The Changing Paradigm of Modern-day Politics: A Case of Political Branding and its Indian Connect

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Abstract
Brands are omnipresent. Politics is no exception to the same in the sense that contemporary politics is characterized by the emergence of many a successful (and failed) political brands. A layman might not associate politics with the field of branding but with time, thanks to the changing paradigms, this aspect of modern-day democracy has become synonymous with branding. The contemporary voter behaves more like a customer who is out to purchase into the ideology of the candidates and, on being convinced, purchases (read votes for that party) a particular product (read candidate or party) based on the promises made (read manifesto). A successful political brand helps the candidate/party connect better with the electorate as compared to its rivals. The reverse also holds true for a failed political brand. Western democracies have seen the ascendancy of political branding for quite some time. Indian democracy has been home to this concept in the past few years. The last general election in particular put the concept of political branding at the forefront.

Through this paper, the authors have attempted to explore the concept of branding and then political branding and related concepts such as emotional branding and political marketing. An attempt has been made to connect political branding with the last general election. To conclude, they would veer towards female participation in the election to drive the point further home.

Key Words: Branding, Emotional Branding, Political Branding, Political Marketing, General Election, Women Participation.
Introduction to Brands

Brands have been around us since “the dawn of history” existing as trademarks (Danesi, 2006, p 10). Brands are described as any visual symbols that identify a product or service (Danesi, 2006).

As per Scammell (2007), consumer activism and branding have been synonymous with each other in the modern world. The rise of consumer awareness and branding has created new paradigms. Further he opines that branding has developed on the lines of being a theory wherein it applies to such diverse concepts as nations, cities, places and politicians. Gertner (2011) states how branding has been extensively used in the context of places thus highlighting its significance. Mayes (2008) opines that place branding is an ongoing process of competitive differentiation. As per Scammell (2007), politicians are increasingly considered as brands who appeal to the electorate with the help of appropriate public relation strategies.

As per Jevons (2005), just as marketing is much more than sales, branding is not restricted to advertising alone. Scammell (2007) further argues that having a good brand name for a political outfit or candidate is imperative.

Early discussions of the way people felt about brands focused on assigning human characteristics and personalities, and brands were seen as relationship partners (Fetscherin, Michele, Cid Goncalves, & Souki, 2014).

A brand is any combination of names, slogans, logos, symbols, shapes, colours, letters, signatures, product design, packaging, advertising, and marketing that together give particular products or services a physical, recognizable form that is visually distinctive (Williams, 2000; Clifton et al., 2009).

As per Chandler & Owen (2002), brands comprise of loosely held impressions as well as associations which make their mark in the human mind in sensory way/s.

As per Jevons (2005), branding is used in developing conscious campaigning aimed towards a positive image. He is of the view that branding is flexible enough to include the field of politics.

Emotional Branding

Emotional connect has come to occupy a position of prominence when one talks about how brands are influencing our day-to-day lives.

Extending on the opinions of Williams (2000) and later propounded by Clifton (2009) that brands are agents of social change, Gobe (2002) further advocated that people are no longer content by merely the functional benefits of a product. Dean, Croft, & Pich (2014) conceptualize the emotional relationship of marketing to political parties. Extending it further, Chandler & Owen (2002) talk about how brands, whether they are products or politicians, need to make their presence felt in sociological and cultural terms thus building a stronger emotional connect.

In politics, brand image enhances emotional connect thus making the product perform well beyond its stated functionality. Rebranding of politicians is done mostly riding on the emotional connect to help him/her improve appeal and ratings (Scammell, 2007).
Understanding Political Branding
When one talks about political branding, it is the manifestation of the perception of a political candidate, party, campaign strategy or other related terms as policy made to a population with the help of both material and immaterial hints as well as language.

As per Clifton et al. (2009), brands have become arbiters of campaigns for social good. A successful campaign results in the electorate holding up voting as a social good.

Jevons (2005) opines that owing to its popularity among politicians, political branding has turned into a 'big business'. He is of the view that the singular consumer context, normally associated with branding, has changed with the advent of political branding. The extensive political campaigns of the present times are hallmarks of the usage of branding in campaigning.

Lieb and Shah (2010) state how the Obama campaign struck the right chord with the electorate on the virtue of it being 'rooted' and understanding the American culture well. This observation is in line with Chandler & Owen (2002) who are of the view that a political brand needs to resonate with the voters culturally. They highlighted the fact that a successful political brand needs to have charismatic appeal.

