

The “marketing party” as a model for the development of contemporary political parties.

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Article: This article discusses one model type of political party – the idea of a “marketing party”. The term marketing party (based on the model of a market-oriented party) applies to newly rising parties offering a political product characterized by flexibility and readiness to adjust to the changing expectations of voters. Marketing parties should be understood as a product, designed to answer voter expectations, and appropriately modified to them – in this way marketing parties make profound use of marketing theories. The following text aims to assess the extent to which the establishment of a marketing party model is necessary, and to test the degree to which this model might be adequate for the political entities present today. This paper also tries to explain the consequences of the marketing concept of political parties, and the way this concept influences people’s understanding of the political environment. Another question is whether this tendency represents an opportunity for the renewal of modern democracy.

Keywords: marketing party, political party, marketing theories

Political parties are dynamic in nature. According to C. Friedrich, their evolution is “the most dynamic process in the whole space of political life (...), it is a constant change from one direction to another, the result of which is never the return to the original point” (Friedrich 1968: 452, in: Mair 1997: 49).

The aim of this article is to present political parties that have appeared on the European political stage in the last decade, and to compare them to the traditional model² with the aim of identifying their specific features. It should be underlined that the term “marketing party” itself is a new defining expression and thus does not constitute a separate category in describing the political party scene within the field of political science. The role of marketing in the existence of political parties is most often reduced to voting campaigns and communication. But marketing parties should be understood as being parties specifically designed as an answer to the

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² The principal models of political parties that have been described in political studies so far (see Table 1) shall constitute a frame of reference for the arguments that will follow, and thus, aiming to simplify the description, shall be referred to as “classical” or “traditional”.

expectations of voters, and specifically modified toward them – making profound use of marketing theories.³

Therefore, the following text aims to assess the extent to which the establishment of a distinct model is necessary, and to test the degree to which this model might be adequate for the political entities present today. Thus the term “marketing parties” should be considered as a particular theoretical construct that needs to be analyzed rather than as a categorized point of reference. The assessment that follows is thereby grounded on the supposition that this particular type of political entity has already entered into the European public space. The article intends to answer the question of whether these new political parties can be a model for a new path of development on the European political scene. The reader should take into consideration that all the arguments are probabilistic in nature, because they are limited to pointing out certain conditions that allow the creation of these particular parties, and to analyzing the stimuli which, under specific conditions, might come to affect this particular trend. It is worth mentioning that marketing parties are the consolidation of two different trends: one present since the 1960's⁴, and the other currently present among nearly all political actors whose success depends on the direct social support. We might define it not as a new trend, but a previous trend with a new intensity – the attribute becoming an integral feature.

The main goal of the article is to identify the essential elements of marketing parties; however, given that the paper chooses to concentrate on the theoretical models, real political entities may have specific characteristics that do not fall into the specified model.

One of the purposes of this article is to answer the following questions – will these “new parties” become an example for other European groups, and what will be the consequences for the democratic system? In particular, in what way will they influence social participation; that is, the drive to become active within the community? Is it possible to describe these new parties as “a modern, professional screen” built to serve the purposes of political leaders, sponsors, and businessmen? This thesis will be explored with briefly-presented arguments.

³ Interesting publications about political marketing in Polish include: R. Wiszniowski (2000): *Marketing wyborczy: studium kampanii wyborczych w systemach prezydenckich i semiprezydenckich. Finlandia, Francja, Polska, Stany Zjednoczone*, Wrocław; J. Muszyński (2001): *Marketing polityczny*, Warszawa; W. Cwalina – A. Falkowski (2005): *Marketing polityczny: perspektywa psychologiczna*, Gdansk.

⁴ The moment when the television became the dominating medium influencing political preferences.

We need to explain the consequences of the marketing concept of political parties, and the way it influences people's understanding of political environment. Another question is whether that tendency represents a chance for a renewal of modern democracy.

However, the main objective of this article is to look at specific political parties and, having classified them, to determine whether they really exist as a common and definable phenomenon that we can distinguish as a new party model. The next issue is to show their dissimilarity as compared to previously-existing political parties, and to provide a sound explanation of all the changes that have occurred. Finally, their current function is presented, and some examples indicated.

There may be a methodological problem that we will have to face, which is finding the point at which we are able to speak of a new development path. And we must also answer the question of whether or not all political parties are now in fact following this pattern.⁵

The analysis is twofold: one aspect covers West European countries (because of their similar levels of social and demographic stratification) and post-Communist countries (where we can observe certain similar social behavior, but at the same time substantial differences resulting from the previous era⁶). Both the conditioning and the functioning of political parties will be totally different within those two above-mentioned aspects.

Selected West European groups as well as those from post-communist region will be used examples of new events taking place on the European political scene. They were chosen for purposes of this article in order to show the particular role performed by the marketization of relations in the party sphere. Thus the Italian Forza Italia and Slovakia's ANO illustrate how groups are built on the basis of media – a resource extremely important for the contemporary world. The Lithuania's Labour Party is found to be an "investment" by a group of entrepreneurs group, a product created as an element of economic strategy in order to extend the influence and have an affect on other sectors. Poland's Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska – PO) at the moment of its creation (January 19th, 2001) was an economic party; it also represents a group that decided to treat its ideological dimension as a distinctive competence. Whereas the other Polish force, Demokraci.pl, is an exercise in "rebranding". The PO may also be placed to some extent in

⁵ The political parties which might be referred to as classical within the European political space are mainly those which represent national or religious minorities, as the Romanian Democratic Hungarian Union (Uniunea Democratica Maghiara din România – UDMR), or the Moldavian Party (Partidul Moldovenilor – PM), <http://www.Alegir2000/Kappa.ro>.

⁶ The party systems in the countries of the former Yugoslavia might serve as a good example.

that category. Slovakia's Smer demonstrates a kind of a party established in opposition to existing political forces, as a "pragmatic" alternative ideologically contesting the current dysfunctional party order.

Parties used here as examples of marketing groups or the evolution of existing parties in the direction of political marketing may also be analyzed in terms of product life cycle. In any case, marketing principles are used in practice to focus on consideration of consumer demand in creating a new product (Smer, Lithuanian Labor Party) and meeting consumers' needs in the final stage of a product's life (Foxall and Goldsmith, 1998: 29) (Demokraci.pl).

What is the essence of marketing parties?

First, the basic categories used in this article should be explained. Some questions need to be answered: what is marketing, what are political parties, and what is the origin of the characteristics of "marketing parties"? According to Kotler and Armstrong, marketing is "understanding, creation, communication, and supplying goods and satisfaction to clients for gaining profits" (Kotler – Armstrong: 2001: 5, in: Lilleker – Negrine 2001: 3) as well as "keeping in constant touch with an organization's consumers, reading their needs, developing a "product" that meet these needs, and building a program of communication to express the organization's purposes" (Kotler, Levy 1969: 15, in: Lees-Marshment 2001a: 1083).

In other words, political marketing means activities in which organizations adopt marketing strategies, normally used in regard to products and services, to accomplish their goals.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that the term "marketing parties" does not appear as a distinct category in political theory. Moreover, political marketing is very often characterized as a marketing method usually used during election campaigns. It is used more or less by all political groups.

The majority of concepts about political marketing concentrate on political communication⁷, which is based on the classical point of view that says that "parties can best be thought of as a means of communication" (Sartori 1976: 28, in: Roemmler 2003: 7), "parties neglect the utter usefulness and abundance of marketing theories" (Butler, Collins 1996: 32–44, in: Lees-Marshment 2001a: 1075), or that limits itself to election campaign analysis. If we

⁷ Political communication in a democratic country is embedded in the political arena, and contains two-way relations between elements of political system. Organizational actors interpret their political environments, and the influence of society on their decisions: O.K. Ngwenyama – A.S. Lee (1997): *Communication Richness in Electronic Mail: Critical Social Theory and the Contextuality of Meaning*, "MIS Quarterly", Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 145.

consider only the area of election campaigns, we might associate marketing groups with the concept of “postmodern parties” (Farrell – Webb 1998: 5–6), nevertheless, this would not reflect the entire complexity of this phenomenon.

To avoid reducing the phenomenon to mere communication techniques, the model of marketing parties treats political marketing as a broader and more complex subject, one of “Comprehensive political marketing” (CPM) ⁸. It is characterized by the use of marketing in all aspects of political activity (Lees-Marshment 2001a: 1076.). The activities of political parties do not refer only to information transfer and reception/communication during the electoral campaign. The use of marketing concepts by political parties also reflects on their organizational structure, leadership and inner management. (Lees-Marshment 2001b: 495) However, this does not change the fact that the history of political parties is to a large extent the history of changes in the field of political communications (Roemmler 2003: 8).

Market-oriented parties, distinguished by J. Lees-Marshment, generate political communication. Their primary function is to satisfy voters. They approach the voter as a consumer of political goods, and the consumer must be satisfied. According to this approach, the product is generated and modified accordingly so as to meet the customer’s needs. The ongoing adaptability to changing circumstances enables its continuing presence on the market (Lees-Marshment 2001b: 695). If a given political party adapts this approach, it may become, at least in theory, a more competitive body compared to other parties that fail to take a similar approach. However, this approach cannot be utilized as effectively on the political market as it can in the market for goods and services, which I shall discuss shortly.

