

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Consumer Democracy

The Marketing of Politics

This book argues that marketing is inherent in competitive democracy, exploring how we can make political marketing more democratic. Margaret Scammell argues that consumer democracy should not be assumed to be inherently antithetical to “proper” political discourse and debate about the common good. Instead, Scammell argues that we should seek to understand it – to create marketing-literate criticism that can distinguish between democratically good and bad campaigns and between shallow, cynical packaging and campaigns that at least aspire to be responsive, engender citizen participation, and enable accountability. Furthermore, we can take important lessons from commercial marketing: enjoyment matters; what citizens think and feel matters; and, just as in commercial markets, structure is key – the type of political marketing will be affected by the conditions of competition.

Margaret Scammell is currently visiting senior lecturer in Media and Communication at the London School of Economics (LSE). Prior to her time at LSE, she worked as a lecturer at the University of Liverpool and as a Research Fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. She worked as a local, sports, and politics journalist for a number of news organizations before receiving her PhD at LSE. Her book *Designer Politics* (1995) became a standard reference for use in marketing and public relations in the United Kingdom. She has published widely on many aspects of political communication, including political campaigning, Americanization of campaigning worldwide, government and news management, consumer activism, and the appropriate role of media in democracies. She is the co-author of *On Message: Communicating the Campaign* (1999) and co-editor of *The Media, Journalism and Democracy* (2000) and *The Sage Handbook of Political Communication* (2012).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Communication, Society and Politics

Editors

W. Lance Bennett, *University of Washington*

Robert M. Entman, *The George Washington University*

Politics and relations among individuals in societies across the world are being transformed by new technologies for targeting individuals and sophisticated methods for shaping personalized messages. The new technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds – between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations. *Communication, Society and Politics* probes the political and social impacts of these new communication systems in national, comparative, and global perspective.

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SERIES

Eva Anduiza, Michael James Jensen, and Laia Jorba, eds., *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide: A Comparative Study*

C. Edwin Baker, *Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters*

C. Edwin Baker, *Media, Markets, and Democracy*

W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman, eds., *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*

Rodney Benson, *The Immigration Debate in the American and French Media*

Bruce Bimber, *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power*

Bruce Bimber, Andrew Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, *Collective Action in Organizations: Interaction and Engagement in an Era of Technological Change*

(continued after the index)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Consumer Democracy

The Marketing of Politics

MARGARET SCAMMELL

London School of Economics



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics
Margaret Scammell
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521545242

© Margaret Scammell 2014

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2014

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Scammell, Margaret.

Consumer democracy : the marketing of politics / Margaret Scammell.
pages cm. – (Communication, society and politics)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-83668-5 (hardback)

1. Advertising, Political. 2. Marketing – Political aspects. 3. Public relations and politics. 4. Communication in politics. 5. Campaign management. 6. Political campaigns. 1. Title.

JF2112.A4S295 2013

324.7'3-dc23 2013027298

ISBN 978-0-521-83668-5 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-54524-2 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

In memory of Pauline, Helen, and Patricia

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Tables, Figures, and Images</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Preface: The U.S. Presidential Election of 2012</i>	<i>xv</i>
Introduction	I
1 Political Marketing: Why It Matters	13
2 Political Marketers: Who Are They and What Do They Think They Are Doing?	35
3 Political Brands: The Latest Stage of Political Marketing and the Case of Tony Blair	66
4 George W. Bush: The Ultimate Brand?	88
5 Campaigning Effects: How Do They Know What Works?	112
6 Citizen Consumers, Political Marketing, and Democracy	138
Conclusion: Hope Not Fear	163
<i>References</i>	<i>187</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>209</i>

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics
Margaret Scammell
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Tables, Figures, and Images

