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### Marketing With a Feeling: The Brand New Party Junilistan in the Swedish European Parliamentary Election 2004

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## **Marketing With a Feeling: The Brand New Party Junilistan in the Swedish European Parliamentary Election 2004**

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*The objective of this article is to analyze the brand new political party Junilistan in the Swedish European Parliamentary election in 2004. The article discusses whether Junilistan can be characterized as a market-oriented party, to what extent the party implemented political marketing techniques, and how the electoral success of Junilistan can be explained. The results indicate that Junilistan can be described as a “quasi-market-oriented” party, in the sense that it was inspired by perceptions of unfulfilled voter needs. However, its electoral success should mainly be explained by other factors, such as the second-ranking nature of European Parliamentary elections and growing distrust of established parties in Sweden.*

**KEYWORDS** *campaigning, EP elections, new party, political marketing, professionalization*

Remarkable things sometimes happen in rather unremarkable settings. In the European Parliamentary (EP) election campaign in Sweden in 2004, almost none of the “usual suspects” in the political communication system seemed to care much about the campaign. In what could be described as a halfhearted democratic performance, political parties cut back their campaign budgets to one-third of national election campaign budgets, the media coverage in the last 3 weeks diminished to about one third compared to national election coverage, and slightly fewer than 4 out of 10 Swedes

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**TABLE 1** Swedish National Election 2002 and EP Election 2004: Budgets, Media, and Voter Turnout

Election	Total Campaign Budget	Total Press Coverage	Total TV Coverage	Voter Turnout
National election 2002	16 M€	392 600 cm <sup>2</sup>	624 min	80%
EP election 2004	5 M€	119 800 cm <sup>2</sup>	222 min	38%

*Note:* The campaign budgets of all parties are included. Media coverage during the last 3 weeks of the campaign in four leading national dailies and three leading TV network news programs is shown.

eligible to vote actually cast their vote on Election Day, which is about half the voter turnout in national elections (Table 1).

Nevertheless, some people voted, and a surprisingly large share voted for a completely new party, Junilistan, which was established just about 4 months before the election. The new party received 14.5% of the votes, thus becoming the third largest Swedish party in the EP. Never before in contemporary Swedish politics has a new party achieved such a success in its first election campaign.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, there are many reasons to ask why the new party Junilistan did so well in the Swedish EP election in 2004. More specifically, and within the context of this issue, it is important to study whether the electoral success of Junilistan can be explained by theories of political marketing and the professionalization of political campaigning.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this article is to analyze the electoral success of Junilistan in the Swedish EP election in 2004. More specifically, three research questions are asked:

- Should Junilistan be characterized as a market-oriented party?
- To what extent did Junilistan implement political marketing techniques in its campaigning?
- How can the electoral success of Junilistan be explained with regard to the political communication system in Sweden?

Methodologically, this article is mainly based on semistructured interviews with eight persons within the party leadership of Junilistan: three members of the EP, three members of the board of the party, one party secretary, and the head of the party office in Stockholm. The interviews were conducted in November 2004.

This article consists of four sections. First, we will briefly describe the new party, Junilistan, and its roots. Thereafter, we will shortly review

the literature about political marketing and political market orientation within the context of the Swedish political communication system. In the third section, we will present the results before, in the last section, we draw some conclusions regarding the importance of the national and electoral context in understanding political marketing practices.

### THE NEW PARTY JUNILISTAN: A BRIEF HISTORY

The electoral outcome in general and the magnitude of Junilistan's success in particular surprised most political analysts and probably also the leadership of the new party. In their most optimistic estimates, the latter hoped for about 12% of the votes (Lydén and Wärme, 2005).

Junilistan was created in February 2004, just about 4 months before the election. However, discussions about founding a new party had started during the campaigns before the Swedish referendum about the common European currency, the Euro, held in September 2003. It was a referendum in which 55.9% voted against adopting the Euro, whereas 42% voted in favor.

Since the "no" campaign had considerably fewer resources and conducted a campaign that was less professionalized than the "yes" campaign (Strömbäck, 2004), this result can be interpreted as a kind of revolt against the political and economic elites in Sweden (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004; Oscarsson, 2004a; Oskarson, 2004). Furthermore, exit polls showed that 13% of the voters were in favor of Sweden belonging to the European Union (EU), although they were opposed to Sweden adopting the Euro (Oscarsson, 2004b).

Two of the leading spokespersons for the "no" campaign were Nils Lundgren, a well-known economist who viewed himself as a social democrat but belonged to the right wing of the party, and Lars Wohlin, a former head of the Swedish Central Bank. During the "no" campaigning, they found out that they had similar ideas with regard to the EU. Both wanted Sweden to remain a member of the EU, but both also said no to further integration and what they perceived as centralization within the EU.