The difference between *market-oriented parties* and *marketing parties* lies in understanding marketing parties as new subjects in political sphere which use marketing rules. Meanwhile, *market-oriented parties* will be understood as already existing parties that begin to adapt marketing techniques on a higher level – “the amount of marketing in a party” (other attitudes are mentioned below). To clarify, the *market-oriented party* described by J. Lees-Marshment is a more

⁸ Broader reading about “comprehensive political marketing” in: P. Niffenegger (1989): *Strategies for success from the political marketers*, “Journal of Consumer Marketing”, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 46-61; D. Wring (1996): *Political marketing and party development in Britain: a “secret history”*, “European Journal of Marketing”, Vol. 30, No. 10-11, pp. 100-111; B. Newman (1996): *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy*, Sage, Thousand Oaks; A. Sackman (1996): *The learning curve towards New Labour: Neil Kinnock’s corporate party 1983-1992*, “European Journal of Marketing”, Vol. 30, No. 10-11, pp. 147-158; D. Wring: *Political marketing and organisational development: the case of the Labour Party in Britain*, “Research Paper in Management Studies”, No. 12; A. O’Cass (1996): *Political marketing and the marketing concept*, “European Journal of Marketing”, Vol. 30, No. 10-11, pp. 45-61.

suitable term for already existing subjects that change their strategy in order to compete on the political market (such as the British Labour Party). Whereas the term marketing party applies to newly rising parties, the political product of which is characterized by flexibility, and readiness to adjust to the changing expectations of voters.

Another factor that distinguishes marketing parties from *market-oriented parties* is timing. The British Conservative Party adopted a marketing orientation in 1979 (Lees-Marshment 2001b: 706), while marketing groups that were established as an answer to market demand aroused in the 1990's (Forza Italia, Smer, ANO etc.). Also important for the defining characteristics of marketing parties is the place where they were created and began to achieve success. These have been countries after transformation or political crisis: Slovakia, Lithuania, Italy, and Poland. An example of viewpoint change for marketing purposes might be the British Labour Party. It is worth noticing that such marketing groups are established within the context of party systems that are open to new actors. In systems with limited access to the political market, it is existing groups that adapt the strategies of *market-oriented parties*. In such a conceptual model, various crises represent the element of chance.

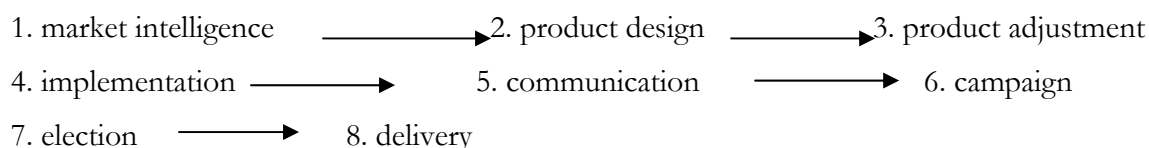
To categorize more precisely, we might say that the term “marketing party” is a sub-class of *market-oriented party*, and in terms of strategic usage of marketing it represents the next stage of development for marketing in public sphere. Consequently, it affects the function of party groups in the political system. The changes in this field are most significant, and fully demonstrate the salient characteristics of marketing parties.

The *market-oriented party* is not the only kind of political group based on marketing theory. J. Lees-Marshment further distinguishes between the *product-oriented party* and the *sales-oriented party*. The first is built on the premise of producing the best product at the lowest cost. The voter receives a complete product, which can be accepted or rejected. Here, the focus is not on the consumer, but on the creation of a product that would be optimum in the opinion of its creators (and allow for some deviation from consumer expectations). Obviously, this cannot be applied to the marketing parties, although history may show that such an approach was a frequent characteristic in the early development of political parties in the public sphere, or of contemporary groups with strongly-espoused ideologies (Green Parties in the 1980's, Communists, and other groups based on ideology).

The *sales-oriented party* has the same origins as the *product-oriented party*; however, it pays more attention to selling – “concentrated on selling its arguments to voters, it is a continuation of the previous type” (Lees-Marshment 2001a: 1076). It has more intensive contact with consumers

than the *product-oriented party*. It realizes that voters may not accept the party as a defined, unchangeable product. It studies marketing research in selecting its sales strategy. More importantly, it concentrates on communication, or at least mutual interaction between party and citizen. (Lees-Marshment 2001a: 1076) In practice, the majority of contemporary groups that use political marketing are closer to being *sales-oriented parties*, selecting as their strategy that which emphasizes “selling” the party during the election campaign.

J. Lees-Marshment created an outline for describing the process of building the marketing-oriented party:



See figure 1, J. Lees-Marshment (2001): *The marriage of Politics and Marketing*, “Political Studies”, Vol. 49, p. 497.

There is a reference to social relations on the various levels of the political party’s development. According to Schattschneider, we can observe the process of forming of a social-choices structure (Schattschneider 1942, in: Dalton 2002: 5). The political parties are shaped by the specific activities of individuals or groups of people who usually become leaders through these phenomena. To use economic terminology, they constitute the supply side, whereas society can be referred to as the demand side. As a result of social support, parties gain a portion of that society’s electorate⁹. Here it is essential to combine two types of activities: building of the party by politicians, and by the will of citizens. This is the only way to bring the party into its own and fulfill its mission. It is also a very helpful factor in distinguishing between periods in the life-cycle

⁹ M.N. Pedersen describes the path that a party needs to follow in realizing its goal – to take part in the forming of government – as a four-stage process. The first stage concerns the passing of the declarative barrier (a group of leaders establishes a party and declares that it will stand in the elections – the establishment of a party in a sociological perspective). The second stage relates to the authorization threshold (the need to register the party – the establishment of the party from a legal standpoint); the third stage concerns the passing of a representative barrier (acquiring enough public support to get party representatives elected to parliament). The fourth stage is participation in forming a ruling coalition, see. M.N. Pedersen (1996): *Towards a New Typology of Party Lifespans and Minor Parties*, SPS, Vol. 5 (1), in: R. Herbut: *Systemy partyjne w Europie Zachodniej – ciągłość i zmiana. Studium porównawcze*, Wrocław, p.167.

of political parties. I will present a short analysis of changes that have influenced the shape of political parties and led to the appearance of the marketing parties.

Marketing parties function differently than the traditional parties. The most fundamental difference is that their structure, program, promoted values, and promotion campaigns are the results of well-organized and well-thought marketing and sales strategy, directed toward a specific target on the political market. This is the reason why some categories used to describe behavioral patterns and functions of political parties may be subject to change. In this context we can introduce such terms as: political product, market, political goods, price, distribution, promotion, sale, purchaser and the transaction (Muszyński 2002). The term “political product” includes type of leadership, members of parliament, party membership, candidates, organizational background, symbols, and internal rules (Lees-Marshment 2001b: 496). For the traditional parties, marketing is “a method of presenting their program in an attractive way, consisting of a synthesis of party ideology, political doctrine, a review of the present situation in all or some areas, development strategy, and promises directed toward either the whole society or to some of its groups, *considering* (emphasis K.W.) their needs, interests, requests and aspirations” (Muszyński 2002: 162). In that case, the political plan is a result of a critical estimation of the current public situation, distinguishing the main problems and presenting the methods of solving them. Marketing groups, on the contrary, gain electoral support through “well-thought-out activities that allow political parties to recognize the current market situation, constituting the *basis* (emphasis K.W.) for the decision to produce the good – in that case the party itself – and a suitable method for addressing it to its future target” (Muszyński 2002: 98). If we compare these two definitions it is obvious that they point in opposing directions in terms of ranking, positioning, and activities that characterize party’s functions. In case of the marketing parties we can observe a total change in the sequence of steps, with the formation of a political program being an outcome instead of a starting point. Forming and introducing a new party on a political stage requires overcoming a threshold; it is a long and arduous process of political and social aggregation. The moment when a party appears on the political stage is not identical to the moment of establishing a connection with society. Analyzing the political market before a party actually enters the political game enables communication with the target as soon as the party materializes as a political reality. This is also made possible by the changes in the modern communication process. In other words, the political party must first be formed for the process of political and social aggregation to begin. This is undoubtedly the great advantage for marketing parties, especially during the process of

formation. It is much harder to introduce a new commodity to the political market than on any other market.

Moving forward, we can observe that membership and structure are not the most important factors in marketing. This is because there is no value synthesis that is fundamental in terms of the political party and its specific electoral needs. There is no need for the compromise between the wishes of the voters and the party mission that used to be such a fundamental factor in many of the political positions presented to society. Marketing parties refrain from presenting their own propositions – which is totally different than creating social preferences – yet they focus on determining listening to and adjusting to social needs. They are formed in the way the public wants them to be formed. The main activities consist of adjusting the product to social needs, tastes and expectations; the product distribution process; and promotional processes such as advertising, public relations activities, sponsoring and media advertising (Muszyński 2002: 98). Based on this information, we can identify two basic changes: the first is the method of building the party program. The program is no longer seen as the synthesis of ideology and doctrine, a review of the actual situation and promises directed to the society (Muszyński 2002: 78). This new type of parties usually presents itself as having no ideological background – for further explanation see the next part of this text. The second change is in the relationship of the party towards the political sphere. Their active functioning within the public environment is rather a distinct one – which might be a paradox, considering the fact that this feature defines their attractiveness. We can define marketing parties as being “an ideal intermediary structure” with excellent sensitivity to social needs. On the other hand, if we consider the prize for which political parties are fighting and other functions they are supposed to perform in a given political system – which are very often forgotten – we must look very carefully and critically at the various types of political entities.

