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Improving Political Marketing Strategies to Enhance Electoral Performance for Moroccan Political Parties

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This study aims to understand how political marketing strategies adopted by political parties in Morocco can improve electoral performance. Methodology: The paper uses a qualitative study approach based on multiple case study research methods examining three political parties and validating three criteria categories. A contextualization study based on exploratory and desk research was conducted to explore and frame the context. The thematic analysis applied to the responses from the two qualitative studies (exploratory and descriptive).

Discussion: The findings of this study highlight the need for the essential use of political marketing to improve political performance. In our context, political marketing is an ethical alternative to fanatic discourse, clientelism, and corruption that, unethically, strongly influences voters. Some political parties unconsciously use political marketing tools; the electoral results of those who do so are more satisfactory than those who do not.

Conclusion: This study explores political marketing in a new context. It also contributes to the literature and attempts to assess the effectiveness of political marketing tools in the Moroccan context.

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Introduction

Political marketing has become one of the most important variables determining the outcome of an election in the fluid environment of the modern political process. Political marketing is a process that entails a set of strategies, tactics, and methods used in marketing political parties, candidates, and their policies, just as commercial marketing promotes products and services in society [1]. These strategies can affect a party's election performance if adopted and developed [2]. This research aims to try to understand the efficiency of the power of political marketing within the Moroccan environment and how some political parties' strategies can significantly improve their performance. The general research paradigm of this article focuses on the idea of contributing an effective instrument to the Moroccan political context. It is not a question of redefining the concept here. Still, establishing a helpful definition corresponding to Moroccan politicians' expectations on one side would be useful for implementing this instrument on the other [3]. There are several ways through which political science looks at electoral politics, one of which is political marketing. Political marketing as an academic discipline has become more critical over the last 20 years [4]. The term political marketing is a comparatively recent addition to the political science literature as it has become significant in contemporary democracies where the politicization of the masses is inevitable for political parties to come into power.

Marketing communication is applied to political campaigns to change voters' behavior and perceptions [5]. Indeed, the influence of marketing on the operational strategies of political parties can be seen as they employ enhanced techniques in the communication process with the voters, the development of persuasive appeals, and the control of the image [6]. However, despite the increasing significance of the concept in the political sphere, the lack of a progressive and encompassing knowledge of political marketing among political actors persists. Surprisingly, many politicians and party strategists are not well-versed in most marketing communication techniques and are inclined to use conventional techniques rather than technological and analytic strategies. This gap indicates a need for a more profound implementation of marketing principles in political work to increase the efficiency of electoral campaigns and, as a result, political activity. Examining political marketing in Morocco from a comparative angle between the perceptions of politicians and the conceptual framework of scientists' attempts to answer one of this research's fundamental questions: What factors make it challenging to implement a political marketing strategy.

The political system of Morocco is a constitutional monarchy with a multi-party system; therefore, it offers an interesting case study for political marketing. The nation has experienced many political transformations and evolutions in the last few decades, resulting in a more open contestation of electoral democracy [7]. In this context, political parties aim to reach out to the dynamic electorate; this makes the place of marketing strategies crucial. Political marketing involves the following significant components:

communication, media, public relations, person-to-person canvassing, and polling and research [8]. These strategies aim to target various segments of voters with the help of traditional and new media to achieve the maximum possible result. However, it is equally essential to understand Moroccan culture and social setting to influence voters' beliefs and values.

The current qualitative study seeks to understand how political marketing strategies enhance electoral performance among Moroccan parties. In this context, the findings of this study are based on the analysis of successful campaigns, the consideration of the socio-political context, and the identification of the challenges and opportunities in the Moroccan political environment, which are helpful for political practitioners and scholars.

Literature Review
Conceptualization of Political Marketing
As conceptualized in several recent studies, including those by Sophocleous et al. and Naheed et al., political marketing represents a set of strategies to influence citizens' electoral behaviour. Sophocleous et al. highlight the interrelationship between political marketing, election campaigns, and the impact of advertising on electoral choices, underscoring the importance of understanding the dynamics between advertising and electoral behaviour. Their research advocates a methodical, voter-centric approach to political campaigns [10-11].

