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A Qualitative Study Revisiting the Theoretical Lens of Brand Image and Developing the Consumer Brand Image Schema

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A Qualitative Study Revisiting the Theoretical Lens of Brand Image and Developing the Consumer Brand Image Schema

Purpose: Brand image remains a 'nebulous' construct with very few frameworks dedicated to understanding the process of uncovering brand image. This is supported by explicit calls for greater clarity on how to examine brand image particularly in different settings. Political branding is one setting that has received some attention, however research has focused on 'party' political brands and neglected 'non-party' brands (independent candidates). Therefore, this study examines how young citizens interpret independent non-party brands through the theoretical lens of brand image in the context of Guernsey and develops a systematic brand image framework that provides greater clarity to this topic area.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative interpretivist approach utilising focus group discussions was adopted to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of young voters aged 18-24 years. Focus group discussions ceased upon reaching theoretical saturation and a six-staged thematic analytical strategy was adopted to analyse the findings.

Findings: This study revealed deep insight into the political brand image of non-party brands from the perspective of young voters in an under-explored context. More specifically, this study uncovered that Guernsey's political brands were seen as 'accessible' however there was little differentiation, identification and connection between young voters and politicians. Further, this study uncovered a series of opportunities for strategists such as the desire for a younger generational view and younger representation in the Guernsey Parliament and greater clarity, distinction and authenticity related to political brand image.

Originality/value: This study addresses explicit calls for further research on brand image with a distinct focus on non-party political brands. Further, this study concludes by presenting the 'consumer brand image schema'; a systematic framework which can be used to uncover brand image within and beyond the setting of politics. Further, the framework operationalises the complex concept of brand image and provides a three-stage process to examine and develop brand image. This will enable strategists to develop targeted strategies and adopt appropriate tactics to manage brand image to ensure brands are differentiated and interpreted as authentic, relatable, engaging, accessible and identifiable.

Keywords: Brand Image, Political Branding, Political Brands, External Perspective.

Paper type: Research

Introduction

Brands are complex, multifaceted entities irrespective of their setting, industry and discipline. Brands are an amalgamation of strategy, tactics, structure, communication-messages, values and culture developed to convey what organisations represent and designed to appeal to their target market (Le Roux and Du Plessis 2019). Indeed, successful brands are clear, consistent, and engaging in terms of the tangible and intangible features which underpin a brand's existence (Grimm and Wagner 2021). Understanding the perceptions, attitudes and opinions consumers associate with brands remains an important area of marketing and consumer research (Plumeyer et al. 2017). Indeed, all brands are strategically positioned to demonstrate differentiation with competitors, present unique qualities and designed to encourage identification (Lee and Atkinson 2019; Hofmann et al. 2021; Panda et al. 2019). Researchers have examined the perceptions and opinions of brands through diverse theoretical lens ranging from brand identity, equity, personality, reputation and brand image. Examining *brand image* remains 'crucial' for branding practitioners, researchers and academics as the concept is a key theoretical lens to understand how consumers interpret, feel and behave with brands (Chan et al. 2018; Plumeyer et al. 2017:227; Savitri et al. 2022). Further, brand image is 'one of the core essences in branding' (Setiawan et al. 2021:3) and is fundamental for developing and managing brands (Plumeyer et al. 2017:251). Nevertheless, the construct is 'nebulous' (Chan et al. 2018) and varied in terms of conceptualisation (Chan et al. 2018; Foroudi et al. 2018; Hartono 2022; Keller 1993; Malik et al. 2012). Further, there continue to be explicit calls for further research and more understanding of brand image particularly in different settings and contexts.

One area that has received some attention is the application of the concept of brand image to the political environment. Indeed, existing research on *political brand image* has tended to focus on the positioning of *political parties* rather than the attitudes, benefits, associations and attributes of *candidates or politicians* (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Pich and Dean 2015; Pich and Armannsdottir 2015; Jain et al. 2017; Pich et al. 2020). Further, existing studies have examined the brands of politicians affiliated to political parties and the leaders of political parties and neglected the brands of independent and unaffiliated elected representatives (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Guzmán et al. 2015; Opara 2022; Pich et al. 2020; Van Steenburg and Guzman 2019). In addition, there are explicit calls for future research to examine the brand image of non-party political brands (candidates), which remains a neglected area of study (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Pich and Dean 2015; Pich and Armannsdottir 2015; Jain et al. 2017;

Pich et al. 2020). Finally, existing research investigating political brands has also tended to focus on established electoral settings dominated by party politics (Jain and Ganesh 2019).

To frame this study, the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey served as an appropriate context. Guernsey has a long history of independent and unaffiliated (Pich et al. 2020). Further, Guernsey has its own directly elected legislative assembly known as the 'States of Deliberation', which has its own administrative, fiscal and legal systems, and its own courts of law (www.gov.gg). Therefore, Guernsey's 38 seated parliament continues to be dominated by non-party political brands (Reardon and Pich 2021). Responding to the identified gaps, this seeks to understand the brand image of non-party political brands in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey from a young citizen perspective and develop a brand image framework which will provide greater clarity to the concept of brand image and support strategists as they develop and manage brands. Further, this study seeks to develop a brand image framework which will provide greater clarity to the concept of brand image and support strategists as they develop and manage their brands. In the *first* section, we critically discuss the theoretical background for this study followed by our research objectives. The *second* part presents our research methodology, while the *third* section presents our empirical findings structured via three themes emergent from our six-staged thematic analysis and discusses our findings in relation to the existing research and presents our developed framework. The *final* part outlines the implications of our research for marketers and academics and conclude with the identification of areas for future research.

Literature Review

Brand Image

Brand image has been described as 'a set of consumer beliefs about a particular brand' (Savitri et al. 2022:186), and a 'fairly concrete initial articulation of user and usage imagery' (Keller 2001: 24). Further, brand image has also been characterised as a 'spontaneous' (Lahap et al. 2016:150) summary of 'beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, ideas, relevant behaviours or impressions that a person holds regarding an object, person or organisation' (Panda et al. 2019:237; Pich et al. 2015; Bosch et al. 2006; Einstein 2008; Chen 2010; Keller 1993). Similarly, brand image is shaped by the brand identity signals (Propheto et al. 2020), personal experiences, conceived expectations and 'structured around a set of associations that are usually organised in a meaningful way' (Plumeyer et al. 2017:228).

Benefits-Implications of Brand Image

Understanding and reflecting on the current positioning and imagery associated with a brand is important strategic stage of the brand management process (Azam and Qureshi 2021; Pich et al. 2020). Further, it has been suggested that establishing a 'strong brand image is inevitable to ensure the overall organisational success' (Lahap et al. 2016:149). Research suggests that a successful brand has a clear, differentiated and engaging brand image, which can lead to several benefits (Cevallos et al. 2020; Panda et al. 2019; Zia et al. 2021) outlined in figure 1.
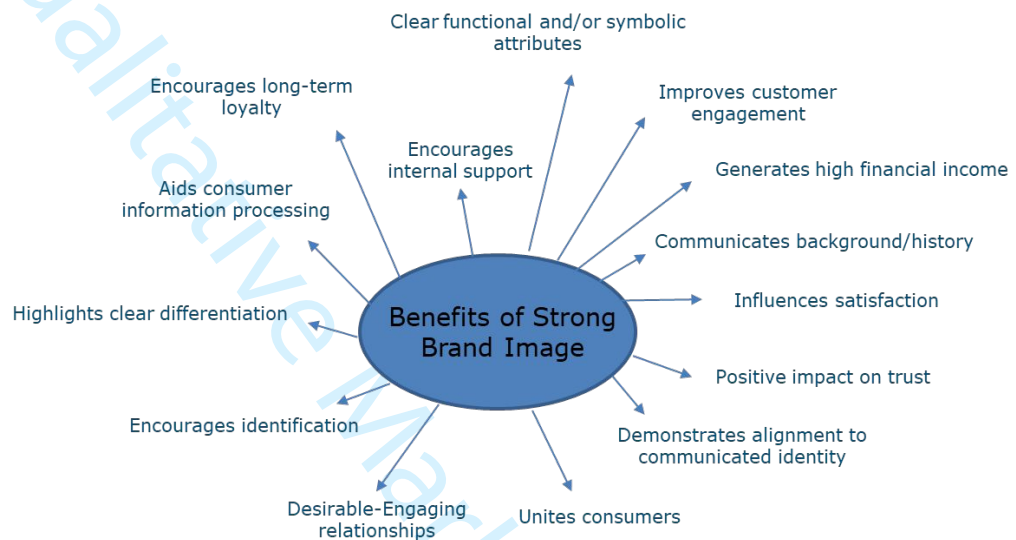
(Figure 1. Benefits of Successful Brand Image created by the authors and inspired by Pich and Armannsdottir 2022)