TABLES

1.1	Modeling changing campaign practices	<i>page</i> 19
1.2	Marketing, competitive structures, and politics	22
2.1	Essential sources of knowledge for professional campaigners	50
3.1	What makes a brand distinctive?	72
3.2	Letters to Blair (from undecided women voters)	76
4.1	Political brand images	95
4.2	McKinnon’s presentation reel: Political advertisements Bush-Cheney 2004	99
4.3	McKinnon’s presentation reel: The positive ads	100
4.4	McKinnon’s presentation reel: The negative ads	100
4.5	Bush brand identity	103
5.1	Success factors of a campaign	117
5.2	How campaigns matter: Types of effects	129
5.3	Democratic dimensions of a good election campaign	133

FIGURES

1.1	Consumer choice and marketing paradigms: From sales to marketing	28
5.1	Party leader speaking, UK general elections 1992–2005	120

IMAGES

3.1	If the candidates were cars ...	67
4.1	Brand association charts	107

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

This book took quite a time to get together, and there are many people to thank for helping me through the long haul. Thanks to all those students who took my Political Communication classes at the London School of Economics. Your enthusiasm was inspirational and your criticism invaluable. Much gratitude to W. Lance Bennett, Lew Bateman, and the editorial staff at Cambridge University Press, for their support, professionalism, and Job-like forbearance.

Big thanks to all those colleagues who helped in various ways, from reading chapters to moral support: Sonia Livingstone at the LSE, Jon Simon (Indiana University), Martin Harrop (formerly of Newcastle University), Katherine Jocz (Harvard Business School), and Julia Hallam (Liverpool University). Special appreciation for Robin Mansell (LSE) and Ana Langer (Glasgow University). You are wonderful friends as well as great colleagues, and so many thanks for commenting on all those multiple drafts without ever betraying an ounce of irritation.

The book draws heavily from help and access given to me over the years by practitioners, in both journalism and politics. While there are too many to name, I would be horribly remiss not to mention Chris Moncrieff, into his eighties and sharp as ever at the Press Association, and the late Philip Gould, whose insight and energy are irreplaceable. Graeme Trayner's help was

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

invaluable, and thanks to him also for reading a draft chapter. A special mention too to Mark McKinnon for generously supplying advertising material. A good number of people and organizations have given me permission to reproduce material or cite from unpublished papers. I thank them all. The following were either single or lead authors: David Farrell (University College, Dublin), Fritz Plasser (University of Innsbruck), James Donius (Marketplace Measurement Worldwide and Fordham Graduate School of Business), Todd Belt (University of Hawaii), and Richard Barberio (SUNY College at Oneonta). Thanks to Charles Trevail and colleagues at Promise Corporation who gave permission to cite extensively from their work on rebranding Prime Minister Tony Blair. Thanks also to branding consultancies Landor PSB Associates and Chernoff Newman for permission to reproduce images created by them.

My family has its own particular style of encouragement. “Are you *still* writing that,” they’d giggle while carving the Sunday roast. I feel their pride and love them for it. Thanks too to my closest friends, just for being my friends, knowing when to hang back and when to offer a hand. Most of all thanks to my partner Lesley. There is simply no way I’d have managed this without her, and I promise faithfully that the next book will shake out smooth as silk. Maybe I should have put an “if” somewhere in that sentence.

Ultimately, despite the help of so many, there are doubtless errors and omissions in this book. They are solely and wholly my responsibility.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface: The U.S. Presidential Election of 2012

What did we learn from the 2012 U.S. presidential election? Its fascination lies partly in the difficulty of characterizing it easily. It presents us with an array of seemingly contradictory verdicts, many of which have at least surface plausibility.

