have drawn consulting help from Madison Avenue – or at least the world of consumer advertising. Nixon’s political advertisements were produced by the “November Group” – a high-powered cadre of advertising executives who primarily created consumer advertising. In 1984 Ronald Reagan’s campaign took the political advertising of his time to a more sophisticated level with the help of the “Tuesday Team” an all-star group of Madison Avenue executives recruited for his re-election campaign. Few members of the Tuesday Team had done political commercials before Reagan. According to a Time Magazine profile written right after Reagan successfully won his second term,

“...their experience lay in dreaming up singing felines for Meow Mix cat food and tingly, tender ads for Pepsi-Cola.”⁷³

The Obama team’s marketing strategy in 2008 was fodder for thousands of popular pundits, blogs and tweets. From the campaign’s consistent branding to its expert social network marketing (presided over by Facebook founder Chris Hughes) to hyper-sophisticated targeting, open source marketing, creative use of celebrity endorsements and more, in the Obama campaign the influence of consumer marketing techniques and trends seems to have reached its zenith, with several prominent political journalists claiming that he was the first president to have been marketed with as much sophistication as a consumer megabrand.⁷⁴

In a major coup the consumer marketing world’s *Advertising Age* magazine dubbed the 2008 Obama campaign “marketer of the year”. Taking unprecedented plays from the consumer world’s game book, the Obama team had beaten consumer marketers at their own game. But perhaps the term “joined” is more apt than “beaten.”

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CHAPTER 3: TRENDS, TECHNIQUES & MIGRATION

*There's one way to figure out which way the influence is moving.
Who's got the money? Corporate America.*

- Donnie Fowler, Field Director, Obama '08

*How do you know Obama's marketing was genius? Because
Pepsi ripped off his logo.*

- Political Consultant Rob Stutzman

The United States, with its early consumerist orientation, has a lengthy history of “packaging” products and services for the purpose of selling them to the public. The US also has a long history of applying the same tools to sway popular opinion about political issues and candidates that are used by manufacturers to market their wares to consumers: sophisticated polling techniques, customer segmentation, celebrity endorsements and so on. For a variety of reasons consumer marketing has, over time, tended to lead the charge – with those in politics adopting and then adapting various techniques to the political sphere.

In this chapter we examine the evolution of particular trends and techniques in the consumer realm (specifically relatively recent branding and targeting methods) and look at the moments in politics - generally during particular campaigns - where there were upsurges in the adoption of these consumer techniques. When did they make the move to, and how did they embed within, the political realm?

As discussed in Chapter 2, the modern, televised campaign broke from the pre-modern campaign in significant ways. While the pre-modern campaign relied on face-to-face communication between citizens and candidates at the local level as well as on the heavy influence of political parties, the modern campaign - waged primarily on TV - was instead run by professional political consultants. Televised campaigns meant not only more paid staff, but the nationalization of the audience for presidential races on the “big three” networks: ABC, NBC and CBS.

During the pre-modern campaign era consumer advertising and presidential campaigning were substantially different pursuits, and comparisons between the marketing of candidates and products were harder to draw.⁷⁵ But as television's influence on politics rose, the importance of coming across well via the new medium led candidates to seek out consultants who knew how to package for television in ways likely to appeal to broad audiences. Madison Avenue advertising firms, long steeped in consumer marketing, became essential to political marketing as well.⁷⁶

In the early days of television there were few firms devoted exclusively or even primarily to politics; the most prominent advertising agencies would dedicate a select team to work on major elections and then go back to selling soap, so to speak, after election day.⁷⁷ When firms were likely to be selling both politicians and consumer products there

was a fair amount of informal intra-agency influence of consumer approaches on political marketing.⁷⁸ But at least since Richard Nixon's campaign the late 1960s every serious contender for the presidency has been actively and comprehensively marketed to the American public. What television producer and political consultant Roger Ailes said of television during the Nixon campaign has thus far held true: "nobody will ever be elected to major office again without presenting themselves well on it."⁷⁹

There are still some main line, Madison Avenue-type agencies that profit from major elections, but they are no longer as dominant as they once were.⁸⁰ As the professionalization of politics and political marketing grew, niche firms began to develop that did business exclusively in the realm of politics. There are several types of marketing agencies specializing in political campaigns:

- * Marketing research firms, specializing in polling to understand the voting public.
 - * Marketing firms whose primary job is to raise funds
 - * Public relations firms that often direct campaigns and manage the overall image of candidates, especially with the media.
 - * Media consultants who create and place media advertisements.
 - * Micro-targeting firms that build, and then sell, voter profiles.
- Telemarketing firms that are used as "grassroots" campaigners and for get out the vote actions.

Niche political firms have become central in the "market" for politics, and because these agencies are so focused on campaigns, they know more about marketing a candidate or issue than general marketing agencies. Yet without a doubt these agencies still look to consumer marketing world for ideas on how to successfully "sell" candidates. Why? The most obvious reason is that the private sector is nearly always ahead of the game in terms of research and resources. With so much relative wealth, the consumer-marketing world has been able to conduct extensive studies into effectiveness of product advertising and marketing strategies for consumer goods and services, and so remains way out front of marketing research.

The poorer cousin, political marketing, digs into that consumer research regularly. One route is informally, through friends and contacts in commercial marketing. For example Jim Spencer, a key media consultant on John Kerry's presidential campaign described regularly picking the brain of his sister in law, who was at the time head of marketing development at Coca Cola.⁸¹ But political marketers also read prominent consumer marketing magazines and go to conferences to figure out how they can adapt what they learn to world of politics.⁸²

According to many of the political consultants, journalists and academics I interviewed for this project, political marketing has increasingly mirrored private sector marketing over the years, and consultants trace most advances in political marketing to the private sector. Below are several of the ways in which consumer marketing was out front:

* **Polling the public**

* **Direct mail**

* **Demographic targeting:** sending messages via mail and now email based on people's specific interests and concerns

* **Most media innovations.** Most of what happens in political marketing happens in consumer marketing first. Consumer marketing is usually way out front on new trends and techniques

Private sector marketing has financed volumes of research, including much trial and error experimentation that the world of political campaigns has benefited from. In this chapter we will look at some of the trends and techniques that have been influential and how they are playing out in the political sphere. "The best political consultants hold advertising people very close," notes Republican political consultant Rob Stutzman.⁸³ As we will see, however, while some tricks of the trade in consumer marketing map very neatly onto politics, some require significant variations, while some do not translate well at all.⁸⁴ But first, let us consider a few specific changes in the political landscape over the years that have moved politics ever closer to the consumer realm.

The Professionalization of Politics

As mentioned earlier, *Advertising Age* magazine caused quite a stir a few years back when it dubbed the 2008 Obama Campaign "marketer of the year". The Obama team bested megabrands like Nike, Apple and Facebook, pulling off a political coup never before seen in relation to consumer marketing. While casting the Obama campaign as the zenith of political marketing seemed fair, the endless discussion of the "Obama brand" whether disparaging along 'politician as product' lines or laudatory and even reverential seemed excessive to some practitioners and other students of electoral politics. For many political watchers, the notion of a marriage between commerce and politics is nothing revelatory. Politics has increasingly become big business. "It is antiquated (even quaint) to think of these realms as wholly distinct" says political reporter Beth Fouhy.⁸⁵ For those who run campaigns, make and show television ads, for pollsters, direct marketers, micro-targeting firms, P.R. people and others - political campaigns can be incredibly lucrative business propositions.

Consumer Identity Uber Alles?

In his book *Lifestyle Politics and Citizen Consumers* Lance Bennett makes the case that, since major changes in global economic and communication systems of the 1970s,

the United States has seen the construction of highly personalized forms of identity politics anchored in lifestyles and consumer choices.⁸⁶ Various characteristics of late modern society, argues Bennett, include social fragmentation and the breakdown of civic institutions, weakening social and political identifications, and a resulting increase in freedom of choice over social identities. As the celebration of personal consumer choice fills the public spheres of advertising and entertainment largely tied to consumption, it also shapes conceptions of fundamental Western values such as freedom, rights and political representation. Citizens whose meaning systems increasingly revolve around material preoccupations, personal lifestyles, and social relationships are, Bennett suggests, likely to experience conventional politics and government as opaque, uninteresting or otherwise difficult to engage.

From the standpoint of government and elected representatives, personalized and diverse citizen expectations seem increasingly hard to satisfy. Consequently many politicians and their handlers have over the past 30 years adopted more personalized rhetorics of choice and lifestyle values to communicate their political messages to citizens. Bennett points out that most leaders in western industrialized countries have abandoned the old rhetoric of self-sacrifice and collective political projects in favor of promises of greater personal choice. It is an interesting theory and seems to have much behind it when looking at the dominant chords within presidential politics from Reagan through George W. Bush but seems not to be on solid ground considering the 2008 Obama campaign, at least. Obama resuscitated much of the communal language of self – sacrifice, putting the “we” back in political campaigning.⁸⁷ Obama’s turn toward a rhetoric of the greater good notwithstanding, most in the “political industry” concur that politics has, in the last few cycles, become more like a business than ever before, and see political marketing is booming.⁸⁸

Here we take a look at the birth and growth of several of the most prominent and influential trends to have moved from the consumer realm to the political realm over the past 30 years: specifically branding (including “emotional” and “open source” strategies) and targeting (data-base driven and “behavioral” strategies over the internet). For the duration of this chapter, we first examine how these trends and techniques grew up in the consumer sphere and then look at how, when and why they moved into electoral politics. (Looking ahead, Chapter 4 explores the divergences between the two realms and Chapter 5, our last, is devoted to exploring the implications of the trends, techniques and migrations that we examine into now.)

Consumer Branding

The term branding has been around for more than one hundred years. Originally referring to a way to tell one’s cattle from another’s with the aid of a hot iron stamp, it was adopted by the consumer realm to refer to any name, symbol, design or feature that identifies one seller’s goods or services from others.⁸⁹ In an era of mass production – when the market was flooded with products that were virtually indistinguishable from

one another, branding was essential. “[W]ithin a context of manufactured sameness,” writes Naomi Klein in her book *No Logo*, “image-based difference had to be manufactured along with the product.”⁹⁰ Potential customers could recognize an advertised brand because it came in a pink package or had a star on the label.

In addition to distinguishing similar products from one another, brands were designed to evoke comfort and familiarity, as production became more remote from (and mysterious to) individual consumers. In an era when people were accustomed to ‘marketing’ in the earlier sense of the word - as in visiting their local butcher, baker, or cobbler - branding helped “to counteract the new and unsettling anonymity of packaged goods.”⁹¹ By the 1880s corporate logos, from Quaker Oats to Uncle Ben To Aunt Jemima, began to replace shopkeepers, and “the corporate ‘personality’ had arrived.”⁹²

From the earliest stages of consumer branding a few prominent people in advertising understood that the most effective marketing would not be exclusively focused on the nuts and bolts of products, but would have greater goals and aspirations.⁹³ In the 1920s legendary adman Bruce Barton successfully turned General Motors into a metaphor for the American family.⁹⁴ Around the same time Sigmund Freud’s nephew Edward Bernays adapted his uncle’s theories of the unconscious to advertising – working from the understanding that the most persuasive ads wouldn’t appeal to the rational mind, but to unconscious motivations.⁹⁵

By the late 1940s, there was a growing awareness in the advertising world that brand identity connected to emotion was important. Yet advertising budgets in the early to mid twentieth century were a tiny fraction of what they are currently and so, from the beginning of consumer branding in the 1880s until roughly a century later, the focus of corporations’ resources continued to be on the *product* over the corporate *image*.⁹⁶ Over the past 30 years, that focus has changed dramatically.

Emotional Branding

In the 1980s, brand management theorists put forth the idea that the majority of corporate resources and attention should not go to product development, but to image development. At that point “emotional branding” took off. A central goal of emotional branding (a term that emerged in the 1980s) was for the consumer to develop an affective attachment to the brand, and to come to view it as integral to their identity. The aim was not something as ho-hum as “customer satisfaction,” but rather an experience that would seem to give people’s lives more meaning – to create a social, spiritual or even cult-like devotion to the brand.⁹⁷

Digital entrepreneur Di Noto Giovanni describes how the advertising world tends to understand the distinctions between “conventional branding” and “emotional branding”:

Where conventional branding [CB] focuses on a suitable identity for the product, its functionality, usage and price, emotional branding [EB] focuses on how the client *feels* about it. One way to grasp the difference is to look the respective terminologies:

- In CB, purchasers buy products and/or services; in EB, people live and “experience” them
- In CB, purchasers have needs; in EB, people desire
- In CB, purchasers make functional and rational decisions: they choose; in EB, people feel and rely on their senses
- CB focus[es] on communication and on telling; EB focus[es] on dialogue and on sharing
- In CB, honest service level is important; in EB, it’s all about the trusted relationship⁹⁸

By the late 1980s, commercials were being produced that were completely devoid of factual content about the product.⁹⁹ More literal advertising was increasingly giving way to emotional branding – the attempt to give products and services a ‘deeper’ or more meaningful dimension with which people could identify.¹⁰⁰ Nike, Naomi Klein argues, doesn’t want consumers to think “sneakers” or sportswear but to associate the brand with “an almost religious transcendence through sport.”¹⁰¹ Apple has very successfully branded itself as cool, counter-cultural, and cutting edge. Brand managers at Kodak worked to reframe their core product: they wanted customers to understand Kodak not as a camera - but as a “social lubricant.” Today, the largest and most successful producers of consumer products, commonly referred to as “megabrands,” spend an enormous amount of resources building and tending to their “brand identities.”¹⁰²

By the 1990s the era of the “er” words (cleaner, whiter, brighter) had clearly receded and emotional branding had become central to corporate strategy. Corporations (and their “brand strategists”) were decreasingly concerned with what products *did* – and increasingly focused on what they *meant*. Indeed, the majority of resources for many large corporations shifted from building products to building brand images. An Infiniti automobile commercial from the early 1990s illustrates the shift: “It’s not just a car. It’s an expression of the culture... somehow connected to nature.... Infiniti.”¹⁰³

In the 1990s advertising and marketing firms also began studying cults in an attempt to crack the code on cult-like devotion. Could people looking for meaning systems, a sense of belonging or ready-made identities – find them in their favorite brands? As Klein points out, effective emotional branding depends on corporations having a “big idea.” Brand strategists for the “megabrands” concern themselves with creating whole meaning systems. Starbucks has worked to have consumers associate its brand with “community” - not home or work, but “a third place” where people can gather to relax with others. Indeed, in many suburban communities Starbucks has become a central community-gathering place. Benetton presents itself as the face of racial diversity. Disney: wholesome family fun.

In an era of “cradle to grave” marketing, where some advertising firms focus exclusively on children and even toddlers, a major question for corporations has become how to create intense, sometimes life-long devotion to the brand or, in the words of Saatchi and Saatchi CEO Kevin Roberts “loyalty beyond reason.”¹⁰⁴ In the new millennium hundreds of billions of dollars a year are spent on branding efforts in what has become a massive psychological and anthropological examination of American culture and individual desires in an effort to capture audiences for, and generate devotion to, brands.

Branding in Politics

We've been very nervous about calling it branding. People in politics don't want to call it that.

- Political consultant Peter Fenn

If you are unable to present a brand to the voters, you lose.

- Political consultant John Aristotle Phillips

Political branding in its broadest sense goes way back. Political parties have arguably always been brands, and famous political slogans and catchphrases such as “Old Ironsides,” “Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too” and “The Rough Rider” can be thought of as brands as well. “The fact is that good politicians have always known how to brand themselves,” says branding expert Karl Speak. “It just wasn’t always thought of in those terms. One of the things the private sector has taught people in politics is how to institutionalize thinking about branding rather than doing it from the gut.”¹⁰⁵ One area in which consumer branding has been very instructive is in terms of the rise of single issue politics – the single issue campaign being more akin to a consumer advertising campaign than, say, a candidate or a party.

According to political communications professor Tom Hollihan, the use of the term “political branding” goes back to 1952 and the Eisenhower campaign’s collaboration with “The Prince of Hard Sell” -- ad man Rosser Reeves.¹⁰⁶ Hollihan points to Eisenhower’s ‘52 commercials and jingles: “It becomes clear that Ike playing ‘The General’ in his own commercials is an early branding strategy. Back then Stevenson said ‘there’s no way I’ll sell myself like soap. It will demean the office.’ Since then nearly everyone has.”¹⁰⁷ But over the years political branding, like consumer branding, has become more sophisticated. For one – branding in the form of merchandise has clearly grown. One recent development is the “super-marketing of campaigns.”¹⁰⁸ In an era of ever-expanding horizontal and vertical marketing in the private sector (as of early 2011 Disney has more than 26,000 separate “princess” products, for example)¹⁰⁹ – politicians are getting in on the game. “Barbara Boxer had ‘Boxer shorts’ as a branding piece of merchandise,” says political consultant Mary Hughes. “Now we have dozens of candidate stores online to generate money and, more importantly, support and grow the

brand. We've come a long way from buttons and brochures."¹¹⁰

The more interesting and complex growth – and the sort of branding that we can say was honed in a systematic, institutionalized way rather than “from the gut,” has taken place in the realm of emotional branding. Judging by the number of articles on the topic in the last presidential election cycle and the sentiments of a majority of people interviewed for this project, politics has learned from the private sector in the area of emotional branding – which is now taken seriously as a political phenomenon. “Candidates are brands,” says Maggie Fitzpatrick, an executive with communications firm APCO Worldwide. “Voters respond to them based on their own emotions and values. Whether it's a candidate or a car... the goal is to make sure consumers understand that the candidate can be trusted, that you can identify with the candidate, that he or she shares your values.”¹¹¹ “Presidential candidates are no longer our fellow citizens running for the highest office in the land,” writes political blogger Jason Easley. “In the modern campaign they are products, and the voters are the consumers...and campaigns are always looking for ways to create a brand that resonates emotionally with voters.”¹¹²

While some who run campaigns balk at the idea of political “branding,” others argue that much of what happens in politics around image construction and public presentation maps neatly on to branding in the commercial world. “Branding is very important and brands mean something,” says Steve Schmitt. Like products, you want to establish trust for politicians. You want to establish credibility. You want people to connect with the brand. You've got to meet your brand, be consistent to it and be true to it. Protection of the brand is very, very important and once you lose your brand it is very difficult to get it back.”¹¹³ According to Bruce Neuman, who teaches political marketing at DePaul University: “It has become very difficult for politicians to communicate to their respective target audiences without a clearly defined brand image.”¹¹⁴

The growth of the conscious, coordinated use of emotional branding in campaigns is at least partially linked to the relatively recent professionalization of politics. To get elected at the state and certainly the national level today means a marketing team: a pollster, a PR firm, a chief strategist, and so on.¹¹⁵ With increasing amounts of money flowing in to political campaigns, many consumer advertising people have moved over from the private sector to the political realm, or have at least made political campaigns a part of their repertoire. They have, of course, brought techniques from the consumer-marketing realm with them.

“Some campaigns are heavily influenced by contemporary Madison Avenue methods because the people working them are from Madison Avenue,” says political communications professor Kathleen Hall Jamieson.¹¹⁶ According to Jamieson, this movement picked up in the 1980s when Democrats started drawing on Madison Avenue to the same degree Republicans had been for some time.

What is interesting is that you largely had Republicans

drawing on Madison Avenue techniques – and this extends back past the early '80s. They were there for Nixon just as they were there for Reagan. Democratic candidates only occasionally drew on those methods until Clinton and Obama.

Until Barack Obama's campaign, says former field director for Obama '08 Donnie Fowler, Republicans from 1980 on tended to be much better at emotional branding than Democrats:

Politics has always been emotional. But since the private sector taught politics how to institutionalize emotional branding Republicans have been better at understanding and capitalizing on that. Democrats and liberals have all too often neglected the emotional in favor of the rational. We lost to Reagan and the Democrats were shocked: 'But we're with the people are with us on all the issues – why are we losing elections?' Clinton transcended some of this, of course. Obama completely changed the landscape.¹¹⁷

Accounts vary as to which presidential candidate was the first to use emotional branding. Some suggest that the constellation of Madison Avenue advertising executives who ran Reagan's campaign, "The Tuesday Team," ushered in emotional branding for politics. "Roger Ailes was key to the emergence of emotional branding in political campaigns," says political consultant Rob Stutzman.¹¹⁸ "All the branding he designed for Reagan was very effective – and was really the beginning of a new paradigm."