A brand that possesses a strong, coherent, trustworthy image has the potential to build long-term meaningful relationships with consumers (Bilgin et al. 2022; Plumeyer et al. 2017; Propheto et al. 2020), which can lead to loyalty and long-term satisfaction (Cretu and Brodie 2007; Savitri et al. 2022). Further, a strong brand is often the result of alignment between external brand image and internal brand identity (Foroudi et al. 2018). Brand identity represents a related yet distinct concept which is developed, managed and communicated by the brand's creators and manifested by consumers (Pich et al. 2020). Congruence between communicated identity and understood image needs to be aligned as possible to ensure brands are deemed authentic and resonate with multiple stakeholders (Pich et al. 2020; Savitri et al. 2022). In addition, 'a strong image is the result of the company's long history and the ability of the products produced by the company to be widely consumed and pose a threat to competition' (Propheto et al. 2020:742) and can 'improve corporate esteem, financial performance…revenue and degree of profitability' (Lahap et al. 2016:150).

Despite the list of benefits and positive implications of creating and maintaining strong brand image, brands with an undesirable, confusing, unbelievable or weak image produce the opposite effect to the benefits set out above (Foroudi et al. 2018). It must be remembered it can be problematic for the company to manage brand image as they cannot have full control of how consumers thought process (Nielson and Surrey 1998; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2015). Similarly, brand image can be influenced by competitors and entities other than the brand's creator who often attempt to express undesired or contrasting associations and imagery with the aim of destabilising the narrative and establish confusion to the desired brand image (Pich et al. 2020). Indeed, exploring brand image may often reveal undesirable associations, characteristics and attributes related to brands (Plumeyer et al. 2017). A brand with a weak or unfavourable brand image can confuse consumers, have a negative influence on loyalty, purchase intension, satisfaction and engagement (Foroudi et al. 2018; Gaustad et al. 2019; Grimm and Wagner 2021; Hartono 2022). Therefore, brand image can be considered a 'dynamic and complex' area of study (Panda et al. 2019:237) and understanding how consumers positively and negatively perceive brands is 'essential for successful brand management' (Plumeyer et al. 2017:227). Nevertheless, further exploration is needed to advance understanding of perceived brand image and the experiences consumers have with brands (Azam and Qureshi 2021). However, this raises the question of how to operationalise the exploration of brand image.

Dimensions of Brand Image

The existing literature appears to broadly conceptualise brand image into two schools of thought. Firstly, brand image can be divided into two components: *functional image* and *symbolic image* (Foroudi et al. 2018; He and Lai 2014). More specifically, *functional image* refers to the tangible features, perceptions of usefulness, benefits, communications, capabilities and practical benefits of a brand (He and Lai 2014; Lee and Atkinson 2019). In contrast, *symbolic image* refers to a brand's intangible features such as its perceived values, positioning, uniqueness and emotional connection with consumers (He and Lai 2014; Lee and Atkinson 2019). Secondly, brand image can be conceptualised via 3 dimensions such as attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Foroudi et al. 2018; Keller 1993; Malik et al. 2012; Plumeyer et al. 2017; Propheto et al. 2020). Attributes are defined as 'descriptive features that characterise a product or service, what a consumer thinks the product or service is or has and what is involved with its purchase or consumptions' (Keller, 1993:4). These are product attributes, price, packaging user and usage imagery. Benefits are the personal value consumers devote to the

product or service attributes. This is what consumers think the product or service can offer them (Keller, 1993; Malik et al. 2012; Propheto et al. 2020).   Finally, brand attitudes are defined as consumers' overall evaluation of a brand (Foroudi et al. 2018; Keller 1993; Propheto et al. 2020). Further, brand attitudes are considered significant because they often form the basis of consumer behaviour, for example their brand choices and link to the benefits and implications outlined earlier in the paper (Propheto et al. 2020). However, after briefly discussing the two schools of thought, it appears there is overlap with the dimensions and components of brand image. For instance, the conceptualisation of the attributes dimension and benefits dimension appear similar to the functional component of brand image (Foroudi et al. 2018; Malik et al. 2012). Likewise, the conceptualisation of the attitudes dimension appears to include similar aspects of the symbolic component of brand image (Foroudi et al. 2018; Malik et al. 2012). There appears to be similarity and implicit agreement within the literature as to how to define and examine brand image (Foroudi et al. 2018; Malik et al. 2012; Plumeyer et al. 2017).

Irrespective of the school of thought, brand image can be described as a multidimensional construct (Malik et al. 2012; Martinez and De Chernatony 2004) and brands can be examined via single or multiple dimensions or constructs (Malik et al. 2012; Martinez and De Chernatony 2004; Plumeyer et al. 2017). The literature implicitly suggests that adopting multiple dimensions rather than single dimensions will reveal deeper insight and greater understanding of the perceptions, associations and imagery ascribed to brands (He and Lai 2014). In-depth understanding of brand image has the potential to guide internal stakeholders as part of the brand management process (He and Lai 2014) and lead to a variety of benefits as discussed earlier in the paper. Indeed, Plumeyer et al. (2017:251) maintain that understanding, measuring, creating and managing the image of brands has 'become important aspects of strategic brand management and they are increasingly emphasised in the academic literature'. Perhaps amalgamating the two schools of thought as part of an empirical study will go some way in addressing the critiques and challenges associated with the concept of brand image and provide greater clarity on how to explore/examine brand image (Chan et al. 2018; Malik et al. 2012; Pich et al. 2020; Le Roux and Du Plessis 2019), particularly as debate continues around how to understand, explore and measure brand image (Chan et al. 2018; Martinez and De Chernatony 2004; Pich et al. 2020). This in turn will address the explicit calls for further research on brand image (Azam and Qureshi 2021; Foroudi et al. 2018; Gaustad et al. 2019) and in different contexts and settings (Aghekyan-Simonian et al. 2012; Hofmann et al. 2021;
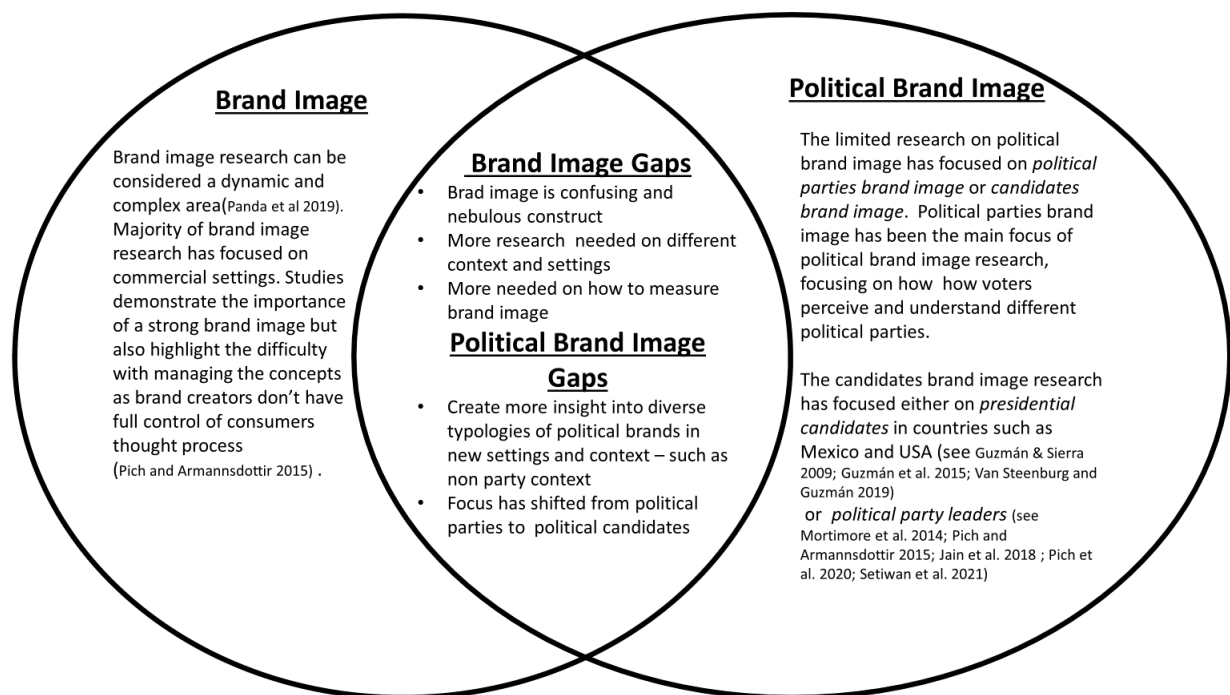
Plumeyer et al. 2017; Setiawan et al. 2021). One area that has received some attention is research on political brand image.

