

# USA: Pricing the Product of an Elected Politician

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## ABSTRACT

*Building on McCarthy's (1960) 4 Ps of Marketing (product, price, place, and promotion), this paper aims to develop a political marketing model arising from the U.S. political arena. Data collected from 128 U.S. elected politicians to reveal that the adoption of the "product" and "price" characteristics facilitate a politician to achieve superior political performance. Several implications can be drawn from this study's findings for elected politicians, political candidates, political parties, and political advisers, and interesting directions for future research are provided.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Political Marketing; 4 Ps of Marketing; Political Performance; Political Product; Political Price*

## I. INTRODUCTION

All organizations are formed to serve the interest of particular groups: hospitals serve the sick, schools serve the students, governments serve the citizens, and labor unions serve the members (Sidney & Rook, 1999). The core of both marketing and political marketing are consumers (Shama, 1975). Without consumers, the marketer of economic goods and services does not have a market, and without voters, the political marketer does not have a campaign (Shama, 1975).

McCarthy (1960) described the marketing mix as the set of marketing tools that the firm uses to pursue its marketing objectives in the target. Thus the marketing mix refers to four broad levels of a marketing decision, namely: product, price, place, and promotion. Political marketing so far has predominantly taken a traditional marketing mix, 4 Ps approach where a vote is comparable to a transitory sale (Lees-Marshment, 2001b). This study aims to fill this void in political marketing literature by proposing and testing an integrated political model of the 4 Ps of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion) and the effect of the 4 Ps on political performance. The paper moves on a review of related literature. The methodology behind this quantitative survey and presentation of the statistical results follow. Conclusions and suggestions for future research close this study.

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study tests the 4 Ps of Marketing (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) to show that these Ps can help politicians to have superior political performance. To achieve these aims, the study will focus on the following:

- 1) Identify the 4 Ps characteristics of a political marketing strategy (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion)
- 2) Measure political performance

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Political marketing is a marriage between political science and marketing (Lees-Marshment, 2001b). Application of political marketing mix is relatively easy to transfer to the political sphere; it is, therefore, advisable to integrate and adopt any new conceptual developments in marketing theory to the existing body of knowledge in political marketing (Egan, 1999).

McCarthy (1964) defined the 4 Ps conceptual framework for marketing decision-making, which used product, price, place (or distribution), and promotion in the marketing mix; McCarthy was the first to propose a marketing mix concept that resonated with both practitioners and academics. Niffenegger (1989) classified political marketing mix concept into 4 Ps namely: product (party platform, past record, personal characteristic), price (paid ads, publicity from staged events, debate), place (economics cost, psychological cost, national images), and promotion (personal appearance, volunteer). Building on the traditional definition of the 4 Ps (product, price, place, and promotion) Newman (1994) proposed a radical redefinition of the meaning of the 4 Ps in the context of political marketing. He suggested an alternative categorization: product (the campaign platform), push marketing (grass-root efforts), pull marketing (mass media communication), and polling (market and competitor research). However, Niffenegger (1989) and Newman (1994) neglected the relationship of the 4 Ps with political performance, they did not take into consideration the politicians' views as individuals who act in the same way as an organization, and they focused on elements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; i.e. social media, internet, and online communication were not part of their study. In the following paragraphs, the 4 Ps (product, price, place, and promotion) and political performance will be identified and described.

### IV. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

#### 4.1 Product

Lees-Marshment (2001a) described marketing as that function of the organization that can keep in constant touch with the organization's consumers, read their needs, develops products that meet these needs and builds a program of communications to express the organization's purposes. Henneberg (2003) argued that the main condition for an exchange (or exchange-related interactions) is the existence of an offering, i.e., something that is valued by a recipient (e.g., a voter or citizen) and produced by a supplier (e.g., a political party or candidate). The service characteristics of the political offering have been noted by several authors (Harrop, 1990; Newman, 1994; Scammell, 1999; Lloyd, 2003).

#### 4.2 Price

Pricing as well as costs constitute somewhat of a conundrum to political marketing theorists (Wortmann, 1989) and remain the most elusive political instrument. Some suggest that there exist no equivalent to an economical price in political exchange (Farrell and Wortmann, 1987). How this understanding is linked to the political exchange and how it could be managed independently of the product characteristics as part of a political offering remains somewhat unclear neglecting the importance of cost of living since the fundamental basic needs include the need for food, drink, shelter, and personal hygiene and the inability to satisfy these needs may be crucial even for the survival of the person in question (Maslow, 1968).