Ken Khachigian worked with the Tuesday Team on many of Reagan's commercials.¹¹⁹ "We were working with several of the best people from ad agencies. The same people doing Michael Jackson Pepsi commercials were doing Reagan ads." Khachigian, who scripted many of those ads, emphasized the positive emotional resonance the Reagan team went for: "The message was simple: make America feel better about itself."¹²⁰ But while most people interviewed concur that the sort of emotional branding practiced by Reagan and other politicians after him borrows from the consumer marketing realm, some have taken umbrage with the notion that the consumer sphere is somehow out in front of politics on branding – or that it mastered "emotional branding" before politics did. "I hate that term," says Jim Spencer. "The commercial world brought us that term – but in America voting is not an intellectual experience it's a gut-level, emotional experience and it always has been. And the best political candidates and strategists have known that since at least the Daisy ad in the 1960s."¹²¹

Though the Daisy Ad sometimes gets cited as a counter point to the idea that emotional branding began in the 1980s, there is one critical aspect of emotional branding that does not fit: the inspirational (and perhaps aspirational) component. Emotional branding is based on positive associations rather than negative.¹²² While the Reagan campaign certainly used its share of negative ads – primarily ads that preyed on fears (Bear in the Woods being one prominent example), his campaign commercials and campaigning style was generally positively branded. “If you look at Morning in America, it looks like a Pepsi ad,” notes Hall-Jamieson, alluding to Reagan’s famous 1984 ad which was first entitled “Prouder, Stronger, Better.”¹²³ Not surprising, since adman Hal Riney, who was also behind Reagan’s “America’s Back” ad, had previously worked in consumer marketing – specifically for Pepsi. These two spots for Reagan-Bush 1984, “Prouder, Stronger, Better” and “America’s Back,” featured optimistic, reassuring narration and were “soft-textured 60-second montages of Americana that described an improving economy, rising prosperity and swelling national pride, implicitly challenging voters to turn their back on it.”¹²⁴ The ads included a wholesome sounding, avuncular narrator (Hal Riney wrote and voiced Morning in America), along with swelling, optimistic music:

It's morning again in America. Today more men and women will go to work than ever before in our country's history. With interest rates at about half the record highs of 1980, nearly 2,000 families today will buy new homes, more than at any time in the past four years. This afternoon 6,500 young men and women will be married, and with inflation at less than half of what it was just four years ago, they can look forward with confidence to the future. It's morning again in America, and under the leadership of President Reagan, our country is prouder and stronger and better. Why would we ever want to return to where we were less than four short years ago?

The ad was a hit with voters, and within much of the political advertising world as well. Riney’s ads were lauded for their departure from prior political advertising: his ads were powerful, but more subtle than most political advertising of the time, which, says Dan Schnur, “hit you over the head.” The soothing optimism that worked well for Reagan, especially in 1984 when the economy was working in his favor was not adopted by his successor George Bush’s campaign team, who, after extensive focus grouping, decided to “go negative” with the campaign’s infamous Willie Horton ad.

While it is possible to draw several analogies between megabrands’ and the campaigns of Reagan, Clinton and Bush II in terms of emotional branding – many credit Obama with the first consciously generated, comprehensive emotional branding campaign in politics. The Obama campaign is viewed not simply as the most effective use of branding in politics to date, but as brand management at its zenith. “The campaign has folded the man and the message and the speeches into a systemic branding effort,” writes Andrew Romano in his 2008 article *Why the Obama Brand is Working*. “Reinforced with a coherent, comprehensive program of fonts, logos, slogans and web

design, Obama is the first presidential candidate to be marketed like a high-end consumer brand.”¹²⁵ In her article for Ad Age entitled *The Most Interesting Branding Story is in Politics*, Jennifer Patterson concurs: “Take a pretty good product and add a layer of hope and empowerment, and you've created evangelists, rather than supporters.”¹²⁶

A common argument is that part of the reason the Obama brand was so successful is that he was not particularly defined in the public consciousness; that he was young and had a relatively short, little recorded life in politics before launching his campaign. A great asset to the Obama campaign was to have a brand – Change – that was vague enough that many could project their own hopes or aspirations onto this appealing yet undefined candidate. But there are few serious presidential contenders who will ever be in Obama's position in 2008 – and it seems likely that the “genius” so often attributed to his branding derives much of its power from structural circumstances outside the campaign's control, but that largely worked in its favor.

While Obama was hailed as the zenith in branding in 2008, today his brand certainly lacks the sort of luster it did during the campaign and the early days of his presidency. One of the problematic implications of successful branding efforts is that no politician can be all things to all supporters. If Obama's campaign was indeed “brand management at its zenith,” was disappointment and disillusionment for many voters simply bound to follow? We'll consider this question in Chapter 5.

“Bottom Up” / “Open Source” Branding

*Are you using yesterday's communication strategies to speak with today's voters?
In 2008, blind faith in traditional media is a recipe for defeat.*

- Political advertising conference brochure

*The love affair between big brands and mass media is over. But where do
marketers go next?*

- Marketing expert James Cherkoff

Over the past fifteen years the Internet has revolutionized advertising and marketing both consumer and political. When the Internet was first introduced, few fully recognized its potential as a marketing tool. One of the first Internet service providers, Netscape, pushed the Web into prominence by focusing on how to make it more accessible to people interested in buying and selling online. In August 1995, Netscape went public, and interest swelled almost immediately. Advertisers and marketers worldwide recognized a golden opportunity. The reach, accessibility and cost-effectiveness of the Internet meant the online world was about to explode. In the 17 years since, the medium has gained ever-growing prominence in the lives of entrepreneurs.

Unlike some other innovations in business and marketing, the Internet touched politics, and everything else almost immediately. In 1996, one year after Netscape went public: “there was something called National Net Day,” says when a bunch of tech companies

worked with Clinton and Gore to get people all over the country wired” says political consultant Katie Hughes.¹²⁷ “So 1996 was a major benchmark where technology became more common for people tuned in to politics.”

The quick growth of the internet’s influence is clear: “In 1994, if a political party or interest group had even a rudimentary Web site, it was a pioneer in the Information Age. In 1996, if a candidate for president had a Web site, he would likely give out the address for it during televised appearances... by 1997, if a party or interest group still did not have a Web site, it was run by a bunch of idiots.”¹²⁸ By 1996 the major parties had fairly sophisticated web sites, as did the presidential candidates. But, as Pippa Norris notes, in the 1996 race the Web was still a novelty rather than integral to the campaign strategy. By the 1998 election the use of the Internet by political organizations proliferated so that “almost all gubernatorial candidates, almost three-quarters of all Democrat and Republican Senate candidates, and just over half the candidates for the House of Representatives had sites, equally divided between the major parties.”¹²⁹ Still, as with other mediums, the private sector took the lead in exploiting it for marketing purposes – and were out front in what has become known as “open source” or “bottom up” branding.

The term “open source” emerged with collaboration among computer programmers building new technical systems. Central to the “open source” concept was the programmers’ willingness to share source code. In 1991 Linux was among the first breakthroughs, and is still going strong today.¹³⁰ More recently, an open source community called Mozilla created Firefox, a popular web browser. With the rise of sites like Wikipedia and Creative Commons an increasing number of people are being attracted to the values that drive OSM.¹³¹ According to James Cherkoff, editor of the technology and marketing blog *Modern Marketing*, these are:

The buzz of meeting like-minded people from all over the world: the fun of sharing ideas, however crazy or leftfield; the feelings of empowerment; the can-do, pioneering freedom. It’s these social...values that are driving Open Source among gamers, petrol heads, food lovers, film fans, musicians, sports junkies, globetrotters and almost every other area of modern culture.¹³²

Why and how was it here and not politics? The growth of open source values has presented a challenge to the business world. Until recently consumer marketers, like political marketers, were preoccupied by controlling the message from on high. “Borrowing the language of war,” Cherkoff writes, “marketers have been used to launching campaigns, targeting consumers with brand collateral, adhering to strict rules of engagement (known as brand guidelines), under the guidance of personnel known as brand guardians.”¹³³ Brands – especially the megabrands – competed for our attention by bombarding us with their messages at every turn. But contemporary consumers are arguably more savvy and skeptical – turning off or filtering out what they don’t want to see or hear. In an attempt to avoid that filtering, many brands have begun to experiment with open source techniques: inviting consumers (or potential consumers) into the marketing process. A few open source principals:

- Open Source marketers may invite consumers to affect a product or service's direction and values. One example: Working Assets is a phone company that donates a portion of proceeds to various social justice and environmental causes. Members help choose where to donate resources.
- Open source marketers may invite consumers to create advertisements or other brand related material in the public sphere. Examples include Budweiser's hugely popular "Whassup!" campaign, Red Bull's "Art of the Can" campaign and Converse's invitation to consumers to submit short films featuring the brand that are then posted on the corporate website.
- Open source marketers realize how powerful authenticity is on the contemporary marketplace. Corporate speak is out – human, friendly, often ironic or community minded voices – are in.
- Whereas mass marketers of old spoke to potential consumers – often in a loud and persistent monologue – corporations interested in open source techniques emphasize "conversation and dialogue."

"The key to understanding open source marketing in this era is that it that brands are no longer owned by the company," says pollster Peter Hart.¹³⁴ Hart points to Google, Apple, Hyundai and Doritos as phenoms of "open source" or "co-branding":

Doritos ran a commercial during the super bowl made by one of their consumers. It cost \$2000 to make and was one of the highest rated commercials that year. Hyundai said, brilliantly, 'we'll take the car back if you lose your job.' These brands are really co-owned by the consumers. Those who try to retain the brand for themselves are running with half the octane.¹³⁵

The phrase "open-source politics" was first used in the lead-up to the 2004 presidential elections, by political operatives associated with Howard Dean's campaign, who claimed that the campaign represented "open source" ideals.¹³⁶ Dean's, arguably the first presidential campaign to use open source techniques (Joe Trippi famously described the process as "building an airplane in mid flight") - mobilized hundreds of thousands of people and raised more than twenty-five million dollars on line – doing more to usher in internet based open-source politics than any prior politician. With its online strategy the Dean campaign mobilized a huge number of people who would have otherwise been unlikely to engage in politics.¹³⁷

The term was further refined by political reporter Micah Sifry in a piece written for *The Nation* magazine shortly after the 2004 election and widely cited since. Sifry argued that "open-source politics" was defined by "opening up participation in planning and implementation to the community, letting competing actors evaluate the value of your plans and actions, being able to shift resources away from bad plans and bad planners and toward better ones, and expecting more of participants in return." It would mean,

Sifry argued “moving away from egocentric organizations and toward network – centric organizing.”¹³⁸

Since the 2004 elections and with the popularization of Web 2.0 technologies such as YouTube and Wikipedia the Internet has become much more accessible, participatory and interactive. Citizen participation via the Internet has lent some currency to the notion that citizens have, via these technologies, more political volition, voice and, potentially, power to change the political landscape. One example is the Macaca video that went viral, contributing to the defeat of Virginia Senator George Allen in 2006.

The Obama campaign took open source branding much further than his predecessors. “The Obama campaign wasn’t the next generation, we skipped a generation” says Fowler. Peter Hart, who polls for clients in both the consumer and political spheres, sees a synergy between those worlds where open source is concerned. “Obama is one of the best brands ever produced in politics and it was co-owned,” he says. “Unlike any other campaign before it the brand was not just the party or the candidate but all the people who worked on it.”¹³⁹ At mybarackobama.com, “Obamaniacs” could send policy recommendations to the campaign, set up mini fund-raising sites, plan Obama-related events, blog about the campaign, and more. “His campaign has deputized soccer grand moms and hipsters alike to generate new heights of viral support,” writes Ellen McGirt in *The Brand Called Obama*. “And he has been exceptionally successful at converting online clicks into real-world currency: rallies in the heartland, videos on YouTube, and most important, donations and votes.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed – many attribute the campaign’s open source style with catapulting Obama from an extreme long shot, fringe candidate to President of the United States.

Why was open source popular in the consumer realm before it made its debut in politics with Dean and Obama? “People in politics were used to doing things a particular way: top down” argues Fowler. “The story of open source branding’s move from the private sector to the political sphere is one of Silicon Valley knocking on doors of presidential campaigns that didn’t want to be open. They opened very grudgingly.”¹⁴¹ Jonah Seiger, founding partner of Connections Media and a veteran of Internet politics, concurs. “Think of an established brand with a lot invested in control of its image. The idea of opening that up is scary.”¹⁴² According to Fowler, while there’s an incentive to do new things in corporate America, there’s often a disincentive in politics. “In politics if you have establishment on your side, you’re good. And the price of failure is enormous. If you fail your reputation is destroyed. Thus politics tends to dissuade risk taking.” He goes on:

Here’s an example that’s really not sexy. My first campaign was in 1988. It was Dick Gephardt in Iowa. Corporations were already using databases – we were still keeping lists of voters on index cards in a metal recipe box. I also was the field director of Al Gore’s 2000 campaign. We did not have a database; we had 150 excel spreadsheets. Along comes Howard Dean in 2003. Just like Obama, he had no chance. No money, came from a small state, no chance in hell.

Obama? He's black - he had very little political history. For Dean and Obama, necessity was the mother of invention. They *had* to find a new way to talk to voters.

The Obama campaign, though similarly a long shot at first, had the advantage of looking back at Dean. And with the success of Dean and especially Obama, that reluctance has certainly receded. "It's important to keep perspective," says political strategist Steve Schmidt, a key operative on the McCain campaign, "that a well constructed-video made by people not formally affiliated with a campaign can lead to more people viewing it on the Internet -- bottom up or, if you like, horizontally -- than could be delivered top down via television advertisements. It's a fundamental change in communication. What's important now is not top down but what people say to each other."¹⁴³

Political consultant Peter Fenn argues that while old media is hardly withering on the vine the way that many suggest (the 2008 Obama campaign spent much more on traditional than new media, for example) that it is undeniable that open source / bottom up marketing is radically changing political communication which was largely top-down and hierarchical before the emergence and immediacy of the internet. "20 million people seeing a video created my Moveon.org over the course of ten days... and it didn't cost the campaign anything? Its difficult not to see the Internet in politics as a revolution."¹⁴⁴

There is no question that the open source branding of Dean and Obama was invigorating to some citizens – leading to a strong sense of engagement and efficacy by a variety of people involved with those campaigns. This and other implications of modern / contemporary branding techniques will be considered in chapter 5. But it seems clear that the "open source" model ushered in by the internet and some "outsider" campaigns has clearly changed the political landscape.

Targeting

*There will always be a top line message – the big brand – but how you motivate and make that real for people – how you build the walls inside the house – that's a totally different matter.*¹⁴⁵

- Political consultant Steve Schmidt

From Abraham Lincoln's 1860 campaign tracking down registered Whig voters in an attempt to persuade them to switch parties, to Eddie Bernays' recruiting legions of young women into the cigarette market by having a gaggle of beautiful debutants smoke what he framed as "torches of freedom" in a Main Street parade, to the John F. Kennedy campaign's meticulous documentation of various subgroups of voters: "how they lived, what they believed, and what they wanted," neither voter nor consumer targeting is anything remotely new.¹⁴⁶ What is relatively new, especially to politics, is the increasingly specific targeting of individuals on the following two fronts:

DATABASE DRIVEN TARGETING: First used in the consumer realm, these massive computer databases contain vast amounts of information about – and complex profiles of – individual citizens/consumers, enabling those market or

political forces attempting to sell, to persuade, to motivate and so on to send very specific, tailored messages based on individuals' information.

BEHAVIORAL TARGETING: This term encompasses a constellation of techniques and technologies used by web publishers and advertisers to gather detailed personal information based on Internet users' individual Internet use (email, social networking, surfing the web, etc) and use it to design specific content – advertising for example – to deliver back to the user.

Consumer Database-Driven Targeting

While targeting potential customers or voters certainly precedes electronic databases, the private sector has for decades taken the information it has gathered about consumers and computerized it. Sophisticated databases now hold an incredible amount of personal information about millions of individuals. Consumer direct marketers began building electronic databases to target customers in the 1970s. They initially relied on basic population characteristics such as age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, education, income, marital status and number of children – much of which was derived from census reports. Once consumer “segments” or “clusters” are identified, targeted messages can be sent through various media: direct mail, by phone, and so on.

Hungry for more ways to slice and dice the consumer universe, consumer marketers began to use zip as a way of organizing marketing segments. Zip code analysis, still practiced today, rests largely on the expectation that “birds of feather flock together” – the notion that our consumer behavior is likely to resemble others who reside nearby. Another longstanding way consumer-targeting firms have categorized the population is through our choices of magazines, which are thought to reveal a wealth of information about us (in some cases more than demographic factors because they can give specific insights into our interests and inclinations). Someone's choice of magazines is held by many who practice targeting as an index of other choices we are likely to make as consumers. Our individual profiles are also likely to contain information about our income level, the number of children we have (or want to have), the kinds of magazines we read, cars we drive, alcohol we drink and more.

One of the earliest companies to engage in consumer segmentation on this scale is Claritas, an organization James Verini describes in his article *Big Brother Inc*:

Claritas divides the U.S. into four major demographic groups and within those carves up another 66 subgroups, with specific information about education levels, likely fields of employment, tastes in cars and television shows, religious affiliations, hobbies, and more. There are Young Digerati, New Empty Nesters, and Blue Blood Estates, all the way down to Urban Ghetto, Shotguns and Pickups, and Bedrock Americans. (The brochure illustration for that last group shows a scruffy, tattooed man in a white tank top sitting in front of a pickup truck and a trailer, next to three bewildered-looking children and a dog.)¹⁴⁷

Another prominent way of categorizing us is through psychographics. As opposed to demographics – the original input for these electronic databases - psychographics are attributes related to things like lifestyle, personality, values, attitudes and interests. Psychographic marketing theorists believe that our values and beliefs are much more important than our demographic characteristics in terms of indicating what consumer behavior is likely. For example consumer (and political) motivations don't necessarily map onto socioeconomic status or other demographic factors. Determining psychographic clusters owes a lot to psychological techniques, many of which are employed in market research: focus grouping and polling in ways that tap into our unconscious / emotional associations with products. Businesses want to understand our unconscious desires and motivations, and to then generate consumer products or experiences that appeal to those desires.

One of the earliest and most influential psychographic models was the values and lifestyles (“VALS”) typology developed at the Stanford Research Institute in 1970s. While at SRI behavioral psychologist Abraham Maslow created psychological profiles of individuals by administering questionnaires that were then run through computers to look for patterns. Maslow found that self-expression came in types, which he referred to as “VALS”.¹⁴⁸ VALS is a way of viewing people on the basis of their attitudes, needs, wants and beliefs. Maslow's typology marked the beginning of what is now commonly referred to as “lifestyle marketing.” With VALS in their sights, corporations understood that they could potentially make a killing helping people figure out how to “be themselves” through consumption.¹⁴⁹

Database driven targeting continues to be honed over the years. Targeting firms troll every possible source of public, and supposedly private, information to generate every more nuanced individual level profiles. The heart of consumer targeting today is the sending of tailored messages to small, distinct (though sometimes overlapping) subpopulations on the basis of unique information about those the individuals within those groups. With a concentration/collection of sophisticated demographic and psychological information and the technology to send “niched” messages, marketers have been able to break large subsets of the population used by consumer and political marketers of the 1950s into many smaller groups.¹⁵⁰ Dozens of ads for the same products can be generated for different population “clusters” – or a single ad may have multiple variations that frame messages differently depending on target audiences and delivered via direct mail, niche television programming (the Golf Channel or the Wedding Channel, for example – also known as “narrow-casting”), the Internet, by phone, and so on.