Political Brand Image

Whilst research in the field of political branding has received some interest in the past few decades, there are limited studies focusing on brand image from external stakeholders' point of view and this is supported by explicit calls for further understanding and studies devoted to this topic area (Pich et al. 2020; Van Steenburg and Guzman 2019). Similar to existing research in the commercial setting set out earlier in this paper, political brand image has been defined as the 'manifestation of the communicated identity combined with perceptions, associations, and attitudes in the mind of the citizen or voter' (Pich and Armannsdottir 2022:16). Political brand image is seen as the voters' understanding of the political brands, both tangible and intangible elements, as well as perceptions about how the brand will perform and any direct or indirect experiences voters will have of these brands (Nielson, 2017: Pich and Armannsdottir 2022). It should also be authentic, unique, and differentiating. Further, 'for a political candidate or party to achieve phenomenal support in the vote market, the candidate or party must have brand image' (Opara 2022:18). Therefore, it is important for politicians to understand how voters develop their attitudes and access the associations to better establish a positive relationship with them. Further, a political brand's image should be routinely monitored to make sense of how the brand is positioned in the mind of the consumer and capture the current impression, which will support the process of brand management (Plumeyer et al. 2017:227). Similarly, examination of brand image is 'critical' as it provides insight and understanding of consumer relationships, interactions and interpretations of brands (Chan et al. 2018; Lee and Atkinson 2019).

Nevertheless, the limited research focusing on political brand image has mostly focused on image of political parties and its leaders' brands (French and Smith; 2010, Pich and Dean;2015; Setiwan et al 2021; Das Gupta and Sarkar 2021) who play a crucial role in influencing voting intention (Van Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). Few studies have investigated brand image of presidential candidates and how voters self-referencing or self-brand image influence their perception of the brand image of candidates (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Guzmán et al. 2015; Van Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). All these studies have demonstrated the importance of understanding the process voters go through when evaluating presidential candidates (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009) and capturing the perceptions and associations with parties and/or candidates

as this can impact voter behaviour (Pich and Dean, 2015; Jain et al. 2017, Jain et al. 2018; Pich et al. 2018). Further, several studies have applied or created brand image frameworks that can be used in political contexts. However, existing studies tend to focus on established political party systems and focus on political *party* brands rather than direct attention to *non-party* brands (independent candidates). In addition, researchers highlight that future research should focus on unexplored settings and different types of political brands (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Pich and Dean 2015; Pich and Armannsdottir 2015; Jain et al. 2017; Pich et al. 2020). Therefore, gaps in the existing body of knowledge continue to exist as outlined in figure 2.

Brand Image

Brand image research can be considered a dynamic and complex area(Panda et al 2019). Majority of brand image research has focused on commercial settings. Studies demonstrate the importance of a strong brand image but also highlight the difficulty with managing the concepts as brand creators don't have full control of consumers thought process (Pich and Armannsdottir 2015) .

Brand Image Gaps
- Brad image is confusing and nebulous construct
- More research needed on different context and settings
- More needed on how to measure brand image

Political Brand Image Gaps
- Create more insight into diverse typologies of political brands in new settings and context – such as non party context
- Focus has shifted from political parties to political candidates

Political Brand Image

The limited research on political brand image has focused on *political parties brand image* or *candidates brand image*. Political parties brand image has been the main focus of political brand image research, focusing on how how voters perceive and understand different political parties.

The candidates brand image research has focused either on *presidential candidates* in countries such as Mexico and USA (see Guzmán & Sierra 2009; Guzmán et al. 2015; Van Steenburg and Guzmán 2019) or *political party leaders* (see Mortimore et al. 2014; Pich and Armannsdottir 2015; Jain et al. 2018 ; Pich et al. 2020; Setiwan et al. 2021)

(Figure 2. Gaps in Political Brand Image Research)

Existing research in this area often investigates brand image with additional concepts such as brand personality, brand equity and brand positioning rather than solely focus on the theoretical lens of brand image (Pich et al. 2020). However, brand image remains a distinct concept (Lee and Atkinson 2019; Panda et al. 2019) and perhaps sole focus on this distinct theoretical lens will address many of the challenges associated with this often 'interchangeably used' and 'nebulous' concept (Chan et al. 2018; Foroudi et al. 2018; Hartono 2022; Keller 1993; Malik et al. 2012). Returning to the political context, Opara (2022:25) argues that 'positing that brand image has shifted from the party to the candidate' amplifies that further research is needed on candidates as this focus appears to be under-researched especially from an exploratory perspective'. Existing literature highlights the importance of deeper understanding of voters'

perceptions and associations (Pich and Armannsdottir 2022; Pich and Armannsdottir 2018) and the need to create and/or adapt brand image frameworks (Pich and Armannsdottir 2018; Pich et al. 2020) to better explore political brand image.

Context – The British Crown Dependency of Guernsey

One jurisdiction that has a long history of independent politicians in the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey. Guernsey is a self-governing sovereign island-state situated in the English Channel, 30 miles from mainland France and 70 miles from the south coast of the United Kingdom. The Channel Island of Guernsey is not a member of the European Union nor part of the United Kingdom (Reardon and Pich 2021). Guernsey has a population over just over 63,000 and has an established directly elected Parliament [known as the States of Deliberation], made up of thirty-eight Parliamentarians (known as Deputies) (www.gov.gg). Once elected, Deputies would vote as individuals and govern by consensus (www.channelislands.eu). Up until 2020, Guernsey had no political parties and politicians were independent and campaigned as individuals without the support and resources of the 'party machine' (Reardon and Pich 2021). However, ahead of the 2020 General Election three new political parties were formed – the Alliance Party Guernsey, the Guernsey Party, and the Guernsey Party of Independents (www.gov.gg). Nevertheless, the new political parties failed to make a breakthrough at the 2020 General Election and independent politicians continue to dominate the political landscape in Guernsey (www.election2020.gg). Therefore, Guernsey and its independent politicians served as an appropriate context to frame this study. Subsequently, this study seeks to

- Understand the brand image of non-party political brands from a young citizen perspective in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey.
- Develop a brand image framework which will provide greater clarity to the concept of brand image and support strategists as they develop and manage brands.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodological approach as it aims to investigate the brand image of non-party political brands from the perspective of young citizens and understand how young citizens engage with the political brands in a non-party context. A qualitative interpretive methodology is an appropriate approach as it enables researchers' to inductively recover and gather rich information to deepen our understanding of the subject area (Gephart 2004; Hollebeek 2011; Singh 2015; Trochim and Donnelly 2007). Indeed, a

qualitative interpretive approach 'is committed to understanding social phenomena from the actor's own perspective' (Taylor and Bogdam 1984:2) and endeavours to explore the meaning attributed to situations, experiences, behaviours, perceptions and associations (Gambetti et al. 2015; Rubin and Rubin 1995).

Focus Groups

Focus group discussions often referred to as group-based interviews (Hofstede et al. 2007) served as a suitable method for this study. Firstly, focus groups are 'unpredictable…organic in nature' (Bloor et al. 2001:19), ideal for exploratory research as they can uncover feelings, reveal experiences, uncover associations, and identify attitudes (Bloor et al. 2001; De Carlo et al. 2009). Secondly, focus groups are suitable methods in initial stages of research or when little is known about the topic, context, or subject under study (Zikmund 2003). Whereas interviews are more appropriate for later stages of research and when investigators desire to revisit themes or issues identified from focus group discussions for additional depth and richness (Bell et al. 2019). Thirdly, unlike interviews, focus groups can also encourage natural-like discussions and debates within a group of participants, which in turn can reveal deeper insight and encourage participants to reflect on their attitudes and perceptions during the group-based discussions (Trochim and Donnelly 2007). Fourthly, focus groups were considered more appropriate compared with interviews as focus groups offered 'the opportunity to study the ways in which individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it (Bell et al. 2019:455). Finally, political practitioners regularly use focus group discussions rather than interviews in political branding research to capture insight into attitudes and perceptions of political parties, party leaders and policies (Ashcroft 2010; Gould 1998; Jain et al. 2017; Ross 2015; Pich et al. 2020).

