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CONCEPTUALISATION OF POLITICAL MARKETING WITH PUBLIC CHOICE THEORY AND THE POSTMODERN APPROACH

Abstract: The key theoretical issue of political marketing is that, what the political product is. Thinkers of political economy, like the representatives of social marketing, say that exchange can be extended to whole society. However, the postmodern marketing emphasize the role of symbols in the individual's decision-making process, which means questioning the role of exchange. The aim of the paper is to examine the role of exchange in politics and outline some possible marketing strategic postures.

Firstly, I introduce the evolution of marketing conception from the first decades of 20th century. After that, our next milestone is the political economy theory of Schumpeter, who reinterprets the political competition, innovation and leadership. Then, it is compared with Public Choice Theory and the postmodern marketing approach. Finally, I synthesize these theories and show our interpretation of political marketing and political exchange.

Keywords: political marketing, politics products, Schumpeter, Public Choice Theory, postmodern marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

Political marketing is an emerging sub-discipline that is gaining increasing interest in the academic sphere and among the general public. The intense growth in election campaign costs, the relationship between social media and manipulation, and the convergence of populism and marketing tools are phenomena that draw attention to the role of political marketing in 21st century democracies, and raise the question of whether they strengthen or weaken the realization of democracy. It is a consensus that politicians employ the marketing approach and its tools, which not only involves political advertising, but also the use of tools necessary for meeting and shaping the needs of voters. The marketing approach and tools complement each other well in the nature of politics, as the targeting of certain communities - quasi-segments - the development of offers for them, and the promotion of existing ones can be observed in both areas. Therefore, it plays an important role in defining social goals and related resource allocation issues, and can be referred to as a political approach that determines state allocation. There are still few authors in the domestic literature who deal with political marketing, so it can also be considered a gap, unlike in political communication, where we can encounter more and more internationally recognized authors. Political marketing can be considered as non-business marketing activity and can be outlined through the extended marketing approach. Politicians and political organizations can adapt the marketing approach and tools on two levels: the mechanistic level, through the adoption of tools (e.g. advertising), and the strategic level, which represents the "philosophy" (O'Shaughnessy, 2001).

In my paper, I focus on the philosophical level and the aim is to attempt the conceptualization of political marketing based on selected authors in political economy. Through the works of Schumpeter (1942), Downs (1957), and Buchanan (1992), I interpret the role of exchange in politics, and from there, I conceptualize the notion of political marketing. I argue that according to the marketing concept, exchange is an essential element of conceptualization. Therefore, if we cannot identify the object of exchange - that is, the political product - we cannot speak of political marketing.

2. THE CHANGE IN THE MARKETING CONCEPT

We cannot find a uniform definition of political marketing (Scammel 1999, O'Shaughnessy – Henneberg 2007, Tóth 2011, Perannagari & Chakrabarti 2020), so we should treat the marketing concept as a starting point during conceptualization. In order to get to know the marketing concept in depth and to be able to interpret it in the market of politics, it is necessary to review the change of marketing thinking over time. In the middle of the 20th century, Alderson and Cox (1948) called for the creation of a marketing paradigm, through which the theoretical framework and methodology could be unified, but fifty years later, in a highly influential study, Brown (1998) already emphasized that the conceptualization of marketing and the argues for the need for a postmodern approach. The individual theories he calls modernist distinguish between three, four, and five periods in the development of marketing thinking, which reflects the evolutionist way of thinking, so production orientation is interpreted as a state of blissful ignorance, while market orientation is interpreted as enlightenment. Kotler and Keller (2012) distinguish four eras from each other, the oldest of which is called the production concept, during which the company focuses on reducing the costs of production, then on reducing the price and thus on mass sales. This is replaced by the product concept, according to which consumers will not prefer the cheapest but the best quality product. The third stage focuses on the sale of produced products, but production is not based on market needs. Finally, we come to today's marketing concept, where the needs of the customers dictate the company's activities and product development, so we are talking about more than sales techniques. The development of marketing thinking clearly points out that marketing can be defined on the one hand as a way of thinking, on the other hand as a management philosophy (Kotler 1998, Meffert 2000, Hoffmanné 2004) and as a system of related tools (Józsa et al 2005).