To understand correctly the function of parties in the political world and on the political market we need to consider the issue from the proper perspective; that is, we should assume the point of view of parties themselves. In terms of marketing, the electorate is an extremely diverse group of units, over differing demographic and social segments with different social needs (Mazur 2005: 65). Previously, society was treated as a collection of different entities, but since the crisis of the mass parties took place, we can no longer speak of covering social divisions with political affiliation. This is why marketing groups must define their electoral target by taking into consideration which part of the electorate will be most needed to win the required amount of

votes. This is the main factor that influences the creation and positioning of a given electoral platform offer (Mazur 2005: 66-81).

Consumers groups are analyzed from various perspectives. The division of market to some extent may be based on cleavages that characterize the classical debate about the development of party systems. Parties and candidates “cannot make electoral success dependant on the belief that the voter will identify with either him his party. Discovery of the factors that can build such identification is a necessary part of success.” (Newman 1999: 259-282, in: Lilleker – Negrine 2001: 5) An electoral product includes two components: a candidate and a program. Both of them are the final result of a long process including detailed research, resulting in recognition of the best way to meet social demand.

This does not mean that all marketing groups come out the same – if that were the case, we could easily reduce our thinking about them to the long-standing concept of “populism”. The main difference is the way populist parties function in a political environment, making calculations that lack specific grounding in reality, and claiming to speak on behalf of exploited and frustrated masses. Marketing parties might instead find that it would be beneficial for them to target at the same time well-educated and rich businessmen who are not satisfied with the representation of their interests by current political groups, as well as single-parent families. It is extremely important to convince future voters at different levels of society to vote for a party. Prior to that, it is essential to target the kind of electoral group that would have a real influence on the election results. Or in marketing terms, to position the product on the market by presenting a particular image of that specific product, a political party, in consumers’ minds for each target segment. To these ends the product is also defined against competitive brands. Strategic marketing tools (“4p”) are presented in chosen market segments: a clear image of the group (product) that consumers are able to recognize as the right brand for them, distinguishable from other brands. Therefore, the *spin doctors* tend to focus on four basic fields – development of product; price (with its own meaning on the electoral market, to be described below); place of distribution; and promotion – creation of the product’s defined position in the proper area of the market (area of competition) (Foxall – Goldsmith 1998: 21). The aim of marketing is not only to sell, but also to attract consumers’ attention to product, to create demand for it at the proper time, in a proper manner, at an acceptable price (Lilleker – Negrine 2001: 5).

Another characteristic feature of marketing parties is that they build more new identities than any other groups – thus we can call them creators¹⁰. The next thing we can observe is that the rapid pace of change in the world today produces a dynamic political discussion and new issues that parties may address. Marketing parties with their high sensibility and flexibility are well able to react to these changes. Although we may think of their program as a base, this has not lead to unification of positions or a situation in which all parties become the same. The political environment seeks to achieve a state of balance, with every internal movement requiring a pattern of behavior tending to bring the balance back.

It is necessary to analyze the criteria given above that have been used to classify political parties so far. The comparison of real political parties with their models will help us to present many of the similarities and differences. It will definitely make it easier to answer the question: can we define marketing parties as a new type of political entity? Do we need new terms to explain them, or can we get by using the existing ones?

Table 1. Party models¹¹ and their characteristics:

| Characteristic | Elite parties (cadre) | Mass parties | Catch-all parties | Cartel parties | Marketing parties |
|---|--------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Time | 19 th century | 1880-1960 | 1945- | 1970- | 1990- |
| Distribution level of political assets | Highly limited | Relatively oriented | Weakly oriented | Relatively broad | Leadership-oriented |
| Principal political goals | Distribution of benefits | Social reform (or social reform protest) | Augmentation of social conditions | Politics as a profession | Politics as a transaction – marketing of politics |
| Fundament for party rivalry | Status held | Capabilities held | Political effectiveness | Management capabilities, effectiveness | Effective image, promotion |

¹⁰ That is why all so called contemporary parties may not be treated as marketing ones. Some of created initiatives, which can be named virtual, abandon creative strategies – program becomes a synthesis of e-mails representing views. At the extreme, such possibilities lead to the formation of ‘virtual’ parties, such as the German party ‘Die Digitalen’, which ran in the 1999 local government election in Berlin. This party operated on an Internet basis only, with an ‘open policy’ program whereby policy formulation was subject to any interested person online. So-called party members were solely in charge of organizing and coordinating the process of policy development. (Rommle 2003: 10).

¹¹ P. Mair makes the claim that differentiating among the models of political parties (elite parties, mass parties, catch-all parties, cartel parties) does not imply the creation of a new model, but rather the end product of the previous forms – they can exist in parallel (see. Mair 1997: 109). Thus the new trend within the party environment signifies the existence of several types of political parties. This state of affairs may in fact constitute a test of effectiveness; that is, a basis for party self-determination, perception, and definition of public space (K.W.).

| Means of electoral rivalry | Management | Mobilization | Competitiveness | Party assets held | Professional electoral apparatus |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| Means of party activity and campaign organization | Non-relevant | Concentrating on own work | Engaging own work and capital | Engaging capital | Engaging capital in relation to professionalism-oriented activities and cumulating of means during campaign period |
| Sources of financial assets | Own sources | Member contribution and donations | Mixture of various sources (state subventions, interest group donations) | State subventions | State subventions, contributions |
| Relations between rank / file and party elites | Elite = file and rank | „Circulation of elites” – elite responsible before the rank and file members | Top-to-bottom drive – elite organizes the activities of the rank and file | Degree of stratification – relative autonomy of levels | Elite as a managing center – often as a symbol of party image, decreasing role of membership. Hired professionals as a new-permanent group. |
| Nature of membership | Narrow and elite | Broad and homogeneous; membership as a logical consequence of identification, rights and duties follow | Membership open to all (heterogeneous) as a right but no duties follow; importance of individual member identification | Rights and duties do not spring from membership (status differences are not clear); feeling of belonging based on individual rather than on organized entities; members are valued as the support giving legitimization to the party | Candidate most key for the party. Party membership irrelevant, reaching the public during different electoral cycles becomes the primary goal. Catching attention above loyalty. |
| Channels of party communication | Direct personal contacts | Party has internal communication channels | Party struggles to reach external (extra-party) communication channels | Party has legally regulated access to the mass media | Party has legally regulated access to the mass media; often uses informal means to increase its presence particularly in the mass media. |
| Party position between the civic society and the state | Unclear divides between the state and politically meaningful citizen groups | Party belongs to the society, sometimes as the representation of a new and important society segment | Party as an actor and mediator between the society and the state | Party as a part of the state | Party as a product for sale, adapting to social expectations (ever more of individuals that social groups), yet financially dependent on the state |

| Style of representation | Trusted representatives | Delegate | Entrepreneur | State agent | Product |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------|--------------|-------------|---------|
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------|--------------|-------------|---------|

Based on: Mair 1997: 110.

The models indicated in the table have heuristic character, which means that real objects existing in the political environment can have traits that differ from the presented pure forms. The same method will be used to explain the idea of marketing parties that have been added to the comparison proposed by P. Mair. In this part of the article I will try to compare the presented model to some existing European political parties that fulfill the marketing conception.

If we follow the evolution of political parties it seems clear that some changes within the society affect the internal structure and working methods of political parties. For example, the introduction of universal right to vote definitely caused a lot of reforms in political parties. It was definitely one of the causes for forming mass parties. Another example might be the new type of *catch-all* groups on the political scene. The *catch-all* groups became issue-mediators, a role which the mass parties could not assume in their dialogue with society. According to Kircheimer, who proposed the term, there are some characteristic features for *catch-all* groups, such as: reduction of ideological heritage, increased importance of party leaders, decreasing importance of individual members in the party, no class identification, and the important process of preserving relations with different interest groups (Kirchheimer 1966: 184-190, in: Mair 1997: 37). Those ideas are very relevant for marketing parties. Therefore, I will pause to analyze this issue more carefully.

The weakened links between parties and society has led to higher flexibility of electoral behavior. It is more and more apparent that the main change that occurred with the mass¹² and *catch-all* parties was in their organization (Panebianco 1988: 264, in: Gunther – Linz 2002: 147). Panebianco presented this change from organizational point of view, indicating that there had been a conversion from “*mass-bureaucratic party*” to “*electoral-professional party*”. The model he describes presents the specific functions of marketing parties, and includes the following components: the role of professionals, appealing to the electorate’s opinions (and not party affiliation), flexible vertical party structure, more personalized leadership, and funding from the

¹² The parties with the most distinct ideological and class profiles are still the social-democrat parties. The analysis proposed by Kircheimer relates to the 1960’s, whereas the most powerful left-of-center parties within the European political space, the British Labour Party and the German SPD, chose to seek broad electoral support much later. In Great Britain, such a shift resulted from the government struggles to limit the influence of labor unions, undertaken by M. Thatcher, while in Germany this shift came with the G. Schroeder taking the position of a party leader and the office of the chancellor. Yet not all parties chose to pursue this course – for example the communist parties in Italy – Rifondazione Comunista (RC), or the Communist Party of Slovakia (Komunistická Strana Slovenska (KSS).

budgets of interest groups (Panebianco 1988: 264, in: Gunther – Linz 2002: 147). The appearance of *catch-all* groups on the political stage, with their emphasis on the party center and weak connection with the average citizen, was one of the most important factors that led to the formation of marketing parties and made them successful. Many ideas were taken by marketing parties from these groups defined by Kirchheimer (1966), while their organizational structure *became* more similar to *electoral-professional parties*. Neither organizational structure nor political ideology are characteristic issues for marketing parties. Their specific attributes are the method of communication with the society, and finding the right place and the right time for the party to appear in public life. This is made possible by the existence of a niche (demand) in the electoral market identified by the party. The situation has required the restoration of the connection between them. The achievement of such parties was to give society hope for better future, and thus gain election votes in response. However, such connections are no longer permanent. Today, the voter is treated as an individual, not as a member of a social group. He makes individual calculations, and anticipates personal gains or losses as a result of political events (Antoszewski – Herbut 1997: 70). Modern changes in the communication process have led to the introduction of marketing concept for new political groups. Organization used to be the most important factor for previous stages of evolution, as it reflected the structure of potential electorate (Antoszewski – Herbut 1997: 71), but today it has lost its importance. It cannot fully present the ideas that marketing groups can. Especially because these type of parties were very active only in election periods – a typical behavior for mass groups. In marketing parties, inner communication is limited while decision processes are developed, resulting in “higher sensitivity to voters’ opinions (Scammell 1995: 12, in: Lilleker – Negrine 2001: 10).