Narrow-casting via cable seems a blunt instrument when it comes to the rapidly evolving world of behavioral targeting through the Internet. Ten years ago computer targeting dealt in demographic subgroups based on age, gender and location.¹⁵¹ Now, with more data, the targeting tends to be much more dynamic and responsive – constantly developing, gauging and honing users interests and preferences. Behavioral targeting happens through a sophisticated constellation of software tools and analytics: targeting companies (who consumer/corporate entities do business with) make a deal with the web publisher, who puts a piece of code on the site so that when users browse the web, the site will put a cookie on their browsers, which collects info as the user

makes their way around the internet. With the cookie on board the browser, the targeting begins. Data is collected about what you buy, read, search for... marketers can tailor Web ads based on individuals online behaviors — the sites they view, the products they look at, and whether they seriously consider purchasing. The more time goes on, the more data is collected about the user. The more information acquired about user, the more the ads we see are a result of our own interest as expressed thru our online behavior providing advertisers and marketers stronger chance of sales and delivering up ads wherever the individual goes (i.e. whatever site they visit, they will see the add of the advertiser who is after them.)¹⁵²

Political Micro-targeting¹⁵³

[T]echnology has enabled us to do all this stuff so much better now. We have all these kick ass voter files – we don't really need the party. You can go knock on doors and brand yourself that way. It's better than its ever been to give individuals what they want.... except for maybe brief periods in the '20s or '60s where candidates dropped off bags of money to machine bosses in SF and Chicago.

- Obama National Deputy Field Director Jake Braun

As most successful micro-targeters will attest, the heart of what is now referred to as micro-targeting has been practiced for a long time. “The best micro-targeter ever is a good precinct captain -- especially the old precinct captain,” says Jake Braun, National Deputy Field Director for the 2008 Obama Campaign.¹⁵⁴ “They would go door to door with service requests and keep a record of those. ‘Hey Mary Jane I got you that street light fixed.’ That’s the best.” Braun argues that much of this individual-level activity waned dramatically. “A lot of urban machines had declined from the 1970s when they had 17x11 sheets of voters and talked to every single Hispanic woman who had no man in the household – that sort of thing.” What’s new, Braun points out, is the computer driven data management side of it. “Its so good now. In these races we always have the pollsters coming back and saying – left hand elbow players are key.”

Indeed, political micro targeting is a modification of data mining practices used by commercial direct marketers since the 1970s. Political micro targeting today depends on large, sophisticated databases similar to those that hold consumer information. Republicans and Democrats each have one with data about millions of voters and there is one large non-partisan one as well. The database basically keeps track of voter habits like credit card companies monitor consumer spending patterns. The databases contain information particular to individuals (contributions, frequency of voting, volunteerism, party affiliation) and merge that information with a consumer profile generated by commercial marketing vendors like Experian or InfoUSA. The resulting profile is then considered a product to be sold to interested parties.

“What the political operatives have done,” says *Los Angeles Times* political columnist

Mark Barabak, “some of who have a leg in both the consumer and the political worlds, is they’ve taken a lot of those practices and techniques from the consumer world and used them for politics. They now know that if you drink certain kind of booze you’re more likely to be a Democrat or a Republican. That’s how it started -- taking private sector marketing data and creating cross tabs with voter data and finding connections between what people consume and how they behave politically.”¹⁵⁵

New developments in terms of honing profiles are common, for example the emergence of the Geographic Information System (GIS) that maps trends based on location alongside hundreds of other variables. This sort of geography based identification system allows those working campaigns to set out to visit potential voters organized along the shortest route (much like FedEx or UPS determines its delivery routes). “Politics is behind – but we’re catching up,” says political consultant Peter Fenn.¹⁵⁶ “This kind of complex information about individuals will be incredibly valuable. And we’ll eventually have everything in there but the DNA map.”

So how did the adoption of database driven targeting to politics happen? As discussed in chapter 1, there is a fair amount of professional overlap between consumer and political marketers – so there is an informal exchange of institutional knowledge. “We work for General Motors and the National Association of Realtors,” notes Fenn.¹⁵⁷ “We understand how they target – how they go to specific people with messaging using all kinds of personal information – and we adapt that to politics.” It is clear that the private sector was way out front in the business of targeting. “For obvious reasons, we want to we want to work with consumer marketers.” says political consultant John Aristotle Phillips.¹⁵⁸ “We want to use market research firms that have done Pepsi or Coke.”

According to Fenn, the consumer targeting firm Claritas made an early impression on him and some of his peers in politics:

I was working with Frank Church in 1979 and we had Claritas folks come in and present the cluster model. It was an early niche-marketing model that made it possible to communicate different sorts of messages to different clusters. This was obviously applicable to politics and therefore pretty interesting to us.¹⁵⁹

But while the seeds of micro targeting may have been planted soon after such database targeting was introduced in the private sector, political micro targeting took several more decades to take hold.¹⁶⁰ According to data-mining expert Hal Malchow, who has practiced political targeting for decades, he and a few others began purchasing information from huge commercial data-mining companies like Axicon and Experian only in the late 1990s, at which point they also began merging that information with existing lists.¹⁶¹

Although some micro-targeting tactics were used in California since 1992, these techniques were not employed nationally until Target Point used them for the Republicans in 2004. According to Democratic consultant Donnie Fowler – it was to some degree a story of necessity being the mother of invention:

We did great in 2000. At that point strategists Frank Luntz and Ken Mehlman said ‘we will never let this happen again.’ Republicans then set about developing this nascent political concept: they dispatched volunteers door-to-door beginning in ’02 with very specific information about individual voters and it really worked. But the great thing about the Republicans is that they telegraph and broadcast everything they do – so the Democrats picked it up almost immediately. By 2006, Democrats were using micro targeting on the national level as well.¹⁶²

According to political communications professor Tom Hollihan, micro-targeting has really become firmly established in politics only since the 2000 election.¹⁶³ “Richard Viguerie did a huge form of direct mail earlier,” says Hollihan. “His work formed some of the basis of what we see today – but now there’s a much higher level of sophistication with the computer databases. But there are no single moments in time, really – micro-targeting has been an evolution in several respects.” As consumer data miners have done for decades, micro-targeting companies gather as much information as possible from a variety of sources and then sell their products: “voter files.”¹⁶⁴ These databases combine political information – things like party affiliation, voting patterns and donations - with information collected from commercial marketing vendors such as Acxiom, Experian Americas, and InfoUSA. Micro-targeters have files on every registered voter. They break us down ethnically, demographically, geographically and ideologically. They keep track of other things, too: from what pets we own to how many children we have to how we feel about specific issues.

While its not uncommon to hear an analogy made (a la Braun) between modern micro-targeters and precinct captains, it is just as common to hear Big Brother invoked. Micro-targeting firms troll every possible source of information to compile voter profiles. Individual voters are then put into groups on the basis of computer modeling. Such groups have names like “Downscale Union Independents,” “Tax and Terrorism Moderates” and “Older Suburban Newshounds.”¹⁶⁵ As in the consumer realm, once political segments are identified, tailored messages can be sent out: it is now common to have dozens of political ads generated for different designated groups via television, radio, email, direct mail and political speeches.¹⁶⁶ But what happens when the public sphere is sliced, diced and messaged to along these lines? What does that do to the notion of a shared political culture or a common understanding of the political issues of priority to the country and its leaders? These are a few of several implications questions related to contemporary political targeting we will consider in Chapter 5.

Behavioral Targeting in Politics

In the relatively new arena of targeting over the Internet, “behavioral targeting” is increasing the depth and breadth of information stored in our online profiles. While many citizens believe much if not all of their computer use is private, online behavior is very closely monitored by advertisers and marketers (and increasingly campaigns and

other political entities as well.) Most platforms assign a unique cookie as a means of identification for every visitor to the site, allowing them to be tracked throughout their web journey. When a user visits a web site, the pages they visit, the amount of time they view each page, the links they click on, the searches they make and the things that they interact with allow sites to collect that data, and other factors, create a 'profile' that links to that visitor's web browser. The platform then makes a decision about what content to provide the user – specifically to deliver their online advertisements to the users who they believe are most likely to be influenced by them.

Site publishers can also use this data to create defined audience segments based on visitors that have similar profiles (similar to segmented sub populations prevalent in microtargeting). When visitors return to a specific site or a network of sites using the same web browser, those profiles allow advertisers to position their online ads with those visitors who seem to exhibit a greater level of interest and intent for the products and services on offer. On the theory that properly targeted ads will fetch more consumer interest, the publisher (or seller) can charge a premium for these ads over random advertising or ads based on the context of a site.

Like other targeting techniques, behavioral marketing can be used on its own or in conjunction with various forms of targeting based on factors like geography, demographics or contextual web page content. When it is done without the knowledge of users, it may be considered a breach of browser security and illegal by many countries' privacy data protection and consumer protection laws. That said it consistently occurs without users' knowledge and is as yet little detected or understood by most users. "Of course, once personal information is gathered, it can be used for purposes other than selling products," writes Dr. Allen Kanner. "Since corporations are profit-driven, their valuable data banks will not remain within the confines of their sales departments."¹⁶⁷

And what about these cutting edge methods in politics? "The Obama campaign near perfected this sort of targeting on the Internet," says Democratic political consultant Katie Merrill. "They depended on very sophisticated knowledge about people. People who had given five dollars were tracked so that they could go back and give them very specific messages."¹⁶⁸ Ken Strasma, president of Strategic Telemetry, which did targeting for Obama's campaign in Iowa and elsewhere, says the technology employed in the 2008 presidential race far outstripped that of just four years earlier. Based on information yielded from both database (micro-) and behavioral targeting, the Obama campaign had an arsenal of targeted campaign tactics to choose from. The ability to custom-tailor cable-television ads down to the zip code in Iowa, or send a canvasser to a voter's doorstep armed with a computer-generated picture of that person's political personality. "We're predicting how people talk and think about politics just like banks predict people's spending habits and credit-worthiness," says Strasma.¹⁶⁹

There is no question that the highly targeted politics of the 21st century is a different landscape than at the dawn of the television age, when the same core political messages were broadcast to the nation to consider, discuss and debate. "The whole world is crumbling," says political consultant Rob Stutzman.¹⁷⁰ "The rules have

dramatically changed and they're going to continue to." Indeed. In addition to the variety of targeting methods described above, how information is gathered and deployed in those areas, there are several new methods being developed or on the horizon. A few recent developments in micro targeting: In 2008, Target Point used a new system: Micro-targeting 2.0. According to the company, when a campaign calls "Jane Doe" everything she talks about is immediately uploaded into the database. Such instant feedback loops are already standard in the business world, and the expectation is that they will increasingly be in use in politics. Another development is software called "Voter DNA" that collects thousands of data points on everything from people's commute time to their hobbies. The software then uses "genetic algorithms to sift through each string, one by one, to find the sequence that best indicates a generic voter's propensity to vote in a certain way."

Yet another recent development in micro targeting is facial recognition software from Micro-target Media. Here's an excerpt from an article on the technology:

Let's say John McCain holds a rally in Miami. As he's running through his stump speech, talking about patriotism, helping small businesses and improving education opportunities, video cameras are filming the entire audience's facial expressions. And let's say one audience member, on her way into the rally, had signed up for a raffle and walked away with a keychain implanted with a small RFID (radio-frequency identification) chip. The campaign could use the chip to identify her, analyze her reactions to the speech, and send her a mail piece targeting the issues she cares about most. 'You put those together and you have the most powerful set of micro targeting tools that you could have,' says Terry Popowich, the firm's president. The technology can also analyze people's emotive responses to topics.

Andrew Tavani, who works for the data-mining and targeting firm Aristotle, says that some micro-targeting firms are experimenting with neural networking, and also that Claritas has already developed "prism codes" with a descriptive code for every house in the country. "You don't want to know what we know about you," says Tavani with a laugh.¹⁷¹

The shift toward a highly targeted politics signals different things to different people: from concern over a waning public sphere and interconnected demos to political consultants' excitement about discovering effective ways to connect with citizens - ways that energize them and motivate them to get involved. Some appreciate advertisers' (political and otherwise) understanding and speaking to their interests and believe that today's candidates and campaigns are more responsive than ever, while others are concerned about privacy and dislike the notion of sophisticated profiling systems that may be employed to manipulate. For some democracy feels more alive than ever - while others worry that our consumer society has led, with a few notable exceptions, to

a population preoccupied by self-interest and the quest for personal gratification with little to no meaningful engagement with notions of the greater good. But on one thing nearly everyone has agreed: the world of consumer marketing has made a big impact on the way politics is practiced in the United States. Now that we've considered some of the key influences and points of overlap, we turn the question of whether and how these two realms: the consumer and the political, diverge – and why.

CHAPTER 4: DIVERGENCES

We're finding out that there are fewer and fewer differences between the psychology of the citizen and the psychology of the consumer.

– Business strategist and author Alan Kelly

The consumer is expected to take into account what is in it for them. The citizen is hopefully going to think about shared social commitments. There should be fundamental differences.

– Political Communications professor Tom Hollihan

While the majority of political consultants, journalists and academics I have spoken with tend to coalesce around the idea that consumer marketing has had a major influence on the way presidential elections are run, that that influence has grown over years, and that there is now substantial commonality between the two pursuits, few argue that they are one in the same – in other words that selling politicians is just like “selling soap.” One major distinction that pops out is the duopoly aspect of American politics: the two party system that has been so dominant for so long is perhaps closer to the cold war – a standoff between or binary of two dominant political forces -- than anything in the realm of consumer marketing in the United States. That duopoly has long existed in American politics, yet seldom has it existed (or at least been so entrenched) in the consumer world. That apparent contrast is one of many between consumer and political spheres. After looking at overlapping trends and techniques in the previous chapter, here we shift course, exploring perspectives on the differences between consumer and political marketing, and why they exist. What distinguishes one realm from the other? What marketing strategies tend to be utilized in one sphere rather than the other, and why? Finally, in today’s United States, is there a tangible difference between the psychology of the citizen and the psychology of the consumer?

The “One Day Sale”

A major distinction between running a presidential campaign versus a consumer marketing campaign is that an election is effectively a one-day sale. Everything leading up to Election Day largely comes down to fewer than twenty-four hours of voting, and the stakes could not be higher: the result is all or nothing.¹⁷² Political consultant Tony Schwartz pointed out nearly a half century ago something still true today: most corporations’ value can fluctuate somewhat in any given year and be fine. In the winner take all American election, candidates have to sell a majority or a plurality or they are, at least temporarily, out of business.¹⁷³

In addition to the capacity of many corporations to rise and fall in value somewhat without being done for, businesses also tend to differ from candidates in terms of their relative ability to thrive in niche markets. “In the consumer world it is possible to have a small piece of the market and do great,” says consultant Peter Hart.¹⁷⁴ “The big, popular brands and the niche brands can often exist happily side by side.”¹⁷⁵ As Hart points out, politics is a different story. “There is no niche presidential candidate. No one talks about how great they did if they lost the election.”¹⁷⁶

The fact that presidential campaigns are won by getting the greatest percentage of the market necessitates that any competitive presidential candidate’s brand is broad and

general enough to appeal to an enormous variety and number of people. Relative to presidential candidates, consumer brands are hugely diverse and endlessly creative in terms of their marketing approaches that make sense since, as a group, they are speaking to myriad smaller audiences. It is not unusual for corporations to generate products for, and then market to, very specific subcultures / subpopulations. Not so in presidential politics.¹⁷⁷

All Too Human

Despite elements of truth in the well-worn analogy of politicians to products, there are several additional ways in which political and consumer marketing spheres distinct. For one, corporations have a relatively easy time keeping their products “on brand”: products are generally speaking, controllable and predictable. There are exceptions, for example if a brand of automobile painstakingly marketed to generate an association with safety has a design flaw that leads to a string of consumer injuries and deaths, or if a popular family lunch meat is suddenly recalled due to a lethal E Coli outbreak. Yet the potential for and the degree to which consumer products are likely to be perceived as “off brand” pales in comparison to their human counterparts because it is possible to tightly choreograph and control the identity of consumer goods.

To put it more plainly: politicians are human, while products are not. For all the criticisms of politicians as inauthentic, candidates are who they are no matter how well funded and carefully scripted their campaigns. Unlike products, candidates come with complicated personal histories and entrenched, sometimes problematic character traits. They may be womanizers, they may be overly formal or stiff, they may be intellectuals (or eschew intellectualism), and they may struggle with grammar, cancer or a history of addiction. Personal histories can be obscured or reframed to some degree but generally speaking, cannot be erased.¹⁷⁸

The unfolding present, such as in the midst of a campaign, is even more difficult to control or frame than the past: no matter how much care is put by consultants and others involved in running a campaign into grooming a candidate to convey a particular image, message or brand – the potential is always there for politicians to stray from or “tarnish” that brand or, worse, for a candidate’s brand to be defined more by the opposition than by the campaign. Case in point: in spite of vigorous attempts by the Gore camp to overcome his image as stiff, wonky and humorless - political opponents, comedians, news media and other agents of popular culture relentlessly cemented that image. While it can certainly be argued that those representations were caricatures, it is also clear that they had a lot to do with whom Gore was, or at least how he presented himself, on the campaign trail. For many Americans, Gore failed the beer test.¹⁷⁹

In short, the degree to which the image or brand of a consumer product can be controlled is simply not possible when dealing with living, breathing, and imperfect human beings – no matter how polished they might be or how savvy their team is. And

with candidates who are out on the campaign trail and in the public eye day after day, being monitored around the clock on cellular phones, by news cameras, and so on, there are plenty of opportunities to slip up: from George H. W. Bush not knowing how self check-out worked at a grocery store, thereby pegging himself as an elitist out of touch with everyday people exactly as he was attempting to convey the opposite, to Barack Obama's gaffe about rural Americans who "cling to guns or religion" undercutting his carefully constructed brand as the voice of hope and change for all Americans.¹⁸⁰

Of course there are some politicians who are better equipped to stay on brand than others. Everyone knows that Ronald Reagan was an actor long before becoming a politician, a fact conveyed by his smooth, facile delivery of choreographed and scripted moments. A well known Reagan biography is subtitled: "The Role of a Lifetime," and it was evident to people around the world that, as candidate and then as President, Reagan drew heavily on his training as an actor in his executive role; he had little problem appearing "presidential," being comfortable delivering speeches, being in the public eye, and so on.¹⁸¹

Other candidates have been notoriously difficult to package or make fit a particular brand. Adlai Stevenson, famous for his initial aversion to and refusal to participate in television commercials (which he believed too closely resembled consumer ads), was successfully branded an "egghead" by the opposition – a label that stuck so thoroughly in part due to his refusal to present a clear/coherent counter image.¹⁸² Meanwhile prominent advertising man Rosser Reeves, until then best known for his consumer advertisements, managed through a combination of canned commercials ("Eisenhower Answers America"), jingles ("I like Ike") and endless repetition (the Prince of Hard Sell's signature), to effectively brand Eisenhower, aka "The General," a commanding, forthright and amiable leader.¹⁸³

A more recent branding success story was Barack Obama's campaign. Obama was an unusual contender for the presidency in that he was comparatively unknown at the time his campaign launched. His brand: an agent (if not the embodiment) of "Hope" and "Change." Obama's brand was abstract yet powerful: the candidate and his team were able to deploy it with enormous success.

The power of the Obama brand had to do with a convergence of several factors. Obama was erudite, attractive, charming and charismatic. From the moment he hit the national stage there were comparisons to J.F.K. The key mantra of Obama's brand: hope/change, immediately resonated with huge numbers of Americans. At a moment when people desired change, Obama was cast as its personification. At a moment when people craved a politics of optimism Obama's campaign team made a compelling case that he was hope's candidate: throughout the campaign he spoke the language of unification, possibility and a brighter future.¹⁸⁴

The success of Obama's brand had much to do with the fact that it was perfectly attuned to the times. Widespread concern and even dismay about the state of the union meant that structural circumstances were ideal for a long-shot candidate with a "funny name" and many other significant hurdles to overcome, to meet with overwhelming

success. And while particular historical circumstances and Obama's personal appeal are often described as key ingredients to his success, political insiders heap heavy praise on Obama's campaign team for its detail-oriented, comprehensive, consistent branding – from heavily focus-grouped logos to well thought through, cutting edge forms of online messaging to the creation of consistent (and consistently effective) talking points. The Obama team has taken on an almost mythic quality: the campaign is considered by many to be the best ever run – with comparisons to high end consumer brands like Apple or Nike made as often as comparisons with earlier candidates.¹⁸⁵

But to circle back to rural Pennsylvania, Obama's particular brand of optimism, with its emphasis on his capacity to unite and heal Americans and his carefully honed image as a president for all was tarnished early on by the guns and religion flap, which was perceived as classist and out of step with middle America. For while there is no doubt that some of the most effective presidential campaigns have had a lot in common with marketing strategies of consumer megabrands, history repeatedly reminds us that no matter how strong the brand, no matter how well imagined, presented and reinforced, no human being can be controlled as completely as a car, a soda or a bar of soap.