This study adopted a purposive sampling technique as it enabled researchers to select 'the sample based on his or her judgement about some appropriate characteristic required of the sampling members' (Zikmund 2003:382). In this case, young voters aged 18-24 years were an appropriate sample for two reasons. Firstly, the Guernsey Government actively pursued young voters aged 18-24 years with the intention of strengthening engagement (https://www.gov.gg/youngpeoplessurvey), and secondly, young voters aged 18-24 years are often characterised as the most disillusioned group in electoral systems (Dermody et al. 2010). Age, therefore, was the only prerequisite for participation. Four focus group discussions led by one mediator and one facilitator and made up of twenty-eight participants were conducted from

October 2017 to February 2018. Data collection ceased after reaching 'knowledge saturation' also known as 'theoretical saturation' (Cayla and Eckhardt 2007; Flick 1998). Theoretical saturation is at the discretion of the researcher and the criterion of when to stop collecting data (Flick 1998; Krueger 1998) usually when no additional insights are uncovered. Further, in order to reach theoretical saturation, researchers need to be satisfied they understand the complex phenomenon under study and be in a position to address the research aim and objectives (Flick 1998; Krueger 1998; Rubin and Rubin 1995). Finally, theoretical saturation is consistent with an interpretivist approach and allows researchers to gain an understanding into the 'lived experiences' of the phenomenon from the perspective of a specific group of individuals (Daymon and Holloway 2011; Gorman and Clayton 2005; Van Maanen et al. 2007). The digital recordings from the focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and each transcript ranged from 7500-10000 words.
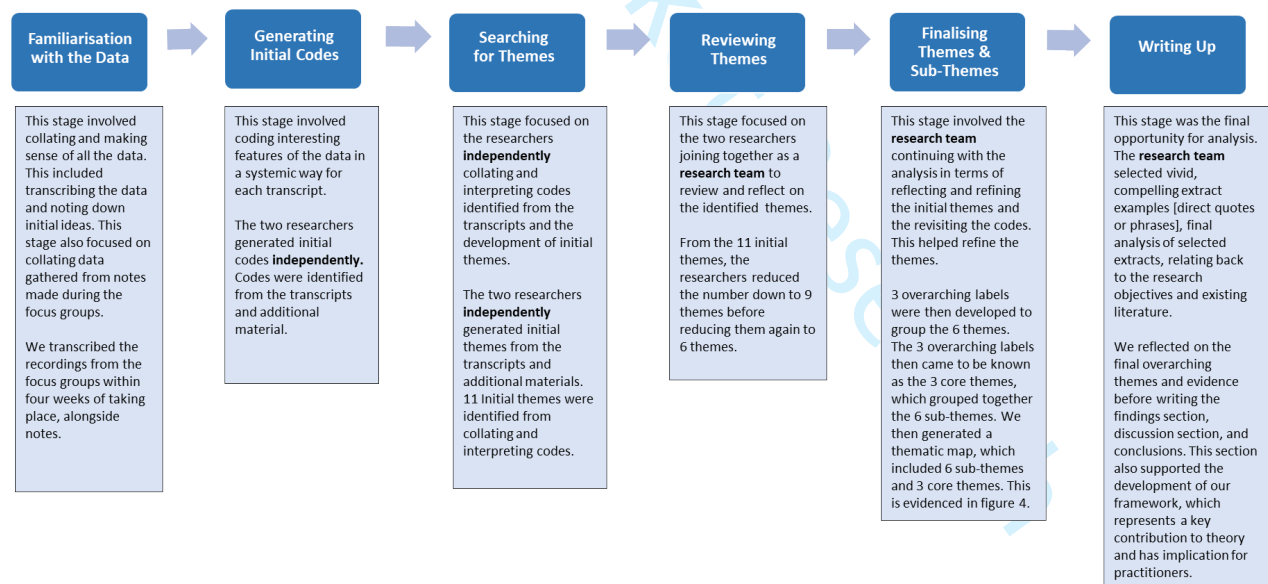
Improving Rigor and Trustworthiness - Analysis

To strengthen the trustworthiness and rigor of our study, three strategies were adopted including *piloting, triangulation* and adopting a *multistage analytical strategy*. Firstly, a pilot study was carried out with our first focus group as to assess the usability of our data collection schedule (Halliday et al. 2021). Pilot studies are crucial as they serve as an opportunity for researchers to reflect and improve the data collection schedule by addressing any questions that may be unclear, irrelevant or identify any questions missing from the schedule (Muijeen et al. 2020). Further, pilot studies allow researchers the chance to assess whether the initial findings/themes address the research objectives and if not, amendments can be made to the schedule (Bell et al. 2019). Based on our pilot study, very few changes were required apart from simplifying the ice-breaker question and amending some of the terminology in the schedule to ensure it contextualised specifically to Guernsey.

The second strategy adopted was triangulation. Triangulation involves implementing processes to strengthen understanding of the phenomenon under study and provides rigor, trustworthiness and transparency to the research process (Bell et al. 2019; Denzin 2017). More specifically, an investigatory triangulation strategy was adopted as part of this study (Denzin 2017). Investigatory triangulation refers to the use of more than one investigator or researcher as part of the study. Investigator triangulation can reduce biases at several stages of the research design including designing and planning the data collection tools (interview schedules), identify additional sources of content and material to support the primary method, data collection and