The model of marketing party appeals to already-existing and defined types of parties. Generally, we may refer to the theory of rational choice by A. Downs (1987) and a growing specialization of electoral operations similar to that of an “*electoral-professional party*”. Whereas the model of the catch-all groups is not a main point of concern for marketing parties. They abandon the ambitious strategy of attracting the widest possible groups of voters, and with help of marketing tools such as segmentation and targeting¹³ they select one group of voters which gives them a strong chance for electoral success. However, it is likely that electoral appeals will be directed towards a particular group, making the transaction formally more similar to the

¹³ Market segmentation is the division and aggregation of prospective buyers or recipients (voters) into groups (segments) that have common needs, which are approached so as to maximize positive reaction to the product. Targeting is a process of selection of the customers you wish to service (Altkorn 2003: 69-73).

communication strategies used by class parties. An attitude which assumes flexibility in electoral communication and choice of target group is another factor which distinguishes marketing parties of from the *market-orientated*¹⁴. Similar ambiguity can be found in the relation between marketing parties and cartel parties.

Language is a very important issue in the relations between political parties and voters. Language helps to increase the credibility of the party and gain social influence. Political practice corresponds with language code. We can even say that political practice creates a particular political language. Political reality determines the choice of language by political actors – that language should not only describe events, but also shape or even create them.

If we follow the changes in that area, we can observe the redefinition of communication priorities in the public space. In the previous stage, this communication had to fulfill two tasks. The first was to guide all coordination, consultation and negotiation processes related to the political elite. The main challenge for the party was not agreement with the electors, who were attached to the party and voted accordingly. The core of political communication was based on coalition bargaining – agreement between politicians themselves. The second task was to limit and control political participation, which is not as illogical and pointless as it might seem. The explanation for that type of behavior might be the desire to decrease communication disturbance – increased social participation, very formal relations, and a strong internal structure were in this situation not desirable. Generally speaking, this helped to secure the position of the “political class” (Crocì 2001: 353). The language was very specific, reserved for the initiated – according to La Palombara it was “the language of a particular curia” (Palombara 1987: 103), a language that was totally different from the one usually used in communicating with the voters. This pattern of behavior changed in West European democracies with the appearance of the *catch-all* parties. Marketing groups saw the political world as a simple and accessible environment, and that determines their language. G. Fedal proposes a critical analysis of the language used by politicians. He observes a tendency toward an opening and simplifying of political language. Fedal refers to a “*pan politicization*” of language. He argues that all kinds of speech are being

¹⁴ J. Lees-Marshment classifies mass parties as a kind of market-oriented party, considering the fact that they used informal social opinion research to optimize their result. However, this point of view leaves out an important factor – the organizational dimension of the described parties. Their origins in the trade union movement (in the case of socialist and social-democratic parties) or Christian groupings and organizations excluded the basic element for a marketing organization: the approach to politics as a product (see. Lees-Marshment 2001a: 701).

treated as political, and they all can be used for political purposes. This spells the end of the specific political language¹⁵.

One of the best examples of political change and the use of marketing concepts in politics is the Italian party Forza Italia. The communication of the political class in Italy was more like the language of secret organizations since 1950's. Then a party was started with the name "Forza Italia" (Forward Italy). The name of the party symbolized the end of the "membership party". The name "Forza Italia" came from football, which is extremely important in Italy. The sport enables Italian society to gather together and get the feeling of real community¹⁶. Party leader Silvio Berlusconi admitted that in looking for a proper communication strategy he was thinking of using religious symbols. Entering into the political world felt like a reaching for a "bitter cup". Finally, he decided to use a less controversial variant – "entrance onto the football field" (Televised broadcast on Rete 4 Channel, January 26, 1994; Croci 2001: 359.). Berlusconi himself was owner of one of the football teams – a circumstance which definitely helped to increase his credibility¹⁷. The whole process of choosing the right language and words is a good example of the new tendency – an analytical view of political market. Berlusconi accomplished his goal – he broke through the isolation of political scene, and brought it closer to society. When corruption scandals were becoming public in Italy in 1993, Berlusconi gained social trust and support as an effective businessman. He owned a commercial TV and a champion football team. This made his promises of an economic miracle awaiting Italy more credible (Croci 2001: 360). The image of Berlusconi in the mass media (which he owned) was sometimes criticized. He was called "telecrat" or "videocrat" and the political system in Italy was referred to as "telecracy" and "videocracy"¹⁸. However, Berlusconi is a real professional if we talk about his knowledge of Italian society. A great example for that might be his defense when he was accused of monopolizing political time and news in the mass media. He answered that the future

¹⁵ Another phenomenon observed by G. Fedel is "pathologism", or the perception of every political language as a code with a low, or even non-existent, though fundamental, communicative function (Fedel 1999: 3–50, quoted in: Croci 2001: 349).

¹⁶ In Italy, football is an intellectual activity that constitutes a complement to physical exercise, and is described and interpreted in a deeper sense (...) The sports commentator thereby acquires the status of a preacher on the matter of football (Tim Parks 1992: 124–125, Italian translation: *Italiani* (1995), quoted in: Croci 2001: 349).

¹⁷ This particular way of speaking about politics has been accepted by political scientists, and G. Sartori called Forza Italia "a second- or third-league party" (compare *La Repubblica*, 12 May 1994; Croci 2001: 360).

¹⁸ A. Duharvel in *Libération*, quoted in: *L'Espresso*, 25 March 1994; *Corriere della Sera*, 1 April 1994; *L'Europeo*, 6 April 1994; *L'Indipendente*, 7 July 1994; Croci 2001: 361.

development of Italy is related to two things: family and enterprise. He only sought to join these two values together in a “family enterprise”. He added that as a father of 5 children he had a duty to secure their future¹⁹. This speech might be also an example of the qualitative changes in political argument, and the *pan-politicization* of the language.

Besides all the changes connected with language, it seems that political parties have begun to appreciate the importance of image. It has been proven that the image goes directly to a person’s mind and does not involve transformation or individual creation as is the case with a written message. This is why so many of those who purchase the political product base their decision on emotions. Images influence the decision to participate in the political market transaction and to buy a certain product (Drzycimski 1996: 27). Political parties know how to make use this kind of behavior in two ways. Firstly, by creating the right image of politicians, especially party leaders²⁰; secondly, by using suitable graphic symbols. Today, we can observe that society is receiving more and more symbolic messages (especially commercials), a process that can be called “bombardment”. Moreover, people’s reception is selective (perception and notice). So it is even harder to influence people’s motivation system (Inglik-Dziak 2000: 37), which in the case of the political environment means to persuade someone to vote for a specific party.

It is necessary to understand the voter’s cognitive mechanisms to determine the background of a successful political image. Changes such as decreased sense of community and social atomization are resulting in more individual political decisions and more personalized views on politics.

At present we can distinguish some differences that are typical for marketing parties. One of them might be the different techniques used to build the political program, and getting out the message supported by adequate language and visual aids. It is important to note that these strategies are selected after a complex process of market research. We have to remember that today’s reality may undergo further change in light of the tendencies described above. It is all rather flexible. Therefore it is important to distinguish between the essence of marketing parties and its mutable factors. The real essence and distinctive characteristic of marketing parties is their flexibility and ability to adapt their own priorities to the changing reality. Marketing theory

¹⁹ *Corriere della Sera*, 25 April 1995; *La Repubblica*, 13 June 1995; Croci 2001: 361.

²⁰ It is claimed that the candidates reach the voters through their appearance and behavior (55 %), through their expression (38 %), and only very slightly with the contents of what they have to say (7 %) (Bruce 1992: 40-41, quoted in: Pietras 1995: 427).

defines the three components of the political product (party) as: the program, people, and the ideology. The first two factors have already been discussed; therefore, I would like to focus on ideology. Defining the ideological essence of those parties seems to be somewhat of a problem. Here we might try coming up with a definition in terms of world view, or a group of ideas gathered together as one strategic vision for political purposes (Muszyński 2002: 118). Accordingly, we might distinguish two methods of building ideology within the party. First, the group as an answer to social demand. A party makes use of social demand, and participates in political competition to attain political power. All of these social demands are transferred into classical political categories²¹. The example for this kind of behavior is the ANO (Alianca Noveho Obciana) in Slovakia. It was founded in 2001 and fulfilled the social demand for a liberal party²². Moreover, Pavel Rusko, owner of the very popular television station “Markiza”, became the leader of ANO.