At the heart of the approach are consumers who buy goods with some value (e.g. product, service, idea, idea, feeling), so it can also be called exchange management (Bauer - Berács 1998, Józsa et al 2005, Kotler - Keller 2012, Rekettye et al 2019). Gummesson (1995) defines the object of exchange as an offer and basically considers it a service, just like Vargo - Lusch (2004) highly influential SDL (service dominant logic) approach, according to which, in the 21st century, instead of products, services are at the center of the exchange of goods. Based on SDL, the source of value creation is competence, that is, the seller's knowledge and skills, through which the product and service are created.

Bauer and Berács (1998) present three possible interpretations of the marketing concept (narrow, broad, extended), of which we use an extended interpretation in our study. The extended marketing approach can be linked to Kotler and Levy's (1969) founding article on nonbusiness marketing, which considers the phenomenon of exchange important not only in business activities, but extends it to the whole society, according to which churches and political parties also strive to provide value to believers and voters who pay for it with their time, support, donation or even vote. This approach can now be called mainstream, which is well illustrated by the latest 2017 definition of the American Marketing Association, in which marketing appears as an activity independent of the business world, and the effort to create value can be interpreted not only for consumers but also for society as a whole.

3. THE POLITICAL ECONOMIC ROOTS OF POLITICAL MARKETING: SCHUMPETER' THEORY AND PUBLIC CHOICE THEORY

In the following, I will first describe Schumpeter's thinking, since the authors of Public Choice Theory and political marketing that arise from it treat his work as a point of reference. The political economy roots of political marketing are traced back to Schumpeter's (1942) highly influential work, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* (Orosdy, 2007, Sekerák, 2022), in which an oft-cited proposition is formulated, according to which parties compete for voters' votes in the same way that businesses compete for consumers' disposable income. Based on this, we can say that the marketing approach can be identified in the thinking of the parties, the primary cause of which is political competition, which means the struggle for voters' votes within a democratic framework. Thus, exchange also plays a central role in Schumpeter's approach, but he defines it differently from the mainstream, the primary reason for which is to be found in the different image of man, that is, in the criticism of the abstraction of homo oeconomicus. The image of man based on the philosophy of the Enlightenment - which appears in neoclassical economic thinking - also had a great impact on the theory of democracy. Schumpeter calls the 18th century conception of democracy classical, and defines his own position against it, the two connected key elements of which are the public good and the problem of preferences. He summarizes the theory of classical democracy as follows: "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will." (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 250). In this approach, voters have *ex ante* preferences, that is, they are able to make decisions according to their own interests, and based on this, they will support the political force whose promises and program meet their will, thus market equilibrium is created through supply and demand.

Schumpeter takes issue with this interpretation of the common good on several points. According to him, there is no single common good, as it can naturally mean different things to different individuals and groups. Even if there were an exclusive common good, the question arises as to why some voters do not recognize it. Based on the classical theory, we can answer this by saying that personal stupidity or a lack of knowledge prevents them from doing so, that is,

political actors must strive to educate people. However, it also follows that compromises have no place in politics, because they can be interpreted as compromises and prevent the realization of the common will. Another problem is the assumption of this common good concept that the individual has a definite position on all political issues, so he knows all matters and has preferences in all matters. This can also be understood as a questioning of homo oeconomicus and means the use of a more sophisticated image of man. Thus, the common good is not interpreted as the result of the summation of individual wills, so it cannot be derived from individual preferences and decisions, but this does not mean the denial of voter preferences. In Schumpeter's (1942) formulation, voter preferences exist, but they can only be interpreted at the given moment: "...Historically, the consumers' desire for shoes may, at least in part, have been shaped by the action of producers offering attractive footwear and campaigning for it; yet at any given time it is a genuine want, the definiteness of which extends beyond "shoes in general" and which prolonged experimenting clears of much of the irrationalities that may originally have surrounded it." (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 258). According to Gedeon (2013), this way of thinking does not break with the mainstream of economics, as it is also characterized by methodological individualism, according to which it approaches the common good as a summation of individual decisions, but does not accept the human image of neoclassical economics and the theory of classical democracy. So, according to Schumpeter, there is a will of the electorate, but we have to imagine it differently than the mainstream does. According to his argument, democracy is based on the decisions of the people, and the will of the citizens is more than a set of uncertain, constantly changing impulses, which are easily influenced by advertisements and catchy slogans. One of the most visible examples of the manifestation of the will is the support of matters involving direct financial benefit (e.g. direct payments, protective tariffs, silver policy, etc.), which raise the problem of the enforcement of short-term and long-term rationality. So, in the short term, it is rational to support direct payment, but in the long term, it may involve greater sacrifices for citizens.