data analysis. In the case of this study, two established researchers formed 'the research team' and were involved in all stages of the research process from conceptualising to reporting. One researcher adopted the role of 'facilitator' (led the focus group), and the second researcher adopted the role of 'mediator' (actively listened to proceedings, made notes, ensured the facilitator adhered to the schedule and followed up on additional insights uncovered in the sessions). Investigatory triangulation also extended to all stages of analysis and enabled the researchers to interpret and verify the findings which provided rigor and trustworthiness to the study (Bell et al. 2019; Denzin 2017).
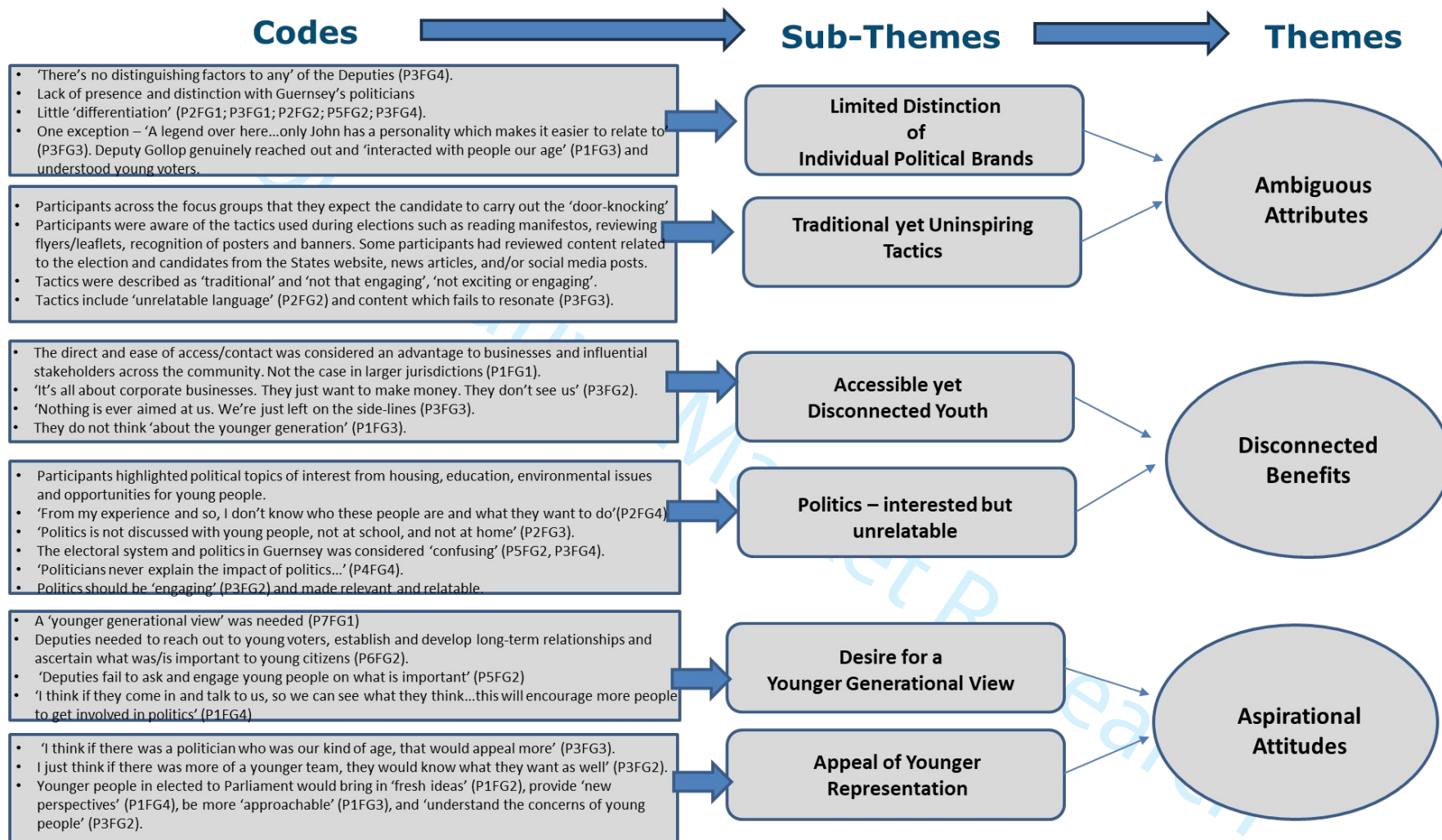
The third strategy adopted to strengthen rigor and trustworthiness of the study focused on adopting a multi-stage analytical framework. This study adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-staged thematic analytical process which is consistent with the interpretive tradition (Paskins et al. 2010; Roper and Shah 2007). In its simplest form, thematic analysis is a systematic process of reviewing the transcripts and encoding the raw data into categories and themes, which reveal insight into the phenomenon under study (Bird et al. 2009; Roper and Shah 2007). Further, this study adhered to six stages as part of its analytical process, which is consistent with the interpretive tradition (Braun and Clarke 2006). An illustration of the six staged thematic process the research team followed is outlined in figure 3.

Familiarisation with the Data	Generating Initial Codes	Searching for Themes	Reviewing Themes	Finalising Themes & Sub-Themes	Writing Up
This stage involved collating and making sense of all the data. This included transcribing the data and noting down initial ideas. This stage also focused on collating data gathered from notes made during the focus groups. We transcribed the recordings from the focus groups within four weeks of taking place, alongside notes.	This stage involved coding interesting features of the data in a systemic way for each transcript. The two researchers generated initial codes **independently.** Codes were identified from the transcripts and additional material.	This stage focused on the researchers **independently** collating and interpreting codes identified from the transcripts and the development of initial themes. The two researchers **independently** generated initial themes from the transcripts and additional materials. 11 initial themes were identified from collating and interpreting codes.	This stage focused on the two researchers joining together as a **research team** to review and reflect on the identified themes. From the 11 initial themes, the researchers reduced the number down to 9 themes before reducing them again to 6 themes.	This stage involved the **research team** continuing with the analysis in terms of reflecting and refining the initial themes and the revisiting the codes. This helped refine the themes. 3 overarching labels were then developed to group the 6 themes. The 3 overarching labels then came to be known as the 3 core themes, which grouped together the 6 sub-themes. We then generated a thematic map, which included 6 sub-themes and 3 core themes. This is evidenced in figure 4.	This stage was the final opportunity for analysis. The **research team** selected vivid, compelling extract examples [direct quotes or phrases], final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the research objectives and existing literature. We reflected on the final overarching themes and evidence before writing the findings section, discussion section, and conclusions. This section also supported the development of our framework, which represents a key contribution to theory and has implication for practitioners.

(Figure 3. Applied 6 stages thematic process, figure created by the authors inspired by Braun and Clarke 2006)

The first stage involved transcribing the recordings from the focus group discussions and reviewing the transcripts without assigning themes to become familiar with the raw data. The

second stage focused on the researchers working independently to read, then re-read each transcript and the identify emergent codes based on the direct quotes and phrases identified from the transcripts (Bird et al. 2009; Braun and Clarke 2006). The third stage involved each researcher to independently reflect on the codes identified from stage two and this led to the development of initial-draft themes. This process was repeated for each transcript. The fourth stage focused on the research team coming together to compare the initial-draft themes from all the transcripts. The initial-draft themes and the themes were expanded, re-categorised or made redundant (Braun and Clarke 2006; Butler-Kisber 2010; Warren and Karner 2005). This led to the fifth stage where the research team reflected and refined the initial themes and the revisited the codes. This helped refine the themes. Three overarching labels were then developed to group the six themes. The three overarching labels then came to be known as the three core themes, which grouped together the six sub-themes. The research team then generated a thematic map, which included examples of the codes, six sub-themes and three core themes which is illustrated in figure 4 (Gioia et al. 2012). The sixth stage formed the final stage of analysis and included the production of the 'findings' section of the article where the key findings were structured via the core three themes and six sub-themes. Therefore, the six stages provided rigour and trustworthiness to the analytical process, which supported an inductive approach of building knowledge step-by-step (Braun and Clarke 2006; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Trochim and Donnelly 2007).

Codes → **Sub-Themes** → **Themes**

- 'There's no distinguishing factors to any' of the Deputies (P3FG4).
- Lack of presence and distinction with Guernsey's politicians
- Little 'differentiation' (P2FG1; P3FG1; P2FG2; P5FG2; P3FG4).
- One exception – 'A legend over here…only John has a personality which makes it easier to relate to' (P3FG3). Deputy Gollop genuinely reached out and 'interacted with people our age' (P1FG3) and understood young voters.

Limited Distinction of Individual Political Brands

- Participants across the focus groups that they expect the candidate to carry out the 'door-knocking'
- Participants were aware of the tactics used during elections such as reading manifestos, reviewing flyers/leaflets, recognition of posters and banners. Some participants had reviewed content related to the election and candidates from the States website, news articles, and/or social media posts.
- Tactics were described as 'traditional' and 'not that engaging', 'not exciting or engaging'.
- Tactics include 'unrelatable language' (P2FG2) and content which fails to resonate (P3FG3).

Traditional yet Uninspiring Tactics

Ambiguous Attributes

- The direct and ease of access/contact was considered an advantage to businesses and influential stakeholders across the community. Not the case in larger jurisdictions (P1FG1).
- 'It's all about corporate businesses. They just want to make money. They don't see us' (P3FG2).
- 'Nothing is ever aimed at us. We're just left on the side-lines (P3FG3).
- They do not think 'about the younger generation' (P1FG3).

Accessible yet Disconnected Youth

- Participants highlighted political topics of interest from housing, education, environmental issues and opportunities for young people.
- 'From my experience and so, I don't know who these people are and what they want to do'(P2FG4)
- 'Politics is not discussed with young people, not at school, and not at home' (P2FG3).
- The electoral system and politics in Guernsey was considered 'confusing' (P5FG2, P3FG4).
- 'Politicians never explain the impact of politics…' (P4FG4).
- Politics should be 'engaging' (P3FG2) and made relevant and relatable.

Politics – interested but unrelatable

Disconnected Benefits

- A 'younger generational view' was needed (P7FG1)
- Deputies needed to reach out to young voters, establish and develop long-term relationships and ascertain what was/is important to young citizens (P6FG2).
- 'Deputies fail to ask and engage young people on what is important' (P5FG2)
- 'I think if they come in and talk to us, so we can see what they think…this will encourage more people to get involved in politics' (P1FG4)

Desire for a Younger Generational View

- 'I think if there was a politician who was our kind of age, that would appeal more' (P3FG3).
- I just think if there was more of a younger team, they would know what they want as well' (P3FG2).
- Younger people in elected to Parliament would bring in 'fresh ideas' (P1FG2), provide 'new perspectives' (P1FG4), be more 'approachable' (P1FG3), and 'understand the concerns of young people' (P3FG2).