Going Negative

Now we turn to what may be the most striking distinction between consumer and political marketing. While consumer businesses tend to go to great lengths to convince consumers how necessary, worthwhile, even wonderful they are or their product or service is – they rarely bash a competitor – at least explicitly. It would not be far off to say that the opposite is true in U.S. presidential campaigning. Whereas negative advertising (sometimes referred to as “branding the opponent”) is relatively rare in the consumer world, it is a fixture – if not the lifeblood – of presidential campaigning. In the relatively few instances of consumer advertising where negative messaging about competing brands or products has been employed, it has tended toward the vague and impersonal, such as: “Unlike other leading brands, Downy does x...” In the consumer-marketing world, such negative ads may also draw on comedy (Wendy's “Where's the Beef?” campaign, for example). Humorous or not, consumer “attack ads” (for lack of a better term) tend toward a light touch. Not so with negative ads in the political realm. In politics negative ads tend to explicitly name and harshly criticize opponents. And they are rarely subtle: “I want to nail our opponent,” says James Carville. “I want to rip his head off.”¹⁸⁶

A classic example of the prevalence and power of negative advertising in politics is the 1988 election between George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis. Dukakis had just clinched the Democratic nomination and was looking strong when Bush seized on Willie Horton as a way to attack his popularity. (The first person to raise the furlough program in the campaign – though not Horton directly - was actually Al Gore during a debate between Democratic nominees).¹⁸⁷ Led by political strategist Lee Atwater, the Bush team did some quick focus group research and discovered that the furlough program, and Willie Horton in particular, could be used a powerful tool to the Bush campaign's advantage. A PAC called The Americans for Bush arm of the National Security began advertisements about Dukakis's supposed “revolving door” for felons, including images of felons pouring out of prison and into audience's living rooms. That ad campaign,

ominously depicting “weekend prison passes” for violent inmates, suggested that horrific acts were being perpetrated by felons with Dukakis sanctioned get out of jail free cards. Especially because it became such a powerful symbol in the campaign and (in)famous political moment, it is interesting to note that the ad was run exclusively by news shows discussing it as an instance of negative advertising. Bush and his supporters had the luxury of bountiful “free media” -- getting their message out without having to pay for traditional TV spots.

Why do we see negative advertising in politics so much more than in the corporate world? More pointedly, why are explicit and at times ruthless attacks on the competition the coin of the realm in presidential campaigning yet non-existent in consumer marketing? We have considered the stakes of the one-day sale: the fact that there is room for just one winner. The all or nothing outcome means that there tends to be a go-for-the-jugular quality in certain phases of presidential campaigns that simply is not necessary or fruitful in the consumer sphere. But there are several other reasons for the distinction. For one, regardless of how much citizens claim to despise attack ads and to be turned off by them, political insiders tend to agree: they work. “Up until the last minute it is all about identifying persuadables and then throwing *everything* at them,” says political reporter Beth Fouhy.¹⁸⁸ “Candidates can solidify their base with all sorts of advertising, but they must also sway the independent vote, and doing so often requires negative advertising.”¹⁸⁹

Part of the effectiveness of negative ads in the political realm has to do with the focus on particular candidates. Human beings tend to arouse certain kinds of gut level responses more powerfully than products. Voters are likely to have quite strong positive or negative feelings about various candidates depending on their party, policy stances, or often something less conscious or “rational” – for example the way a candidate wears his hair, a regional accent or a voter’s sense of whether they’d be good company at the bar. While consumer ads certainly traffic in the realm of desire: love, family, happiness, romance and so on – it is the political ads that tend to tap deeply held feelings about morality, ethics, or character. The latter are the zones of the political, and can elicit powerful reactions that may have significant consequences for electoral outcomes.

Finally, there is a salient legal distinction between what is permitted in political versus consumer advertising. Unlike product advertisements that appear on television, political commercials are not formally regulated either to ensure their truthfulness or to prohibit distortions or deceptions. Thus, according to *No Place for Amateurs* author Dennis Johnson, political advertising is “a world of half-truths and innuendo.”¹⁹⁰ Political Communications professor Tom Hollihan agrees: “Much political advertising is built on solid research, but it sometimes comes to unsupportable - but emotionally powerful - conclusions.”¹⁹¹

Competitive Intelligence, aka “Oppo”

A longstanding approach to generating fodder for negative political advertisements is opposition research, also known as “oppo.” In conducting “oppo,” a candidate’s supporters or paid consultants research opposing candidates’ biographical, medical, educational, financial, criminal or political/voting records with the goal of unearthing damaging information about them. While opposition research is sometimes legal, it is also often the result of unethical or illegal means such as eavesdropping, wiretapping, hacking, dumpster diving and so forth. “Bare-knuckle, nasty research,” writes Johnson, “flourishes at nearly every level of professionally run campaigns.”¹⁹² The goals of “oppo” are clear: find the most damning information available to be used against an opponent and nail them. Character assassination, it is clear, is a staple of presidential campaign tactics.

“Oppo dumps” are used by political campaigns or their supporters to reveal damaging information, generally to press outlets. Many prime time television and radio news commentaries rely on “oppo dumps” because they are free and therefore much more cost-effective than paying investigative reporters. In the 2008 presidential election, for example, a dossier of research collected on then Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin was posted in full on Politico.com. The staff of Palin’s opponent in the 2006 Alaska gubernatorial race generated the file.

Though it is not discussed using the same terms, a version of “oppo” certainly goes on in the consumer realm. Corporations need to know their competition, and therefore engage in gathering “competitive intelligence” – information that tends to be deployed in a very different way than in the political sphere. Naama Tal, an independent “information specialist” who spent years collecting competitive intelligence for Microsoft and Google, describes a different primary objective for corporations. “Intelligence is gathered to anticipate innovations of other companies and then to get out front. Its about innovation rather than direct, public attack.”¹⁹³ Yet Tal concedes that, while many are hired to collect competitive intelligence, few know exactly how the amassed intelligence is used to a corporation’s competitive advantage. Whatever the intelligence is used for, it is clear that corporations do not normally engage in anything like the direct, explicit, full frontal assaults that go on in presidential campaigns.

Advertising executive Alan Kelly, who works in both political and corporate sectors, argues that opposition research is a rare area of marketing where politics has tended to forge its own path – and be out front. “While in most marketing areas corporate research and development is way out front by virtue of having the resources, competitive intelligence is one area where politics is out front instead. That oppo mindset is form fit to politics.”¹⁹⁴ Kelly claims that, in the case of oppo, politics has clearly influenced consumer marketing. “The war room flowered in politics but has been picked up on and has begun to migrate to the consumer realm,” Kelly says.¹⁹⁵ “Today if a large corporation doesn’t have a war room, they are at least thinking about it.”¹⁹⁶

Humor

Where negative advertising *does* exist in the consumer realm, it sometimes reveals itself in the form of humor - a marketing technique much more prevalent in consumer than political advertising. Humor is attempted relatively rarely in political ads, especially at the presidential level. Why is it so prevalent and effective in one sphere but not the other? As political consultant Mary Hughes suggests, many of the central issues of politics don't lend themselves to comedy. "Most of the big hard issues of politics: war, pestilence, disease, the economy - they're not exactly fodder for humorous treatment."¹⁹⁷ Hughes points out that in lower level races comedy is more often used to lampoon opponents and can be effective in branding the opposition. But at the presidential level it is almost unheard of. "Above all, candidates want to appear 'presidential'. Funny doesn't equal presidential. It undermines that image."¹⁹⁸

Sex

While there is no dearth of sex scandals in politics that make their way into public perceptions about candidates through "oppo" and otherwise, sex has rarely been explicitly or overtly used to market an American presidential candidate.¹⁹⁹ By stark contrast, sex as a marketing device is hugely prevalent in consumer advertising. As discussed in Chapter 1, Edward Bernays was familiar with some of the unconscious desires and forces that motivate human behavior and capitalized on those motivations for decades (as did myriad other consumer marketers). At least since the 1930s, one of the most powerful corporate / product marketing tools – if not the most powerful - has been sex. The desire for it, the promise or suggestion of it, these are seemingly permanent fixtures of consumer marketing, yet barely exist in the realm of presidential advertising.

The Psychology of the Citizen versus the Psychology of the Consumer

The distinctions discussed above are concrete, tangible differences between consumer and political marketing techniques, styles and approaches. But a transcendent question relates to what I will refer to as "the psychology of the citizen" and "the psychology of the consumer." To what degree is the consumer different from the citizen – in disposition, identification, and motivation - versus similar or even one in the same? And how has the relationship between the consumer and the citizen shifted over time? When asked whether such a distinction can or should be made and on what basis, responses of consultants, journalists and academics I have spoken with reflect longstanding tensions in American notions of citizenship and democracy, and illuminate important contemporary tensions and truths as well.

The Consumer

In attempting to understand the relationship between the psychology of the consumer and the citizen, perhaps best to begin with a simple definition: a consumer is "a broad

label for an individual who uses goods and services generated within an economy.”²⁰⁰ Historically it has been rare for citizens/voters to be called “consumers” when referring to forms of democratic participation. The “consumer” is traditionally used to refer to the economic marketplace rather than the political (though references to the “political consumer” do exist in academic literature and there is no question that, over the years, the term “consumer” has increasingly been used in place of the terms “citizen” and “American” in society writ large.)

In much contemporary American discourse, the consumer is understood as operating primarily, if not exclusively, from a place of self-interest, while the citizen is thought to have motivations that transcend self interest (to some degree at least) and are rooted in a broader duty to society / community / the “common good.”²⁰¹ Of course these distinctions are not hard and fast, nor universally agreed upon, but rather represent some broad contours of public understanding. And while there is a reasonably simple, mutually agreed upon definition of the term consumer, understandings of what it means to be a citizen are substantially more contested and complex.

The Citizen

American ideas of citizenship and democracy today emerge from distinct historic conceptions. Prevailing understandings of citizenship tend to be rooted in one of two models: the Republican or the liberal. Roots of the republican model are found in Athenian democracy, republican Rome and Italian city-states, and also in the writings of such theorists as Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, and Rousseau.²⁰² The republican model of citizenship was established in ancient Greece – in the small communities of the polis. Citizenship was not seen as a public versus private matter: but was understood as essential and deeply connected to every day life. To be fully human necessitated being an active citizen of the community. As Aristotle put it: “To take no part in the running of the community's affairs is to be either a beast or a god!”²⁰³ This understanding of citizenship as critical to daily life was based on a widely held belief in the obligations of citizens toward the community over and above the rights they expected to receive. Aristotle said that citizens are, first and foremost, “those who share in the holding of office,” and civic self-rule was embodied in institutions and practices like the rotation of offices.²⁰⁴ A democracy also required that citizens had regular, active participation in the process of deliberation and decision-making.²⁰⁵ Such participation, Aristotle claimed, ensures that individuals remain citizens rather than subjects.

The model of the citizen from ancient Greece is a person defined at least as much by his or her membership in the community as by his or her individual interests. It does not, as some contemporary thinkers might, cast that citizen as self sacrificing or a martyr, but rather views the identity and well being of the individual citizen as inextricably linked to broader society or community and so recognizes common welfare as a logical extension of one’s own well-being. Citizens of the polis thus tended to see obligations to the community as worthwhile means of self-preservation as well as an opportunity to be virtuous – a source of honor and respect.

The second major model of citizenship is the liberal model, whose origins can be traced to the Roman Empire and to early modern reflections of Roman law.²⁰⁶ Rome’s

expansion resulted in citizenship rights being extended to conquered populations, radically altering the concept's meaning. The liberal tradition is primarily understood in terms of legal status. The liberal model of citizenship essentially meant three things:

**Being protected by the law (rather than participating in debating or creating it).²⁰⁷

**Having one's individual freedoms protected from other citizens or from the state.

**Understanding and exercising one's freedoms primarily in terms of private lives, associations and attachments rather than in the political domain.²⁰⁸

At first glance, the liberal and republican models of democracy present us with a clear set of alternatives: citizenship as a political office or as a legal status – citizenship as central to an individual's sense of self or as an “occasional identity”. The citizen appears either as the primary political agent or as an individual whose private activities leave little time or inclination to engage actively in politics, instead best entrusting the business of lawmaking to representatives. While both traditions' understandings of citizenship are at play in contemporary American political discourse, the liberal definition reigns supreme, offering at least a partial explanation for why certain normative conceptions of citizenship tend to dominate in the United States today. Still, the republican model, though perhaps not realistically attainable in an enormous, diverse democratic society, provides an implicit critique of the *liberal* citizen's tendency to self-centered political passivity – and an appealing alternate vision, still alive and well, of meaningful democratic engagement and deeper connection to political community.

Citizenship in America

Looking back, we get a glimpse of that alternate democratic model in New England town halls. The American colonies are known for their active civic participation in local government with frequent public debate and broad political involvement. This robust iteration of citizenship fascinated Tocqueville, who documented it in great detail in *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville argued that the great challenge for the young democracy would be the balancing of individual versus communal interests – a precarious balance indeed. A variety of factors and forces changed the dynamics of colonial citizenship, including immense population growth and rapidly expanding social, cultural and religious diversity, the rise of consumer culture and other factors.

Democracy in America today looks very different. In the contemporary United States, citizenship tends to be understood in terms of legal status -- rights to live and work in the nation as well as to enjoy certain rights and privileges defined by law. These constitutionally protected rights are sometimes regarded as “positive” (*freedom to* assemble, speak, practice one's religion without fear of persecution, bear arms and so on) and “negative” (*freedom from* unreasonable searches and seizures, self incrimination, cruel and unusual punishment, and so on). The duties are expected and sometimes enforced: voting for elected officials or on legislation, paying taxes, serving on juries, and so forth. For those concerned about the “thinning” of citizenship and the rising power and influence of the consumer vis a vis the citizen, there is lament: the contemporary western citizen might be thought of as comparable to those that exist in

economic theories of democracy, whose political participation is thought to map rather neatly on to “participation” in the consumer marketplace, and where political outcomes amount to little more than aggregations of personal interest.²⁰⁹ Is the modern citizen at root a consumer, driven primarily or even entirely by self-interest? Or does our very participation indicate a sense of our political duty, and are all the claims about us having tipped over into full blown consumer identities overblown?

“I do think there’s a distinction,” says political consultant Mary Hughes. “The citizen is still looking to make a decision that effects the world beyond them personally. With the consumer *is just them*. The weight of what one is deciding and the consequence of that decision are really quite different. The whole process of evaluation is different.”²¹⁰

Donnie Fowler agrees. “You can’t sell a candidate like you sell a car,” he says. “A car doesn’t have a moral meaning. Very few people consume products based on moral foundations.”²¹¹

“The citizen is different,” says political consultant Peter Fenn.²¹² “The vote is the most personal ‘purchase,’ if you will. Americans take it very, very personally.” And according to Tom Hollihan: “The consumer is expected to take into account what is in it for them. The citizen hopefully is going to think not just about themselves but about shared social commitments and shared civic responsibility.”²¹³ But Hollihan concedes that this notion of shared commitment of the “ask not what your country can do for you” variety, has changed markedly since the early 1980s, specifically with the Reagan campaign. “Reagan was very effective at shifting the discourse away from civic commitment and toward individual responsibility,” says Hollihan. “The poor were cast by Reagan and his operatives as cunning and gaming the system. Reagan said you were supposed to look out for yourself and your family. That rhetoric was profoundly damaging to a sense of shared responsibility.”²¹⁴

That sort of rhetoric of individual responsibility over and above shared social commitments continued after Reagan, becoming, as political communications scholar Lance Bennett has argued, an explicitly consumerist politics at the formal governmental level aimed at framing issues in terms of consumer considerations.²¹⁵ Though it is true that Reagan very consciously shifted much of the language in American political discourse as Hollihan describes, it is also important to consider some of the foundation for this shift we discussed in Chapters 1 & 3, i.e. how notions of capitalism became intertwined with conceptions of democracy in the 1920s and 1930s. Remember Bernays’ “Democracity” – the notion that democracy was brought to Americans by G.E. and other big corporations. There have in fact been repeated messages since that point in the public sphere about how democracy is linked to free enterprise, competition, the profit motive – ideas of self interest that were not in fact included in the founding documents in any literal way but that became a powerful part of political discourse long before the 1980s. Also recall Lance Bennett’s argument (discussed in Chapter 3) which argues that politics has changed dramatically over the past 50 years – that prior conditions that allowed citizens within nations to imagine common cause and common conflict have eroded and that, since the 1970s with massive global economic, political and communications changes, we’ve seen the construction of highly personalized forms of identity politics anchored in lifestyle and consumer choices. And that, from the

standpoint of government and elected representatives, personalized and diverse citizen expectations are increasingly hard to satisfy. This sort of me first framing happened in both parties to some degree but primarily on the right (one notable example was the George W. Bush 2000 website's tax refund calculator with which citizens could find out what they personally would be likely to save under Bush's proposed tax cuts). Consumerist language and framing was prevalent during the latter half of Clinton's presidency as well, including his move to establish a "call center" where consumer-citizens could call and complain, give feedback, etc as with a large corporation.

But as Political Scientist Jack Citrin points out, the simple narrative that many seem to espouse – that we were once good citizens and are now hopeless self-interested consumers" is inadequate. "Citizen duty and appeals to public good are out there," Citrin argues. Even before Obama's campaign rhetoric / messages successfully transcended self-interested politics without losing popularity: "McCain's whole campaign theme was 'Country, country, country,'" Citrin points out. "And of course some politicians are going to trumpet benefits they provide you -- government is one side's version of a benefit, doing your own thing with your own money is the other side's vision." The question remains, have we moved toward a more consumerist politics overall, and I believe the answer is yes. "In either context people are consumers," says Republican political consultant Rob Stutzman. "But we know that people are different as 'election consumers' as opposed to if they are buying toothpaste. People start with certain ideological predispositions."²¹⁶

The rhetorical and ideological shift that began under Reagan has had lasting implications for how individuals understand themselves vis a vis the collective / broader society – namely the increasing balkanization, polarization, alienation and/or single issue advocacy that has, Obama notwithstanding, grown over time. "The voters and the consumers have a simple question: 'What's in it for me?'" says political strategist Steve Schmidt.²¹⁷ "Civics isn't taught like it used to be. People aren't taught what the collective is. The whole paradigm today – whether it's a Valentine's Day sale or a President's Day sale – is consumerism. Me first. People evaluate what's in it for them."²¹⁸

Democratic consultant Katie Merrill agrees with the essences of Schmidt's premise, but tempers it somewhat with her distinction between "high information" and "low information" voters.

High information voters -- they do expect to get different information from political ads than consumer ads. They do have a different set of criteria to judge the candidate than the product. For low information voters there is no difference – they are thinking more like consumers. And that's why political consultants are so cynical. Voters in general are not very engaged with the broader issues. I've seen elections where it really does seem like it's just 'what's in it for me?' Especially in the '80s and early '90s.

Merrill sees the shift away from citizenship as largely a problem of failing public education. "Previously there really was a divide," she says. "Citizens grew up with

civics classes.... when I'm a citizen I need to think about it this way. When I'm thinking about laundry detergent it's completely different. Part of the death of the citizen is the death of public education."²¹⁹

By now we have explored many different ways in which consumerism's rise and, more specifically, certain consumer trends and techniques, have impacted, interacted with and shaped presidential campaigning. From the discussion in this chapter and elsewhere we are clear that politicians are not synonymous with products -- we do know that there are arguably significant political implications associated with the influence from the consumer sphere. In our fifth and final chapter we will dig into the important question of implications. Of the consumer trends and techniques we have examined that have influenced presidential campaigning and, by extension, American democratic life, to what end? Are the implications positive? Negative? A combination?

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

*It is difficult to imagine that something so widely and evidently a part of every day politics is inconsequential.*²²⁰

- Political Scientist Ted Brader

*You don't have to change 50 percent of Americans. You don't have to change 30 percent. You move 2 percent or 3 percent in New Mexico or Missouri or Wisconsin on one issue, then you've done a whole lot.*²²¹

- Political Consultant Richard Viguerie

At least since Edward Bernays began to merge notions of democracy and capitalism in the American consciousness approximately 75 years ago, United States' citizens have been subject to an increasingly sophisticated barrage of advertising techniques. Today, advertising and marketing permeate American life so thoroughly that its difficult to imagine a culture, political or otherwise, not deeply intertwined with it.