#### 4.3 Place

Distribution instruments as part of political marketing have sometimes been linked with the rank-and-file members of a party, the political grassroots that provide local electioneering support, like canvassing and leafleting (Harris, 2001b). The distribution of the candidate (as a product surrogate) through speaking events, rallies, etc. has been, likewise, mentioned. According to Henneberg (2003), the distribution function is concerned with the conditions regarding the availability of the exchange offer (the political product as described above) to the exchange partner. This function has two aspects, namely the campaign delivery and the offering delivery. The campaign delivery function provides the primary exchange partner, the electorate, with access to all relevant elements of the political product. This includes, for example, the dissemination of information regarding crucial political policies on important agenda points, placing the candidates in the right channels (e.g. TV ads or canvassing, party conferences or chat shows), making sure that the distribution medium fits the ideological umbrella, etc. Henneberg (2003) also stated that the complexity of this function was expected to increase with the arrival of new media (e.g. e-campaigning, WebTV).

#### **4.4 Promotion**

Communication serves the function of informing the primary exchange partner(s) of the offer and its availability; it is often seen as defining the essence of political marketing (Harrop, 1990; O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Harris, 2001b; Palmer, 2002). Wring (2002a) calls this "free communication activities" which are concerned with managing publicity that is not directly controlled by the political organization (Wortmann, 1989), i.e., public relations activities and what is commonly called spin (Harris, 2001b). Due to the simplicity of the 4 Ps model, this makes it adaptable for changes in the marketing area, such as internet commerce (Dominic, 2009). This is confirmed by the active participation of social media users which it has become an increasingly important element in political communication, especially during political elections in the 2000s (Skogerbo & Krumsvik, 2015). Although political advertising may educate, engage, and mobilize American voters (Kenneth, Ridout, Goldstein, & Freedman, 2009), in the United States, political institutions such as politicians, political parties, foundations, institutions, and political think tanks are all using social media, Facebook and Twitter, as a new way of communicating with and engaging voters (Kearney, 2013).

#### **4.5 Political Performance**

Performance measurement is the process of collecting, analyzing and/or reporting information regarding the performance of an individual, group, organization, system or component (Upadhaya, Munir, & Blount, 2014). It can involve studying processes/strategies within organizations or studying engineering processes, parameters, or phenomena, to see whether output are in line with what was intended or should have been achieved (Upadhaya, Munir, & Blount, 2014). Its legitimacy rests on a convincing performance; it has to be representative of a particular political stand; it must engage the audience that is its particular target; it should satisfy the formal rules, rituals, and conventions of the institutions through which the meaning is being projected; and be received as logical and coherent (Rai, 2014).

In an attempt to measure the hotel environmental performance, Leonidou et al. (2012) examined the Greek hotels' resources and capabilities using the 7 Ps as their marketing strategy. Via the Resource-Based View (RBV) tool, Leonidou et al. (2012) measured the environmental performance based on the degree of the hotel managers' satisfaction, loyalty, and reputation. Leonidou et al. study (2012) became an example to build our questions and to transfer the theory to the political marketing of individual politicians.

## **V. METHODOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

### **5.1 Research Method**

A quantitative approach was used for this study; this method allows the research problem to be conducted in very specific and set terms (Cooper & Schindler, 1998). Quantitative research plainly and distinctively specifies both the independent and the dependent variables under investigation and also follows resolutely the original set of research goals, arriving at more objective conclusions, testing hypothesis, determining the issues of causality, and eliminates or minimizes subjectivity of judgment (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996).

### **5.2 Respondents**

The process resulted in completed questionnaires from 128 U.S. elected politicians. The study identified a number of variables appropriate for examination by U.S. politicians since the U.S. may have the world's largest economy and military, but the superpower's influence is almost as much cultural as it is political (Haynie, 2017). According to the National Conference of States Legislatures (2010) and the Bureau of the Census (1992), the total number of elected officials in the United States is 519,682. The population size was set to 143,500 and represents the U.S. elected politicians who possess the highest positions in the Federal Government, State, and Local governments. Based on this data, the delivered online questionnaires were randomly sent by e-mail to the following elected politicians: The President of the United States, 30 Senators, 181 Members of the House of Representatives, and 39 Governors. Another 3,543 Members of the State Government (state legislatures), and 2,306 Mayors and City Council Members (Local Governments) were also solicited for a total 6,100 delivered invitations.