Schumpeter's innovation can be summarized by bringing the dynamic process of "leading or following" into the discourse. It complements neoclassical economic thinking with the role of innovation in the economy, the essence of which is that equilibrium positions may indeed exist, but these are constantly disrupted by innovations, resulting in the creation of monopolies. These innovations can also be understood as leadership, shaping individual preferences, the concept of innovation can also be interpreted in the political market. His conclusion is that preference and the common good are created through leadership, in which marketing communication plays a prominent role: "The ways in which issues and the popular will on any issue are being manufactured is exactly analogous to the ways of commercial advertising. We find the same attempts to contact the subconscious" (Schumpeter, p. 263). Democracy thus becomes inseparable from the concept of management, so marketing as a management approach and tool system also plays an important role in the system. The classical theory is issue-oriented and its starting point is that citizens have a definite opinion on all issues, so they look for representatives who implement this opinion, with the result that the personality of the politician becomes secondary. However, Schumpeter proposes to exchange these two elements, and in his interpretation, democracy is about the selection of leaders, and the decision of matters is secondary, so the role of the people is limited to the creation of the government. The classical theory attributed too much of a role to the voters regarding initiative, and the phenomenon of leadership could not be included in the theory, however, leadership and its acceptance is the dominant mechanism of every community. In this way, he considers manufactured will to be compatible with democracy, but emphasizes that leadership can never be absolute, and democratic leadership even less so, since competition is constantly present. The role of the election, the acceptance or rejection of the leader or group of leaders, however, during the cycle, the leaders can only be controlled and held accountable to a limited extent. Based on these considerations, he defines democracy as follows: "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote." (Schumpeter, p. 269). He considers democracy to be the rule of politicians, which he illustrates with a metaphor in which he compares the prime minister to a horseman who is constantly busy staying in the saddle, so he cannot plan for the long term.

Schumpeter's concept is exchange, as he derives the democratic process from the interaction of politicians and voters, where the people have the opportunity to accept or reject the leader with their vote, and in return they receive the service of managing common affairs. His starting point is that the voters' preferences regarding issues are often created as a result of the leadership, but he does not consider the people to be unlimitedly led, guided and manipulated. We can see a remarkable dichotomy in his argument regarding this topic, on the one hand, he accepts the existence of the will of the voters - even if it was created as a result of the leadership - and considers it important in everyday political matters. However, in addition to this, he also claims that certain preferences often lie dormant among the people for decades, until a leader appears who is able to bring them to life, turn them into politics - include them in his offer - and organize the will of the voters around him. Based on this, we can say that Schumpeter tried to grasp voter preferences on two levels, daily politics and a much deeper, "subconscious" level, but he did not dissolve this duality and did not pour it into a pure theoretical concept.

According to Gedeon (2013), two economic theories - Downs' theory of community decisions and Buchanan's constitutional economics - had a great influence on democratic theories, and both strive for the political application of exchange logic. Following Schumpeter's (1942) theory of economics and democracy, the Public Choice Theory or new political economy, a school based on methodological individualism, which derives the political and economic decisions of a given society through individual preferences. Anthony Downs (1957) can be considered one of the founders of the new political economy, according to whom we can also interpret the phenomena of the political market with the help of

the theory and methods of economics (Johnson, 1999). Its basic assumption is that the behavior of political actors, just like the actors of private markets, is characterized by rational behavior, so they want to maximize their own utility, but at the same time they also promote the realization of the common good and increase social utility (Downs, 1957). It should be noted that his approach cannot be narrowed down to the decisions of voters and includes the behavior of parties and politicians as well. The exchange therefore also appears in the political market, because in democracies, self-interested citizens are only able to maximize their own utility in this way (Johnson, 1999). According to Downs (1957), the main function of government is to maximize social welfare, which leads to two problems, the first is that it is not clear what social welfare (in other words, common good) means, and the second is that there is no agreement on how it can be maximized. If it is possible to define the common good and a public consensus is formed on the method of maximization, how can it be ensured that the government is motivated to achieve social goals. His central thesis is that political parties in a democracy shape their policies in such a way as to win the most votes.