In line with Young and Rubican's 'brand asset valuator' or Aaker's 'brand identity model, a political brand is directly linked to its ability to influence the electorate's belief in the electoral system of the country and subsequently in that particular political outfit/leader.

Brand equity or brandscendence emanates from the successful management of a brand and the same applies to political branding as well. Positive brand associations equal strong brand equity (Keller, 1993). Building on it, Ahmed, Lodhi, & Ahmad (2015) introduced the political brand equity model (PBE) which talks about the application of brand equity in the arena of political branding.

Speed, Butler, & Collins (2015) observe that political branding is within the area of multidisciplinary research and can be conducted from various perspectives including economics, management, journalism and sociology.

Further, Speed et al., (2015) introduce human branding concept in politics. This is pretty much evident in the connect (or disconnect) which the consumer-citizen develops with the leaders in terms of them being reliable (or unreliable) political brands.

Busby & Cronshaw (2015) talk about utilizing participation branding where the consumer-citizen, by the virtue of participation, becomes a part of the political brand.

Winchester, Hall, & Binney (2014) specifically argue that the political environment of today could be seen as the one where branding frameworks and related concepts could be applied.

Holt (2004) discusses how some brands are devoid of any meaning and then there are others who build upon the strong image they have developed over the years.

Neiheisel & Niebler (2013) find that the use of party symbols is effective for candidates and hence, add value to the political brands and should be used with much diligence.
At the same time, White and de Chernatony (2011) observe how political brands get greatly devalued when they don’t live up to the pre-poll tall claims or fall short of the promises on which they ought to deliver. In this context, it becomes all the more relevant to highlight the concept of ‘repeat buy’ as stated by Needham (2006) who pointed out that an incumbent who is seeking re-election should treat it on similar lines as ‘repeat buy’ by a consumer for a brand.

The electorate develops a reciprocal relationship with the political brands in the sense that the way they feel towards a political brand influences the value of the brand (Williams, 2000).

As per Smith and French (2011), the associations which voters develop with a party brand help them avoid any new learning about the political scenario thus creating heuristics or ‘mental shortcuts’ which enable them to avoid complex analysis while deciding the candidate/party to vote for. This builds upon the views of Scammell (2007) who propounded that brands act as a shortcut for choices to be made by consumers thanks to differentiating elements such as name and image.

A strong and positive image and an uplifting message characterize a successful political brand as they make the electorate excited and hopeful (Seidman, 2010).

Consistency in the message and performance of the political brand help in building strong political brands (Creamer, 2008).

One of the leading contributors to the field of political branding, Lees Marshment (2009) observes how political branding succeeds in differentiating one politician/party from another thus providing more choice to the voters. However, as political branding has matured over the past years, it has touched new realms rather than acting as a mere differentiator. On similar lines, Serazio (2015) critiques the logic and practices of branding in American political campaigns.

**Political Branding: The Concurrent Aspect of Polity**

Political branding is seen as the study of the composite outlook of a political candidate, campaign, party, policies and the likes. It talks about the policies being made by an incumbent government or the promises of a potential candidate, and reinforces the beliefs which the electorate have from the political candidate/party.

Bennett (2012) observes how declining group affinities, coupled with social fragmentation, have resulted in personalized politics wherein collective actions have been replaced with individual expressions. This holds much relevance in the modern polity as the politician becomes more popular than the party.

It treats voters as consumers and draws heavily from a consumer-oriented approach towards politics. It manifests itself in the form of tangibles such as logos, symbols, colours along with intangibles such as trust, emotional connect, story and visual context. Nielsen (2015a) believes that brand relationships relate to voters' personal experiences with a party brand.

Contemporary political battles are fought as much in the virtual world (if not more) as they are in the real world. It is for this reason that Rutter, Hanretty, & Lettice (2015) propound that the distinctiveness of the communicated brand personalities of political parties can be measured through their websites.
Personal events related to the candidate, the candidate’s image, current events surrounding the process of elections, interest in issues, policies and religious beliefs are factors that influence voting behaviour (Farrag & Shamma, 2014).

Dean et al. (2014) put forth the idea that the internal market plays a crucial role as an intermediary between the party and the voters thus highlighting the aspect that doing a check on the internal environment is as crucial as doing a check on the external one for a political outfit.

Guzmán, Paswan, & Steenburg (2014) in their study concluded that voters see themselves and the candidate as a distinct brand, and associate with such brands which resonate with their own persona.

Scammell (2015) argues that a brand concept is a powerful tool for understanding political images. This lends further credibility to the relevance of political branding in the modern political arena.