Early in *Packaging Politics* I laid out the primary aim of the project: to better understand how, since the widespread use of television in the United States, consumer marketing trends and techniques have migrated to and influenced politics. While I examine a longer history of structural circumstances that helped pave the way for the migration and influence - core findings of the project revolve around a few specific techniques from the consumer domain that have been especially influential in politics over roughly the last 30 years. These approaches, detailed in Chapter 3, include:

- Contemporary forms of branding, namely
 - Emotional branding, which attempts to appeal to unconscious desires/create identification with brand
 - Open-source branding, which attempts to make consumer/citizen a “co-owner” of the brand
- Contemporary forms of targeting
 - Micro-targeting using massive databases and individual / group profiles
 - Behavioral targeting using individual level internet use

Packaging Politics primarily examines an empirical and historical phenomenon: when, how and why certain consumer marketing trends and techniques migrated to campaigns and how they have played out in politics. The practitioners, academics and journalists interviewed for this project have tended to agree on the nuts and bolts of these historical and empirical questions, and research into secondary literature has reinforced these points as well.²²²

To reprise, interview subjects have generally agreed on the following points:

- Since the rise of television, consumer marketing has had a major influence on electoral politics / political marketing strategies.
- As money spent on campaigns has surged over time politics has increasingly adopted trends and technologies from its wealthier cousin: consumer marketing.
- With the spectacular ascendance of consumer culture and the related shift in individual orientations toward consumerism, political elites have tended to respond by using a rhetoric of consumerism over and above a rhetoric of citizenship.
- While there have been ways in / moments during which political marketing has influenced consumer marketing, influence has clearly tended to run consumer to political rather than the other way around.
- There have been certain tipping points - generally during a specific campaign and undertaken mainly by one side / candidate - wherein a new technique has made a big impact.
- New technologies (television, large sophisticated informational databases, the internet) have often served as conduits for migration of consumer marketing tools to the political sphere.

Yet as I laid out in the introduction to *Packaging Politics*, the impetus for and intellectual fire under the project comes primarily from questions more normative and theoretical than historical and empirical. Now that we have come to some conclusions about the descriptive piece of this project: namely how and when certain trends and techniques migrated to politics, we turn to the question of implications: what implications does the increasing “packaging” of politics have for democratic discourse and intelligent voting? How has this seemingly entrenched pattern of campaigning affected democratic competence and the capacity of citizens to make informed decisions?

Answers to implications questions are inevitably predicated on particular normative conceptions of democracy: ideas regarding how democratic decision making should happen, how much involvement in government citizens should have, what the ideal relationship or balance of power between politicians and citizens should be, and so on. As discussed in Chapter 1, students of politics have over time held widely divergent perspectives on such questions.²²³ The question of democratic potential is complicated and deeply contested and is most fruitfully considered in the context of longstanding scholarly debates on the topic.

In some ways, marketing language that originated in the consumer/commercial realm fits rather neatly into existing debates.²²⁴ If a brand can be considered a heuristic (which it certainly can be in both commercial and political realms) what might it communicate?²²⁵ And where the brand relates to politics, is that heuristic likely to be “good” or “bad” for democracy? If a campaign is sending targeted messages derived from a complex web of information stored in a database, is that message likely to induce political engagement, or alienation? Or some combination depending on circumstances?

If, as I argue, more political marketing is going on than ever and that it draws on consumer marketing methods as a matter of course, what are the implications, good bad or indifferent? When we reflect on the last half century of presidents, is it even possible to say which choices were right or wrong when they were “sold” to the American public? Any such empirical claim would be absurd of course, as answers are not just subjective in terms of political views or ideologies but in terms of historical and economic context. What happens in the course of a presidential term can certainly lead citizens to the conclusion that their choice was quite right, quite wrong or anything in between. And their conclusion may be directly opposed to someone next door, a city or several states away.

So while my work does not lead me to any sense of objective conclusions about democracy’s relative health or purity prior to contemporary marketing methods, nor does it point to some theoretical or historical ideal, it is still possible to draw out a few tentative conclusions about whether the contemporary political process with its emphasis on marketing is better or worse off for “democracy” in the more robust, participatory, informed sense. And it raises the question: what might lead to our moving toward fulfilling that sort of democratic potential – and how does

that intersect with these contemporary forms of marketing.

Again, while I have held various and divergent democratic conceptions in mind, I am far from neutral on the question of what constitutes healthy democracy. I maintain that democracy's appeal is based largely on the key arguments in support of it: that a broad and diverse range of perspectives might lead to better decision making, that the process of democratic deliberation enhances citizens' critical capacity; that broad public engagement and discussion is likely to lead to better decision making than other political systems and that those participating in meaningful democratic engagement are most likely to think beyond self interest to the collective good.

Beginning with "robust" democracy as an ideal, we can consider how the techniques and trends discussed in *Packaging Politics* advance or undermine that ideal. How do these images of a political sphere where democratic engagement, discussion, deliberation, and decision-making are the norm compare with the American experience of electoral politics and democratic discourse in the early 21st Century?

Branding – Emotional & Open source

Let us begin with the question of branding. To reprise: in Chapter 3, after looking at the early history of branding in both the consumer and political realms, we focused on a more recent shift – from "conventional" to "emotional" branding – meant to imbue products and services with a 'deeper' or more meaningful dimension with which people might connect. We learned that since the 1980s, specifically Ronald Reagan's 1984 campaign, politics has adopted and adapted from the consumer world techniques of "emotional branding," the central goal of which was for the consumer (and later citizen) to develop an affective attachment to the brand, hopefully (from marketers' perspectives) coming to view it as integral to their identity. By the late 1980s, commercials were being produced in both the consumer and political realms that were completely devoid of factual content. Literal / conventional branding was increasingly giving way to emotional branding.

On balance interviewees for this project have agreed that branding of the past thirty years or so has been more likely to evoke powerful emotional and aspirational responses to and identifications with candidates than earlier forms of / eras in branding. What has been difficult to pin down is what if any concrete, discernable implications this shift toward emotional branding has had on electoral politics and democratic discourse.

I began researching *Packaging Politics* at the height of the media discussion about Obama's branding efforts, and with the expectation that I would reach a deeper understanding of the implications of the shift from conventional to

emotional branding in politics over the course of the project. For a number of reasons, that goal has proven more elusive than understanding implications of other marketing methods examined here, and insights into how the rise of emotional branding per se have impacted electoral politics and democratic discourse are relatively modest.

For one, there has been quite a lot of divergence among interviewees on the question of whether emotional branding in politics is a truly substantial and significant change from earlier forms of political marketing. A number of my interview subjects do not recognize any major transformation in branding efforts over time, though they do tend to recognize an increased measure of sophistication in contemporary branding efforts. *Los Angeles Times* political reporter Mark Barabak sums up this position: “The Obama campaign did a very good and consistent job of boiling down the message to ‘change’ and ‘hope.’ But how different is that from the past, really?”²²⁶

As several people interviewed for *Packaging Politics* have pointed out, while the style of delivery of these brands may have shifted in terms of sophistication, the core messages are similar. “With Presidential candidates of the past and, I’m certain, of the future, messages are essentially the same” argues political consultant Mary Hughes. “Hope, change, stay the course, change the course.”²²⁷

What is going on out there with the economy and so on largely determines the message at any level of politics. But the higher up you go, the more abstract the psychology is. That Obama would talk about ‘change’ was almost a given. But it is true that campaigns are getting more sophisticated in terms of how that abstraction is delivered.²²⁸

After numerous discussions and much reflection, I have been persuaded that, in a number of cases at least, too much has been made of emotional branding efforts per se in politics (particularly in the case of Barak Obama’s 2008 campaign) without enough consideration having been given other factors that may have contributed to more sophisticated political marketing. This conclusion does not diminish my sense that a significant shift in branding has transpired. It seems clear that advances in emotional branding -- with the goal of having consumers (and later citizens) develop an affective attachment to “the brand” and to come to view it as integral to their identity, is a marked change from conventional branding. So on that point I diverge from the handful of interviewees who deny any fundamental distinction between conventional and emotional branding.²²⁹

Nor should this conclusion be understood as a declaration that emotional branding does not have significant implications. On the contrary -- I expect that it does. But any implications specifically tied to that shift are difficult to isolate or otherwise pin down. While it is beyond the scope of this project (and perhaps any

project) to neatly isolate the implications of the shift toward emotional branding for electoral politics and democratic discourse, it does seem clear that shifts toward more (and more sophisticated) emotionally and spiritually oriented core branding concepts have interacted with other shifts in political marketing, from contemporary forms of targeting and messaging to the use of new technologies to skyrocketing money in electoral politics.

Political consultant Mary Hughes's earlier point is thus well taken: while Obama's branding is often cited as brilliant and cutting edge, it is likely other aspects of his campaigning that were more relevant to his success. "Obama's stratification was brilliant," says Hughes. "His engagement was brilliant. The campaign's use of technology was brilliant. Their layers of moving the product were brilliant. But more than anything else it was probably a story of big money – the biggest amount ever seen in politics."²³⁰

That said, few dispute the notion that overall branding is important – that the meta-message becomes a foundation for or frame within which so much else is possible. Take as an analogy the case of Absolut Vodka, whose marketing campaign has repeatedly been compared by political watchers to the Obama campaign. As Naomi Klein, author of the popular anti-consumerist manifesto *No Logo* describes:

Absolut developed a marketing strategy in which its product disappeared and its brand was nothing but a blank bottle shaped space that could be filled with whatever content a particular audience most wanted from its brands: intellectual in Harper's, futuristic in Wired, alternative in Spin, loud and proud in Out, and Absolut Centerfold in Playboy.²³¹

As Klein and others have pointed out, the best branding (at least of the megabrand variety) evokes a powerful attachment to or identification with the brand for many, yet – and this is key – appeals to various stripes of consumer/citizens in ways that do not feel general, but rather specific and intimately connected to them, their interests, their values or their lives. Several presidential campaigns over the past thirty years have done an advertising job worthy of the megabrands in terms of presenting a meta-brand or image appealing to so many but that individuals and subgroups can project their particular identities, beliefs and values onto, a la Absolut.

What are the potential implications of this sort of marketing in politics? Naomi Klein, normally highly critical of modern mass marketing, also makes a case for what positive political impacts brands are capable of drawing out. Brands awaken deep desires, says Klein, sometimes giving rise to meaningful political action or engagement. Klein argues that Obama's brand proved decisively that there was a tremendous appetite for change, and made it clear that people -- at least in 2008 -- wanted to be part of a political project larger than themselves. There is certainly some truth in this analysis. As Ted Brader and other

proponents of Affective Intelligence Theory have shown, emotional responses to politics can be “good for democracy” because they often serve as catalysts for political learning and action.²³²

The abstract big brand paired with the intimate and specific messaging for each subculture or group (or even person) has proven an extremely effective approach in both consumer and political spheres. And while this sort of combination of branding and targeting is not new, the sophistication with which it is currently undertaken is remarkable. The vagueness of the brand (or, as Hughes describes, the necessary abstraction of message at the highest levels of campaigning) allows citizens to imagine nearly anything about a candidate – to project their own values, issues of concern, political views or beliefs onto that candidate – values and views the candidate of course may or may not hold, or may or may not hold to as strongly as any citizen or group expects or believes. So while Obama’s branding was regularly trumpeted in 2008 as the bleeding edge of political marketing – and that which really stood out – more careful political observers recognized a confluence of factors.²³³

We have already discussed what an open source approach meant for Obama vis a vis Hillary Clinton’s top down model. “The concept of open source is going to become an undercurrent to almost everything this administration does,” argues the OSI’s Michael Tiemann in a BBC piece on “Open Source Government” that came out soon after Obama was elected. “I think what we will see now is a maturation in America and around the world of an understanding of the open source model.” Indeed the new Change.gov website is said to be a portal for “interactive government” and “open source democracy.”

At this point the conscious, contemporary open source model is still relatively new to political campaigns and it is unclear how it will ultimately play out in terms of democratic potential. In terms of striving toward robust democracy, it felt very promising around the Obama campaign in terms of fostering engagement and motivating people politically – and many theorists remain excited about its potential (Henry Jenkins view of agency through technology is one popular and quasi – utopian view shared by groups like the New Politics Institute, the Personal Democracy Forum and the Center for Politics, Democracy and the Internet).

One of the major stances of open source proponents is that with the internet at our fingertips, open source democracy is less likely to be manipulated. We are, Jenkins and others argue, active rather than passive and more likely to be engaged in the political realm. Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales argues this same point:

Hopefully, you start to see a little bit of diminished effectiveness when people can talk back to attack ads. In the past, when you’d see a vicious attack ad, you might find it distasteful, but you might also wonder if that person did that horrible thing. Online, you begin to see some of those things

start to unravel, and people responding and saying, Yeah, this is an attack ad, and this is what really happened.’ Then you get a more interesting dialogue around that.

Yet others believe that “open source” politics will be thoroughly co-opted by establishment players such as political parties. The fact that open source was so readily co-opted by consumer marketing does generate some concern along these lines, but open source politics is very young and nothing I’ve read or studied for this project struck me as making plain how the movement is likely to effect politics – though it does strike me that, on its face, it is non hierarchical and participatory in a way that has a lot more in common with robust than formal democracy.²³⁴

New Technologies: Database driven Micro-targeting & Behavioral marketing via the Internet

While understanding the implications of emotional branding for politics has proven more elusive than expected, implications of modern targeting methods have been much more tangible and easier to discern. To reprise: following consumer marketing in the 1970s, the political sphere began developing its own massive informational databases in the 1990s, allowing campaigns to target citizens in ever more specific and sophisticated ways. Since the 1990s micro-targeting has been advancing by leaps and bounds, especially when considered in conjunction with Internet developments over the past several years including “behavioral targeting” and social networking.

This confluence of new technologies has meant that tailoring of messages is of a completely different caliber today than in pre-database era electoral politics – at least after the waning of the heyday of great precinct captains.²³⁵ “In both the Obama and Clinton campaigns I saw pretty heavily tailored messages – definitely more tailored than what we’d seen before,” says Peter Swire, a law professor and privacy expert who worked in both administrations.²³⁶ “You’d hear people on the campaigns say, ‘Okay. This is the environmental message, this is the 1% versus 99% message or the clean up government/clean up campaign financing message.’ They send very distinct messages to different groups.”

Swire maintains that developments in targeting have changed the political landscape in fundamental ways. “The primary difference from the past – say with direct mail - is the speed and detail of the feedback loop,” says Swire. “I can send out five emails and see what the response is right away – meaning *today*. I can run experiments very quickly.” Along with the speed of information response, says Swire, is specificity: “it is now standard to be able to measure not just who donated but who opened the message to take a look. If they’ve opened it then you know they’re interested.” With modern database driven targeting, it is possible to amp up that interest by finding out more about just who is opening or responding to political messages. “Whatever political information you get initially

you can enrich pretty easily,” says Swire. In addition to speed and specificity, there is the question of cost: “TV is expensive, direct mail is medium, messaging via email is cheap – so the targeting possibilities are many.”²³⁷

The specificity and sophistication of messaging may be especially relevant at the fundraising stage. In an era of increasingly money-driven politics, campaigns go out first to those who might be able to contribute financially. This population is obviously a subsection of voters or citizens on the whole, and it is this relatively narrow slice of citizens that often holds the focus and determines the early direction of campaigns. “It is now straightforward for campaigns to look at how emails ‘do’ for each fundraising message,” says Swire – “in other words how much money they bring in.”²³⁸ In the current climate of rapid technology and low to no cost messaging via the Internet, campaigns can hone their messages quickly with an eye toward fundraising, by responding to the inclinations and concerns of ever more specific subsets of the population with increasingly tailored messages.

Thus while it is clear that tailoring to specific or single issues is far from new - that was Richard Viguerie’s direct mail story as well - what is really different is the speed and the cost.²³⁹ “It’s faster and cheaper, so you can mobilize around smaller pieces of the electorate,” says Swire.

So what does all this information about targeting and new technology mean in terms of implications for the normative conception of democracy described above? In short: it is very good or very bad depending on whom you talk to. Two prominent and contrasting positions are the “data use” and “data limits” views, a divide in perspective on the democratic potential of messaging and technology that is, interestingly, quite pronounced among sub-sets of interviewees.

While political practitioners right, left and center interviewed for this project tended to be rather enthusiastic about the democratic possibilities (the “data use” view), academics have leaned toward more concern (the “data limits” view). From practitioners’ perspectives, new forms of targeting represent opportunities to engage more citizens through specific issues they care about. Consultants tended to sing the praises of targeting and the Internet for democratic involvement in various ways, from increased discourse and other forms of engagement to the possibilities of ferreting out truth and accuracy in politics.

Many practitioners seem to accept the “politics is a sideshow” adage -- that people simply do not have the time nor the interest to stay informed and engaged in politics. From most political operatives’ perspectives new techniques and technologies present the potential to “break through the clutter” of everyday people’s lives. “Is slicing and dicing data a problem for the democratic sphere?” asks political consultant Katie Merrill.

That's like saying we shouldn't have access to individualized musical choices on I-tunes because only some small percentage is listening to some of the songs. We still have mass media for delivering big messages – like, oh, I don't know, 'hope and change.' So it's fine to talk to people about what they care about in more detail.²⁴⁰

Republican political consultant Rob Stutzman concurs. "If anything, there is less puppeteering going on now than there was pre-internet. With new technologies emerging all the time it is going to become that much more difficult to control what people are doing and thinking. The Orwellian mass communication control," says Stutzman, "...that's harder and harder to do."²⁴¹

"There's going to be a new definition of the political water cooler," says Democratic strategist Peter Fenn.²⁴² "Once you've got your message right and you're moving on it – how far can someone go in the viral world with a misinformation campaign? You could knock that stuff down. In the old days misleading or false info could get set in stone." Political consultant Donnie Fowler agrees that the Internet opens up more rather than fewer avenues for robust and informed democracy. "As marketers get more sophisticated," says Fowler, "consumers get more cynical – and more smart. And voters now have many more places to go to fact check!" He continues:

People can of course be influenced and manipulated on various levels. But no voter goes into the voting booth without being able to articulate why they're supporting the candidate. Voters are not dumb voting machines. They might be wrong factually but they know what they're doing and they are sincere. They don't exercise franchise cynically. Yes – you can influence voters. Yes, you can manipulate some voters. And the best strategists can both influence and manipulate democracy, the voting process and voters. That's all true. But voters know why they vote the way they do. So the stark image of the marionette strings is just wrong. I just don't buy it. The more I do it the more faith I have in voters, and in democracy.

Proponents of the "data use" theory see ample opportunities to be better informed and more meaningfully engaged. "In the current political landscape," says Swire, you can get greater depth of engagement through social media rather than the campaign just sending stuff in the old hierarchical fashion."²⁴³ "You can get bigger mindshare and get those people involved and excited because you are touching them in so many different, particular ways."

While there is no doubt that practitioners, among my body of interviewees, are more likely than academics to have faith in the democratic potential of new developments in targeting and other technologies, Republican political consultant Steve Schmidt is one notable exception. “For voters and consumers there is a danger of increasing intrusion into the private sphere, but there’s an even greater concern for democracy,” he warns.²⁴⁴

At this point with micro-targeting, you’re doing a campaign aimed at one person. In 2012 all the targeting, the mail, phones, etc – there will be greater than ever capacity to target one person - to a universe of one. This means it will drive things even more acutely through the prism of self-interest rather than communal interest. It will increasingly be a politics of individual anger points and pleasure points. There are a lot of ominous connotations to that.²⁴⁵

Academics I interviewed and read for *Packaging Politics* definitely tended to echo Schmidt’s concerns, and/or to lean toward a “data limits” perspective, collectively raising a constellation of troubling factors that resonate with and reinforce my own views about the negative aspects of consumer marketing’s influence on democracy. To reprise: Habermas, Howard and others have claimed that, for constructive democratic conversation and engagement to take place, there must be some common identification between participants, and some “shared text” on which conversations can be based. As political communications professor Tom Hollihan explains, “Citizens need to be exposed to enough common sources of information that they have shared experiences and information upon which to base their political conversations.”²⁴⁶ There is no question that the trends and techniques explored in *Packaging Politics*, specifically those of the past 30 years or so, have real implications for notions of democracy based on shared experiences, identification and access to information among citizens.