Naheed & Chowdhury highlight the importance of the American Marketing Association (AMA) in political parties' identifying voters' needs and using political marketing effectively to deliver optimal services. Their study recommends applying McCarthy's 4P model (Product, price, place, and promotion) adapted with customized adjustments from the generic marketing mix proposed by Booms and Bitner (1981), thus incorporating a wide range of political variables [12-15].

Three dimensions of political marketing strategy are explored: design, emergence, and interpretation. Political design involves the creation of a clear plan from the outset, while emergent strategies are developed in response to immediate situations, although they may lack logical coherence. Political organizations draw on experience and learn from feedback mechanisms such as market research. Interpretive strategy, conversely, implies that political organizations seek to influence and transform their environment rather than interact with it [16].

The political marketing approach is emerging as an adaptation of marketing to political processes, as Çakırkaya & Koçyiğit points out. There has been a noticeable increase in the integration of marketing approaches into political initiatives. This is because applications such as target market determination, segmentation, market research, promotion, etc., which are included in political marketing processes, are essentially marketing approach studies [17-18]. Political marketing involves applying the 4Ps of marketing to political parties and candidates. Their proposals are based on research showing that candidates use various marketing

policies for their election, such as product policy, price policy, distribution policy, and promotion [19-21]. The 4P concept of political marketing includes Product (program, individual characteristics), Price (paid advertising, public relations), Place (economic and emotional expenditure), and Promotion (public presence, awareness agenda).

Nonprofit organization Performance
They initially introduced the concept of performance in commercial and industrial contexts, where profit-oriented organizations aimed to maximize their financial gains [22]. There is a difference between for-profit and nonprofit organizations in how they define profit. Profit-making organizations have the primary purpose of making profits and creating wealth for the owners, and the difference between income and expenses determines the success of these [23-24]. In general, higher profits are considered signs of an organization's higher performance. On the other hand, the mission or goal of nonprofit organizations is to deliver public services. One of the most important tasks in performance management is linking the mission of nonprofit public and professional organizations to performance measures [25-26]. While for-profit companies focus on indicators such as profit and market share, nonprofit organizations have the problem of finding suitable yet efficient ways to measure the quality of services they offer to their communities. The assessment of the performance of a nonprofit organization is, in some ways, more complicated because it is necessary to consider the time horizons of the problems they solve; the missions of such organizations are often longer than the gestation period of a professional organization. Thus, the effectiveness or inefficiency of a nonprofit organization may not be evident for quite some time. This time-based distinction is essential as it highlights nonprofit organizations' trade-offs, like policy impact, service delivery, and program implementation [27].

Problem Frame
By examining the central and sub-questions in Table 1, this study aims to shed light on the potential benefits and challenges of applying the political marketing approach. It provides valuable insights for Moroccan political parties striving to enhance their electoral performance and achieve favourable election outcomes. One of the primary challenges any political party faces is to improve its electoral performance and secure enough votes to form a governmental majority. Consequently, a central question arises regarding the potential efficacy of employing a political marketing approach to enhance election outcomes significantly. This inquiry becomes crucial considering the recent prevalence of unpredictable election results and the absence of robust and predictive polling methodologies.

Central Research Question
How can using political marketing tools improve the electoral performance of Moroccan parties? Sub-questions of the research are in Table 1.

Table 1. Sub Questions of the Research.

Target Selection	In the Moroccan political landscape, what factors and considerations influence the choices made by politicians when selecting their target demographics?
Determinants of Parliamentary Election Results	How did the digital transformation of political marketing strategies affect the outcome of the 2016 general election in Morocco?
Impact of Digital Political Marketing Transformation	What barriers and challenges hinder politicians from effectively utilizing political marketing techniques in their campaigns?
Barriers to Political Marketing Adoption	What barriers and challenges hinder politicians from effectively utilizing political marketing techniques in their campaigns?
The Influence of Political Marketing on Electoral Performance	To what extent does the implementation of political marketing practices impact the performance of political parties in elections?