The second method is an attempt to separate ideological factors from the party identity. It can be also considered as a strategy to reach a specific goal (it must be preceded by market research). The example for that method is the Slovak party Smer mentioned earlier. That party’s vice-chairman Boris Zala said in one interview: “The current situation in Slovakia is caused by this attachment to ideology. This does not allow us to be flexible, adapt to new conditions and solve problems. On the contrary, it means following the strict rules and doctrine”²³. Those words were later borne out by reality.

Some parties have decided to use a strategy of presenting themselves as a “new kind of political party”. Their effectiveness will be tested at the level of European Parliament. If they wish to achieve a stronger position in that institution they will have to look for a suitable affiliation. One of the examples was Smer²⁴ (member of the socialist faction). It turned out that it

²¹ As the basis for defining its identity a party may refer to the typology proposed by Kalus von Beyme, who distinguished parties as: liberal and radical, conservative, socialist and social-democrat, Christian-democrat, communist, agrarian, regional and ethnic, radical right-wing and eco-parties (Ware 1996: 22).

²² See: *Slonenske volby 2002 – prekročení Rubikonu?*, in: číslo 4, ročník IV, podzim 2002, p.1.

²³ „Narodna obroda”, 30.11.1999, quoted in: Kristofik M., *Ideove a programove vymedzenie strany SMER*, p. 3.

²⁴ The ineffectiveness of the attempt staged by Smer to escape ideological connotations as part of marketing-oriented calculations, whereby the party initially presented itself as “pragmatic and non-ideological” („Tezy Politického programu „Preco sme tu”, <http://www.strana-smer.sk/program/programovetezy>) has led to – partly as a tactical move – the party finding its place in the left-of-center camp, aiming to establish its political postulates in the “third way” framework. Thus Smer turned away from “pragmatic and rational” politics, trying to gain support based on the positive social connotations held at the time of the “third way” concept, which, according to T. Blair “was in

was still very important to have a vision and not only a strategy. This means that political parties will sometimes have to forget about their marketing qualities. If they do not follow this advice, they will lose their political influence. It is not possible that a specific product designed to fulfill the special demands of one country's society could be as interesting on the European Parliament level. Especially, if we consider the fact that political market is rather closed at this level. Moreover, the new parties are usually vetted by classical parties that hold prevailing influence.

The lack of ideologically based identity declared by some marketing parties is rather illusory. It is a tactic that may be an advantage only within the internal political environment. Beside these strategic-tactical arguments, it is worth to mention some practical issues. It is almost not possible to separate a party from the fiscal policies it advocates, issues of social assistance, and state influence on the national economy. Taking positions on these issues classifies a party as part of a broader framework²⁵, as right- or left-of-center on the political scene²⁶.

Why have marketing parties appeared on European political stage?

After a general description of political parties, it is time to summarize the factors and mechanisms that influence these actors and their success or failure. By means of three main components, the issue of political leadership, the method of building political appeal, and system of mobilization and party organization and operational strategy, the parties tend to approach one another on the issues, making possible the transfer of preferences between parties, even across traditional left- and right-of-center system division (Mair 1997: 32).

I want to emphasize the relations between parties and the electorate. The type of language used is determined by the level of political loyalty. The weaker the loyalty the more

principal an idea. Without an in-depth identification with the goals and values, governments lack guidance and effectiveness, regardless of whether they have a majority." (T. Kowalik 2001: 125)

²⁵ Let us recall the "new issues" (gender, ecology, quality of life) that have cut across the left-right political divides, and yet were adopted by the left-of-center parties, spurring appropriate reaction from the conservative circles, that came to treat those issues as dividing lines within the discourse characterizing the adversary. N. Bobbio claims that the political description in terms of "left-right" still has significant bearing on the political thinking, as politics is by nature about conflict. Left and right are the two sides of any given body. Although what constitutes "the left", and, on the other hand, that what constitutes "the right", may change, no single concept can fully encompass both the left and the right (Bobbio 1996, quoted in: Giddens 1999: 39).

²⁶ Budge and Robertson point out that the dominating line that defines party rivalry is the "right – left" divide. Only ethnic conflict or a direct security threat to the state constitute factors that may eliminate this fundamental dividing line. (Bugde – Robertson, quoted in: P. Mair 1997: 24).

open, simple and flexible is the language (Crocì 2001: 362). This is a situation that facilitates the creation of marketing parties.

It is impossible not to mention the consequences of the communication and technology revolution²⁷, which has brought society both advantages and disadvantages. The first is the rapidity of information transfer which allows for increased control of political life (at least according to the model approach), as well as simplification of cognitive mechanisms, and less analytical perception of political messages brought by television and other media to clients – many of whom vote. G. Sartori defined this kind of voter as “homo videns” – somebody who looks but does not think (Sartori 1994: *Il Manifesto*, 21 May 1994, quoted in: Crocì 2001: 361). As a result, “party voting” is becoming less attractive as opposed to “opinion voting” – which is actually the consequence of marketing competition. The main goal of the parties is to get attention and a vote during an election time. It is no longer an attempt to create long-lasting loyalty to the party. According to those arguments we might presume that the voter is not a rational person incapable of independent decision-making; however, this does not take into account all the changes that have been happening in the public environment. To explain this situation we should now focus on the voters of marketing parties, and where they are recruited from.

Among the characteristics of marketing parties, we observe that they direct their appeal towards people who have been standing aside and are not politically involved. This message is intended to encourage them to participate in political life and vote for the marketing parties. They usually try to change (exploit) all the negative consequences of bad decisions in public environment. Those parties may appear more or less successful because they have been able to motivate special kind of electors. These groups of voters differ depending on the country and conditions. In Slovakia they are young people; in Italy the lower middle class; in Poland youth, a frustrated intelligentsia, and disappointed businessmen. We must remember that marketing parties define mobilization differently than mass parties. However, this does not necessarily mean that they increase the quality of democracy and create civic attitudes. Their political participation has two sides: active and passive. Marketing parties particularly stress active participation, which

²⁷ The polls conducted during the recent parliamentary elections in Germany showed that 70 % of voters base their political awareness on the information presented on television (Zagrodzka, in: “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 24-25.09.2005, p.19).

means voting during elections. However, routine and passive participation such as following the election campaign in the media is also of particular importance for these parties²⁸.

We must also mention institutional changes such as financing parties from the national budget, and reimbursement of money spent on election campaign. This tends to weaken the links between parties and society. Parties are thus less dependent on the financial support of ordinary citizens. I have already presented the similarities to *catch-all* parties. Now, I would like to look at marketing parties in comparison with another trend present among political parties in the 21st century – the process of cartelization.

After Second World War we can observe this new type of political party, and its subsequent institutionalization. As the result of those tendencies we observe a stronger dependence on the state and weaker connection with the social support base. A social support base has become an element in the management process, and not the fundamental basis for party's superiority. Without close relations between party and the state²⁹, the effect on party donations, and the changes in voter behavior it would be impossible for marketing parties to successfully use such marketing techniques. It is also insufficient to explain political marketing as the process of adaptation to communication changes in a public environment. However, it is still important to get a share of the vote. This vote is not only as a pass to power acquisition, but also a pass to different kinds of resources. Cartelization might be an opportunity for marketing parties in post-communist countries. Their political markets are more open than in the western democracies, and are ruled by different principles. It is much easier to enter onto that market and obtain access to state resources. Some political analysts (Szczerbiak, 2001: 3) point to cartelization as a new negative tendency. They declare that parties tend to become overly dependent on the state. On the other hand, this dependence is a chance for marketing parties to survive. It might be difficult for those types of parties to replicate their initial success. They may be successful in using marketing techniques for creating party identity and manifestation at the initial stage of electoral competition. Later on, at the level of governmental formation, this might be difficult to achieve. It can be problematic to waive party principles in the name of seeking out various compromises. The party that operates according to the “we-give-you-what-you-want” principle is not treated as a serious partner during coalition discussions, and lacks credibility.

²⁸ Compare: Conway 2000, quoted in: Bucy – Gregson 2001: 359.

²⁹ In the former Communist countries, a weak post-Communist state remains powerful enough to assure that the society is kept in an even weaker position, co-opting local elites and maintaining ultra-stability (Staniszki 2001: 93).

As mentioned above, we must differentiate between two environments when discussing the issues of fundamentals of marketing parties – countries with stable democratic systems, and post-Communist countries where new pluralism in political life created favorable conditions for free political competition. In those countries we observe the transformation from dominant, mono-party system to free competition between all parties, followed by market orientation of political actors. Summing up the arguments about the reasons behind the development of marketing parties, it is necessary to consider those differences, as well as appreciate the influence of similarities.