Thus, after the referendum, talks about founding a party continued, and in February 2004, the new party and its candidates were presented. In the Swedish context, Junilistan was a rather odd party, with both left-wing and right-wing candidates on the ballot. The party did not argue for Sweden to leave the EU but emphasized the importance of nonfederal and nation-based political decision-making processes within the union. The Swedish electorate perceived it as an EU-negative party, but not as critical of the EU as the Greens and the Left Party. Its most prominent and outspoken candidates were Nils Lundgren and Lars Wohlin, both in their 70s.

The question then is: How could this party, with two leaders with virtually no experience in party politics, win 14.5% of the votes and three

seats in the EP in only 4 months? Was it because Junilistan was market-oriented and managed to run an effective campaign, utilizing modern political marketing techniques?

## POLITICAL MARKET ORIENTATION AND PROFESSIONALIZED CAMPAIGNING

First of all, it is necessary to define the central concepts used in the literature and in this analysis. According to Newman (2002, p. 1), political marketing can be defined as

“the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations. The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists, and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in a society.”

What is crucial in this definition is that the processes should be “in response to the needs and wants” of those targeted by the campaigns and parties. Thus, campaigns and parties that rely on political marketing make use of marketing techniques and tools in order to design a product that appeals to the needs and wants of targeted groups. Those parties and campaigns could be described as market-oriented. However, not only market-oriented parties and campaigns make use of marketing techniques, such as polling, focus groups, voter segmentation, and targeted voter communication (cf. Gibson and Römmele, 2001). Parties and campaigns that do not try to design a “political product” to suit the needs and wants of targeted groups can also make use of marketing techniques and tools, but with the purpose of “selling” their “political product.”

Thus, there is a conceptual difference between being market-oriented and making use of marketing techniques and tools; the crucial difference has to do with whether the party or campaign in question make use of marketing techniques and tools when designing their “political product” (Strömbäck, 2007). Another important distinction in this context is between product-, sales-, and market-oriented parties or campaigns. The defining characteristics of these ideal types and their explanations of electoral success are outlined in Table 2.

Thus, in order for the first research question to be answered positively, Junilistan should have used market intelligence systematically to identify voter needs and demands, and it should have designed its policies, candidates, and behavior to provide voter satisfaction.

**TABLE 2** Defining Characteristics of Product-, Sales-, and Market-Oriented Parties

	Product-Oriented Party	Sales-Oriented Party	Market-Oriented Party
Defining characteristic	Argues for its own ideas and policies; assumes that voters will realize that its ideas are the best and therefore vote for it	Believes in its own ideas and policies but realizes that they must be "sold" to the public; does not change its behavior or policies to give people what they want but tries to make people want what the party offers	Uses market intelligence to identify voter needs and demands and designs its policies, candidates, and behavior to provide voter satisfaction; does not try to change what people want but gives people what they want
If the party does succeed in elections	Believes that the voters realized that the party's policies are the best ones compared to other parties' policies	Believes that the voters were convinced by the party's professional campaign and by the selling and packaging of the political message	Believes that the voters realized that the party was in touch with the wants and needs of targeted people

*Note:* The data in the table build upon the reasoning in Lees-Marshment, 2001. See also Henneberg, 2002; Wring, 2005; Nord and Strömbäck, 2003.

Whereas the distinction between product-, sales-, and market-oriented parties and campaigns mainly has to do with what Wring (2005, p. 2) calls "a philosophy, attitude, and a perspective," the use of marketing techniques and tools is connected with the degree of professionalization when planning and running campaigns. More specifically, it has to do with the use of, for example, opinion polling, focus groups, computerized databases, telemarketing, voter segmentation, direct mail, online communication systems, as well as in-house expertise and/or outside consultants when making use of these marketing techniques (Gibson and Römmele, 2001; Kavanagh, 1995; Nord and Strömbäck, 2003; Plasser and Plasser, 2002).

## POLITICAL MARKETING IN THE SWEDISH MULTIPARTY SYSTEM

Swedish democracy is based upon a multiparty parliamentary system in which the parties traditionally are more important than the candidates (Holmberg, 2000). The election system is proportional, even if voters have the option of expressing preference for a single candidate on the party ballot. National, regional, and local elections are held on the same day, which means rather few elections in which campaign strategies can be developed and practices can be improved.

