



Political Marketing in Canada. Edited by Alex Marland, Thierry Giasson, & Jennifer Lees-Marshment. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012. 320 pp. ISBN 9780774822299 (pbk).

Political marketing is one of the most popular and exciting subfields emerging within Canadian political science today. The origins of this edited collection lie in the first political marketing workshop held at the Canadian Political Science Association conference in May 2009, which Jennifer Lees-Marshment, the New Zealand political scientist and leading scholar in the field, was invited to speak. After the workshop, Lees-Marshment teamed up with Alex Marland (Memorial University) and Thierry Giasson (Université Laval) to edit the first book-length treatment of the development of political marketing in Canada.

The collection simultaneously serves as a textbook for an upper-year undergraduate or graduate course in political marketing and provides benchmark analysis for Canadian scholars in this field. The collection makes two overarching arguments. First, it argues that the advent of political marketing in Canada in the early twenty-first century has irrevocably changed the way that Canadian politics are practised. Second, it argues that, on balance, political marketing is good for Canadian democracy.

Several scholars, such as Norris (2000) and Plasser and Plasser (2002), have noted that campaigning entered a “postmodern” phase in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century with the following practices: multimedia communication replacing communication exclusively relying on television; professional consultants being substituted for volunteer labour; marketing to niches within the electorate as opposed to trying to appeal to large regions and socio-demographic groups; and a permanent and centralized campaign structure superseding localized campaigns that were only mobilized immediately prior to elections. *Political Marketing in Canada* represents the first attempt to systemically analyze Canada’s transition to postmodern campaigning. In doing so, it uses the conceptual framework of political marketing that it defines as the application of business marketing concepts to the practice and study of politics. In practical terms, the adoption of political marketing by Canadian political parties involves “branding, e-marketing, delivery, focus groups, GOTV, internal marketing, listening exercises, opposition research, polling, public relations, segmentation, strategic product development, volunteer management, voter-driven communications, voter expectation management, and voter profiling” (p. 262).

The collection argues that the adoption of political marketing by all Canadian federal parties in the early twenty-first century has reshaped Canadian politics in multiple ways. Yannick Dufresne and Alex Marland illustrate that Canadian political parties have adopted practices whereby they are now continuously campaigning and fundraising through centralized management structures. Elisabeth Gidengil points out that voter behaviour research has found that approximately 50 percent of voters make up their minds during election campaigns, and that parties’ ability to use market research to craft communications to these “late deciders” is having decisive effects on the out-

comes of elections. A subsequent chapter by Alex Marland argues that the level of professionalism of all Canadian political parties has increased and that elections are now often decided by which group of professional political operatives is best able to gather and use market research to their advantage.

Similarly, André Turcotte argues that the Harper Conservatives' success in the 2000s has not been due to finding policies that appeal to a large swath of Canadian society. Rather, the Conservatives used market research to attract the support of the 500,000 voters out of the sea of 23 million eligible voters that they needed to build toward a majority government. Anna Esselment's chapter then focuses on how Harper solidified his party's hold on power during his first mandate by using market intelligence to deliver a series of "quick wins" to appeal to the Conservatives' base and their targeted voters. Patricia Cormack provides a fascinating account of how all Canadian political parties have attempted to emulate the successful branding of Tim Hortons, which has provided the company with an indirect influence over the shape of Canadian politics.

One of the most methodologically solid chapters is Giasson's contribution, which uses content analysis to show that a potential byproduct of parties adopting political marketing is that media covering elections now concentrate more than ever on strategy, as opposed to policies or issues. Émile Foster and Patrick Lemieux illustrate that it is not only political parties that are using political marketing techniques. Their chapter finds that unions and business, but not broader social movements, are now using market research to hone their messages. Tamara Small's chapter points out the only shortcoming of Canadian federal political parties when it comes to adopting modern political marketing techniques. Her case study of the Facebook pages of the major parties in Canada illustrates that these pages lack interactivity, and the infrequency of updates indicates that parties have not yet prioritized social media in their communications strategies.

The second line of argument that animates the collection concerns the relationship between political marketing and Canadian democracy. Most of the authors in the book conclude that political marketing is not detrimental to democracy. Jennifer Lees-Marshment interviewed Canadian political operatives and argues that public opinion polling offers decision-makers an important source of information but does not override their ideology and leadership instincts. Royce Koop presents survey evidence showing that Canadians' confidence in parties and sense of being politically effective has not diminished since the advent of political marketing. Lisa Birch argues that the use of public opinion by government bureaucrats allows citizens' voices to be heard during the making of public policy. The views of most of the authors in the collection are summed up in the conclusion, which contends that "political marketing doesn't just offer politicians a means of understanding and connecting with citizens, it encourages them to be in touch" (p. 245). The lone dissenting voice is Kirsten Kozolanka, who fears that the principle of a non-partisan federal public service has been jeopardized as bureaucrats are drawn into carrying out the Harper government's marketing schemes for its new policies and political staff are given undue influence over official government communications.

Certainly, *Political Marketing in Canada* is an important collection as it establishes a baseline for future attempts to analyze political marketing in Canada. However, some weaknesses may inhibit its influence on the political marketing field on a global stage. Most of the chapters do not really break new theoretical ground and several do not even refer to established political marketing theory. As such, the book is a collection of interesting case studies but does not push forward our theoretical understanding of political marketing. Further, the data collection and analysis of some chapters is more rigorous than others. Despite these shortcomings, the authors of this collection have done a great service to political scientists and communications specialists by producing a readable and high-quality edited collection that will define the political marketing field in Canada for years to come.

References

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- Plasser, Fritz, & Plasser, Gunder. (2002). *Global political campaigning: A worldwide analysis of campaign professionals and their practices*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

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