The consequences of the Communist system (defined as a political, economic and social system, which was based on one authority, the Communist party, its national economic system, and total social subordination to the authorities) (Grabowska 2004: 99), in terms of the activity within the public space, might be said to include: an increase in nationalism, a no-compromise culture, high social expectations towards authorities, cynicism and lack of trust towards public and political institutions, disinterest in ideas, moral confusion, the sense of an uncertain future (as a result of unemployment and reduced state influence in the area of social benefits) (Holmes 1997: 15-21, in: Grabowska 2004: 98). The parties formed at the beginning of the transformation process were incapable of dealing with this legacy. Some of these tendencies ended up being exacerbated, and in some cases the medicine was more dangerous than the disease itself³⁰. Moreover, those parties had to face new problems such as antagonisms between old partners, as well as internal conflicts within groups that were once more or less united. This led to a lack of interest in political participation. On the other hand, it encouraged some new parties to appear on the political stage. Those parties emphasized that they have no interest in stale political disputes, and that they represent the true society, understand its disillusionments, social needs, and fears.

There have also been some important changes within the West-European democracies. For a long time the political market was a small one³¹ with high voter loyalty and low voter transfer from one party to another. There was one way to make it onto that market – a political crisis that

³⁰ Taking the Polish experience as an example, we might point to the ideas that originated in the circles closely tied to the radical right-of-center “Radio Maryja”, which aspired to fill the moral vacuum remaining in society.

³¹ Today such markets are to be found in countries where ethnic or religious issues play an important part in defining political identity – such was the case up until now in Ireland, or in the countries where a certain fear has been expressed to sustain party loyalty, for example in Italy of the late 1990’s.

destroys existing political relations³². This happened in Italy in 1993. That was the main cause that brought Forza Italia to the political stage and made it so successful. It presented itself as a new kind of political party not involved in the old system and its corruption. This situation was called the end of the First Republic. Forza Italia was based on a fusion of its founder's personality³³ and an analysis of social expectations. The party won an election only three months after it appeared on the political stage.

That leads us to the question: perhaps we have just found the recipe for a successful political group. All we need is to unite an analysis of social needs with enough money to run a campaign. In the post-Communist countries there is one more very important factor we have to consider – the party leadership. According to Dalton and Wattenberg, the young democracies in Central and Eastern European countries are the most suitable environment for creating these types of voter behavior. Election choices are very often based on the image of political leaders.³⁴ From the party point of view, the easiest way should be to build political message based on a leader. A vivid example in support of this argument is Robert Fico in Slovakia. He became the framework for a party that built its identification around him (Cwalina 2000: 60).

In Poland that experiment did not succeed, the failure of the Democratic Party is an interesting example. It is also a proof that market calculations are not always correct. There, an attempt was made to apply techniques related to the marketing theory of product life cycle³⁵ that might be termed as modernization in the decline stage. The product being modernized came in the form of the Freedom Union, which constituted the foundation for the establishment of the new party. While for young people (especially first-time voters), the division between the post-

³² Analyzing the role of political crisis on the existence of marketing parties, it is necessary to make reference to potential opinions that treat marketing and populist parties as equals. The latter exploit the “populist situation” by appealing to broad masses, by direct reference to those masses and by a strategy of mass manipulation. The intensity of the “populist situation” increases with an increased sense of deprivation – the lack of fulfilled expectations. Such is the case with deep economic crisis situations, which most affect the lowest social classes – the masses (compare: Dzwonczyk 2000: 23). In the case of marketing parties, a crisis situation opens up the political market, thus facilitating the entry of political entities onto that market. Marketing parties are principally an embodiment of a different view of the public space that departs from the manipulation-oriented, emotion-based mobilization of the masses (compare: Tokraczyk 1998: 541).

³³ Berlusconi is the wealthiest person in Italy with an annual income of \$7.7 mil., savings and assets estimated at \$11bln (see: Jędrzyk – Wojciechowski 2003: 4).

³⁴ Compare: Dalton – Wattenberg, quoted in: Cwalina 2000: 60).

³⁵ Four distinct stages have been defined: the product's introduction onto the market, the growth phase, the maturity phase, and the decline phase (see: Foxal – Goldsmith 1998: 28).

Communist and post-Solidarity parties on the Polish political stage is less important, this was not a sufficient impetus to build a new Democratic Party in Poland, especially considering the many older voters who still consider this division crucial (Grabowska 2004: 99). It was a big mistake to emphasize “leaving behind the post-Communist divisions” as an important selling point. Also, party movers failed to consider one of the most important factors – voter turnout among the target group – in the case of that party, the young people³⁶. This political project was supposed to be a synthesis of professional political vision – “the party is a professional organization, cooperating towards one purpose, and fighting for something and not against somebody”, and politics was defined “as a competence of cooperation with the society, enabling the creation of a vision of the common good as part of a social discussion, gaining support for that vision, and taking the responsibility for implementing it” (<http://demokraci.pl/index.php?do=standard&navi=0001,0003,28.09.2005>). Władysław Frasyniuk, the party leader, proved unable to serve as its symbol, as there were too many other important personalities in the party membership³⁷. His image did not have much success in gaining social support. Another reason for the failure of the party, which acquired the alternative name “Demokraci.pl”, was its positioning on the political stage. Slovakia’s Smer was a party that appeared on the political stage in that country as the first marketing party in Slovakia. In Poland, however, there was another marketing party already present – the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska). This party could be compared to Smer. It was the first marketing party on the Polish political stage; it was new, dynamic and succeeded in

³⁶ Slovakia has witnessed efforts aiming to increase the civic awareness and political activeness of the young people, the consequences of which were visible in the 1998 elections, when the voter turnout among first- and second-time voters reached 80 %. In comparison, during the 1994 elections, the voter turnout for that group ranged at less than 50 % (Guarfasova – Velsic 2003: 1).

³⁷ Head – Władysław Frasyniuk, Deputy – Jerzy Hausner, Head of the Political Committee – Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Secretary General – former deputy Mirosław Czech (secretary of the Freedom Union until Fall 2001), Treasurer – Zbigniew Lewiński (entrepreneur), Members of the Board: Joanna Brzozowska, Bartłomiej Krasicki (both young, former members of the Democratic Left Alliance), Bogdan Lis (one of the leaders of the 1980 strike), Paweł Lisiewicz (chief of the youth organization linked to the Freedom Union), Włodzimierz Puzyna (chief of regional structures of the Freedom Union, former deputy), Jan Lityński (deputy chief of the Freedom Union, former deputy), Rafał Zaczyk (young manager, without former party affiliation, with connections to J. Hausner). Minister Dariusz Rosati voiced his support for the party, and as it was making its appearance on the political market, the support from the Prime Minister Marek Belka gained much publicity, facing many critical opinions, (Milewicz – Sandeck: *Ponad podziałami.pl*, in: „*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, No. 106, 09/05/2005, p. 4.

rolling over the competition³⁸. When the Civic Platform was entering the market, it was the only party with a marketing strategy; it was new, unique, and voters had nothing else to compare it to. In the case of “Demokraci.pl”, society’s initial reaction was to compare it to the bigger, stronger, more stable Civic Platform. As we see from the example of the Democratic Party, it is not enough to study the market and create a product to be successful. There was another “Demokraci.pl” mistake worth mentioning. The party focused its marketing strategy towards a very narrow target – the voters of another party, the Freedom Union. But these voters were not the kind to treat politics merely as a mechanism for satisfying demand, and that kind of approach found no acceptance among this voter group. As we also see with the “open political market” where voters choose between various parties and frequently change their preferences (Mazur 2005: 20), it is very hard to recast a party marketing model and be successful.

Once again, I would like to return to the importance of political crisis as a factor that “opens” the political market for marketing parties. Slovakia’s Smer is the perfect example of this. At the time it appeared, the country was slowly recovering after the Meciar government and the initial disillusionment with the rule of the Democratic Coalition. Slovakia was returning to the transformation process, which had been halted. By comparison, the Polish political scene did not experience the type of shock³⁹ that could help the “Demokraci.pl” political project to look fresh and attractive. The political scene in Lithuania might also serve as an example supporting the idea of political breakthroughs playing a key role for the emergence of marketing parties. There, a political crisis culminating in the impeachment of President R. Paksas by the Lithuanian parliament became the source of success for the Labor Party, established in 2003 by W. Uspaskich. The party was in fact an investment project undertaken by several Lithuanian businessmen⁴⁰ who up to that time lacked influence on government decisions; they decided to acquire that influence by sponsoring their own political project. Their primary aim was to win the

³⁸ The Civic Platform constituted a natural point of reference for Demokraci.pl (also because of similarities in target voter identification), a factor which was visible in the party program, which made specific references to propositions put forth by the Civic Platform (<http://demokraci.pl/index.php?do=standard&navi=0001,0003>, accessed on 28.09.2005).

³⁹ The situation in Poland, despite subsequent publication of corruption scandals and illegal contacts between business and politicians, was not comparable to the magnitude of the changes in Slovakia in 1998 towards the end of the “democrature” and the return to the democratic path.

⁴⁰ The main sponsors of the Labor Party appeared as party candidates at the top of the party lists – 15 of them were millionaires (Komar: *W niedzielę druga tura wyborów na Litwie Uspaskich goni głosy*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, No. 250, of 23/10/2004-24/10/2004, p. 8).

2004 elections, thus acquiring access to financial assistance flowing from the European Union⁴¹. Making skillful use of the techniques of political communication, they managed to turn their lack of political experience into an advantage, arguing that party representatives had proven themselves able to create their own personal wealth, and were now ready to help the whole society become wealthy. The Lithuanian Labor Party is an example in support of the argument that the political market as well is governed by marketing principles in planning for a new product, including the determination of the optimum timing for introducing the new product onto the market (the absorption ability of the market), the degree of acceptance for the projected goods and services by the customers, as well as the profitability of the new products for the entrepreneurs (Altkorn 2003: 145). It is interesting to pay particular attention to the last element – the profitability of the product being introduced. In Lithuania, for a certain business elite to realize its goals, it proved to be more beneficial and effective to establish a new political entity, and not to explore other venues for influencing the government officials, venues offered by a democratic system. In accordance with marketing theory, new products seldom bring profits from the very beginning (Foxall – Goldsmith 1998: 26), but this did not apply to the voting results for the Labour Party. The reason may lie in the stage of stabilization of the Lithuanian political market, where it is rather easy to introduce a new product-party into market⁴².