Methodology

By adopting an interpretivist epistemological positioning and utilizing a qualitative research approach, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities associated with political decision-making and the implementation of effective political marketing strategies. The mixed strategy of case and conceptual analysis, along with the principles of Coding, ensures rigorous data analysis and enhances the validity of the findings.

Embracing Interpretivism: Addressing Objectivity Challenges

From an interpretivist perspective, this study recognizes the subjective nature of knowledge and accepts the researchers' involvement in political organizations. Thus, the relativistic approach enables the investigation of how the researchers' views and communication with the political actors contribute to understanding political marketing strategies.

In light of this, one is forced to question the objectivity of the research since the researchers are active in political organizations. On the other hand, adopting interpretivism facilitates the recognition of the researchers' subjectivity and engagement with the political decision-makers and the phenomena that negatively influence the application of political marketing strategies.

Qualitative Approach for Understanding Human Decision-Making

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to understand the nature and reasons for political decisions. This approach enables a broad appreciation of the nature of the phenomenon under study by exploring the meanings and perceptions of the actors.

Political marketing is still poorly understood in the context of the study, which is why the current qualitative research is needed. In this case, by analyzing the contextual details of the statements given by the actors, it becomes possible to reveal such essential aspects as the actors' attitudes towards the organizational environment, changes, and the role of legislation.

Research Case Analysis: Mixed Strategy of Cases and Concepts

This study employs a mixed strategy that combines case and conceptual analysis. This approach facilitates data triangulation, enhancing the findings' validity and reliability. Thus, two fundamentally different types of analyses were carried out. A literature review was done to identify the unique features of each political party, their internal structures, and the general marketing strategy. Self-administered questionnaires were then given to each party's senior management to uncover contextual factors that might have led to differences in their marketing strategies and performance. This step was to discover the contextual factors that

may have led to the differences in the marketing strategies and performance. The second step was conducting a thematic analysis of the interviews with all the respondents. The aim was to explain and compare the process of political marketing management and the resources used and identify variables that influenced various stages.

Principles of Coding

Two fundamental principles of Coding are the unit of analysis and the category. Following the unit of analysis allows for the division and extraction of meaningful units from the data [28]. These units are subsequently classified into selected categories, as conceptualized by as classes of signified that group together units of analysis with similar meanings or properties. This categorization process enables the researchers to identify patterns, themes, and recurring elements within the data For collecting empirical data for the study, several methodological decisions were taken regarding case selection, targeting interviewees, and developing an interview guide [29].

Methodological decisions: Case selection, interviews, and interview guide
Interview Guide

An interview guide was developed based on the key research questions identified in the literature review. This guide is structured around essential thematic axes to ensure comprehensive coverage of all significant aspects related to the research topic. It features semi-structured questions that specifically examine the impact of political marketing techniques on the performance of political parties.

The guide is organized around the following key axes:
- Impact of Political Marketing Tools: Exploration of how the use of political marketing tools enhances the electoral performance of Moroccan parties.
- Consequences of Absence: Examination of how the lack of political marketing tools influenced the outcomes of the 2016 legislative elections for certain parties.
- Influence of Digital Revolution: Analysis of how the digital revolution in political marketing has impacted the results of the 2016 legislative elections.
- Perception of Political Marketing: Investigation into why Moroccan political parties assign limited importance to political marketing.
- Human Resources and Qualifications: Assessment of whether the human resources within Moroccan political parties are adequately qualified to implement effective political marketing strategies.
- Electorate Selection: Understanding how political decision-makers in Morocco select their electorate.

The initial section of the interview guide focuses specifically on party members, while the latter section addresses both observers and politicians, facilitating a comparative analysis. By employing these methodological choices, this research aims to gather in-depth and diverse perspectives on political marketing strategies and their impact on political party performance [3032].