He begins his analysis with a well-known abstraction, the perfectly informed environment, where information has no cost, so politicians and voters have absolute knowledge. In the model, voters are rational, so they vote for the party that they believe offers them the greatest utility. The basis of the election is the comparison, during which the performance of the current governing party is evaluated and compared with the assumed future performance of the parties. In a perfectly informed world, where party preferences are fully known to citizens and citizens' preferences are known to political actors, strategic considerations lead to serving the largest number of voters with the same preferences. In reality, the parties do not know exactly the will of the voters, and the citizens do not know exactly the ideas of the government or the opposition. As a result of these findings, the role of persuasion and ideologies is enhanced. If the voters were perfectly informed, they would decide rationally, persuasion would be incomprehensible, because they would know exactly who represents their interests. Ideologies can often appear to be one of the reasons for an irrational decision, however, due to imperfect information, the decision is uncertain, and voters long for simplification, in which ideologies help. These labels show the differences between the parties, and the potential positions of the parties can be inferred from them even in the case of the most diverse issues, which is why voters demand their existence. However, the parties were not interested in reducing this uncertainty, as they are able to select the information shared with the voters due to the lack of information.

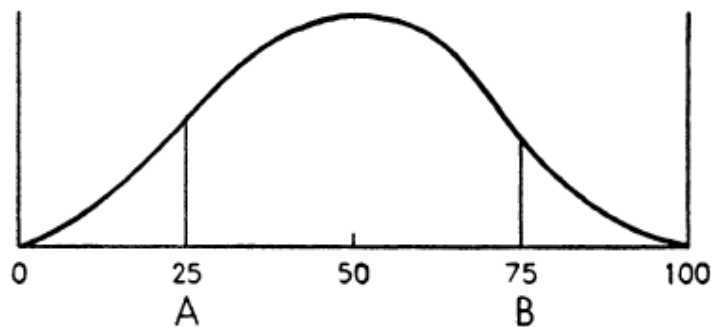


Figure 1: Hotelling model with a normal distribution in a two-party system
Source: Downs (1957, p. 143)

Downs (1957) examines the interaction of the party system and voter preferences with the help of the Hotelling model, and then interprets the strategic possibilities of political parties. In the case (Figure 1), if the voters' preferences are in the right and left ideological dimension - it is plotted on a linear scale from 0 to 100; 0 means the extreme left, 100 means the extreme right - they are formed according to a normal distribution, then the two parties (A and B) will fight for the "median voters" in the middle, since they have the most. Since every vote counts for one, parties can only have one goal - unlike traditional markets - to get the most voters. If one party (A) is at 25 and the other party is at 75 (B), then both want to move towards 50, because if they opened up to radical voters, they would lose centrist voters. It follows that in a two-party system, if voter preferences follow a normal distribution, changes in government are not accompanied by strong political changes, as governments want to satisfy the needs of centrist voters. These preferences are relatively similar, so we can talk about consensus and we can see a lower degree of polarization.

However, if their preferences are not normally distributed, but are at either end of the scale, it is in the parties' interest to position themselves towards the edges, as this is how they can get the most votes. This leads to a polarisation and instability in the party system, as in the event of a change of government, the focus of politics will be on satisfying the demands of radicals, which means rejecting the policies of the previous government.

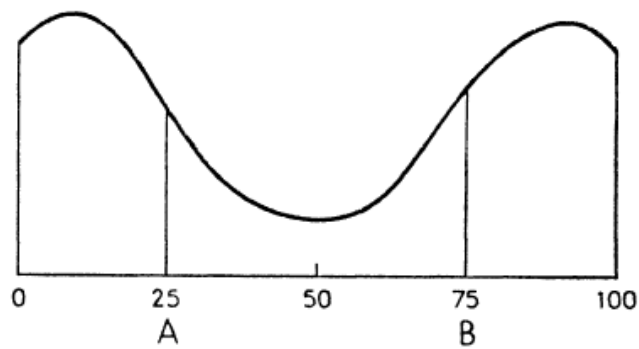


Figure 2: Hotelling model for polarized voter preferences in a two-party system
Source: Downs (1957, p. 143)