It is not necessarily the rule that there must be a vital crisis such as an important change in politics or a financial crash to facilitate the appearance of marketing parties. As we can see, some entities on the political market are trying to adapt to the pattern described above. A more effective strategy in stable democracies is “rebranding”, which was used in Great Britain when Tony Blair reformed the Labour Party and created New Labour Party.

Political parties are not the only objects existing in the political environment. Apart from them, we can also recognize pressure groups, social movements, and the media. In a sense they also represent competition for political parties; although they are not a direct danger to the parties, they still have a very special position⁴³, and influence political forces. If we compare the

⁴¹ Statement made by Rimvydas Valatka, a journalist for the "Lietuvos Rytas" daily newspaper in an interview for Lithuanian Television, commenting on the election results. *Kto będzie rządził na Litwie?* Monday, 25 October 2004, PAP 14:05.

⁴² Looking back at election results in Lithuania Republic from 1990 to 2004, only three parties were able to win seats in Parliament during this period; other actors were changing (<http://www.parties-and-elections.de/lithuania.html>).

⁴³ The distinctive role of political parties can be seen when considering the neo-corporatist theories, which would be non-existent without the party factor in connections between business and politics (Lehmbruch 1977, quoted in: Mair 1997: 10).

creation process of a party and its political message to the creation of a new product on a market, we can see the change in aggregation of interests. This differentiates political parties from the entities mentioned above. The contribution of these entities lies in representing social needs. The competition forces improvement of the political product, and the use of promotional and advertising techniques.

Marketing parties – results and myths

Based on the information presented above, I would like to try to evaluate the role of the marketing parties. The assessment will relate to the model and not to real-life entities, in spite of the fact that they are sometimes very close to the described pattern. We can observe a certain ambivalence in the character of marketing parties – they could be very important in a democratic system, helping to rebuild relations between citizens and the state. On the other hand, their techniques can represent a serious danger to the essence of the democratic system, especially the function of political parties in that system.

It is important to consider the price of the transaction that happens on the political market, the transaction that is finalized with the moment of voting. The price for voters is high: their own political subordination, especially considering that the product can not be returned, and if they want to return “the product”, they have to wait until the next elections. The significant difference between marketing for products and the marketing used by political parties is the role of price. In the first case, price determines the attractiveness of the product; in the second, the price is a constant. As a result, competition between parties is focused on the other elements of the marketing mix: (4p) product, promotion and product distribution.

We can find two marketing theories that might be relevant to our problem, theories related to the position held by the consumer – the voter. According to P. Kotler, marketing is “a social and management process that allows individuals and groups to receive whatever they want and need. This goal is maintained by creating suitable products.” (Kotler 1994: 7) On the other hand, M. Bongrand presents the essence of marketing as “techniques that help to adjust the product to the market, make it known to the consumer, make it better than the competition and make an optimum profit bearing limited costs.” (Bongrand 1986: 5, in: Mazur 2004: 16) Marketing parties emphasize their openness and their competence in reacting to social needs. They contrast those values with the decadence of the political class, the experience of the Communist parties, and other groups that pursued grand ideas. They use marketing techniques and treat it as a great advantage. Marketing parties provide society with the values most in demand: attention to and

concentration on social problems – they know how to treat and listen to people. Everything that could be a disadvantage is turned into an advantage. A great example might be Sylvio Berlusconi's declaration – “If somebody is concave I will be convex, if somebody is convex I will be concave” (Jędrzyk – Wojciechowski, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 08.12.2003), or yet a different statement: “I am trying to follow the great example of Ronald Reagan, who was always telling people whatever they wanted to hear” (D'Anna – Moncalvo 1994: *Berlusconi in Concert*, p. 363, quoted in: Croci 2001: 361). In spite of potential arguments that might regard Berlusconi as a representative of arrogant political extremism, we recall the words of Robert Fico and his opinion about Fyodor Flasičkov⁴⁴ who was responsible for the Smer election campaign in 2002. According to Fico, Flasičkov was “a person that could turn water into either cacao or Pepsi-cola” (Kollar – Mesežnikov 2000: 120). These examples reveal what leaders of these parties think about the importance of the political parties and the citizens who are more likely to choose water than some more noble drink. This type of thinking causes some doubts about the sincerity of some of these leaders' intentions. It is also questionable whether it is possible for the marketing parties to rebuild the connection between the party and the society⁴⁵.

If we put together two things, the declarations by the leaders of marketing parties that they consider the citizen as a very important subject, and the special techniques that are used to attract social attention, we can see the process of manipulation. Naturally we can interpret these techniques as a proof that marketing parties want to understand their voter-clients, or as a political pragmatism that helps them to be more efficient (especially when we are talking about attracting voters). All those techniques help the parties to reach their goals and be successful.

If we emphasize the role a political party as a creator of the party system, the discussion about political marketing is even more interesting. Political marketing focuses on the principal concern of the party (or organization) – the consumer (Mazur 2005: 17). Unfortunately, this cannot be considered a perfect reflection of party relations with the public today. It is hard to reconcile two tendencies: the party depends on the state more and more, it separates itself from the society, while at the same time presenting itself as a product on the political market. The explanation for this contradiction might be that marketing parties do not constitute a separate,

⁴⁴ Fiodor Flasičkov is former owner of a marketing firm “Donar”, which was responsible for preparing the election campaign for HZDS prior to the 1998 elections – it is equally interesting to observe the path pursued by pragmatic, and perhaps even cynical, professionals dealing with the sale of political products.

⁴⁵ “The political discourse in the media (television) should be billed as “press news” because that is precisely what an average person is able to understand” (Mannheimer: *Il marketing del Cavaliere*, “Corriere della Sera”, 6 August 1998, Croci 2001: 362).

independent trend in political developments. Naturally, we can create a theoretical model, but political objects are very specific. Marketing parties understand the changes, and show better sensitivity towards electoral perceptions and the different roles of a party in the political system. Political parties do not need loyal members and large structures to survive. What they need is the vote of citizens, which will lead them to government structures and power, and assure them political existence and development. Those are the only values that are important for a party. As a result, parties have not lost their social basis. Moreover, they are not interested in social support any more. They are looking for voters everywhere without paying any particular attention to old loyal members. In the post-Communist countries, this tendency is related to the symbolic experience whereby the citizen gave up his own independence to the state – but he has the right to control it and decide not to participate in next elections (Staniszki 2001: 93). Based on this information, we must admit that the model that we had been trying to form was actually an adaptation of the tendency to political and social relations.

Returning to our evaluation of marketing parties as a distinct type of entity, we must address the question of how those entities fulfill the functions assigned to political parties in the political system. In the context of that issue, we might even ask another question that is not really related to our subject. Do modern democracies really need political parties? Are they still fundamental entities that can facilitate important public issues? Can they be replaced by other non-governmental organizations or different groups that can potentially represent the voice of the society?

Political functions can be ranked according their relevance for society, party members, the institutions of power, and the political system as a whole⁴⁶. Here we are trying to focus on the relations between the party and the society; therefore, it is important to mention the following: the process of nominating candidates in the election campaign, electoral mobilization, emphasizing important issues and alternatives, representing social groups and interest aggregation. According to P.G. Lewis, the functions of political parties in post-Communist countries involve: identification of future goals, articulation and aggregation of interests, society

⁴⁶ Quoting M. Grabowska, R.Gunther and L.Diamond, seven principal functions of a party might be listed: nominating candidates in the elections, mobilizing the electorate, articulating important issues and alternatives, representing social groups, aggregating interests, forming and giving support to the government, as well as integrating citizens with politics (Gunther – Diamond 2001: 7-9, quoted in: Grabowska 2004: 207).

mobilization and socialization, the recruitment process, and creation of governments (Lewis 2000: 156, in: Grabowska 2004: 207).

Establishing stability of marketing conception for political parties would cause changes in relations between the citizens and the party. Previously, the function of parties concentrated more on providing a service: they educated society, and introduced new ideas in the areas where they held specific political competence. The principle of the marketing party rejects this conception completely. When a marketing party becomes a flexible product, it must adapt to fluctuating social demand each time such a necessity presents itself. That does not allow a marketing party to realize the tasks defined as follows in the German Constitution: “political parties cooperate in the political shaping of the national will” (art.21&1)⁴⁷. As already mentioned, marketing groups answer to or create expectations voiced by their target group, turning away from the holistic vision of social development. In practice, accepting the development model of marketing parties would mean the end of party politics defined as the ability to mobilize and integrate people in a democratic process (Dalton 2002: 19).