Case Selection and Interviews
Given the limited marketing practices among Moroccan political parties, which can be attributed in part to budget constraints and a lack of specialized expertise distinct from corporate marketing, this research focuses on parties that have been established for over ten years and possess a clear organizational structure. While newer parties may adopt innovative marketing practices, their organizational development typically lags behind that of more experienced parties.

Following the explanatory case study approach outlined by we selected between two and three cases when "the theory is simple and the issue does not require a high degree of certainty". Considering the criteria for theoretical saturation and the feasibility of accessing relevant information, we opted for three cases:
- A party that experienced a significant gain of 9.5 points.
- A party that remained stagnant.
- A party that suffered a decline of 3.5 points.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding, we carefully selected interviewees holding key positions within the political parties. Participants included:
- Two party leaders (the Secretary General and the Vice Secretary General)
- Three deputies (including one young deputy and two female deputies)
- A national party communication officer
- The party headquarters director
- A provincial secretary
- A young section member
- An executive board member of the party

In addition to interviewing individuals from within the political parties, we sought the perspectives of external observers to provide additional depth and minimize potential biases. The external interviewees included:
- Two independent political journalists
- A partisan newspaper editor
- A marketing consultant
- An academic

This diverse study population facilitates a rich analysis of political marketing practices and their impact on electoral performance. The interview guide was designed to cover various axes relevant to our research objectives. It is structured to elicit information about:
- The party's background, including its founders, ideology, governance, and organizational functioning.
- The party's target audience, encompassing members and supporters.
- The outcomes of the 2016 legislative elections, focusing on campaign strategies, budgeting, and communication efforts.
- The role of digital marketing in the campaign and its impact on electoral results.
- The barriers and facilitators to implementing political marketing strategies.

The administration of the interview guide will be conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing for flexibility while ensuring consistency in the information sought from both party members and observers.

Data Analysis Strategy
In this study, we employed a rigorous qualitative approach to analyze political marketing through semi-structured interviews conducted with political parties. The research unfolded in two phases. Initially, interviews with observers provided context for understanding political marketing and exploring how parties organize themselves and their respective performances. The insights gained from these interviews informed the development of our final interview guides for the individual interviews with the studied parties. Once consent was obtained, interviews were conducted in confidential settings, ensuring the safety of the respondents. We conducted a total of 15 interviews, supplemented by secondary documentation, while adhering to qualitative research quality standards.

Research Conduct and Analysis
For data analysis, we adopted a mixed strategy, combining in-depth case studies with thematic analysis, facilitated by the software Tropes. This approach allowed us to code and categorize the data effectively while ensuring the reliability and validity of our findings through triangulation techniques and achieving theoretical saturation. The results provide valuable insights into political marketing practices tailored to the diverse contexts of the parties studied, enhancing our understanding of the varying strategies employed in political marketing.

Discussion
In analyzing the Moroccan political landscape, during the 2016 legislative elections, several key factors influenced politicians' choices regarding target demographics. A party's ability to adapt to the socio-economic and cultural contexts of various voter groups is crucial. The PJD exemplifies this adaptability by tailoring its messaging to resonate with both urban and rural audiences, as well as younger and older voters, maximizing its overall appeal.

The digital transformation of political marketing strategies significantly impacted the outcomes of the 2016 elections. The PJD effectively utilized social media and other digital tools, allowing for direct engagement with voters and enhancing its visibility among younger demographics. This strategic use of digital platforms played a vital role in galvanizing grassroots support.

However, challenges remain for parties like the USFP, which is facing an identity crisis and struggles to connect with younger voters. The party's slow adaptation to modern communication methods and the lack of a dedicated communication structure hinder its effectiveness in leveraging digital marketing techniques.

The implementation of targeted political marketing practices has shown a considerable influence on electoral performance. The PJD's cohesive messaging, focused on youth mobilization and populist narratives, helped establish a strong party identity that resonated with the electorate, in stark contrast to the USFP's challenges in maintaining its relevance.