### **5.3 Questionnaire**

The U.S. elected politicians who took part in this study completed an online survey questionnaire to examine their behavior in regards to the 4 Ps of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion), their political

performance, and the processes that underlie it. The results of the survey were then processed by computing the weighted mean of each survey item. The computed values were compared to the Likert (1932) scale for data interpretation.

A self-administered questionnaire was created for the data gathering process to obtain quantitative data via the Survey Monkey platform. The primary aim of the questionnaire was to identify the 4 Ps of marketing that act as drivers of the U.S. politicians' performance. The study's questionnaire link (sent by e-mail) used a structured approach with closed statements and was based on a 7-point Likert rating scale. The respondents specified their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree scale for a series of statements.

#### **5.4 Sampling Method**

The range captured the intensity of their feelings for a given item (i.e., Product), while the results of analysis of multiple items revealed a pattern that scaled properties of the kind Likert identities. Evidence was gathered according to a specific plan in which formal instruments were used to collect the needed information. This information was translated into numeric information and was analyzed using statistical procedures; EXCEL software was used to analyze all the responses to the questionnaires.

#### **5.5 Variables**

Product and Price marketing characteristics were measured by one item seven-point rating scales and Place and Promotion marketing characteristics were measured by two-item seven-point rating scales ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). Product characteristic measured the "offering" (Leonidou et al., 2012) of political ideas/proposals that meet the voters' needs" (Harrop, 1990; Newman, 1994; Scammell, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001b; Lloyd, 2003). Price characteristic (Maslow, 1968; Leonidou et al, 2012) measured the politician's "offering" of political ideas/proposals to reduce the voters' cost of living. Place characteristics (Harris, 2001b; Wring, 2002a; Leonidou et al, 2012) captured the politician's "distribution" (place) in the political arena, and Promotion characteristics (Leonidou et al, 2012) measured the politician's promotional activities in the political arena (Kenneth, Ridout, Goldstein, & Freedman, 2009; Kearney, 2013). A three-item seven-point Likert scale measured political performance. These three items captured the perceived political satisfaction, loyalty, and reputation (adapted from Leonidou et al., 2012).

A reliability test was conducted based on Cronbach's alpha (1951) to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire; Place, Promotion, and Performance characteristics were measured. A satisfactory level of reliability is 0.70 or greater (Nunnally, 1978). All values were at 0.70 which are considered as valid and satisfactory. The survey took place from 2 October 2017 until 4 December 2017.

#### **5.6 Statistical Methods**

The descriptive statistics used in this study via the RStudio (2015) statistical program were the mean; population mean, and expected value are used synonymously to refer to one measure of the central tendency either of a probability distribution or of the random variable characterized by that distribution (Feller, 1950). The average values of the responses were measured. Second, the standard deviation, which is a number used to indicate how measurements for a group are spread out from the average (mean). A low standard deviation means that most of the numbers are very close to the average. A high standard deviation means that the numbers are spread out (Walker, 1931). Distributions with a coefficient of variation to be less than one are considered to be low-variance, whereas those with a CV higher than one are considered to be high variance (Danish, 2017). Third, correlations were conducted to test the hypotheses. They measure the linear relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient is a very useful way to summarize the relationship between two variables with a single number that falls between -1 and +1. -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, 0-0 indicates no correlation, and +1 indicates a perfect positive correlation (Welkowitz, Cohen, and Ewen, 2006). According to Rumsey (2018), exactly -1 shows a perfect downhill (negative) linear relationship, -0.70 shows a strong downhill (negative) linear relationship, -0.50 shows a moderate downhill (negative) relationship, -0.30 shows a weak downhill (negative) linear relationship, 0 shows no linear relationship, +0.30 shows a weak uphill (positive) linear relationship, +0.50 shows a moderate uphill (positive) relationship, +0.70 shows a strong uphill (positive) linear relationship, and exactly +1 shows a perfect uphill (positive) linear relationship. Lastly, in statistical hypothesis testing, the p-value or probability value is the probability for a given statistical model that, when the null hypothesis is true, the statistical summary (such as the sample mean difference between two compared groups) would be the same as or of greater magnitude than the actual observed results (Wasserstein and Lazar, 2016). The p-value is a number between 0 and 1

and interpreted in the following way: A small p-value (typically  $\leq 0.05$ ) indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis. Statistical results are presented in Table 1.