The hotelling model is a spectacular approach to exchange-based logic, which can be summed up by saying that voters, as rational actors, want to maximize their own utility, so they vote for parties and politicians who help them in this. The distribution of preferences determines the stability of the party system, its polarization and the variability of its policies. However, the primary problem is imperfect information, which is why voters demand ideologies that simplify political matters for them as cognitive labels. Based on this, we can say that both Schumpeter and Downs stand on the ground of methodological individualism, and both are critical of the abstraction of *homo oeconomicus*, but to a different degree, and as Körösenyi (2012) highlights, they also draw different conclusions about the nature of joint decisions. He also points out that Schumpeter's work is often mistakenly confused with Downs and his followers who use an economic approach. Schumpeter's entire oeuvre can be understood as a supplement to, or as a critique of, neoclassical economics, according to which he considers the state of equilibrium to be momentary and, through his dynamic approach, the formation of monopoly inevitable. This leads to an elitist approach where the role of politicians is primary compared to policy matters. However, Downs and the Public Choice Theory deepen what Schumpeter called the theory of classical democracy, in which the subjects of exchange are social issues.

James Buchanan (1992) examines the relationship between economic and political decisions using the logic of exchange. According to Buchanan (1992), the role of the state is to provide public goods and services to the citizens, and it should do so based on the preferences of the citizens. He considers Schumpeter and Pareto to be the forerunners of the trend in the 20th century, and his starting point is that it is not possible to draw a sharp line between the economic and political spheres, just as it is not possible to draw a sharp line between the government and the market sector. Its approach can be called normative, and it tries to harmonize the relationship between voter preferences and policy-making, while treating human rights and the reduction of inequalities as priority values. Thus, those Pareto -optimal situations when no one's well-being can be increased without decreasing the well-being of others must be judged on the basis of these value criteria. Contrary to the thinking of Schumpeter and Downs, he considers the public good to be defined based on preferences and these values. Constitutional economics assumes that the aggregation of individual preferences leads to the common good, however, group action in many issues is based only on the agreement of a part of the entire group. He brings these conflicts into the theorizing, and he also tries to make the role of minority positions compatible with it. According to his opinion, economists have behaved in the past half century as if the economic theory based on *homo oeconomicus* is a general theory of social behavior, so it is a quasi-science of choice. He considers it the task of economists to think about the origin, characteristics and connection to institutions of broadly understood exchange. Its basic premise is that mutual benefits arise from the exchange, so through joint decisions we must create social rules and institutions that all citizens voluntarily comply with, as it is in their interest. According to Gedeon (2013), constitutional economics is not a positive approach that seeks to explain the true functioning of democracies, but rather a search for procedural frameworks through which the public good can be enforced.

Like Buchanan (1992), Elster (2001) also points out that the preferences of different individuals are difficult to compare and their intensity can be different in some issues, therefore he criticizes the procedure that finding the majority position for all political matters would realize the public good. Neoclassical economics considers the human image to be only valid in a limited way, since from the point of view of a self-interested voter who weighs benefits and costs, participation in voting cannot be interpreted and cannot be called rational behavior. The cost of time, attention, and energy spent on voting easily exceeds the expected benefit, while the vote of the given individual probably does not decide the outcome of the election. Since participation in elections cannot necessarily be derived from self-interest, the question arises as to why citizens participate in elections. We call this contradiction the paradox of choice, and in order to understand it, we have to leave the abstraction of *homo oeconomicus* and instead of material factors, we have to turn to cultural ones. Elster (2001) sees the essence of collective action problems in the fact that it is difficult to get people to cooperate and follow the rules, because short-term benefits are often overestimated. As an example, he cites littering in the park, where it is easier to throw away the litter - especially if others are doing the same - than to take it to the nearest bin, but if everyone follows the rules, then a clean park is a shared reward. Therefore, he considers institutions to be important phenomena of community cooperation, as they hold society together and protect against the destruction of selfishness, which he calls the "rust" of society.

4. THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POLITICAL MARKETING BASED ON POLITICAL ECONOMY

The thoughtful conceptualization of political marketing is not possible without an understanding of exchange processes. A common view in the literature is the product is a combination of the image of the party and its politicians, and the statements regarding each issues (Wring 1997, Simons 2020). Therefore, in this chapter, we examined how the object of exchange can be grasped based on political economy. According to these theories, we can say that democracy, based on two economic theories - collective decision-making and constitutional democracy - considers individual issues as the object of exchange, while based on Schumpeter's concept of leadership democracy, the person of the politician is seen as the object of exchange (Table 1). Based on Schumpeter, we can say that the role of parties is overshadowed, as voters identify the party with the characteristics of the leading politicians, and thus we can observe the growth of their power (Müller, 2018). Therefore we can see that media consumption and online news searching are fundamentally determined by social identity, which results in the emergence of cognitive biases (Knobloch-Westerwick, Mothes & Polavin 2017). Merkovity's (2018) attention-based concept, which links behavioural economics to politics, understands attention as a selection process between different stimuli and as a salient aspect of political struggle. Its essence is the politicisation of particular issues, through which politicians can direct attention to themselves.

The main difference between the two approaches lies in the methodological starting point, as political economic theories - by their very nature - are grounded in methodological individualism, while leadership theories consider community interactions. However, an important finding must be made here: the exchange-based interpretation, which is the basis of social and macro marketing trends, can also be found in political economic thinking and the leadership-based concept of democracy.

Table 1: Interpretation possibilities of the political exchange

Approaches	Public Choice Theory	Schumpeter's theory
Subject to exchange	issues	politician
Nature of preferences	rather materialistic (focuses on individual well-being)	Cultural (focuses on acceptance)
Voter preferences	ex ante	ex post
Process nature	static (equilibrium)	dynamic (process-like)
Methodology	individualistic	more communal (but does not break with methodological individualism)
Related theories	Downs (1957) Buchanan (1992)	Schumpeter's Theory of Democracy (1942)

Source: own conception

Based on these authors, we can say that exchange plays a prominent role in the conceptualization of political marketing. However, it is important to have a dynamic view of political processes, so the concept of leadership must be incorporated into the understanding. The concept of leadership assumes citizen acceptance, so the legitimacy of political decisions can also be interpreted. Therefore, political marketing can be defined as follows: *“Political marketing is a political leadership approach and communication tool system, which is centered on voter preferences in a democratic institutional system and is characterized by a dual goal system, on the one hand formulating offers to voters, and on the other hand getting them to accept political decisions, measures, and actions in the service process.”*

Regarding the object of exchange (Table 2), we can say that the politician offers the continuous management of common affairs, their vision for the future of the country, policy promises, and the possibility of self-expression. Therefore, voters can pay for this service in many ways, such as with their vote, voluntary work, data, or even monetary donations, and ultimately, in extreme cases, even self-sacrifice.

Table 2: Objects of the political exchange process

Political offer	Voter's currency
Continuous service: managing the affairs of the country (e.g. governing ability)	Vote
Vision (e.g. Christian democracy)	Voluntary work (e.g. participation in the campaign)
Policy and functional promises (e.g. 13th monthly pension)	Donation, financial support
The possibility of self-expression (e.g. voting for the Green Party due to environmental protection)	Signing petitions and consultations (e.g. online petitions, national consultation referendum)
	Data sharing (e.g. mailing list, public opinion poll)
	Publicly supporting a politician, engaging in debates, commenting / sharing on social media
	Personal sacrifice (e.g. civil disobedience, self-sacrifice)

Source: own conception

5. CONCLUSION

In my study, I examined the role of exchange based on changes in marketing thinking and certain political economic theories. Based on the changes in marketing thinking, the extension of exchange to the entire society can now be considered a mainstream approach, and social marketing and macro marketing have emerged as independent areas of research. Political economy helps us understand the deeper meaning of political exchange, so, like political marketing authors, I started with Schumpeter (1942), and then examined the role of exchange with the help of two prominent authors of Public Choice Theory, Downs (1957) and Buchanan (1992). Finally, based on these theories, I defined political marketing and the various objects that can be the subject of exchange. In addition to material factors, which dominate in the case of Public Choice Theory authors, cultural and symbolic elements can also be interpreted within the exchange paradigm.

The main message of my paper is that political marketing theory should include the phenomenon of leadership. It means that shaping preferences and gaining legitimacy are part of the concept. So instead of Downs' Public Choice Theory, it is worth returning to Schumpeter. In addition, we see a blurring of the line between symbolic and policy promises, so we have to pay more attention to symbolic exchanges as they are essential parts of voter's interpretation of reality, thus play a prominent role in the process of leadership. Therefore future research directions could aim to gain a deeper understanding of symbolic exchange, for which postmodern marketing approaches can provide suitable guidance.

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