Appeal of Younger Representation

Aspirational Attitudes

(Figure 4. Thematic Map Generated from the Focus Group Discussions)

Findings and Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand the brand image of non-party political brands from a young citizen perspective in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey. Further, this study aimed to develop a brand image framework which will provide greater clarity to the concept of brand image and support strategists as they develop and manage brands. The focus group discussions revealed three core themes associated with Guernsey's political brands including *ambiguous attributes, disconnected benefits*, and *aspirational attitudes*. The core themes are illustrated in figure 5.
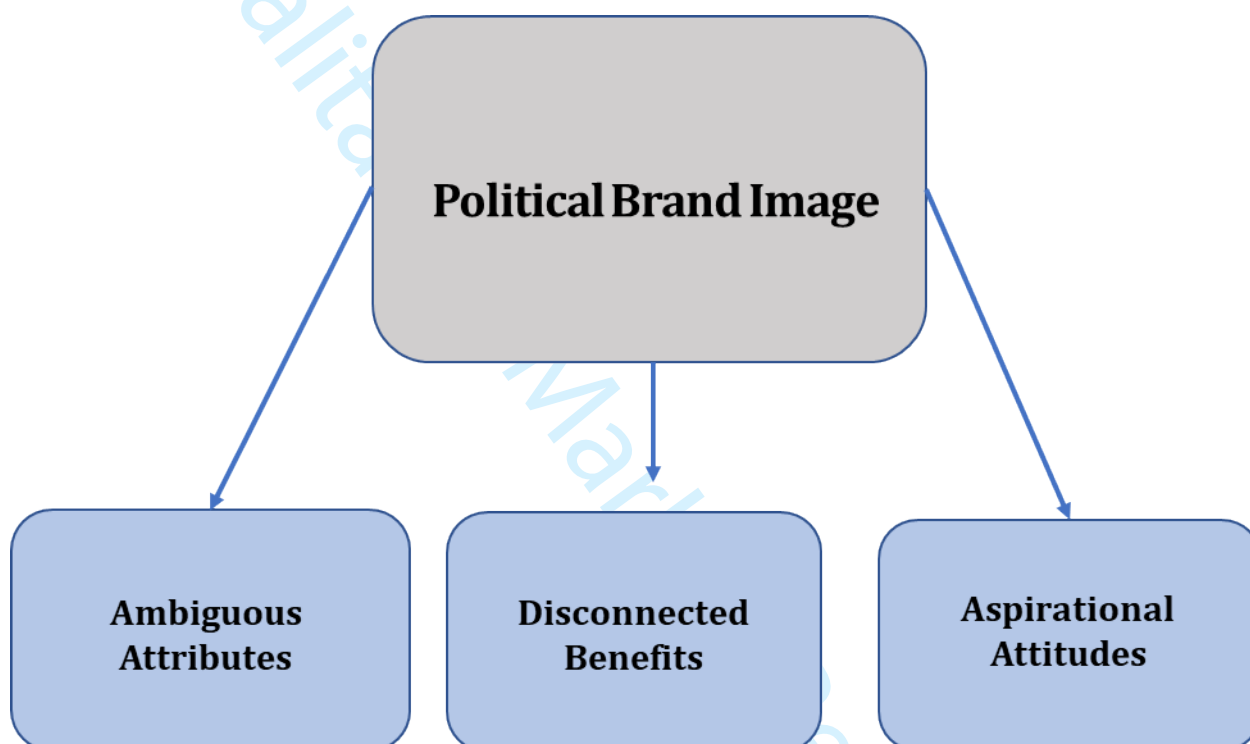
(Figure 5. Core Themes of Independent Political Brand Image Identified from Focus Groups)

Ambiguous Attributes

Limited Distinction of Guernsey's Political Brands

The first sub-theme of ambiguous attributes identified from the focus group discussions suggested there was limited distinction and differentiation with the political brands in Guernsey. More specifically, young voters believed Guernsey's politicians (sitting Deputies and candidates) failed to articulate strong and impactful identities, which in turn made Guernsey's political brands undistinguishable. For example, one voter argued,

'I'm unsure what deputies stand for. I haven't got a clue. We have a
general election in a few months, deputies should tell people especially
young people what they stand for and what they will do if elected'
(P3FG3).

Similarly, it was revealed that Guernsey's politicians are 'too confusing and unclear what they
stand for' (P5FG1) 'they are quite similar' (P2FG4). Further, voters believed that 'there's no
distinguishing factors to any of the Deputies' (P3FG4) and politicians in Guernsey were
'nameless and faceless' (P5FG4). Further, there was broad agreement across focus groups that
there is little 'differentiation' (P2FG1; P3FG1; P2FG2; P5FG2; P3FG4) and 'there's a lack of
choice' (P3FG1) due to the limited presence and distinction with Guernsey's politicians. One
voter suggested,

'politicians here all say the same thing "vote for me, I'm local, I'm
hardworking, I'm trustworthy" but they all say that. There's no difference.
They don't give you clear reasons to vote for them. We need detail and
specifics, but we don't get that' (P3FG2).

However, participants across all focus groups identified one exception to this characterisation
of Guernsey's political brands – *Deputy John Gollop.* Participants agreed that Deputy John
Gollop had a clear, distinguishable political brand and identifiable compared with his
counterparts. For example, Deputy Gollop possessed a 'different' (P1FG3), 'good reputation
and stands out' (P5FG2), identifiable, distinguishable (P5FG4) and was considered 'the most
popular' (P5FG2), 'the best' politician on the island (P6FG2) and 'a bit of an icon' (P2FG4).
Further, it was argued that Deputy Gollop,

'Is unique for a couple of reasons. He is clear about what he believes in
for example he is a big supporter of equal opportunities and supporter of
environmental issues. He seems to genuinely want to make a difference
and cares. He uses Twitter, he's on the radio and he's not afraid to speak
to people. In fact, my mum bumped into him the other day and moaned
about an issue with buses, and he took the time to listen and didn't fob
her off' (P2FG1).

Similar points were echoed across the focus group discussion. For instance, Deputy Gollop
was described as 'a legend over here…only John has a personality which makes it easier to
relate to' (P3FG3). Participants revealed several factors for this accolade. Firstly, the Gollop

political brand was seen to focus on the wants and needs of voters ['locals'] rather than focusing on tourists as 'he knows more about the culture and what everyone from Guernsey would like' (P5FG2). Secondly, the Gollop political brand possessed a sense of presence and recognition as 'John goes to every single community event that is on over here, literally you'll see him there…he talks to people…none of the others do that. He's always involved with people, when none of the others are' (P1FG4). Thirdly, the Gollop political brand was perceived to have engaging, outgoing, fun, approachable and relatable personality. Part of the engaging and relatability personality stems from not solely focusing on political issues when engaging with constituents yet when political issues were raised, they were made relevant and communicated to appeal to the audience. This engaging and amusing character was seen as a key reason people 'want to talk to him' (P5FG2) and reach out to the politician (P1FG3). Deputy Gollop possessed a character that was described as,

> 'really funny and gets your attention…there was an advert for a housing
> company and viewing a house in Guernsey. It was Darth Vader. At the
> very end, Darth Vader took his mask off and it was John Gollop' (P3FG2).

Further, participants believed Deputy Gollop genuinely reached out and 'interacted with people our age' (P1FG3) and understood young voters, which gave a sense of approachability to his political brand. However, participants did not have this sense of affinity, identification, originality, and presence for any other political brand from the Bailiwick of Guernsey. Therefore, this study revealed that political brands in Guernsey possessed ambiguous attributes and limited differentiation. However, there was one exception. The one exception managed to create and communicate an authentic, relatable, and engaging personal political brand, which enabled young voters to identify with the politician (Grimm and Wagner 2021; Plumeyer et al. 2017). A clearly differentiated political brand with a strong coherent image has the potential to build long-term meaningful trustworthy relationships with citizens, which can lead to loyalty and satisfaction (Cretu and Brodie 2007; Savitri et al. 2022). However, most political brands in Guernsey failed to clarify their positioning, project unique attributes, and demonstrate coherent differentiation with competitors, which had an impact on identification (Lee and Atkinson 2019; Hofmann et al. 2021; Panda et al. 2019; Pich et al. 2020; Setiawan et al. 2021).