On the one hand, it was the nothing-much-happened election; it was the most costly race in history that ended up delivering the status quo in the White House and relatively minimal change on Capitol Hill. On the other, it marked a watershed result that may cast the Republicans into the wilderness, ideologically alienated from women, nonwhites, youth, and the “new Americans” from Latin America and Asia. On the one hand, it was a race of tight margins; just a few hundred thousand votes in four key states separated former governor Mitt Romney from the White House. The real decider was not the Republican “value set” but their organizational failures in the ground wars; they were out-fought and outthought on the data-driven turnout operations in the places where it mattered (Stutts, 2012). On the other hand, it was an “ass-whuppin’,” in the words of Democratic consultants Carville and Greenberg (2012a), in which the Republicans were crushed in the Electoral College, fell short in almost all the main battleground states, and fared badly with virtually all demographic segments of society apart from white men and those over forty-five.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

It is plausible to view 2012 as a dispiriting anticlimax after the grassroots enthusiasm of 2008's election of a lifetime. It could easily be seen as a regressive rerun of big money, negative, advertising-dominated politics as usual. Equally, it could be seen as a seminal election; it might carve the American political landscape as decisively as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1940s. Obama, just as FDR, defied the normal economic logic of elections. He became the first incumbent since FDR to be reelected with an unemployment rate of around 8 percent. Just as FDR's victories entrenched Social Security as the untouchable "third rail" of American politics, so Obama's Affordable Care Act may come to be regarded historically as a great achievement, argues American historian Gary Gerstle (2012). Just like FDR, Obama is associated with the future, while the Republicans have become overreliant, not just on the relatively declining demographic of white men, "but on an institution – heterosexual marriage – that encompasses a smaller group of Americans than it has at any time in the past two hundred years."

Typically the aftermath of general elections generates competing narratives of success and failure as practitioners, pollsters, pundits, and academics dissect the data. In the post-2012 analyses a cluster of possibly decisive factors has emerged. Some of these are long-term factors, such as the changing demographics of the United States. "This isn't your father's America," as veteran political consultant Dick Morris told the election night *NewsHour* PBS program. Some are short-term factors, such as the influence of particular issues: the economy, social welfare, women's reproductive rights, and so on. Some factors are linked to ideology and especially its resurgence on the Republican right; Carville and Greenberg (2012b) characterized the election as a "class war" for middle-income America; not "it's the economy, stupid," the slogan that propelled Bill Clinton's 1992 success, but "it's the middle class, stupid." Other factors relate to campaign effectiveness of specific elements, the qualities of the candidates, the efficacy of targeted ground and air wars, and the sophistication and efficiency of software.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xvii

Fascinating and fundamental as these issues may be, it is not my purpose here to try to resolve them. In any event, consensus around the most compelling explanations will take time, as history unfolds and as analysts drill beneath the numbers, offering perspective and order to all these various elements. Rather, the point is to indicate how these debates connect to the key themes of this book: trends of political salesmanship and the significance of marketing frameworks to understanding these; the importance of structures of competition in determining styles of political marketing; the relationship between ideology and the work of the political marketers; and the quest to understand exactly what is a “good” campaign, both in terms of effectiveness and more broadly with respect to systemwide democratic dimensions. The following chapters work through these issues, but for now the general point can be made by picking up just two of these themes: the significance of marketing analysis and the problem of “good” campaigns.

MARKETING ANALYSIS AND THE 2012 ELECTION

A marketing analysis takes the conditions of competition as a guiding principle. It is in essence an economic perspective that sees politicians and parties as goal-directed actors in direct contest with rivals for particular rewards, for example, control of issue agendas, share of the vote, or ultimately electoral victory. Modes and styles of campaigning are directly shaped by the structure of competition: oligarchy or multiparty, first-past-the-post winner-take-all contests, or proportional representation where vote share across the electorate may matter more than individual constituency majorities. This emphasis on competitive structure renders marketing analysis as an alternative perspective on campaigning change compared to the usual political communication accounts that highlight mediation, media power, and communications innovation (see Chapter 1).