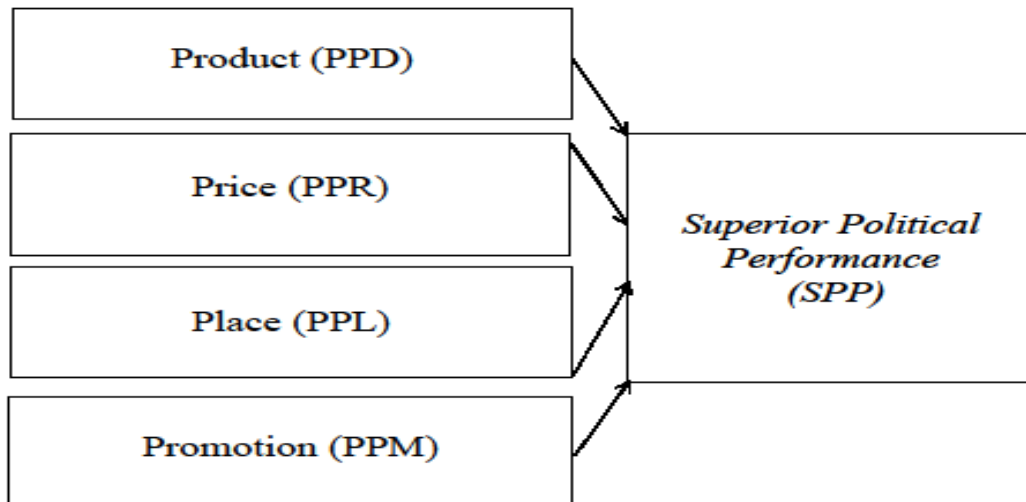
**Table 1**  
**Statistical Analysis**

	Mean	St. Deviation	Cor. (SPP)	p-value
<b>Product (PPD)</b>	4.89	1.35	0.24	0.008
<b>Price (PPR)</b>	5.63	1.10	0.32	0.001
<b>Place (PPL)</b>	4.83	1.43	0.19	0.183
<b>Promotion (PPM)</b>	4.19	1.51	0.14	0.350
<b>Political Performance (SPP)</b>	5.61	0.70		

**5.7 Development of Research Hypotheses**

The Leonidou et al. (2012) study was used to a) build this study’s questions, b) examine the relationship of the 4 Ps of marketing with political performance, and c) transfer the theory to the political marketing of individual politicians in regards to their performance. The conceptual model comprises four hypothesized associations between key constructs of a political marketing strategy (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) and political performance (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**The Conceptual Model**



According to the Introduction and objectives of the study, the researchers have made the following hypotheses:

- 1) *There is a positive relationship between Product (PPD) and Political Performance(SPP).*
- 2) *There is a positive relationship between Price (PPR) and Political Performance (SPP).*
- 3) *There is a positive relationship between Place (PPL) and Political Performance (SPP).*
- 4) *There is a positive relationship between Promotion (PPM) and Political Performance (SPP).*

## **VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Respondents' Demographics**

A total of 67% of the respondents were male and 33% female. The majority of the respondents (31.5%) possess a Bachelor Degree, 27% possess a Master Degree, 23% possess a College Degree, 17% possess a Ph.D. Degree, 10% possess a High School diploma, and 4% possess an Associate Degree. This distribution shows that most of the respondents are highly educated people, who could know the concept of marketing strategy. Forty percent of the respondents come from the Democratic Party, 39% come from the Republican Party, and 21% come from other affiliations. Twenty-one percent come from the Northeast, 21% come from the Midwest, 25% come from the South, and 33% come from the West. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents have more than 10 years' experience in politics, 21% have 7-10 years' political experience, 12% have 5-7 years' political experience, 16% have 2-5 years' political experience, and 22% have less than two years' political experience.

### **6.2 Hypothesis Testing**

#### ***H1. There is a positive relationship between Product (PPD) and Political Performance (SPP)***

The correlation value (0.24) shows a weak positive relationship between product and political performance. The results are significant with a p-value of 0.008.

#### ***H2. There is a positive relationship between Price (PPR) and Political Performance (SPP)***

The correlation value (0.32) shows a weak positive relationship between price and political performance. The results are significant with a p-value of 0.001.

#### ***H3. There is a positive relationship between Place (PPL) and Political Performance (SPP)***

The correlation value (0.19) shows a weak positive relationship between place and political performance. The results are not significant with a p-value of 0.183.