Traditional yet Uninspiring Communication Tactics

The second sub-theme of ambiguous attributes related to the traditional, yet uninspiring communication tactics used by political brands during the general election period. For example,

young voters were aware of the range of tools used by candidates in election campaigns and engaged with the political tactics ranging from manifestoes, posters to the use of websites and social media platforms. An overview of the tactics used by candidates in elections can be seen in table 1.

Tactics used by Deputies	Explanation
Manifestos	Short written document which introduces the deputy to its voters and details their intentions, motives, interests and views. Focused policies are generally not included but broad values and aspirations. This is due to the nature and culture of politics in Guernsey and the independent system. Manifestoes are hand delivered by Deputies and/or published on social media sites or State website.
Hustings	Meetings held where Deputies can introduce themselves and what they stand for. Voters can attend and ask them questions . However, each Deputy has a limited amount of time to answer questions.
Door to door knocking	A key campaign tactic. Deputies go from door to door introducing themselves and their motives, views and intentions. Only Deputies take part in door knocking.
Posters/ Billboards	Posters/Billboards placed in public places or private properties.
Social Media	Social Media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram are used by some Deputies but not all Deputies.
Flyers/ Leaflets	Flyers/Leaflets left at restaurants and shops and also put through the letter box.
States website	Each manifesto is published ahead of election date on the States website. Each deputy (once elected) has a page with their information and contact details.

(Table 1. Overview of Communication Tactics Used by Candidates in Elections)

Despite awareness and some engagement, young voters were critical of the tactics and content such as the limited clarity and focus of the tactics, use of 'unrelatable language' (P2FG2) and positioning of the messages appeared to be barriers between young citizens and politics. For instance,

> 'I've found the manifestoes not a good sense what they're about [candidates] because like "they want a good education and health system", well who doesn't' (P2FG1).

Similarly, 'I have a little flick through to see what they're about', but the content is positioned for a different audience and not for young citizens (P6FG2) and 'there needs to be more communication with this generation…they need be clear and tell us what they will do' (P3FG3). Further, 'teenagers spend most of their time on their phones on social media, so it would be a very good way of getting information to young people' (P4FG2). Although, candidates should also reflect on the communication tools used as not all young people use 'Twitter' and an array of social media platforms may be needed to appeal and engage different voters (P1FG3). Further, 'they just assume that we're all on social media' (P3FG3).

Nevertheless, one key tactic that is considered the most influential and important way of connecting with citizens is known as 'door-knocking'. Door-knocking involves each politician visiting most homes/citizens across the constituency to say 'hello', 'give you a little pep talk and speech' (P1FG3), drop-off a short leaflet outlining biographical information, broad values and why they should be elected and serves as an opportunity for citizens to ask questions (P1FG4). This resembles canvassing. However, unlike other political systems, only the candidate carries out the door-knocking tactic and not carried out by supporters or campaign staff. For example,

> 'Guernsey is quite unique as it's always the deputies themselves who do
> all the door knocking and from my experience when I was in the UK when
> it came to elections for MPs or city councillors you'd get their supporters
> and people working for the party and they'd say 'have you thought about
> voting for our labour candidate' and I don't think that would necessarily
> work here' (P2FG1).

There was broad agreement from participants across the focus groups that they expect the candidate to carry out the 'door-knocking' and no one else. Further, participants of all focus groups were aware of the practice of 'door-knocking', however young citizen engagement with this tactic varied. For example, some young voters 'invited candidates into the house to hear what they had to say' (P6FG2), engaged with candidates on the door-step to listen to what they had to offer (P4FG2), and some decided to 'hide' when candidates carried out door-knocking and waited for the candidates to post their leaflets and 'sorry we missed you cards' (P1FG4).

> 'To be honest, I get why politicians go from door-to-door [door-
> knocking]. My mum, dad and gran love it. It gives them a chance to put
> the politicians on the spot and ask them questions. But for me, it's
> cringeworthy and feels unnatural, awkward, a bit fake. Like they only
> want to speak to me to get my vote and will say anything to get my vote'
> (P1FG3).

Further, young voters recognised that 'door-knocking' was a key electioneering tactics yet believed it was geared towards older voters not young voters. There was agreement across most focus groups that 'door-knocking' had little impact on young citizens (FG1; FG2; FG3) and candidates should focus on more appropriate tactics and events designed to appeal to young voters (FG3; FG4). Participants argued that older citizens expect this tactic and failing to 'door-

knock' sends out the message that candidates do not care about constituents and the candidate takes constituents for granted (FG1; FG2).

Subsequently, this study revealed that young voters desired relatable and engaging communication tactics to clarify the electoral process in Guernsey and allow aspiring Deputies to provide greater distinction as to 'what they stand for' (P5FG2). Nevertheless, young voters were *aware* of the different types of communication tactics and brand identity signals used by candidates designed to communicate their offering and existence (Grimm and Wagner 2021; Propheto et al. 2020). However, most signals and descriptive features designed to structure political brand identity, failed to communicate functional and symbolic attributes, resonate, or engage young voters (Foroudi et al. 2018; He and Lai 2014). This had an impact on clarifying the unique qualities of political brands in Guernsey and forming emotional connections between political brands and voters (He and Lai 2014; Lee and Atkinson 2019). Further, the findings suggest that most of Guernsey's politicians possessed weak and confusing brands and had failed to convey clear narratives and imagery communicated through their brand identity signals (Foroudi et al. 2018; Gaustad et al. 2019; Pich et al. 2020). Although, as evidenced in the previous section, it can be argued that one political brand could be considered 'successful' as the politician possessed a consistent authentic image supported by engaging and relatable tactics (Grimm and Wagner 2021). To maintain strong brand image, political brands should communicate a coherent identity underpinned by clear, relatable, and engaging tactics, which in turn would address confusion and strengthen identification (Foroudi et al. 2018; Pich et al. 2020; Savitri et al. 2022). Nevertheless, despite the weak nature of most of Guernsey's political brands, it would be unfair to argue that the brand images were undesirable or unbelievable (Foroudi et al. 2018; Gaustad et al. 2019). Therefore, most of Guernsey's political brands can be interpreted as possessing weak brand imagery due limited awareness and a lack of differentiation. This reaffirms the dynamic and complexity of brand image research (Panda et al. 2019).

Disconnected Benefits

Accessible yet Disconnected Youth

It was also revealed that young voters recognised that their politicians were accessible and were fortunate their system of government facilitated an informal degree of access with very few barriers existing between voters and candidates. For instance, there was acknowledgement that citizens could easily access contact information of sitting Deputies [once eleteced], ranging

from telephone, email, social media accounts and home addresses via the government 'States' website. For example,

> 'if you look at the States website you can see all the Deputies' personal
> details and you can phone deputies up on their home phone. You can also
> find their email address so they're accessible if you need to contact them'
> (P2FG1).

The point of 'accessibility' was consistent across all focus group discussions for instance, 'you can look them up in the phonebook' (P2FG4) and 'can access [the] States website to find out information on Deputies' (P1FG3). Further,

> 'Deputies publish their contact information on the States website like
> phone number, address. You can easily get in touch with them if there's
> a problem' (P2FG2).

However, it was also acknowledged that this level of accessibility was 'a double-edged sword' (P1FG1) as it often had an impact on politicians seen to be on continuously on duty with no distinction between personal and private time. For instance,

> 'Because Guernsey's a small place, you will see Deputies in the
> supermarket or at a restaurant or in town. You could easily ask them a
> question or report a problem. But they probably wouldn't like that'
> (P1FG3).

Nevertheless, the direct and ease of access/contact was considered an advantage to businesses and influential stakeholders across the community not afforded to organisations and citizens in larger jurisdictions (P1FG1). Despite widespread recognition across focus group discussions that politicians were accessible, many believed politicians were disconnected from voters' especially young people. It was believed,

> 'unless you are in finance, business or an old person, politicians don't
> really care about young people. There is no connection or relationship
> between young people and politicians (P3FG3).