As described above, a small fraction of the population receives the majority of targeted messages. In efforts to remain competitive candidates must present different and sometimes ideologically conflicting packages to different communities of supporters, raising the question of who the candidate really is and what they stand for, and also potentially setting off a cascade of problems in terms of how what is being promised (so much to so many and disparate people and groups) cannot possibly be delivered after the candidate comes to office. As those narrow, influential or consequential publics are delineated and messages tailored to them, huge numbers of others – whole categories of people - are left out of the political conversation.

Recalling the key arguments of robust democracy and the public sphere: a broad, public conversation with many/diverse perspectives, shared political texts and shared identification, just to name a few aspects -- contemporary methods of

slicing and dicing the population, focusing on narrower segments with ever more honed and specific messages, seem highly problematic. In an era of hyper-sophisticated targeting, where citizens are likely to have their impressions, beliefs or expectations based on the brand reiterated in direct micro targeted messages that may vary dramatically from what other supporters of the candidate receive. "It's one of these things," says Barabak, "that in theory could lead to a further splintering of the electorate because they all think the politician will be representing their issues."²⁴⁷

This trend and its complications are particularly pronounced in the Internet age: "A million people may view an official party web site, imagining that the text is shared," says professor and author Phillip Howard, "...but they do so in physical isolation from each other, without knowing that the text is almost exclusively theirs and something of their own creation."²⁴⁸ What does Howard mean by "of their own creation"? In his book *New Media Campaigns and The Managed Citizen*, he describes what he calls a "data shadow" -- essentially the map/history/pattern/shadow of what we do online. As technology advances the shadows we cast are ever longer, more expertly traced and deployed in ever more sophisticated ways by marketers of all stripes to sell things back to us -- whether products, policies or candidates.

How can voters know where politicians stand if they are more and more likely to be receiving different messages? Media critic Doug Rushkoff describes the problem of "demographic tribalism" that has emerged in large part from marketing to narrow or private interests, from framing different - even contradictory - messages based on disparate interests and from focusing on the "persuadables" or other small subsets of the population. All these things, Rushkoff argues, lead to "tribalism" rather than support of the "common weal."²⁴⁹

Political Redlining: The Un-Targeted

Returning to the idea that whole populations are likely to be left out of the democratic conversation: there is little doubt that contemporary campaigning strategies and innovations, many of which were first brought to us by consumer marketing, diminish the amount of shared political text available in the public sphere. University of Pennsylvania professor Oscar Gandy has argued that political targeting may further disenfranchise whole subcultures or segments of the electorate that are less likely to vote, or less likely to be persuadable. "Why reach out to someone a statistician or a computer program does not consider a viable target?"²⁵⁰ Professor Howard concurs. According to Howard, this sort of segmentation of the population is already fueling the growth of what he calls "political redlining." Campaigning has become so costly that politicians must decide which voters they should spend money targeting and which voters aren't worth the expense. Poor and minority voters who don't donate to candidates and who vote in dependable blocs get cut out of the process. "The data is used to figure out what areas you want to under serve," Howard says.²⁵¹ "Professional

consultants and politicians redline by focusing their attention and resources almost exclusively on swing voters to the exclusion of large blocks of citizens from the discourse of elections.”²⁵² It is increasingly likely to be the case, Howard argues, that there will be “an immense total supply of [political] information that is only sparingly shared among citizens.”²⁵³

Finally, there is the very real issue of candidates being incapable of delivering on all the promises of the many micro or issue publics that they have engaged over the course of a campaign. Obama’s gay supporters on Don’t Ask Don’t Tell or people who believed he would close Guantanamo immediately upon coming into office as promised are just two of many examples of disappointed subgroups who threw enormous support behind candidate Obama in part because of his persuasiveness on the issues they cared about. “The whole issue of talking to micro issue publics and engaging with them is great in certain respects,” says Swire.²⁵⁴ “But then there’s the near certainty that many people will be disappointed, and what does that say for democracy?” As such targeting methods get more sophisticated the natural outcome seems likely to be more citizens who are (more) cynical and angry at politicians for being disappointing at best, dishonest at worst.

In contemporary politics, how are citizens to genuinely understand where our politicians stand or who they are? To know who is in fact representing us? Candidates must remain ideologically competitive so they often present different and sometimes conflicting ideological packages to different communities or supporters. “Campaigns and candidates present appealing features and conceal less appealing features according to the audience being addressed,” writes Howard, “leaving the true core policy positions strategically ambiguous or sheltered from public view.”²⁵⁵

Perhaps most worrisome for democracy, there is mounting evidence of widespread surveiling of citizens by corporations, to figure out buying habits / purchasing patterns / how to market effectively, and plenty of evidence that these sorts of technologies are being employed in the political realm as well. Dr. Alan Kanner’s article *Piracy of Privacy* describes how, in the political world, current technology ostensibly intended to help foster public discussion and dialogue is essentially being used to spy on us: to find out what people’s political views are and reflect/sell messages back to them or appeal to them by tailoring messages based on their own views – a la Howard’s “data shadow.” Howard in fact describes how a site called Opinionbot, supposedly intended to help people match preferences with particular candidates and/or make them better informed, was actually selling their information to campaigns. To add insult to injury, when Opinionbot went bankrupt they sold off information they had gathered to the highest bidder at auction.²⁵⁶

Howard makes a compelling overarching claim: that we are living in a highly managed democracy: “Our contemporary system of political communication is built by information technology consultants whose design choices affect the exercise and distribution of political power.”²⁵⁷ Howard’s vision of the modern

political landscape has a particularly Big Brother quality: where data collection trumps personal privacy and messages are individualized in ways that we are only beginning to grasp. The cover of his book shows the hand of a puppeteer with strings of a marionette running down over a city – the idea being that technically savvy political and economic elites are controlling citizens to a large degree, often without our knowledge. This kind of dystopic, managed and controlled, political system sometimes referred to / referred to by Howard as a “thin polity,” a far cry from the normative vision of democracy laid that I abide.²⁵⁸

Effectiveness: How do Trends & Techniques Stack Up in the Big Picture?

We have considered how various contemporary branding and targeting techniques relate to one another in terms of effectiveness, but how should their influence be understood in a broader political context? Do the techniques examined here really make a difference when “both sides” in a presidential race are, as Citrin puts it, “geared up and playing the same game”? What of their power when considered in the context of structural constraints on electoral politics such as the state of the economy or the influence of the news media?

On the first question – that of two sides playing the same game, it is fair to say that opponents geared up and playing equal games at the national, state and local levels are the exception to the rule. While contemporary presidential races are guaranteed to be heavily funded on both sides, each presidential race is still its own particular constellation of advantages and disadvantages related to shifting economic, cultural and political terrains, to candidates’ relative personal capacities and charisma, and so on.

As we have discussed Obama got a lot of credit for having run a “near perfect” campaign with “expert” branding and an overall strategy that made so many consumer marketers gnash teeth in envy, yet it is also clear that many things conspired/unfolded to give him a real advantage in the 2008 race – not least the enormous influx of money.²⁵⁹

When asked what works many practitioners have a similar refrain: money. “Money works” was definitely a recurring and strong theme among my interviewees. In other words – the point of origin for some political success is perceived to be (and I believe is) the war chest that funds the overall campaign strategy rather than the effectiveness of any particular trend or technique itself. Still – the power of money is essentially considered in the context of what it can buy... marketing and advertising. The problem with this picture is that the jury is out on the question of money’s effect on a presidential election. As political reporter Jamelle Boule recently put it:

“Obviously, if you don’t have the funds to air advertising or run a get-out-the-vote operation, you’re in trouble. But at a certain point—particularly in presidential

elections—it's not clear whether an advantage or disadvantage means anything for the final outcome."²⁶⁰ His article quotes Nyhan:

'I tend to think the effects of money in politics are overstated,' says political scientist Brendan Nyhan of Dartmouth College. 'The reason is that campaign donors are strategic—candidates who are likely to win are more likely to attract funds, which means that the apparent correlation between funding advantages and winning can't be interpreted as causal...much of the money that is raised goes to TV ads that have short-lived effects and tend to cancel each other out in competitive races.'

In a recent post, the Monkey Cage's John Sides made a similar assessment: "The effect of ads seems to dissipate quickly, even within a week. So you may not need to think about the effects of ads for another 3+ months." Put another way, we essentially have to wait until just before the election to start thinking about the effectiveness of ads on voting, because those effects are so fleeting.²⁶¹

In many political campaigns, money will have a big impact – if not be the defining feature – in terms of who wins and who loses. Yet it is certainly not always the case that the most-moneyed and thus equipped with a well funded marketing arsenal will win.

It's the Economy, Stupid

There are several constraints on the power of money / marketing in politics, but it is unlikely that any is as great as the state of the economy leading up to an election. There is no clear agreement at this political moment (July 2012) as to whether the economy will help or hurt Obama, there is little question among my interviewees of the last year and a half plus that the economy matters in 2012. Many have proposed that the state of the economy – easily the worst since the Great Depression, would make a second Obama term a long shot regardless of how gilded his war chest. Casting the economy (and incumbency) in a different light but underlining its capacity to determine the fate of presidential elections, Bouie writes: "Given the huge amounts that will be raised on both sides, odds are good that money will have a marginal effect on the outcome of this election."²⁶² Yet:

[T]he fundamentals still favor Obama. Mitt Romney, Karl Rove, and the Republican Party can spend billions; it won't change the fact that it's simply unusual for an incumbent president to lose reelection when there's positive economic growth - even if it isn't enough to bring the economy to where it needs to be.

A powerful variation on and predecessor to that argument:

Near the end of his presidency, Bill Clinton had approval ratings in the 70s, and it wasn't a result of his storytelling prowess. If you remember, the story the public was hungry for him to tell—the whole “did he or didn't he have sexual relations with that woman” one—wasn't one he was particularly keen on sharing. He had high approval ratings mostly because of the kick-ass economy.²⁶³

Another structural constraint on the power of political marketing is the state of contemporary media. Polarized and scattershot (a fact that tends to obscure the consolidation of media ownership) media outlets tend to make it difficult for presidents (let alone contenders) to speak to a broad national audience. This fact undercuts the theory undermining the theory of the power of the president or the campaign to manipulate, let alone control.

Back in the days when television was limited to three channels that all broadcast presidential addresses and the Internet was barely a twinkle in Al Gore's eye, listening to Richard Nixon was high entertainment. Now, people would much rather watch *Game of Thrones* or check Facebook. For Obama's last State of the Union in January, 38 percent of households tuned in. In March 1969, Nixon had 59 percent of the country listening to him. And it was only for a routine press conference. It's hard to tell a story when no one's listening.²⁶⁴

By now the messages of presidents and contenders are more fractured than ever thanks to the Internet exploding the media into millions of tiny pieces, wherein, “[P]eople hear presidential remarks from a mélange of different outlets with wildly diverse frames, agendas, and expertise”:

The Higgs boson effect of modern news coverage also leaves reporters far less interested in covering policy-driven speeches and presidential attempts to divine narrative from wonkiness. There are other factors that constrain the effectiveness of (and undermine the theory of all powerful) marketing trends and techniques: demography political culture the climate of opinion and more.²⁶⁵

Yet there are times and places in which these trends and techniques certainly do have power and influence, and can even be the defining element, a belief I heard echoed many times over the course of the project and that I have come to believe even more firmly than when I undertook this project.

Neck in Neck

“In a close race, if you’re able to dig a little deeper on microtargeting it can be very valuable,” says democratic consultant Katie Merrill.²⁶⁶ They did a brilliant job of exciting and turning out the base in Ohio in 2004 with the anti-gay marriage initiative.”

Peter Fenn echoes the belief that the 2004 campaign reveals the power of targeting in certain contexts. “The 2004 campaign in Ohio,” says Fenn:

...was an incredible battle ground with Bush and Kerry. Both campaigns made it a battle ground. The Kerry campaign far and away exceeded their target vote. But Bush left them in the dust. Bush microtargeting in the African American community in Ohio was brilliant. He targeted a lot in churches. Kerry lost much of Gore’s African American vote in Ohio.²⁶⁷

“Microtargeting becomes much more critical in those environments,” says Stutzman.²⁶⁸ “Its not necessarily about people we can persuade but about voting propensity. If I can identify a universe of two hundred thousand and get eighty thousand out in CA I might win. McCain was so far behind It wouldn’t have mattered... he needed a big idea, a mass message to turn the campaign around.”

And what of branding? Once one has heard tell of the storied Republican wordsmith Frank Luntz and the power of language to turn the polled public on its head it is difficult to dismiss the effectiveness of certain marketing tools on politics. Still, as Mary Hughes points out:

Unless you have the luxury of a follow survey or exit polling we often don’t know what works and doesn’t. Campaigns are nearly always strapped for resources and the results are yesterday’s news and the troops are exhausted. So on many levels its hard to go back and find out. We tend to want to settle for just knowing who won the election.²⁶⁹

“At the end of the day you don’t know if branding works,” says Stutzman.²⁷⁰ “With soda pop and toothpaste, you can measure sales. In politics, you only have one day to make the sale. So, not as perfect a science as consumer lines.”

While money in politics continues to balloon, there are at least some cases where disparities between sides are widening rather than balancing out as they grow. The recent American Prospect article *How do we Make Elections More Competitive* notes that, between 1992 and 2002, in the districts most likely to be competitive, median spending by incumbents rose from \$596,000 to \$910,000, while median spending by challengers fell from \$229,000 to \$198,000. “When it comes down to it,” Bouie argues, “challengers simply lack the money to mount an effective bid for office.”²⁷¹ Of course it is a different story at the presidential level but the trend toward more money for incumbents is noteworthy.

By now it is clear that my central goal with *Packaging Politics* has been descriptive: to shed light on how and when certain trends and techniques moved from the consumer to the political realm. I have also made clear from the outset that the true impetus behind the project has to do with normative and theoretical questions about democratic potential.

As we know our interview subjects have thoughts on implications questions as I do. But unlike the coherent narrative the interviews yielded on a set of questions about trends, techniques and migration, with implications questions there is much more room for subjective interpretation and diverse perspectives.

It has been interesting to learn over the course of interviewing, for example, how discipline/vocation seems to influence perspective on the intersection of marketing and politics. To revisit these points briefly, our academics tend toward a dark view of democracy in crisis, with forces of manipulation are ascending.²⁷² By contrast a majority of practitioners / political consultants tended toward enthusiasm for any/all new tricks of the trade that might give them an edge. Political reporters were skeptical – viewing the new developments as just one more in a history of flourishes to something that will never change: politicians trying to get votes. Of course there are seeds of truth in each of these perspectives.

Democratic Potential Redux

Unlike those who hold the darkest views of marketing’s influence on politics, I do see some positive influences resulting from advances in consumer marketing and its migration to politics that occasionally do some good toward creating the more robust version of democracy that I am inclined toward. But while these occasional benefits are clearer now than when I began researching *Packaging Politics*, and some of the most dire characterizations of marketing’s influence I read and even spoke early on now seem to go too far, I share the concerns of several academics I interviewed and/or read for this project -- that the path

toward / potential for robust democracy feels remote and / or threatened. I perceive that threat as connected to a significant problem built into many normative conceptions of democracy both historic and contemporary: these formulations have too often perceived reason / rationality as the sine qua non of the democratic citizen and democratic society.

As thinkers from Plato to Freud affective intelligence theorists over the last ten years or so have made clear – much if not most of our political beliefs and actions are driven by emotion rather than reason.²⁷³ Further destabilizing the goal of democracy where reason rules is that, unlike Ancient Athens, modern democratic politics are complex and often overwhelming – probably too much for most citizens to really make sense of intellectually / rationally. While theorists like Popkin, Lupia and McCubbins have proven that heuristics can facilitate rational action / behavior – i.e. allowing citizens to connect to a candidate or ballot initiative in line with their policy preferences – others who have studied heuristics (Kuklinski & Quirk, Kahneman & Tversky and Dan Ariely among them), have made compelling arguments for how - since our behaviors are primarily driven by unconscious and emotional responses, heuristics are at least as likely to mislead us²⁷⁴

But to pull the curtain back just a bit more, the whole discussion of whether heuristics can “save” democracy and allow “democratic competence” to flourish is deeply unsatisfying. People who argue that heuristics lead to democratic competence seem to understand it much too narrowly -- where what is of concern is whether people are acting on their preferences, irrespective of whether those preferences can be considered reasonable or rational. This is problematic because it doesn't consider how we get our preferences in first place.²⁷⁵

Again, I have carried out this research holding a number of democratic conceptions in mind – though not in equal favor. A host of heuristic and economic models of democracy discussed over the course of the project seem misguided in certain respects but, more crucially, impoverished - even anemic - in terms of democratic/political life. Such minimalist models leave a citizenry very little reason to care about democracy because they lack any meaningful vision for what democracy should be.

While we've established that there is no ideal theoretical or historical model of democracy to attempt to replicate, this exploration of consumer marketing's influence on politics over the past 60 years has provided a foundation for and framework within which to consider our current market politics and to ask whether it's a democratic vision we are satisfied with or whether we might imagine another democratic horizon toward which to move.

Notes

¹ The Obama campaign successfully marshaled a non-hierarchical, “open source” branding model while many believe Hillary Clinton was hurt by her campaign’s very traditional top down organizing model.

² *The Selling of the President* was a sort of political analog to Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders*, published 12 years earlier. Like *Hidden Persuaders*, McGinnis’s book (also a best seller) drew back the curtain on the marketing machine – but this time with politics rather than consumer marketing.

³ As it relates to campaigns, the term political marketing refers primarily to the increasing use of experts and the corresponding study of voters to guide campaign choices. I borrow (and paraphrase) this definition from Lilleker, D., & Negrine, R. (2006). *Mapping a Market Orientation: Can We Detect Political Marketing Only Through the Lens of Hindsight?* In P. J. Davies & B. I. Newman (Eds.), *Winning Elections With Political Marketing* (pp. 33-58). Philadelphia, PA: The Haworth Press.

⁴ See Stuart Ewen. (1997). *PR! A Social History of Spin*. New York: Basic Books. p. 339–372, 389. Also Adam Curtis’s documentary film series “Century of the Self” 2004. Episode 1.

⁵ See *The Living Room Candidate*. (2008). Retrieved July 7, 2010, from <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/>

⁶ See Bennett, W. Lance and Entman, Robert M. (2001). *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. In terms of the claim that the “consumer” had triumphed over the citizen, I am referring to the cultural shift toward people identifying more as consumers and less as citizens as a result of living in a society based largely around consumerism, but also because Ronald Reagan employed very sophisticated focus grouped language testing (conducted by Frank Luntz) that indicated that he should trumpet the individual “consumer” above all else. Thus his stock campaign line “I’m gonna get big government off your back and let you do what you wanna do!”

⁷ As we will read below the idea of what ideal democracy or democratic behavior is or ought to be has always been contested. Recognizing that normative views of democracy are highly subjective, I make the case for a more versus less robust conception in the body of the text.

⁸ See *Exploring Constitutional Law*. (2001-11). Retrieved June 16, 2012, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/convention1787.html>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ While Schumpeter is among the democratic theorists of the last hundred years best known for intensely circumscribed conceptions of democracy, he is certainly not the first to eschew direct democracy and/or broad-based political engagement. Aversion to citizen participation has been a prominent strain within democratic theory at least since Plato imagined an ideal (and distinctly anti-democratic) political world of strictly delineated classes presided over by Philosopher Kings.

¹¹ Obviously Rousseau’s conception has much more in common with what I refer to as *robust democracy*.

¹² See Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ I borrow the term from Jack Citrin’s Political Behavior and Political Psychology courses.

¹⁵ See Popkin, S. (1994). *The Reasoning Voter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁶ See Arthur Lupia, Adam Seth Levine, Jesse O. Menning and Gisela Sin, (2007). Were Bush Tax Cut Supporters “Simply Ignorant?” A Second Look at Conservatives and Liberals in “Homer Gets a Tax Cut”. *Perspectives on Politics*, 5

¹⁸ For example PID is something that, while it has fluctuated in influence over the years, for many it still runs strong and more or less lines up with policy preferences.

¹⁹ Thanks to my dissertation chair Jack Citrin for making this point in an earlier draft.