#### ***H4. There is a positive relationship between Promotion (PPM) and Political Performance (SPP)***

The correlation value (0.14) shows a weak positive relationship between promotion and political performance. The results are not significant with a p-value of 0.350.

### **6.3 Correlations by Group**

The researchers proceeded to additional correlation analysis in order to measure the relationship between the 4 Ps and political performance in specific groups (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Correlations by Group**

Group	Dependent Variable	Product (PPD) Cor.	Price (PPR) Cor.	Place (PPL) Cor.	Promotion (PPM) Cor.
Ages 18-44	Political Performance (SPP)	0.42	0.41	0.01	-0.04
Ages 45+	Political Performance (SPP)	0.22	0.31	-0.01	0.17
Democrats	Political Performance (SPP)	0.2	0.07	-0.08	0.02
Republicans	Political Performance (SPP)	0.35	0.52	0.02	0.17
Other Affil.	Political Performance (SPP)	0.12	0.24	0.08	0.22
Local Gov.	Political Performance (SPP)	0.35	0.37	-0.04	0.13
State Gov.	Political Performance (SPP)	-0.12	0.08	0.1	0.2
Northeast	Political Performance (SPP)	0.04	0.24	0.26	-0.08
Midwest	Political Performance (SPP)	0.5	0.31	0.04	0.21
South	Political Performance (SPP)	0.09	0.17	0.04	0.43
West	Political Performance (SPP)	0.35	0.49	-0.23	-0.04

The results show that:

The younger a politician, the stronger is the relationship between “product” and political performance (0.42 and 0.22, respectively); the younger the politician, the stronger is the relationship between “price” and political performance (0.41 and 0.31, respectively).

The relationship between “price” and political performance is much stronger in Republicans (0.52) than in Democrats (0.07).

The relationship between “product” and political performance and “price” and political performance is stronger in Local Government elected officials (0.35 and 0.37, respectively) than in State Government elected officials (-0.12 and 0.08, respectively).

The relationship between “product” and political performance is much stronger in elected politicians coming from the Midwest (0.50) than in elected politicians coming from the Northeast (0.04), the South (0.09), and the West (0.35).

The relationship between “price” and political performance is much stronger in elected politicians coming from the West (0.49) than in elected politicians coming from the Northeast (0.24), the Midwest (0.31), and the South (0.17).

Lastly, the relationship between “promotion” and political performance is much stronger in elected politicians coming from the South (0.43) than in elected politicians coming from the Northeast (-0.08), the Midwest (0.21), and the West (-0.04).

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

As indicated in the literature review, some scholars suggested that there exist no equivalent to an economical price in political exchange (Farrell & Wortmann, 1987); how this understanding is linked to the political exchange and how it could be managed independently of the product characteristics as part of a political offering was somewhat unclear. This study showed that, despite their weak positive relationship, “political product” (described as “the development and offer of political ideas/proposals that satisfy the voters’ needs”) and “political price” (described as “the offering of political ideas/proposals that reduce the voters’ cost of living”) are both positively related to superior political performance. In contrast to the above findings, the study showed that “political distribution-place”, described as “the presentation of political ideas/proposals at social events, rallies, conferences, and forums”, and “political promotion”, described as “the use of political advertising to promote political ideas/proposals” are not significant to the achievement of superior political performance.

Furthermore, the study showed that there is a stronger positive relationship between “product” and political performance in ages 18-44, Republicans, and Local government elected politicians; there is a stronger relationship between “price” and political performance in ages 18-44, Local government elected politicians, and elected politicians coming from the West; and there is a stronger relationship between “promotion” and political performance in elected politicians coming from the South.

The findings of this study shed some light on the general theory of political marketing and move it to a stronger theory and practice adding a significant asset in the international literature possession. The relationship between the 4 Ps and political performance as they were identified and described in this study can facilitate a politician’s performance and give him/her an additional tool to develop a strategy; with an aim to fulfill his/her audience’s needs accordingly.

## VIII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given that the RBV tool adopts a resource-based view of goal setting by identifying a firm’s valuable resources and using them to develop a competitive advantage (Penrose, 1959), the identification of resources and capabilities as drivers of political marketing strategy (using the 4 Ps and/or the 7 Ps) and their implications to political competitive advantage could open up great opportunities to upgrading political marketing literature and practice. Future research could also validate the findings of this study using data obtained from other countries; this study focused on the USA and this may limit the generalizability of the findings to other countries. Lastly, research could also develop data collection based on voters’ views and not only on politicians’ views.

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