While these perspectives (competitive structure and mediation) are by no means mutually exclusive, they can lead to strikingly differentiated conclusions. Thus, from a media-centric viewpoint,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii

Preface

the 2012 election may seem a curiously backward step compared to 2008. Obama's first victory heralded the power of the Internet; it offered a dramatic demonstration of how technology can alter the campaigning landscape. It held out the possibility of democratized campaigning, with Internet-enabled initiative and participation on a grand scale. However, if 2008 proclaimed social media and the collective influence of small donors, 2012 reminded us of older structures of power. This was exemplified by the continuing significance of big money, epitomized by the war of the "Super PACs." In the wake of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling, political action committees had no limits on the funds they were able to raise from corporate and individual donors, and this led to "historic spending levels spurred by outside groups dominated by a small number of individuals and organizations making exceptional contributions," according to Sheila Krumholz, executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics (Center for Responsive Politics, 2012).

If 2008 was all about the Internet, 2012 revived good old-fashioned "big money" TV advertising wars, with some estimates at nearly \$1 billion spent on advertising in the ten battleground states of Ohio, Florida, Virginia, Colorado, Iowa, North Carolina, Nevada, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania. *Campaigns & Elections* reported that about \$197 million was spent on political advertising, much of it negative, in Ohio alone (Trish, 2012). In short, 2012 apparently returned us to pre-Internet themes: big money, powerful interests, negative television advertising, and grassroots organization.

However, from the marketing perspective, media use in this campaign was not surprising. Rather, it exemplified fierce oligopoly competition for relatively small but decisive segments of the market. In 2012 the standout political marketing lesson was pinpoint micro-targeting enabled by "Big Data." The "Obama team assembled a team of top-notch technical talent and developed one of the most sophisticated data-driven marketing campaigns the world has ever seen," according to an admiring analysis in *Forbes* magazine (Severinghaus, 2012). Vast data banks combining electoral rolls and household- and individual-level consumer

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xix

and social media information facilitated personalized targeting for messaging and fund-raising. Data analysis underpinned all aspects of communication, whether through video advertising to specific program audiences, social media messaging, or personal contacting via the telephone or on the doorstep. Among campaigners, both in the United States and elsewhere, the Obama camp's data advantage has come to be regarded as one of the decisive factors influencing the result. "Big Data," allied to intelligent analysis and military-precision organization, is the key lesson of 2012.

From the perspective of marketing analysis, this was predictable; the trend toward data-informed micro-targeting has been evident in both politics and commerce for some time. Data mining, including cookie-enabled tracking of online consumer behavior, has led to the applied "science" of "predictive analytics" in the retail sector, to facilitate marketing to ever more precisely identified potential customers. Especially in times of relative austerity, business is forced to work harder for a smaller slice of the pie. Predictive analysis enables companies not to wait until customers come through the door, but to approach selected targets much earlier in the purchase decision-making process. Bob Moritz, chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers, described the data effect as transformational, using the example of a large mortgage insurer (Hellweg, 2013). Typically customers would seek out insurance agents only after they had already selected a house, he said: "We worked with the insurer to supply the agents with more data so they could contact clients further upstream, say three months before the purchase. Then they could provide information on the insurance, obviously, but also on the demographics of the area, comparable homes with insurance info, data on schools – that kind of thing. The data turned what had been a transaction into a service and an experience."

A similar process is evident in the 2012 presidential election. Two fierce rivals competing in a relatively diminishing market exploited data to target potential supporters. Both the Obama and Romney campaigns "broke new ground" in data exploitation (Trish, 2012), sifting through personal information on

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xx

Preface

spending patterns, cultural tastes, church attendance, and so on to approach and motivate possible donors, activists, and voters. The main difference between them is that Obama waged the more effective Big Data war. His dream team of software engineers, with experience in Facebook, Twitter, and Google, is credited with amassing more volunteers and small donors than they had in 2008 and with running an awesomely efficient turnout operation on Election Day. In contrast, Romney's digital data platform, Orca, famously crashed on polling day (Madrigal, 2012).