Accepting the model that the party is a product made to meet specific demands could also lead to various consequences in terms of the socializing function, which is strongly related to the issue of who (personally) is responsible for carrying it out. Here we have the issue of the candidate selection. If we free the politicians from their responsibility, and do not allow them to create demanded attitudes, it might lead to the redefinition of the political elite. It is possible for the politicians to resign from the mentor function? Leadership has long been inseparable from politics. Would they agree to a passive function whereby they would be merely representing the features that are expected by electors? In that case, the candidate selection would be restricted to competition based on the physical features of a given candidate (looks, height, etc.). Assuming that marketing parties are not manipulative, that they represent the real answer to the new expectations and rules of social communication, the effects they produce can be dangerous to the political class; i.e. people who consider national and social issues very seriously. This could cause a decrease in political standards, and thus a crisis in the sociological function of the party, which is one of the fundamental characteristics of a functioning democracy (Aberbach – Putnam – Rockman 1981, quoted in: Dalton 2003: 6). This is one perspective on the appearance of marketing parties and their success in post-communist countries: that these groups are trying to

⁴⁷ German Constitution of 23 May 1949, with subsequent changes (<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/eurodocs/germ/ggeng.html>, accessed on 29.09.2005).

use this very effect to influence social expectations, appearing to abandon the leadership function and present themselves as mere executors of the public will.

We must also mention the importance of marketing parties in terms of the formation political plans and political decisions. The marketing view of the political program is based on “treating voters as groupings of different demographical and social segments with different needs and expectations” (Mazur 2005: 65). This forces the party to examine social expectations. The public opinion poll is usually the main source of political market information (Mazur 2005: 77). The quality of the data and its reliability is determined by the source. G. Satori has addressed the question of social knowledge in relevance to public issues, stating that “ignorance, lack of interest, a distorted picture, and finally the total ignorance exhibited by the average citizen do not cease to amaze an observer (...) in all democracies the electoral polls and surveys continue to paint a rather sad picture of the information base (...) of a large majority of citizens” (Sartori 1998: 136). In that case, if parties are creating their program as a response to that kind of voter, it might be a satisfying product. Yet, its quality is not a good example of a well-balanced and long-term project – take for instance popular support for stricter criminal law as a response to deteriorating perceptions of public safety in the eyes of the citizens. The opinion poll is not only a research tool, but also a method of influencing social feelings, needs, and modifying people’s attitudes. One of the difficult communication techniques is to form, select, and present questions properly. If the decision-making process at the national level is based on citizens’ perceptions that are in reality a collection of postulates foisted upon them by marketing specialists, we confront two political visions for a country being governed by such methods. First, we might predict a governmental crisis. This crisis would be caused by the same strategy that helped the government win in the first place. The second alternative is a return to elite pluralism. That theory claims that an average citizen is not sufficiently qualified to participate in public affairs. Marketing techniques are thus needed to create an illusion of citizen participation in public life, of a democratic system, and to separate rational administration from the emotion and confusion of public opinion (Lippmann 1927, quoted in: Bucy – Gregson 2001: 361).

The image of marketing parties that we have so far construed is that of targeted manipulation that helps to fulfill the aspirations of party leaders. When we compare it to the party types described earlier (Table 1), we might paradoxically conclude that the category a marketing party is unnecessary. However, we can show that there is a specific kind of a strategy that allows the party to function on the political stage. We must keep in mind that those parties become less attractive

for the voters whenever there is more than one such entity on the political stage. It shows that marketing parties must adhere to the tactic of “escaping ahead”, of “being first in line”, yet they have little chance to survive unless they change the essence of their activities. One more time we refer to Slovakia’s Smer party – when this political product reached its maturity stage (referring to the marketing theory of product life cycle (Foxal – Goldsmith 1998: 23-28), it decided to modernize – and Smer merged with the SDL. Fico left his party, separating himself from that group to create his new political party. This action might be defined as creating a new product by exploiting an old brand (Smer). We can conclude that marketing parties are adapting and getting close to the previous models already described.

These considerations have been related to certain theoretical assumptions, but it is worthwhile to present the case in which classical groups are faced with a new social perception on a given political stage. The German elections to the Bundestag (September 18, 2005) might serve as a valuable example. During the elections almost one million voters changed their minds and decided to vote for the New Left instead of the SPD; over one million left the CDU-CSU for the FDP, and 640 000 previous SPD voters went over to the Christian-Democrats. In the week before the election, around 4 million people changed their preferences, and 29 % undecided German voters made up their minds (Zagrodzka, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 24-25.09.2005). That was not the only surprise during the elections in Germany. Another surprise was the phenomenon of a personalized election that we described before. As a result of a televised debate between A. Merkel and G. Schroeder, support for SPD increased by 2 %⁴⁸ – an example of the personalized politics of perception. This situation demonstrates that the social impulse can force traditional groups to redefine their identity in terms of a given product. The unpredictability of behavioral patterns is related to the perceived threat that these groups – as it happened in Germany – may see the losses outweigh the gains as they are threatened with losing their loyal electors. The most common mistake nowadays is when political parties forget about their loyal voters and focus on undecided and passive voters. The most important lesson is to continue devoting proper attention to loyal voters. Parties should not use marketing techniques to increase the size of the target group because it does not need people with fluctuating preferences or voters electors – especially because people disappointed with their party may withdraw from political activity forever.

⁴⁸ The debate was watched by 20 mil. viewers. While A. Merkel was better prepared and more competent in the opinion of political experts, in the eyes of the viewers it was Schroeder who came out victorious, as he personified strength and experience; *ibidem*.

Conclusion

The appearance of marketing parties on the political stage might be treated as an indicator of changes in public environment in the last few years. Our conclusions about the political market indicate many challenges for modern democracy – some that are already quite visible, some that are only slowly becoming apparent.

According to the arguments presented in this article, marketing parties can sometimes be seen as a threat to the process of political recruitment, civic socialization, and long-term strategy for a country. In this case we may ask if it is beneficial for a democratic system to host those kinds of political groups. Their essence is to use and manipulate social preferences; the party's survival depends on this principle. J. Staniszkis suggests that this is not such an important issue for the post-Communist countries. Their political elites have little influence, with little competence, and few ethical rules. Here, limits on the influence of democratic institutions and elected politicians could be an advantage. The coordination of the political process, its “management”, will be placed with external entities, while the rest will remain a mere facade⁴⁹.

We must also deal with another criticism directed toward marketing parties, which stand accused of simplifying political relations and devaluing the importance of ideas in the political environment. On the contrary, those parties can be used as a framework for the improvement of political standards. Through them, issues that become important for citizens tend to be addressed immediately as a part of the party program. And when one of the myths of democracy – that of the rational voter – finally comes true, marketing parties will no longer be a threat to the efficiency of the democratic system. Yet the question of whether the marketing parties will continue to be a distinct type under such conditions remains open.

Considering the future of marketing parties, we have to remember that their attractiveness is strongly related to the novelty effect on the political stage. Presuming that all the parties follow the marketing path, the party as an institution will lose one of its most important attributes. Regarding the traditional view that one of party functions is to transfer social preferences to the

⁴⁹ Professor Staniszkis predicts that the most probable scenario is that of an “irrelevant democracy” limited to a legitimizing ritual reinforcing the political class (yet not elite, but more of a level of management). J. Staniszkis points out that, at least in principle, under the present-day realities, it is somewhat irrelevant whether the marketing parties, or some different model becomes predominant, because the real power will remain outside the formal institutions of the post-Communist state. (Staniszkis 2001: 106).

political decision-making process, we have to ask one question: Is it possible to better fulfill consumer/elector expectations? Is it possible to raise the level of fulfilling their “wishes” and at the same time reach political goals? Will we be able to find responsible entities on the political stage to create civic attitudes? If we do not find them, what kind of voters will marketing parties have to deal with? Would it still be a democracy, or would it be (as argued by J. Staniszkis) a manipulation – a show for the people, with the new oligarchy holding the reins? Marketing parties may fall into the trap of a tendency to oversimplify, adjusting the picture of reality to the level of the audience, a level that is rarely a demanding one, and thus abandon their socializing function. It may therefore be predicted that the quality of political discourse will systematically decline.

One more time it is worthwhile to mention the influence of marketing parties on classical political groups. Marketing parties (even if they are similar in their roots to the ones described in the specific examples above) give an impulse for more prompt changes. One of the consequences is that classical groups are looking for new techniques and channels to improve their communication with society. Cyber parties may even appear on the political stage. This potential phenomenon will build direct individual relations with voters through IT network systems. This type of relationship has already been termed as CMC (*computer-mediated communication*) (Tambini 1999: 305-329). This represents a chance to revive active social participation in political life. It facilitates parties in adjusting to the new environment without treating politics as a market. CMC enables parties to avoid certain traps that are part of the issues of party commercialization and state control. Nevertheless this project is a rather distant one, especially for this part of Europe.

It is very important to remember that the marketing party model can be an easy way for the party founders to reach their own goals. The great advantage of those parties is their ability to enter the market very quickly, without long discussions held with the various social groups and their factions. Moreover, those groups are controllable, either through internal management, or prompt reaction to the outside changes. That is the key advantage that defines their competitiveness against the classical groups. It is no longer enough for modern political activity to be efficient, it is also important to act fast.

To sum up, we should continue to try and answer to the question of whether the new evolutionary pattern of political parties is unique to the present-day political stage. At this level of observation, with current information about the changes in the European party system, it would be too early to make any definite claims. The first reason is that observations on those parties have been carried out only over a short period of time. The second reason – even more

important than period of observation – is the dynamic evolution on the part of some marketing groups towards becoming the types of parties which have been previously distinguished by political scientists, and their adaptation to predominant patterns of political activities in a particular environmental setting.

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