In the United States, the presidential process of filing nominations for both the principal parties is still applied. Political party loyalty has been found to have a strong influence on voting behaviour (Schofield & Reeves, 2015) thus playing a crucial role in the process of political branding and eventually on the nomination process.

On an interesting note, Saftoiu & Popescu (2014) have been able to propound that humour can be an important ingredient in the construction and consolidation of political brands. The surging popularity (or notoriety!) towards brand Trump has much to do with his ability to talk in an unorthodox manner among many other things. The role of social media is something which came into prominence for the first time in the 2008 Presidential election in USA, heralded as the first social media election (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009). The success of the Obama campaign in harnessing the social media paved the way ahead for it in subsequent years. The 2012 Presidential election in USA, the 2014 elections in India and Brazil, and the impending 2016 Presidential election in USA were/are being fought as much (if not more) on the physical front as they are in the virtual world. At the same time, Seidman (2010) is of the view that television is a prevalent tactic in politics, even with increased use of new media. This particularly holds true in such countries where internet penetration is an issue (like India).

**Political Marketing: The Bedrock for Political Branding**

Political marketing is the bedrock on which political branding finds its origin. It deals with the activities related to the field of politics in the 20th century highlighting the various trends and patterns formed with regard to campaigning, voting and overall elections.

The economic side of campaigning is an integral part of political marketing as it deals with the finances which go into starting and managing political campaigns. The assets which make a political campaign successful such as fliers, ads, rallies, commercials, billboards (mostly tangible in nature) are the ones which characterize the phenomenon of political marketing.

As per Scammell (2007), branding is the new form of political marketing and its manifestation is characterized by the popularity gained by political branding in the current scheme of things in political outfits.
“The 'inside job' played by political reporters and commentators in interpreting, changing, and challenging the message of the political marketers is clearly vital in any marketing campaign, as are the interests of media organizations themselves” (Savigny, 2010, p. 1049).

Henneberg (2002) defines political marketing as “seeking to establish, maintain, and enhance long-term political relationships at a profit for society, so that the objectives of the individual political actors and organizations involved are met.” Further, he propounds that political marketing becomes instrumental in terms of mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises with regard to the political brand and the consumer-citizen. Lauffer and Paradeise (1990) discuss the transactional and commercial aspects of election which again highlights the essence of political marketing.

Political Branding in the Indian Context: The Last General Election

India witnessed the biggest election exercise in the history of mankind to elect the sixteenth Lok Sabha in 2014. According to EC data, more than 553 million people -- more than South America's population -- of India's 834 million eligible voters exercised their franchise. An all-time high of 67.7% voting was recorded as compared to 57.61% in 2009. The high turnout had much to do with the aspirations, the hope of the consumer-citizens with the poll promises made by brand Modi which fought this election on the plank of development, employment opportunities, elimination of corruption and other aspects which resonated well with the electorate.

The last general election saw about 140 million more people turn up at polling stations as compared to 2009. This was about 40 million more than the total number of voters -- 100 million -- added to the electoral rolls in the past five years. Majority of these additional 40 million voters were either the youth or female, or both.

The advent of political branding in the most comprehensive manner in the history of Indian politics was very evident in the last general election when brand Modi trounced all other brands (leaders as well as parties) single-handedly.

This research paper discusses the various aspects which go in the making of a political brand and related concepts; brand Modi definitely fits the bill on majority of these counts. Also, enhanced female participation during the last general election validates the authors' contention of the significance of a strong political brand in ensuring enhanced political participation and representation.

The 'Branded' Politician

Modern times have seen charismatic leadership at the helm of affairs in many scenarios. Some of the biggest movements in human history have seen 'branded' politicians heralding them. Whether it was brand Mahatma in India during the struggle for independence, brand Abraham Lincoln and brand Martin Luther King Jr. in USA speaking against discrimination in the society, all of them were able to put the force of their believers behind them and started movements which received whole-hearted support just because of their credentials among the masses. Later, brand Mao Zedong in China, brand Mandela in South Africa and brand Gorbachev in the erstwhile USSR brought tectonic changes in the political setups of their respective countries and found support among their followers on the virtue of being strong political brands. In current times, brand Angela
Merkel in Germany, brand Putin in Russia, brand Obama in USA and brand Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar have been popular and effective as political brands and introduced such policies which resonated with the masses. As was recently the case with Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, she held to her beliefs on immigration despite strong opposition and still found support owing to her strong image.