THE "GOOD" CAMPAIGN

It is clear already that it is nearly impossible to talk about the 2012 election and not engage with that key question: what is a good campaign? The election exposed once again some raw democratic nerves. The highly polarized and aggressive character of American political discourse has been a matter of public concern for some years now, and the 2012 campaigns were remarkable for the amount of attack ads in the national races. It is well known that citizens dislike the mudslinging, and Pew's exit polls (2012) tell us that voters hated the ugly negativity, resented a lack of debate about substantive issues, and graded the candidates' campaigns lower than their counterparts in 2008. The potentially corrupting influence of big money, a perennial theme of American politics, emerged with intensified force following the *Citizens United* ruling. It was not just the basic issue of fairness and inequality of resources, but also that vast sums of money from corporations and wealthy donors could avoid disclosure, being funneled through a succession of political action committees, such that it is nearly impossible to trace the original source. A further, and relatively new, trouble spot is exposed by Big Data. Its prominence now in commerce and politics inevitably raises issues of the invasion of privacy of unwitting citizens. Moreover, in politics there are fundamental issues at stake. What are elections for, asked a postelection feature in the trade journal *Campaigns & Elections*, if what should be competing visions about the way to run the country – debates about the common

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xxi

good – are reduced to contests of social engineering of a ruthlessly selected group of target voters (Trish, 2012)?

Just what constitutes a good campaign is a driving question of this book, and we can see even from this limited discussion that there are two key strands in play. The first concerns the democratic dimensions: how closely did this campaign match up to requirements for free and fair elections, in which informed citizens express preferences and judgments about competing candidates' track records, issue stances, and general visions for a common future? Elections provide key tests of the well-being of democracy, the quality of the information environment, and the extent of public knowledge and citizen engagement, political responsiveness to public concerns, and accountability for political actions. The second strand has to do with effectiveness; it is most typically, but by no means exclusively, the practitioner perspective. What worked? What turned this election? What factors could have been influenced by strategy and tactics, and what were outside campaigners' control? Did the campaign matter at all in influencing the outcome?

There is a common tendency to view these two, the practitioner and democratic dimensions perspectives, as being in conflict with each other. The pragmatic, if you like, is posed as the enemy of the ideal. The cold reality of an imperfect world will tempt practitioners (the political marketers) to do the graceless necessary: to go negative, to hide and bias information, to reduce voters to crunched numbers, to be bland rather than bold, to court the money and marginalize the masses. In this view, perhaps Obama's victory of 2012 is a dismal return to politics as usual; from the electrifying heights of hope, change, and popular participation to the ugly pragmatics of what it takes to win. Equally, pragmatism is frequently opposed to ideological principle. Karl Rove, in particular, has become the whipping boy among Republican right-wingers, still astonished by the party's failure to topple a relatively weak incumbent beset by the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Rove wielded his considerable influence to promote the (relatively speaking) pragmatic candidate and marginalize or even attack the likes of Newt Gingrich, Sarah

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxii

Preface

Palin, Rick Perry, Herman Cain, and so on, those who were ideologically much closer to the party's base. Super PACs associated with Rove raised and spent many millions in support of Romney and selected Senate and House candidates, the vast majority of whom were beaten. "Congrats to @Karl Rove on blowing \$400 million this cycle," tweeted Donald Trump. "What a waste of money." These are familiar lines of argument in election post-mortems, and by no means exclusively in the United States. There are near-global concerns about the conduct of elections and their capacity to enhance democracy and serve citizen participation, while, even if the Tea Party has engendered a particularly intense debate in the United States, it is commonplace everywhere for losing parties to search their souls and question whether defeat was due to a deficiency or excess of ideological purity.

This book is located precisely at the intersection between pragmatism and idealism; or to put it another way, between the pragmatism of marketing practice and the ideals of democracy. It rejects a binary division between the two. Both in theory and in history, pragmatism and idealism may be often in tension but not easily separated. This connects to deeper underlying debates about the philosophy and practice of politics. Pragmatism, in the tradition of Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, is sometimes hailed as America's great contribution to political philosophy (Westbrook, 2005). Although often criticized, the tradition survives, and at its best keeps a path between the "illusions of metaphysics" and foundational "god-like" truths, and the "illusions of skepticism" (Putnam, cited in Westbrook, 2005: 2). Suffice it to say here that there are two relevant ways of considering pragmatism in relation to the 2012 election. First is the idea that assertions of "truth" are always to be judged by their practical consequences on human lives and interests. Viewed from this perspective, the key judgment on Obama 2012 is not his (democratically questionable) campaign, but what he delivers over the next four years. If, as Professor Gerstle suggests, Obamacare becomes an achievement to rank alongside Roosevelt's social security, then the conduct of his campaign is rendered pragmatically necessary. The second idea can be called