Thus, the analysis illustrates that the success of parties in the 2016 legislative elections was largely dependent on their ability to adapt to contemporary realities, effectively utilize digital tools, and engage voters through strategic communication.

Case Analysis 1: Exploring the Success Factors of PJD in Morocco's Political Landscape: 2016 Legislative Elections

The PJD's political marketing strategy is marked by a combination of contextual awareness, effective communication, populist narratives, youth mobilization, and charismatic leadership. These elements work synergistically to create a robust party identity that resonates with Moroccan voters. As the political landscape continues to evolve, the PJD's ability to adapt and refine its strategies will be crucial in maintaining its position within Morocco's dynamic political arena.Strategic Adaptation and Contextual Understanding: The PJD demonstrates a profound ability to adapt its strategies based on the socio-political context of Morocco. This adaptability is evident in its targeted communication styles tailored to various demographics. By shifting its language and approach depending on the audience urban vs. rural, young vs. older voters the PJD maximizes its appeal and engagement.

Integrated Communication Approach: The establishment of a dedicated communication department has enabled the PJD to craft a cohesive and effective message across multiple platforms. By leveraging digital tools, such as its website, social media channels, and even web radio, the party not only engages a broader audience but also cultivates a digital presence that rivals that of more established political entities. This comprehensive approach allows for immediate feedback and interaction with constituents, enhancing the party's visibility and relatability.

Populist and Victimhood Narratives: The use of populist rhetoric, particularly through the concept of "Tahakoum," underscores the PJD's strategy to position itself as a victim of powerful forces. This narrative not only galvanizes grassroots support but also frames the party as a defender of the common citizen against entrenched interests. Such a portrayal resonates deeply with voters who feel marginalized, thereby strengthening their loyalty to the PJD.

Youth Engagement and Mobilization: The PJD's ability to connect with the youth demographic is a significant asset. By portraying young supporters as active participants in a movement for change, the party effectively channels their energy and enthusiasm into its campaigns. This youth-centric approach not only refreshes the party's image but also cultivates a new generation of politically engaged citizens.

Leadership and Charismatic Authority: Abdelilah Benkirane emerges as a pivotal figure in the PJD's strategy, serving as both a charismatic leader and a skilled communicator. His ability to resonate with the electorate through relatable language and compelling narratives enhances the party's appeal. Benkirane's oratory skills have proven instrumental in transforming potential setbacks into electoral victories, showcasing the importance of personal branding in political success.

Crisis Management and Narrative Control: The PJD's history of facing crises, such as competition from rival parties, reveals its adeptness at narrative management. By framing challenges as part of a larger struggle against systemic forces, the party effectively mitigates negative impacts on its reputation and maintains voter trust.

Case Analysis 2: Assessing Communication Strategies and Challenges of the USFP

The USFP is a party rooted in a rich history but facing significant challenges in an ever-evolving political landscape. Its historical positioning and broad target audience are complicated by an identity crisis and strategic gaps in communication.

Historical and Ideological Heritage: The USFP positions itself as the leading socialist party in Morocco, claiming a historical legitimacy rooted in the struggle for democracy and social rights. It does not define itself as a revolutionary party, but rather as a defender of socialist principles through active political participation. The party emphasizes its historical role as an opposition force, highlighting the sacrifices of its members and their commitment to social justice. However, it is currently experiencing an identity crisis due to the aging of its leadership, leading to a loss of connection with its past.

Strategic Marketing: Positioning and Targeting: As one of the oldest parties, the USFP aims to reach a broad audience, engaging various social strata. While it has achieved some success, its electoral base is shrinking, particularly among the youth, whose representation is minimal. The majority of its members are aged between 45 and 65, indicating a generational imbalance. The competition from newer parties, which benefit from the opposition role, exacerbates this situation.