Closer to home, the rise of brand Modi during the last general election was a case in point. Party veterans, oppositions, detractors, critics, everyone was sidelined to make way for the brand which triumphed over all else during the election. Even those segments which were traditionally not pro-BJP entrusted brand Modi with their vote. This coincided with rise of such segments like women, first time voters and middle class who considered brand Modi as the panacea for their troubles. In fact, the success of brand Modi was likened to brand Obama, despite India being a multi-party Prime-ministerial democracy and USA two-party Presidential democratic system, due to the fact that his campaign was on similar lines to the Obama campaign, especially the usage of social networking as a medium. The success of brand Obama (twice) and brand Modi in their respective campaigns further illustrates the importance of having a strong political brand which acts as the beacon of light for its supporters. Sonies (2011) observes how in a presidential election, political branding is a tactic for strategically building an image. She is of the view that brand Obama had a great deal to offer in terms of valuable marketing tactics. The brand Modi campaign certainly drew inspiration from the Obama campaign.

**Political Branding and the Female Voters: An Illustration**

Out of the 397 million female eligible voters, as against their 437 million male counterparts, almost 260 million turned up to vote in the election, which is almost two-third of the total. This was the highest and best-ever turnout of female voters in a Lok Sabha election. What's more, even the two-thirds percentage of eligible female participation recorded was an all-time high. They understood well that without registering their presence, it would be quite difficult to get themselves heard, and they did precisely that. The detractors may point out that 260 million was not a big enough number but what was indeed a landmark here was the highest ever participation of female voters to make it count.

At least 22 of the states showed an increased participation of women as compared to the 2009 general election. Not only was the female voter participation the highest during the last general election, the female contenders also stood at an all-time high of 668 out of whom 62 were elected to the Lok Sabha, again an all-time high.

The big question which needs to be answered from the above discussion is whether the rise in women’s participation in the last general election had anything to do with the charisma of brand Modi. While the naysayers might dismiss this notion as a figment of thought, the larger picture point to the same. It was after a very long time that the country as a whole came out to vote (or at least the majority of the eligible electorate) cutting across the various combinations based on religion, caste, language, region, community and other parameters which had been the driving forces till then.

For long, women have been considered as the 'other-part' of the electorate whose voice was considered 'next-to' their male counterparts; because they
wanted to be ‘heard’, they came out to vote in an unprecedented manner. People talked about women empowerment, women reservation, women participation, women representation but most of this was on paper. This angst was reflected well in the increased participation. Female voters were impressed with the way Narendra Modi talked about women empowerment and promised them various opportunities once voted to power. In brand Modi they saw the hope for a better tomorrow and more importantly, they felt that their voice would be heard and they would be given their due share of status and benefits.

Further, 62 female MPs were elected to the Sixteenth Lok Sabha election of 2014. This is the highest number of women members elected to the Lok Sabha in the history of the country, although by a small margin. Fifty-eight (58) women were elected to the Fifteenth Lok Sabha in the 2009 election. Though this may not look like a big number, still it was some progress over the past elections (only 5.5% of the women MPs were part of the first Lok Sabha in 1957). Again, while the time frame (1957 to 2014) and the increase (5.5% to 11.5%) might not sound impressive and convincing for many, still it is progress in the sense that the current Lok Sabha is more representative than ever before.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, this research paper has discussed the concept of branding, its manifestation into the political arena and how it has come to influence voting patterns. Emotional branding and related terms were highlighted in terms of how they play an instrumental role in connecting with the clientele and its relevance was extended to the field of political branding. The paper also discussed how the concept of political branding has evolved with time and found wide acceptance for its prudence and justifiability. The concept of political marketing was also a part of this discussion wherein the authors related it with the central concept of this research paper, namely, political branding.

The application of political branding in the Indian context was another issue which this research paper brought forth by highlighting the rise of brand Modi and how it influenced the intention to vote. The role of female voters and rise in female representativeness in the last general election were highlighted as an illustration in this research paper thus making an attempt to link the rise of a political brand (in the present case, brand Modi) and the increased female participation and representation. The authors brought forth the scenario wherein both these aspects (participation and representation) stood at an all-time high thus highlighting the rise of brand Modi and the efficacy of it. Both first-time voters and female voters were enthusiastic about their right to vote. The sworn-in government at the centre chose seven females to lead various departments thus highlighting the growing prominence which women are getting in every walk of life.
References


Most farmers between Rs 5 – 10 lakhs on a per annum basis. Most farmers (82%) borrow less than small farmers. Majority of the

Changes

** p < .01

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