Sweden has seven parties represented in the national parliament and, Junilistan included, eight parties represented in the EP. Theoretically, this is important, since it means that the political landscape is very crowded, and crowded political landscapes make it more difficult for parties to create unique selling propositions. At the same time, voting behavior is more volatile than ever in Sweden, and a political dealignment process characterized by decreasing party identification is evident (Holmberg, 2000; Nord, 2006).

This suggests that it may be more important for parties in multiple party systems to rely on their ideological and historical policy positions and images than it is for parties in systems with only two or three parties. Multiparty systems with crowded political landscapes do not usually offer opportunities for all parties to implement successful political marketing strategies.

Furthermore, and providing that most of the voters can be found in the middle of the left-right ideological continuum, this makes it difficult for parties to choose a “flight to the center” as an electoral strategy—a strategy that otherwise would be a likely result if the parties would become market-oriented (Downs, 1957; Wring, 2002). What is more, becoming market-oriented would probably make it more difficult for the parties to mobilize their electoral bases in multiparty systems than in two- or few-party systems (Strömbäck and Nord, 2005). Finally, the uneven strengths in terms of size, power, and resources arguably restrict the freedom of choice for a majority of the Swedish parties, with the exception of the larger and most powerful ones.

Thus, the situation facing Junilistan was a crowded political landscape, and the party had just been founded, was without an organizational base or members to rely upon, and had very limited financial resources. On the other hand, the members of Junilistan knew from the referendum campaign as well as from polls that a substantial portion of the Swedish electorate viewed the EU with skepticism, if not hostility, and that distrust against established politicians and political parties was rather widespread (Holmberg, 2000). Building upon experiences from prior EP elections, they also knew that the established parties would give less priority to these elections than to national elections. It can also be assumed that they had knowledge about how the media work.

Given all this, to what extent did Junilistan implement political marketing techniques in their campaigning? Should Junilistan be characterized as a market-oriented party? And how can the electoral success of Junilistan be explained with regard to the existing political communication system in Sweden?

## THE CASE OF JUNILISTAN

As mentioned above, the “founding fathers” of Junilistan were Nils Lundgren and Lars Wohlin, and they explained their decision to form the new party

from what perhaps could be described as a genuine market-oriented perspective. They assumed there was a need for this kind of party within the Swedish electorate.

There existed no party for people who would like us to stay within the European Union but had become more critical about giving more political power to Brussels. That's why we founded Junilistan and that's the role the party has today—to be somewhere 'in between' (Hélène Goudin, Member of the European Parliament, 22 Nov 2004).

The party still has no traditional party organization and no party members, but it does keep in touch with about 1,000 "party supporters." The promotion of the new party was rather modest. During the campaign, Junilistan produced only one brochure, a couple of fliers, and two posters; all were printed in only one color—orange—to symbolize the alternative position of the party and the low-budget character of their campaign communication. The printed material was not tested in focus groups before it was distributed, as this was regarded as too expensive and time-consuming.

Media interest in party activities was most pronounced in February and March 2004, when the new party was officially proclaimed and its political ambitions were presented. In the following months, media coverage decreased and focused mainly on the financial and organizational shortcomings of the party. Finally, during the last weeks before Election Day, media attention to the party suddenly increased again. This happened partly because opinion polls confirmed increasing voter support for the party and partly because Junilistan was not allowed to participate in the important final party debate on public service TV.

A comprehensive content analysis of media coverage of the EP election for the last 3 weeks of the campaign also shows that Junilistan was the most dominant party in the TV news programs and the second-ranking party in newspaper coverage of the election. Only the Social Democrats got more extensive coverage than did Junilistan (Abramsson and Strömbäck, 2004, p. 15).

Even if the new party was initially founded on the somewhat market-oriented perspective that there was a public need for this kind of party, its campaign was not market-oriented. Marketing intelligence to identify voter needs was not used. Target groups or voter segments within the electorate were never identified. Opinion polls or focus groups were not conducted in order to shape party policies. No evaluation of campaign communications took place. In the interviews, the lack of political marketing behavior is mainly explained by financial and organizational considerations.

Junilistan's point of departure was the feeling within the party leadership that many voters did not identify themselves with the EU-related policies of the established parties and that there was a demand for a skeptical, but not

outright negative, party focusing on EU affairs. This assumption was supported by the outcome of the Euro referendum and polls about public opinion in this area. However, the market orientation in the initial stage did not inspire a market-oriented campaign. On the contrary, the campaign performance of Junilistan was rather unprofessional and had more in common with the behavior of a product-oriented party, assuming that voters naturally would realize that the ideas of the party were better than the ideas of the competitors.