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xxiii

the “glass half full” argument; pragmatists have not abandoned ideals, but accept that change comes slowly. They choose to see partial achievement as the glass half full, rather than half empty. In both ideas, pragmatism and ideals can be thought of as bedfellows, albeit uneasy ones.

Political marketers, indeed marketers in general, might be considered the ultimate pragmatists, sometimes to the point where pragmatism, skepticism, and cynicism become horribly blurred. The realist “whatever works” imperative is not self-evidently an idealist or even improving project. It is no surprise then that when practitioners consider the “good campaign” question they focus on the effectiveness of strategies, tactics, and communication. However, even among themselves, the ideal, the democratic dimensions of a “good campaign,” do register in intriguingly pragmatic ways.

Take, for example, the issue of “hate discourse.” This was raised in a postelection discussion in the consultants’ trade journal *Campaigns & Elections*. Republican consultant Tom Edmonds (2012: 41) urged his fellow professionals to address “the nearly total lack of civility in the campaigns.” Negative ads can provide vital information, he argued, but “any objective analysis of the recent elections would have to conclude that ... we are quickly reaching a tipping point in civil discourse. The fact is, we’ve become a rude, mean-spirited, base society.” Consultants, says Edmonds, have become addicted to the potency of negative campaigning and increasingly reckless about the truth of attacks on opponents. But in the wake of the 2012 results, and given the public dislike of negativity, it was clear that billions spent on negative ads achieved very little: “maybe political professionals will do the right thing simply based on pragmatism rather than principle.”

Edmonds’s argument touches upon a further aspect of the democratic dimensions of a good campaign: the quality of information. In fact, this became a major theme in postelection narratives of success and failure and offers a fascinating case of the blending of pragmatism and idealism. In this instance, criticism of the Republican campaign turned precisely on the relationship

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83668-5 - Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics

Margaret Scammell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxiv

Preface

of pragmatism to the ideal; a pragmatic (realistic) strategy relies upon the use and quality of information, judged according to correspondence with ideal standards of objective facts. The Republicans' misplaced optimism signified more than simple errors in internal campaigning polling; it was indicative of a much broader Republican "alternate reality" in which any discordant information was dismissed as Democratic propaganda, including notably the poll analysis of *New York Times* blogger Nate Silver, who had consistently predicted an Obama win. With barely disguised schadenfreude, Democrat consultants Carville and Greenberg (2012a) described a Republican "war on science and facts" that had led ultimately to a grand self-delusion. Karl Rove, once again, was tagged as a major culprit and deluder in chief for his partisan punditry on Fox News. His infamous "meltdown" on election night when he refused to accept Fox's call of the Ohio results quickly became a YouTube hit and the subject of satire. "Math you do as a Republican to make yourself feel better," joked Jon Stewart on the *Daily Show*.

These issues, the quality of information and the alienating or welcoming character of political discourse, touch directly on the nature of the communicative relationship between citizens and politicians. They plainly matter for any assessment of what we might consider as democratically desirable campaigns, and more generally for a healthy public sphere. The point is not that the political marketers, left to their own devices, will remedy the ills of campaign practice. However, it is to say more than that the pragmatism of practice is not axiomatically at odds with democratic ideals. It is to say that there are possibilities, explored in this book, for finding means and ways to encourage political marketers to do well out of doing good. And that ultimately is the point; it is not enough to try to understand political marketing practice, and how it relates to underlying conditions of competition. The point is to change it.