²⁰ There is an interesting debate on the question of whether recent transformations in presidential politics should be viewed in marketing terms (i.e. branding) versus as a manifestation of an increasing “culture of celebrity.” It is true that the idea of party brand names exists in political

science literature -- work by Cox and McCubbins on Congress, Mike Ting and Jim Snyder on parties in general. GOPers have talked in the last few years about how Bush hurt their "brand."

²¹ From here on if I talk about something being "good for democracy" it should be read as good for my normative conception – i.e. robust democracy

²² See Holzer, R. (2008). *The Living Room Candidate*. Retrieved June 22, 2008, from <http://livingroomcandidate.org/>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Here I plan to consider arguments of heuristics proponents (Popkin, Lupia & McCubbins, Sniderman and others) by looking at how current political marketing may trouble the notion that rational decisions are likely to be made based on certain readily available cues.

²⁵ While the impetus for *Packaging Politics* derives from normative / theoretical questions about democratic potential, in conducting this research I am principally examining an empirical and historical phenomenon: when, how and why have certain consumer marketing trends and techniques migrated to political campaigns and how they have influenced the way campaigns are run.

²⁶ One interesting question for future research is how and why people at the forefront of their fields – whether practitioners, scholars or journalists - tend to understand the phenomena discussed here similarly or differently.

²⁷ The duties part of rights and duties seems to get lost in the shuffle too often – nor surprising in an era of a more consumer orientation.

²⁸ Curtis, Adam, Director. *Century of the Self*, 2002.

²⁹ Ibid. Curtis describes how Bernays and other PR and marketing people around the mid-20th century presented consumerism as patriotic because it supported the economy and made manifest American ideals such as freedom (to choose what to buy, wear, drive, etc) and individualism (expressing oneself through consumption).

³⁰ The General Motors Corporation largely constructed Democracy.

³¹ "It's not that the people are in charge but that the people's desires are in charge," says historian and media studies scholar Stuart Ewen in *Century of the Self*. "So democracy is reduced from something that involves an active citizenry to something that is predicated on the idea of the public as passive consumers."

³² Freud had a very dark view of human nature and has through various texts depicted human impulses as dangerous, irrational, savage and more.

³³ See Curtis, A. (2002). *Century of the Self*. United Kingdom: BBC Four.

³⁴ Such ideas were prevalent around the turn of the century as well, but they had fallen out of favor among (or not been known to) most American business and political elites until Bernays and other marketing strategists ushered them back in.

³⁵ See Packard, V. (1957). *The Hidden Persuaders*. New York: Ig Publishing

³⁶ Ibid. (Introduction)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Here I draw on political communication scholar John Corner's definition of political culture: "the broader context of meanings and values, hopes and anxieties, within which the more formal business of politics is conducted" from his *Media and the Restyling of Politics* (2003). Like Corner, I think of political culture as reaching beyond the realm of politics proper to the cultural milieu in which politics is conducted – a milieu that Corner points out shapes "the orientation of the citizens of a nation toward politics, and their perceptions of political legitimacy and the traditions of political practice."

³⁹ Also sometimes referred to as the "magic bullet" theory.

⁴⁰ A few were ahead of the curve, notably Bernard Cohen who, in 1963, anticipated agenda-setting theory by arguing that "the media doesn't tell us what to think; it tells us what to think about."

⁴¹ See Bartels, Larry. (1993). *Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure*. APSR 87: 267-285. p. 267

⁴² See Zaller, John. (1999). *A Theory of Media Politics*. p.2 Unpublished. Originally in Halberstam. See paper.

⁴³ Norris, Pippa. (2000). "A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post- Industrial Societies." NY: Cambridge University Press. The "pre-modern campaign" is described in Chapter 1.

⁴⁴ Harry Truman's 1948 whistle stop tour was the end of an era. Many candidates have embarked on such tours since (Gerald Ford, Robert Kennedy and Ronald Reagan to name a few) – yet these tours have had more to do with nostalgia and media spectacle than necessity.

⁴⁵ They also continued to play an important role in fundraising.

⁴⁶ Ibid. By contrast, today's presidential candidates have paid staff in the hundreds. In his book *Campaigning for President 2008*, Dennis Johnson reports that, in the first half of October 2008, the Obama-Biden campaign had nearly 800 employees, and that, by mid-October, payroll expenses for the Obama Biden staff were 31 million.

⁴⁷ Check public law exam. Candidate-centered campaigns in discussion of why American system is more punitive.

⁴⁸ See "Fireside Chat Microphone." (1930s). National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. Retrieved March 7, 2011, from http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/small_exhibition.cfm?key=1267&exkey=143&pagekey=246

⁴⁹ See Holzer, R. (2008). *The Living Room Candidate*. Retrieved June 22, 2008, from <http://livingroomcandidate.org/>

⁵⁰ See Westen, Drew. (2007). *The Political Brain*. New York: Public Affairs. p. 285

⁵¹ A longstanding criticism of television spots as a source of useful political information is that they are, at best, too superficial/scant on information to be useful tools of political knowledge and, at worst, that they tend to deceive citizens and/or pander to some of their basest motivations: fear or selfishness, for example. Recently some theorists of heuristics and affective intelligence have argued that political ads are in fact capable of relaying useful political information. Ted Brader contends that emotion generated by short, dramatic political spots may lead citizens to seek out additional information (when ads generate fear) or become more politically engaged (when enthusiasm is aroused). Samuel Popkin has long argued for the existence and usefulness of "low information rationality" -- shortcuts in a political world that is too complicated and time consuming for most people to consider in depth.

⁵² In his book *Political Consultants* Larry Sabato reasonably deemphasizes the "magic lantern" per se as the origin of personality-driven politics, instead pointing to the new political/media consultants – many of whom came from consumer advertising - stoking the "cult of personality" around political candidates.

⁵³ While television was certainly a game changer in electoral politics, some analyses – including the "magic lantern" oversimplify the reasons behind certain politicians' success or failure. While Reagan was certainly comfortable with the camera, his success was also due to such factors as the economy (American voters' rejection of stagflation in 1980 helping his and the 1984 economic rebound giving him another political boost as an incumbent). Furthermore, the power and persuasion of Reagan's messages came in part from the careful focus grouping / testing of language that lead Reagan to declare that he was going to "get the government off your back so you can do what you want to do" -- a stroke of rhetorical genius (not Reagan's – but his consultants) that also helps explain part of the story of the "Reagan-Democrats."

⁵⁴ Chappell, Lawson and Gabriel Lenz, Andy Baker and Michael Myers. (2010). "Looking Like a Winner. Candidate Appearance and Electoral Success." *World Politics*. Volume 62.4 (October 2010). pp. 573-575.

⁵⁵ See Definitions from Wikipedia and Merriam – Webster's. Retrieved May 26, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consumerism> and <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consumerism>

⁵⁶ See Cross, G. (2000). *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See Hirsch, E. (2004). "New Technologies and Domestic Consumption," *Media Studies: A Reader*. Eds. Paul Harris and Sue Thornham. New York: New York University Press. p. 816-824.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 823-824. This point is also made by Robert Putnam and others who have argued that television's rise has led to a decline in social capital.

⁶⁰ Clearly the use of the word “origin” here is a stretch. Certainly some of the roots of consumerism reach back further. (dev)

⁶¹ See Packard, V. (1957). *The Hidden Persuaders*. New York: Ig Publishing.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ In a celebrated essay written in 1980, critical theorist Raymond Williams refers to advertising as “The Magic System.” Beginning with a normative conception of democracy in which the goal of society is the satisfaction of human needs and the development of human capacities for all, Williams instead depicts a dystopic consumerist society driven by the corporate bottom line rather than democratic ideals. Advertising, Williams writes, is the “magic” that preserves the consumption ideal, masking the fact that true human needs are left unsatisfied. “The attempt is made,” he writes, “to associate this consumption with human desires to which it has no real reference.” One center of this sort of research was Stanford’s Institute for Motivational Research, founded to provide big business with data regarding the motives and desires of consumers. Like Williams, IMR founder Ernst Dichter believed that people often were not conscious of why they purchased certain things; their motivations were sexual, psychological or other origins they either couldn’t verbalize or were embarrassed about. Dichter would conduct focus groups modeled on psychoanalysis in order to ascertain what he called “The Strategy of Desire.” In one study, Dichter had women free-associate about cake mix. He found that women felt unconscious guilt about the ease of a product that asked them to do nothing more than simply “add water.” Dichter suggested to marketers that they remove that barrier to consumption by requiring that women add an egg. Sales skyrocketed.

⁶⁴ See Stuart Ewen. (1997). *PR! A Social History of Spin*. New York: Basic Books.

⁶⁵ See Moyers, B. (1984). *Walk Through the 20th Century: The 30-Second President*. PBS Video.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See The Living Room Candidate. (2008). <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/>

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See Moyers, B. (1984). *Walk Through the 20th Century: The 30-Second President*. PBS Video.

⁷⁰ Among these million elections every 4-year cycle there is obviously a huge range of consultant involvement, from headline grabbing *billion* dollar presidential campaigns to low profile local races in which voters have no knowledge of the contests until they see the candidates on ballots on Election Day.

⁷¹ See Norris, Pippa. (2000). “A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post- Industrial Societies.” New York: Cambridge University Press. p 36. (Also see Johnson, D.W. (2001). *No Place For Amateurs: How Political Consultants Are Reshaping American Democracy*. New York, NY: Routledge.)

⁷² See Sabato, L. (1983). *The Rise of Political Consultants*. Basic Books. It should be noted that while the idea that party influence has waned and other factors have more influence in contemporary elections party network researchers have introduced a new perspective that puts party back in a central role, in large part by understanding party as extending beyond formal organizations (DNC or RNC) to what Jonathan Bernstein calls an “expanded party” (including party aligned interest groups, campaign professionals, candidates and their organizations and activists). According to Bernstein and others (Seth Masket’s *No Middle Ground* or Cohen, Karol, Noel and Zaller’s *The Party Decides*) parties “properly understood” still play major roles in presidential politics.

⁷³ See Brew, D., Kelly, J., and John E. Yang. (1984). “Packaging the Presidency”. *Time Magazine*. Retrieved May 23, 2011, from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,926922,00.html>

⁷⁴ Naomi Klein and Chris Hedges made this claim, among others.

⁷⁵ As noted in the previous chapter, the first American political consulting firm was Whitaker and Baxter’s Campaigns Inc., which opened up shop in California in the 1930s substantially ahead of the curve. One of their early jobs was running the Republican’s campaign against muckraker Upton Sinclair, who ran for governor in 1934 in the midst of the Great Depression. Sinclair’s campaign was focused on one key issue: ending poverty. The Republicans hired Whitaker and Baxter to discredit Sinclair by painting him as a crazed Bolshevik. Though television was not yet available, Whitaker and Baxter helped produce phony newsreels (presaging the Bush administration’s practice of offering up “news stories” ready to go to news stations around the country and packaged as “objective” and independent, but in reality generated with an explicit goal and slant rather than by the fourth estate).

Adoption of consumer marketing techniques to political campaigning did not begin to take center stage until the 1950s. While consumer advertising – long honed in the radio and print worlds – exploded on television, political marketing was still relatively new.

⁷⁶ See Lilleker, D., & Negrine, R. (2006). *Mapping a Market Orientation: Can We Detect Political Marketing Only Through the Lens of Hindsight?* and Davies, P.J., & B. I. Newman (Eds.), *Winning Elections With Political Marketing* (pp. 33-58). Philadelphia, PA: The Haworth Press. As it relates to campaigns, political marketing refers primarily to the increasing use of experts and the corresponding study of voters to guide campaign choices.

⁷⁷ K. Speak. Personal Interview. May 2008.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ In an interesting reversal, many political advertising agencies have now taken up corporate work as well; they apparently need the business to keep them afloat during the off years. So in some sense what we are seeing now is a return to, but a more sophisticated version of, what existed back in the 1950s, when commercial advertising agencies primarily handled consumer advertising but used some of the techniques that worked for them in the commercial world and applied them to politics. Now what we see with firms that do both political and private sector advertising seems to be a more integrated and sophisticated version of that trend.

⁸¹ J. Spencer. Personal Interview. Washington D.C.: American Association of Political Consultants, June 2008.

⁸² See Sabato, L. (1983). *The Rise of Political Consultants*. Basic Books. p. 16

⁸³ R. Stutzman. Personal interview.

⁸⁴ There are clearly significant divergences between marketing trends in the consumer/commercial sphere and electoral politics – and Chapter 4 is devoted to exploring those differences.

⁸⁵ B. Fouhy. Personal Interview. 2009.

⁸⁶ See Corner, J. & D. Pels (Eds.) *Media and the Restyling of Politics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

⁸⁷ Bennett's book predates the Obama campaign and I would argue that the Obama campaign and administration does not substantially undercut the theory: a majority of presidential hopefuls and successes from 1980 on did seem to focus on the citizen as consumer: Reagan, Bush I, Clinton and Bush II included. In *Century of the Self* Robert Reich speaks in interview with much dismay about the Clinton administration's blowing with the winds of polls and focus groups, which led to, as Reich describes it, a wildly disproportionate focus on things like the V-Chip at the expense of much more central and crucial issues of governance.

⁸⁸ Schnur, Dan. (2008, May). Personal Interview, and Speak, Karl. (2008, June). Personal Interview

⁸⁹ While the term branding has increasingly been used to in the realm of politics, including the notion that political parties, some candidates, and even nations are brands, the term as it was first used and is still most widely understood applies to the consumer rather than the political sphere. Coca-Cola is arguably the most internationally famous consumer brand.

⁹⁰ See Klein, N. (2002). *No Logo*. New York: Picador USA

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ See Moyers, B. (1984). *Walk Through the 20th Century: The 30 Second President*. PBS.

⁹⁴ See Klein, N. (2002). *No Logo*. New York: Picador USA. p. 6

⁹⁵ See Curtis, A. (2002). *Century of the Self*. United Kingdom: BBC Four.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ See Sexton, T. (2007, January 17). "Emotional Branding and the History of Product Marketing." Associated Content. Retrieved June 21, 2008, from http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/119068/emotional_branding_and_the_history.html?page=2&cat=3

⁹⁸ See Giovanni, D. (2009, June 23). Retrieved November 8, 2010, from http://www.linkedin.com/answers/product-management/branding/PRM_BRA/499192-31639170.

⁹⁹ The Persuaders, PBS Frontline. 2004. OR Frank Luntz in Dretzin, R., Goodman, B., & Soenens, M. (Producers), & Goodman, B., & Dretzin, R. (Directors). (2003). Frontline: The Persuaders. [Film]. WGBH Boston.

¹⁰⁰ See Van Ham, P. (2001). "The rise of the brand state: The postmodern politics of image and reputation." *Foreign Affairs*, 80(5), p. 2-6.

¹⁰¹ See Jhally, S., Alper, L., & Garner, K. (Producers). (2003). No Logo: Brands, Globalization, & Resistance. Media Education Foundation. (Naomi Klein interview).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See Goodman, B. and Dretzin, R. (2003). The Persuaders. PBS Frontline.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ K. Speak. Personal interview. 2009. Speak points out that slogans, which are now used to promote the virtues of everything from washing detergent to beer, originated as the rallying cries of warring factions (the word itself is Gaelic in origin and means 'war cry').

¹⁰⁶ T. Hollihan. Personal Interview. 2009

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ M. Hughes. Personal Interview. February 21, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ See Orenstein, P. (2010). "Cinderella Ate My Daughter." *New York: The New York Times*.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ See Lochhead, C. (2008, August 22). "Selling Candidates' Brand is Crucial to Wooing Voters." *San Francisco: San Francisco Chronicle*.

¹¹² See Easley, J. (2008, March 9). "Clinton, Obama, and Political Branding. Blogger News Network." Retrieved June 21, 2008, from <http://www.bloggernews.net/114330>

¹¹³ S. Schmidt. Personal Interview. 2009

¹¹⁴ See Newman, B. I. (2007). Branding and Political Marketing in the United States. SpringerLink. Retrieved June 22, 2008, from <http://www.springerlink.com/content/x4v0k56u87543801/>

¹¹⁵ Public Relations people are now central to campaigns. In many cases PR people are business people before they are ideological. So, for example, John McCain's and Hillary Clinton's chief strategists were in the same company.

¹¹⁶ K. Hall-Jamieson. Personal interview. August 23, 2011.

¹¹⁷ D. Fowler. Personal interview. March 31, 2009.

¹¹⁸ R. Stutzman. Personal interview. 2008. February 11, 2009.

¹¹⁹ K. Khachigian. Personal interview. October 27, 2009.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ J. Spencer. Personal interview. June 12, 2008.

¹²² In fact one of the foremost distinctions between consumer and political marketing is the use of negative advertising, something that will be explored in the next chapter, which focuses on divergences.

¹²³ K. Hall-Jamieson. Personal interview. 2011.

¹²⁴ See Raine, G. (1984, June 9). "Creating Reagan's Image." *San Francisco Chronicle*. Retrieved August 24, 2001, from <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/06/09/BUGBI72U801.DTL>

¹²⁵ See Romano, A. (2008, February 27). "Why the Obama 'Brand' is Working." *Newsweek*. Retrieved June 22, 2008, from <http://blog.newsweek.com/blogs/stumper/archive/2008/02/27/how-obama-s-branding-is-working-on-you.aspx>

¹²⁶ See Patterson, J. (2008, March 4). "The Most Interesting Branding Story is in Politics." *Ad Age*. Retrieved November 8, 2010, from http://adage.com/smallagency/post?article_id=125486

¹²⁷ M. Hughes. Personal interview. February 21, 2009.

¹²⁸ Hill and Hughes. (2000). quoted in Norris, Pippa. *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communication in Post- Industrial Societies*. NY: Cambridge University Press. P. 17

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 18

¹³⁰ While Linux emerged in 1991, it was based on user space system tools and libraries from the GNU Project, which was established in 1983.

¹³¹ The Creative Commons license is a new type of copyright (nicknamed "Copy Left") created by

an Open Source community that gives artists the flexibility to collaborate. Its fans include Chuck D, the Beastie Boys, David Byrne and Gilberto Gil.

¹³² See Cherkoff, J. (2005, February 4). "What is Open Source Marketing?" London: Collaborate Marketing Services. Retrieved November 16, 2010, from http://www.collaboratemarketing.com/open_source_marketing/

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Peter Hart. Personal interview. February 25, 2009.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Unlike the term "open source governance" which connotes the idea of overhauling or replacing existing governmental institutions to allow direct citizen input into governing, and "open politics" which refers to a constellation of theorists advocating the advancement of political virtues and adherence to human rights law, "open source politics" is a term favored by technologists and commonly used interchangeably with "politics 2.0."

¹³⁷ See Sifry, M. "The Rise of Open Source Politics." The Nation. Retrieved September 6, 2010, from <http://www.thenation.com/article/rise-open-source-politics?page=0,4>

¹³⁸ Some people, especially from the software engineering industry, dislike the term open-source politics because many of the technologies that the term references in politics (YouTube and facebook, for example, which do not operate under and open source license) are not open source. Proponents of the term argue that "open source" is a useful way to indicate that technology is making politics more participatory. Opponents are concerned is that use of the term causes unnecessary confusion, and it has suggested alternates such as "open politics" and "politics 2.0."

¹³⁹ P. Hart. Personal interview. February 5, 2009.

¹⁴⁰ See McGirt, E. (2008, April). "The Brand Called Obama." FastCompany.com. Retrieved June 21, 2008, from <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/124/the-brand-called-obama.html>

¹⁴¹ D. Fowler. Personal interview. March 31, 2009.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ S. Schmidt. Personal Interview. February 11, 2009.

¹⁴⁴ P. Fenn. Personal Interview. February 21, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ S. Schmidt. Personal Interview. 2008.

¹⁴⁶ See Verini, J. (2007). "Big Brother Inc.". Vanity Fair. Retrieved from <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/12/aristotle200712?printable=true¤tPage=all>

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ See Curtis, A. (2002). Century of the Self.

¹⁴⁹ The intriguing back story of the development of the VALS typology is laid out in part 3 of Adam Curtis's documentary series Century of the Self (2002) which documents rising opposition to the Freudian idea that the id had to be controlled – first in psychology, then in business and marketing. Big business was first terrified by the burgeoning rejection of social conformity (and, along with that, mass produced goods) but later realized that markets could expand to fulfill people's more complicated, individualized attempts at self-expression through consumption.