When trying to explain the electoral success afterward, all persons interviewed referred to *presumed* latent voter needs that the party finally managed to satisfy. Thus, they made some use of references to the market-oriented type of party when explaining their success. They also perceived themselves as representatives of widespread public opinion on how Swedish relations to the EU should develop in the future.

Although market orientation based on general perceptions and feelings may explain the founding of the party, it can hardly explain the magnitude of its electoral success. Once voter needs were assumed to exist, no other efforts to confirm or deepen the understanding of public opinion were put into action. On the contrary, the campaign was characterized by being product-oriented and by rather low-key activities.

Still, this mixture of approaches did not affect the party negatively. On the contrary, its performance shows that it is still possible to win in modern elections in rather old-fashioned ways. Thus, the statement that the most market-oriented party wins the elections (Lees-Marshment, 2001) was falsified in this case.

To conclude, Junilistan could not be described as a market-oriented party, and it certainly did not implement political marketing techniques to a significant degree. However, perhaps it can be described as a quasi-market-oriented party, in the sense that it was inspired by perceptions of unfulfilled voter needs, but at the same time it was rather uninterested in further marketing practices to increase knowledge in this field.

The electoral success of Junilistan should thus be explained by other factors than the degree of market orientation or the use of marketing techniques. Here, it seems more reasonable to refer to the diverse roles of parties offered within a multiparty system, the news values within the media system, and the public's perceptions of parties in Sweden. The importance of these factors will be discussed in the last part of this article.

## MARKETING AND ELECTORAL CONTEXT

Partisan dealignment and a volatile electorate should theoretically encourage the market orientation of the parties in Sweden, as is the case in many other advanced democracies around the world. On the other hand, multiparty

systems as well as proportional and party-based electoral systems impose certain conditions for the implementation of political marketing. In multi-party systems, smaller parties can be successful without using political marketing intelligence and catchall strategies.

In a study of the latest national election in Sweden, most parties were characterized as sales- rather than market-oriented (Nord and Strömbäck, 2003). Several parties are positioned in the middle of the political left-right ideological continuum, which makes it difficult for them to market themselves by “fighting for the center,” where most voters can be found. Some parties can be more successful in establishing themselves as niche parties, attracting smaller segments of the electorate. Furthermore, considerations of internal party cohesion sometimes seem to be a dominant constraining factor in developing market-oriented perspectives in political parties.

In this case, Junilistan had no internal grassroots movement of which to take notice and no relations to coalition partners to consider. Their policy on the EU could be decided exclusively by the party leadership. Most of the established parties—with the exception of the Greens and the Left Party—were all basically in favor of further European integration in spite of public opinion. Thus, Junilistan could form a policy in accordance with public opinion and at the same time distinguish itself from its main competitors.

The electoral context also worked to the advantage of the new party. The second-ranking character of EP elections, with domestically focused campaigns, low campaign budgets, decreased media coverage, and low voter turnout, was important in this aspect (Abramsson and Strömbäck, 2004).

Thus, voter interest in the campaign decreased, and the lack of ideological guidelines probably diminished the importance of party identification for voting decisions. Accordingly, modest media coverage and horse-race-driven reporting favored the new party on behalf of the traditional political establishment. Thus, the need for political marketing was not pressing in a situation in which both the electoral and media contexts were basically favorable for new political challengers.

In most other countries, a great deal of professional competence is required in the production of political TV ads and for party broadcasts. As these phenomena are not allowed in Sweden, it reduces the need for professional skills within these fields.

Finally, political culture and political behavior may still be important counterforces in the diffusion of political market orientation and in the implementation of political marketing techniques in Sweden. Political parties still thrive on party platforms in their campaign activities, while they officially play down political marketing practices, mainly because of possible negative attitudes among members and voters. Most parties were founded as popular movements, and this has probably encouraged a nonprofessional party “self-image” in Swedish political culture (Nord, 2006).

Thus, the production of simple brochures and the appearance of grey-haired party leaders in grey suits at town hall meetings may not be as big a political disaster as it first might seem. The growing distrust of politicians and political parties in Sweden may provide unexpected chances for campaigns that are completely outdated and that contradict common wisdom regarding the importance of running highly professionalized campaigns. This holds true at least for second-ranking elections, in which less than half of the electorate cast their vote and both the parties and the media play down the importance of the election.

## NOTE

1. The results of the other parties in the election: Social Democrats, 24.6 percent; Conservatives, 18.2 percent; Left Party, 12.8 percent; Liberals, 9.9 percent; Centre Party, 6.3 percent; Green Party, 6.0 percent; and Christian Democrats, 5.7 percent.

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