Operational Marketing: Electoral Program and Communication: Historically, the USFP relied on print media to promote its ideas, supported by a strong presence of journalists and intellectuals. However, voter behavior has evolved, making electoral programs less impactful. The party lacks an internal structure dedicated to communication, resulting in a lack of clear strategy. Additionally, the transition to modern communication tools has been slow, further hindered by the low involvement of younger members.

Internal Challenges: The USFP faces significant challenges in integrating new technologies into its communication. Old working structures impede adaptation to contemporary realities, and the party struggles to establish effective communication. The lack of a dedicated budget for communication reflects an insufficient awareness of its importance.

Case Analysis 3: Assessing the RNI in Morocco

The RNI is navigating a complex landscape as it repositions itself as a social-democratic party while maintaining its liberal roots. Through strategic marketing efforts aimed at engaging the youth and leveraging digital platforms, the party is attempting to modernize its approach and enhance its electoral appeal. However, challenges remain, particularly in bridging the gap between traditional practices and contemporary political marketing demands.

Strategic Marketing: Positioning and Targeting: The RNI employs a diverse range of communication strategies, addressing various demographics through multiple institutional channels, including the youth and women, who are seen as essential for the party's future. This targeting reflects the party's intent to resonate with a broad audience while fostering a connection with younger generations.

Operational Marketing: Electoral Program, Candidate Selection, and Communication Channels: The electoral program is crafted by specialized committees that gather data from various sources, including an online portal and political events. The RNI has established a candidacy committee allowing any Moroccan to apply for nomination, aiming to enhance openness and engagement with civil society. The party acknowledges existing organizational and ideological barriers but emphasizes the need for political parties to remain accessible to citizens.

Digital Transition: RNI 2.0: The RNI has made significant strides in digital marketing, previously engaging external communication agencies for its campaigns. Since 2016, the party has developed a digital communication strategy, focusing on social media engagement and interactive communication. The party has set ambitious goals for its digital presence, including institutionalizing digital communication and increasing social media followers. This strategy reflects an understanding of modern electoral dynamics, where digital interaction is crucial for connecting with the electorate.

Performance and Challenges: Despite the strategic developments, the party faces challenges, particularly in its ability to connect with younger voters and adapt to rapidly changing communication landscapes. While efforts are being made to institutionalize digital strategies, the transition from traditional to modern marketing practices remains ongoing.

Conclusion

This research identifies the effects of political marketing practices on Moroccan political parties' election outcomes with the help of an analytical framework that has three perspectives. The first dimension of the marketing strategy is the social and cultural environment, which focuses on how the firms' promotional activities fit into society. The second dimension relates to integrating digital technology in marketing communication initiatives, where attention is paid to the resources mobilized and their relevance to the target public. The third dimension focuses on multiple interactions and marketing communication as relational activities that change over prior conversations, experiences, and events. This analytical framework aims to offer a vast perspective of how political marketing practices influence the elections' results while incorporating more than just partisan strategies. Future research can build on these dimensions and examine other factors that can affect the outcome of the elections in Moroccan politics. These issues can help get a better perspective of the variability in the effects on electoral results.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study focuses on Moroccan political parties, which may limit our ability to generalize the results to other political systems or countries. We acknowledge that Morocco's socio-political situation might differ from that of other nations, which could restrict the generalization of our findings. From a methodological perspective, the interpretivism paradigm offers rich insights into the phenomenon we are investigating, but it is based on our interpretation of the interview data, which may introduce bias into our study and findings. Additionally, our research may not capture how strategies evolve over time or during non-election periods, thus limiting our understanding of the dynamics of political marketing within the political process.

In the future, we suggest expanding the sample to include more parties, particularly new and lesser-known ones, to make our research more inclusive of political marketing. Furthermore, future studies should monitor changes in the digital environment and focus on new social networks and other digital tools that influence political marketing communication. By integrating concepts from marketing, political science, sociology, and technology studies, we believe we can deepen our insights into political marketing and uncover new strategies that could enhance political participation and electoral success.

Declarations and statements
Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Author Contribution
The author contributed to the study's design, analysis, and interpretation of data, as well as the writing of the manuscript.

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