¹⁵⁰ One of the major shifts in consumer advertising using technology was, beginning with the birth of cable in the 1970s, shifted first the way consumer marketers did business. As Pippa Norris describes in her book *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post- Industrial Societies* (2000), the networks in 1970 had no rivals: only ten percent of American homes had cable. By 1980, Norris points out, the number was closer to twenty percent. But by the 1990s nearly three-quarters had cable or satellite and audience share for networks plummeted. Needed to create for all these niche interests and audiences.

¹⁵¹ See Steel, E. (2007, June 19). "How Marketers Hone Their Aim Online." Wall Street Journal on the Web. Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118221104155539813.html>

¹⁵² Privacy advocates object to micro targeting on several fronts, including the possibility of private information being stored in files, or that sensitive information - about a serious illness, for example -- might fall into the wrong hands.

¹⁵³ Though I use it here to distinguish political from private sector, to say "political micro-targeting" is redundant. The term "micro-targeting" is used exclusively in the political realm.

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- ¹⁵⁴ J. Braun. Personal Interview. April 2, 2009.
- ¹⁵⁵ M. Barabak. Personal Interview. February 10, 2009.
- ¹⁵⁶ P. Fenn. Personal Interview. February 21, 2009.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁸ J. A. Phillips. Personal interview. April 7, 2009.
- ¹⁵⁹ P. Fenn. Personal Interview. 2008.
- ¹⁶⁰ See Frank Luntz in Dretzin, R., Goodman, B., & Soenens, M. (Producers), & Goodman, B., & Dretzin, R. (Directors). (2003). *Frontline: The Persuaders*. [Film]. WGBH Boston.
- ¹⁶¹ H. Malchow. Personal Interview. 2009.
- ¹⁶² D. Fowler. Personal interview. 2009.
- ¹⁶³ T. Hollihan. Personal Interview. 2009
- ¹⁶⁴ The Republican version is called *Voter Vault*. The DNC's is called *VoteBuilder*. Harold Ickes recently developed *Catalist*, another Democratic effort, to the tune of \$9 million.
- ¹⁶⁵ Many of these sub-group titles sound rather exotic but actually point up a single issue or two of key import to a subset of voters. These heuristics can be very useful in the case of, say, Rudi Giuliani needing to draw on support from citizens who consider terrorism and taxes the key issues they vote on. A list of "tax and terrorism moderates" would be much more valuable in this instance than, say, Republicans in a certain income bracket or who drive a particular car. With modern microtargeting, specificity is key, because it allows resources to be channeled toward those voters most promising to the campaign.
- ¹⁶⁶ Bethany Albertson has looked at incidences of multiple targeted messages embedded within single texts – i.e. the use of codes to speak to different audiences. I look forward to reading her work, which may influence the way I develop my content analysis.
- ¹⁶⁷ Kanner, A. (2009). *The Piracy of Privacy: Why Marketers Must Bare Our Souls*. Tikun.
- ¹⁶⁸ K. Merrill. Personal Interview. February 12, 2009.
- ¹⁶⁹ See Verini, J. (2007). "Big Brother Inc.". Vanity Fair. Retrieved from <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/12/aristotle200712?printable=true¤tPage=all>
- ¹⁷⁰ R. Stutzman. Personal interview. February 11, 2009.
- ¹⁷¹ Like with most attendees at the American Association of Political Consultants conference I had to take Tavani's warnings of his power and influence with a grain of salt. Nearly everyone I met there was working an angle; most had products or services of some kind for sale. All who did trumpeted the virtues of their particular approach to or specialty in the political game: whether it be "rich media" "nanotargeting" "oppo" "branding the opponent" or some other niche.
- ¹⁷² Increases in absentee voting complicate the notion of the "one day sale" somewhat, but a clear majority of voters still cast their ballots on Election Day.
- ¹⁷³ See Moyers, B. (1984). *Walk Through the 20th Century: The 30 Second President*. PBS. (Interview with Tony Schwartz)
- ¹⁷⁴ P.D. Hart. Personal interview. February 25, 2009.
- ¹⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁶ Ibid. Of course there are times where 3rd party or independent candidates have felt good about their campaigns thought they've lost. Many campaigns are run knowing full well they will never be won – sometimes that is not the issue. Beyond a bit of hyperbole here, Hart is clearly talking about mainstream party-backed candidates.
- ¹⁷⁷ As discussed in the last chapter – politicians do speak to various sub-populations through targeted messaging, but those targeted messages must in some way map onto or relate to the overall brand. A consumer product can target and market entirely to, say, gay African American men between the ages of 18 and 25, or upper-middle class parents of colicky infants.
- ¹⁷⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, certain candidates have been much easier to package and keep "on brand" than others.
- ¹⁷⁹ According to Donnie Fowler: "The person you want to sit down and have a beer with is, more often than not, the person you will vote for."

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- ¹⁸⁰ See Pilkington, E. (2011). Obama Angers Midwest Voters with Guns and Religion Remark. United Kingdom: The Guardian. Retrieved September 24, 2011, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/14/barackobama.uselections2008>
- ¹⁸¹ See Cannon, L. (2000). *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*. Public Affairs Books.
- ¹⁸² Stevenson eventually came around and began to do campaign advertisements for television, but without much success.
- ¹⁸³ See Moyers, B. (1984). *Walk Through the 20th Century: The 30 Second President*. PBS.
- ¹⁸⁴ There is a certain “Morning in America” quality to Obama’s messaging.
- ¹⁸⁵ In fact the Obama Campaign won Advertising Age’s coveted Advertiser of the Year award in 2008, beating out several apparently stunned megabrands. A major component of the campaign’s success is how well funded it was – more so than any presidential candidate in history.
- ¹⁸⁶ See Johnson, D.W. (2001). *No Place For Amateurs: How Political Consultants Are Reshaping American Democracy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- ¹⁸⁷ See Seifter, A. (2005, Feb 16). “Ingraham, Hannity revived claim that ‘Al Gore brought up Williw Horton’”. Media Matters for America. Retrieved from <http://mediamatters.org/research/200502160008>
- ¹⁸⁸ B. Fouhy. Personal interview. February 4, 2009.
- ¹⁸⁹ In *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds*, Ted Brader makes a compelling case that advertisements that generate fear or enthusiasm tend to lead to increased political involvement / engagement. Brader’s evidence that fear tends to lead people to seek out more political information (at least in some situations), complicates the conventional wisdom about attack ads leading people to disengage / tune politics out.
- ¹⁹⁰ See Johnson, D.W. (2001). *No Place For Amateurs: How Political Consultants Are Reshaping American Democracy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- ¹⁹¹ Hollihan, Tom. Personal interview.
- ¹⁹² See Johnson, D.W. (2001). *No Place For Amateurs: How Political Consultants Are Reshaping American Democracy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- ¹⁹³ N. Tal. Personal interview. October 23, 2011.
- ¹⁹⁴ A. Kelly. Personal interview. January 29, 2009.
- ¹⁹⁵ Ibid. The concept of the “war room” in politics was made famous by a documentary of the same name about the 1992 Clinton campaign team, which included James Carville and George Stephanopoulos.
- ¹⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁹⁷ M. Hughes. Personal interview. February 21, 2009.
- ¹⁹⁸ An exception to the rule: John Kerry was lampooned as a flip-flopper and too French in an ad campaign that drew a little more on humor than most.
- ¹⁹⁹ The Obama Girl comes to mind, but the You Tube sensation was not generated by the campaign proper but was rather an example of “open source” marketing / branding which the Obama campaign certainly tended to welcome. Obama’s supporters generated part of his brand, and I suppose the claim can be made that being “sexy” was some small part of his brand. But it certainly was not central, as sex is to so much consumer advertising.
- ²⁰⁰ Wikipedia. Retrieved May 26, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consumerism>
- ²⁰¹ Margaret Scammell and others have recently argued against the notion of consumer as self-interested drone. In her article “Citizen Consumers” Scammell notes “business has begun to respond to citizen consumers’ increasing environmental and social awareness and concerns because they have to in order to stay competitive.” Implicit in this argument is that the citizen consumer binary is somewhat artificial or at least overdrawn.
- ²⁰² Ibid.
- ²⁰³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle. (384-322 BCE)
- ²⁰⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁰⁵ Civic self-rule is also at the heart of Rousseau’s project in the *Contrat Social*: it is their co-authoring of the laws via the General Will that makes citizens free and laws legitimate.

²⁰⁶ See Leydet, D (2011, Fall). "Citizenship", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/citizenship/>

²⁰⁷ It became an "important but occasional identity, a legal status rather than a fact of everyday life" (Walzer 1989, 215).

²⁰⁸ See Leydet, D (2011, Fall). "Citizenship", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/citizenship/>

²⁰⁹ With such influential thinkers as Joseph Schumpeter and Anthony Downs, theorizing rests on the idea that economic models can be applied to political decision-making, and that politics can (and should, according to some) be understood through the lens of economics. According to these theorists the self-interest that motivates both the political and economic market is a good thing. Why? They maintain that unfettered markets (both consumer and political) will tend to produce the outcome that customers want. Economic theories of democracy tend to reject much of classical democracy with its notion of the "common good": that people are or should be concerned with the fate of the broader community, that citizens should engage in robust, sustained democratic participation, and so on. Rather these theories assume people appropriately tend to act in their individual (or family, or group) self-interest. It does tend to be acknowledged among such economic theorists of democracy that citizens do not always operate from a place of simple economic self-interest, but tend to have other motivations, including a sense of civic duty, or of moral or ethical obligation. The act of voting (or other forms of political participation) may serve an important function in terms of people's identities, their values, and/or simply the ways in which they have been socialized.

²¹⁰ M. Hughes. Personal interview. February 2009.

²¹¹ D. Fowler. Personal interview. March 2009.

²¹² P. Fenn. Personal interview. Feb 2009.

²¹³ T. Hollihan. Personal interview. Jan 2009.

²¹⁴ Though it is true that Reagan very consciously shifted much of the language in American political discourse as Hollihan describes, it is also important to consider some of the foundation for this shift we discussed in Chapters 1 & 3, i.e. how notions of capitalism became intertwined with conceptions of democracy in the 1920s and 1930s. Remember Bernays' "Democracy" – the notion that democracy was brought to Americans by G.E. and other big corporations. There have in fact been repeated messages since that point in the public sphere about how democracy is linked to free enterprise, competition, the profit motive – ideas of self interest that were not in fact included in the founding documents in any literal way but that became a powerful part of political discourse long before the 1980s. Also recall Lance Bennett's argument (discussed in Chapter 3) which argues that politics has changed dramatically over the past 50 years – that prior conditions that allowed citizens within nations to imagine common cause and common conflict have eroded and that, since the 1970s with massive global economic, political and communications changes, we've seen the construction of highly personalized forms of identity politics anchored in lifestyle and consumer choices. And that, as the celebration of personal consumer choice fills the public spheres of advertising, entertainment and shopping displays, it also shapes conceptions of fundamental Western values such as freedom, rights and political representation. From the standpoint of government and elected representatives, personalized and diverse citizen expectations are increasingly hard to satisfy. Leaders in most western industrialized countries have abandoned the old rhetorics of sacrifice and collective political projects in favor of promises of greater personal choice. (Look at this. Quoted or paraphrased from Bennet? Do I need to say all this here? Is it redundant with previous chapter?)

²¹⁵ See Bennett, W. Lance and Entman, Robert M. (2001). *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*.

²¹⁶ R. Stutzman. Personal interview. Feb 2009.

²¹⁷ S. Schmitt. Personal Interview. Feb 2009.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Merrill goes on to make the following distinction between what she calls high information versus low information voters. "For low information voters there is no difference – they are thinking more like consumers. And that's why political consultants

are so cynical. Voters in general are not very engaged with the broader issues. I've seen elections where it really does seem like it's just 'what's in it for me?' Especially in the '80s and early '90s. For high information voters they do expect to get different information from political ads than consumer ads. They do have a different set of criteria to judge the candidate than the product.

²²⁰ Brader, T. (2006). *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p 3.

²²¹ Gertner, John. (2004, Feb 15). *The Very Very Personal is the Political*. New York Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/15/magazine/15VOTERS.html?ei=5007&en=a5915700c5b83cb3&ex=1392181200&partner=USERLAND&pagewanted=6>

²²² To reprise, subjects have generally agreed on the following points:

- That since the rise of television, consumer marketing has had a major and increasing influence on electoral politics / political marketing strategies.
- That, while there have been ways in / moments during which political marketing has occasionally influenced consumer marketing, influence has tended to run consumer to political rather than the other way around.
- That there have been certain tipping points - generally during a specific campaign and undertaken mainly by one side / candidate - wherein a technique has taken electoral politics by storm.
- That new technologies (television, large sophisticated informational databases, the internet) have often been conduits for migration of consumer marketing tools to the political sphere.
- That as money spent on campaigns has surged over time politics has increasingly adopted trends and technologies from its wealthier cousin: consumer marketing.
- That, with the spectacular ascendance of consumer culture and the related shift in individual orientations toward consumerism, political elites have tended to respond by using a rhetoric of consumerism over and above a rhetoric of citizenship.

²²³ Chapter 1 outlined / laid out a range of normative conceptions of democracy present in western political thought over the past several thousand years, highlighting several paradigmatic conceptions (but by no means a comprehensive list) ranging from the highly formal (one person one vote) as an ideal vision of democracy, to a more robust iteration in which citizens are engaged, informed, educated and deliberative.

²²⁴ Thanks to Professor Jack Citrin for this observation.

²²⁵ There is an interesting debate on the question of whether recent transformations in presidential politics should be viewed in marketing terms (i.e. branding) versus as a manifestation of an increasing "culture of celebrity." It is true that the idea of party brand names exists in political science literature -- work by Cox and McCubbins on Congress, Mike Ting and Jim Snyder on parties in general. GOPers have talked in the last few years about how Bush hurt their "brand."

²²⁶ M. Barabak. Personal Interview. Feb 2009.

²²⁷ M. Hughes. Personal Interview. Feb 2009.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ As discussed earlier on, there has always been branding in politics, but whether Tippecanoe, "I like Ike," Johnson's branding as a tough legislator or Carter's as an honest peanut farmer, these more conventional brands were all qualitatively different from Reagan's branding as optimism personified as in "Morning in America."

²³⁰ At various points in *Packaging Politics* I have noted one of the main reasons consumer marketing has tended to impact political marketing is consumer marketing's relative wealth. Consumer marketers have the resources to try everything under the sun to find out what sells; politics cherry-picks. While this fact is certainly still true, it is also true that political campaigns have much more money now than in the past: the "poor cousin" is more flush every year. Presidential elections are increasingly a high stakes game, with -- as many political commentators have pointed out -- candidates being marketed more like high-end consumer brands each political cycle. As money in politics has increased, more sophisticated marketing methods have been appropriated, and appropriated more quickly.

²³¹ See Klein, N. (2002). *No Logo*. New York: Picador USA.

²³² Particularly relevant to this discussion is Brader's focus on enthusiasm as a motivator -- much emotional branding in politics is comprised of attempts to evoke enthusiasm.

²³³ "Obama's branding was brilliant in its consistency," says Donnie Fowler, "but there were other things going on. He was new – an empty vessel. And you could put into Obama's 'change' vessel whatever you wanted him to be." Fowler and others have pointed out that that combination of top notch branding – with an abstract enough brand in both content and history "on the market"; the latest in targeting technology; and tapping into the open source trend increasingly popular in consumer marketing (as opposed to Hillary's mega top down approach which was all wrong) was a winning combination.

²³⁴ Skeptics include Nicholas Lemann, Dean of the Columbia School of Journalism, who has said open-source politics may eventually be co-opted by political parties.

²³⁵ I am reminded of one Obama campaign staffer's claim that the best targeter ever was a good precinct captain, and the point is well taken.

²³⁶ P. Swire. Personal Interview. Jan 2012.

²³⁷ J. Braun. Personal Interview. April 2009.

²³⁸ P. Swire. Personal Interview. Jan 2012.

²³⁹ Re: Viguerie Swire explains that in the 1970s the party apparatus was breaking down and direct mail was very effective at that point for mobilizing people around single issues stances: pro and anti abortion groups, for example. Or, in the late 1980s, Judge Bork becoming a huge fundraising windfall for liberals.

²⁴⁰ K. Merrill. Personal interview. Feb 2009.

²⁴¹ R. Stutzman. Personal interview. Feb 2009.

²⁴² P. Fenn. Personal Interview. Feb 2009.

²⁴³ P. Swire. Personal Interview. Jan 2012.

²⁴⁴ S. Schmidt. Personal interview. Feb 2009.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ T. Hollihan. Personal Interview. Jan 2009.

²⁴⁷ M. Babarak. Personal Interview. Feb 2009.

²⁴⁸ P. Howard. Personal Interview. Feb 2009.

²⁴⁹ See Goodman, B. and Dretzin, R. (2003). *The Persuaders*. PBS Frontline.

²⁵⁰ See Gertner, J. (2004, February 15) *The Very Very Personal is the Political*. *New York Times*.

Retrieved January 6, 2012, from

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/15/magazine/15VOTERS.html?ex=1392181200&en=a5915700c5b83cb3&ei=5007&partner=USERLAND.&pagewanted=all>

²⁵¹ See Verini, J. (2007). "Big Brother Inc.". *Vanity Fair*. Retrieved from <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/12/aristotle200712?printable=true¤tPage=all>

²⁵² P. Howard. Personal Interview. Feb 2009.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ P. Swire. Personal Interview. Jan 2012.

²⁵⁵ See Howard, P. (2006). *New Media and the Managed Citizen*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p. 179

²⁵⁶ See Howard, P. (2006). *New Media and the Managed Citizen*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p. 174-175

²⁵⁷ P. Howard. Personal Interview. Feb 2009.

²⁵⁸ See Howard, P. (2006). *New Media and the Managed Citizen*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²⁵⁹ While money in politics continues to balloon, there are at least some cases where disparities between sides are widening rather than balancing out as they grow. The recent American Prospect article *How do we Make Elections More Competitive* notes that, between 1992 and 2002, in the districts most likely to be competitive, median spending by incumbents rose from \$596,000 to \$910,000, while median spending by challengers fell from \$229,000 to \$198,000. "When it comes down to it," the author argues, "challengers

simply lack the money to mount an effective bid for office.” Of course it is a different story at the presidential level but the trend toward more money for incumbents is noteworthy.

²⁶⁰ See Bouie, J. (2012, July 11) *The American Prospect* Retrieved July 28, 2012, from <http://prospect.org/article/how-much-will-money-matter>

²⁶¹ See Sides, J. (2012, July 10) The Monkey Cage Retrieved July 28, 2012, from <http://themonkeycage.org/blog/2012/07/10/what-matters-between-now-and-the-election>

²⁶² See Bouie, J. (2012, July 11) *The American Prospect* Retrieved July 28, 2012, from <http://prospect.org/article/how-much-will-money-matter>

²⁶³ See Fuller, J. (2012, July 24) *The American Prospect* Retrieved July 28, 2012, from <http://prospect.org/article/explaining-and-inspiring-good-luck>

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ See Bouie, J. (2012, July 11) *The American Prospect* Retrieved July 28, 2012, from <http://prospect.org/article/how-much-will-money-matter>

²⁶⁶ K. Merrill. Personal Interview. February 12, 2009.

²⁶⁷ P. Fenn. Personal Interview. February 21, 2009.

²⁶⁸ R. Stutzman. Personal interview. 2008. February 11, 2009.

²⁶⁹ M. Hughes. Personal interview. February 21, 2009.

²⁷⁰ R. Stutzman. Personal interview. 2008. February 11, 2009.

²⁷¹ See Bouie, J. (2012, July 25) *The American Prospect* Retrieved July 28, 2012, from <http://prospect.org/article/how-do-we-make-elections-more-competitive>

²⁷² The cover of Phillip Howard’s book *New Media and the Managed Citizen* is an apt illustration of this point, with a puppeteers hand ominously hovering over a city – marionette strings running between fingers and unsuspecting homes.

²⁷³ Freud gives us the useful metaphor of a man riding an elephant, where the man represents reason, elephant – emotion.

²⁷⁴ Kuklinski and Quirk do acknowledge that heuristics tend to work in terms of voting because there are various major heuristics that lead people to their preferences – Party ID, trusted elites or friends, even the likability heuristic.

²⁷⁵ On the one hand this is a tricky argument because it can get into notions of false consciousness or subjective “elitist” notions of what peoples’ preferences should be.

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