Similarly, it was perceived that candidates in Guernsey do not consider the wants and needs of young people. For instance, it was argued that 'it's all about corporate businesses. They just want to make money. They don't see us' (P3FG2). There was also a consistent perception that

politicians across the island tended to focus their attention and tactics on the older generation rather than attempt to engage and connect with young voters. Indeed, participants argued that politicians and communication tactics were 'geared to [the] older generation' (P3FG4) and they do not think 'about the younger generation (P1FG3).

Subsequently, our research highlighted young voters acknowledged that they were fortunate to have an 'accessible' relationship with Guernsey's political brands compared with the perceived inaccessible nature of politicians in other jurisdictions. This highlights that the political brands in the Bailiwick offered some differentiation compared with political brands beyond the context of Guernsey (Cevallos et al. 2020; Panda et al. 2019; Zia et al. 2021). However, the personal experiences discussed in the focus group discussions highlighted that young voters felt disconnected with Guernsey's political brands and perceived that there were no meaningful, long-term relationships between young voters and politicians in Guernsey. Therefore, political brands should continually strive to establish and maintain positive authentic relationships with citizens and/or address misperceptions associated with limited emotional connections, which has the potential to strengthen loyalty, trust, engagement, and overall satisfaction (Aghekyan-Simonian et al. 2012; Plumeyer et al. 2017; Sasmita and Mohd 2015).

Politics - Interested but Unrelatable

It was revealed that most participants across all focus groups were interested in political issues. For example, when participants were prompted to list issues of interest, participants highlighted topics such as the environment, university education, job opportunities/employment, housing, transport in Guernsey, transport off-island, and desire more amenities for young people (P2FG1, P3FG2, P1FG3, P4FG4). However, participants felt excluded from the political 'process' including engaging in elections and politics. For instance, many admitted they knew know very little about politics, the electoral system or political process in Guernsey. It was suggested,

> 'politics is not discussed with young people, not at school and not at home.
> I know more about politics in the UK and USA but can't tell you how it
> works here. We're not taught it here. My cousin lives in Southampton,
> and he has sessions at college on politics and how politics works in the
> UK. We need something like that here to explain the system and explain
> how things work' (P2FG3).

Similar points were expressed in other focus groups for instance, 'we don't get really told much about it at school' (P4FG2), 'if you're just going about your school day-to-day, you are not

going to hear about it, at least from my experience and so, I don't know who these people are and what they want to do' (P2FG4). Further,

> 'I know we have Deputies, that's what we call our politicians, but apart
> from that I can't tell you much else. I know Deputies are independent and
> we don't have political parties here. Political parties would be good here
> as you would know what they stand for and it might make politics a bit
> more interesting here' (P2FG2).

Participants across all focus groups argued that they want to know more about the electoral system and political process in Guernsey. Further, participants suggested schools should dedicate time to provide unbiased sessions about the political system and electoral process as this would end confusion and bring about much needed clarity (P3FG2; P4FG2; P3FG5). It was also revealed that some participants engaged and reviewed the leaflets and posters during elections, but the content was positioned for the older generation (P2FG2, P1FG3, P3FG4). However, part of the problem stemmed from how candidates position political issues and fail to make political issues relevant to young voters, (P1FG1; P2FG4). For example,

> 'Politicians never explain the impact of politics. They only seem to want
> to talk about voting and voting for them. They never explain why I should
> vote for them. They usually say "vote for me, I've been a politician for x
> number of years" rather than ask me about political issues that I'm
> interested in' (P4FG4).

Making politics 'relevant' was a common issue identified across all the focus group discussions. For instance, one participant expressed,

> 'I can't see the relevance of politics. Nothing seems to change. Politicians
> never make politics relevant especially to young people or explain why it
> is relevant to us. Does it matter, is it important. I don't know' (P2FG3).

In addition, it was suggested that politics 'has to be engaging for younger people. People will just get bored straight away…I think it needs to be more fun' (P3FG2), Deputies need to 'relate to us…understand our problems' and clarify 'potential solutions' (P3FG3). Subsequently, as identified in the focus group discussions, young voters were interested and concerned about political issues, yet they were unaware and somewhat confused with the implications of electoral system and political process in Guernsey. This is consistent with existing work on

young voters and political brands in different jurisdictions (Pich and Armannsdottir 2018; Pich and Armannsdottir 2015). Successful political brands clearly communicate the impact of policies and relevance of politics to citizens (Anselmsson et al. 2014; Pich et al. 2020; Plumeyer et al. 2017; Sasmita and Mohd 2015). Further, political brands should reassure voters by signifying performance and manage expectations ahead of polling day and be explicit about how they are distinct from competitors in addressing the wants needs, and concerns of voters (Aghekyan-Simonian et al. 2012; Hartono 2022; Lee and Atkinson 2019; Rozikin and Sholekhah 2020). However, this cannot be said to be the case with political brands in Guernsey. Therefore, political brands in Guernsey should not only appeal to young citizens but also explicitly emphasise the relevance and impact of potential policies and initiatives.

<u>Aspirational Attitudes</u>

Desire for a Younger Generational View

Young voters across all focus groups argued that a 'younger generational view' was needed and candidates needed to reach out to young voters, establish and develop long-term relationships and understand what was/is important to young citizens (P6FG2). For instance,

> 'It would be good if politicians actually took the time to listen to us and hear what's important to us and hear what we want to see in Guernsey. That never happens. Getting a good job, education, getting on the property ladder are important issues for us. We need fun things to do, things for young people to get excited about. There is nothing here for young people' (P7FG1).

There was a common perception that young people in Guernsey have a 'voice but we're not listened to, we're overlooked and forgotten about' (P3FG3). Further, it was argued that very few candidates reach out to young voters for instance 'deputies fail to ask and engage young people on what is important' (P5FG2).

Similarly,

> 'I think if they [candidates] come in and talk to us, so we can see what they think and they can see what we think as well, and this will encourage more young people to get involved in politics' (P1FG4).

Likewise,

> 'the older generation has grown up together so they all tend to have similar opinions. That can be a problem because everyone starts thinking the same way. They stop thinking about the younger generation' (P1FG3).

Finally,

> 'Nothing is ever aimed at us. We're just left on the sidelines. Everyone says: 'It's up to you, it's your future'. What's my future? What do I have to decide on? What happens if I do that or that? Nothing ever really gets explained' (P3FG3).

Subsequently, we uncovered young voters had aspirational attitudes. More specifically, young voters perceived that political brands in Guernsey failed to reach out to young people and identify their wants and needs. Brand attitudes represent the overall evaluation of a brand, and attitudes are significant as they often form the basis of behaviour (Foroudi et al. 2018; Keller 1993; Propheto et al. 2020). Therefore, political brands in Guernsey should seek to engage with young people and utilise this opportunity to respond to the wants and needs of young people. This would allow the establishment and development of relationships between the two groups and allow candidates to tailor strategies and tactics to appeal, resonate and engage young voters in future elections (Azam and Qureshi 2021; Pich et al. 2020; Plumeyer et al. 2017). This in turn would provide candidates an understanding of how to clearly position and communicate their political offering and enable them to differentiate their political brand image (Azam and Qureshi 2021; Pich et al. 2020; Propheto et al. 2020).

Appeal of Younger Representation

Similarly, young voters argued that this younger generational view linked to representation too. For instance, young voters highlighted not only would they like to see greater engagement and appealing candidates, but also younger candidates elected to Parliament to physically symbolise representation and potential role models. For example,

> 'I think if there was a politician who was our kind of age, that would appeal more. I want to see someone who looks like me, sounds like me and understands me' (P3FG3).

Similar points were made in another focus group, the States need:

'young people. They're all at least 40 or 50 plus…if there were people who were 25 or maybe 30, then they'd have more ideas of that their childhood was like, so they'd understand and put more ideas towards people our age…I just think if there was more of a younger team, they would know what they want as well…I think the younger people need to start stepping up to help out' (P3FG2).

Further, some young voters also argued for a greater presence of non-locals elected to Parliament to demonstrate an inclusive, outward facing approach and the opportunity to bring in 'fresh ideas' (P1FG2) and 'new perspectives' (P1FG4) to Guernsey. It was perceived that younger and more diverse candidates would encourage young people to get engaged in politics as they would be more 'relatable' (P1FG3), 'make more of an effort to reach out to young people' (P4FG4), 'understand the concerns of young people' (P3FG2), 'share similar outlooks in life' (P3FG3) and 'reflects what modern society looks like' (P4FG1).

Subsequently, young voters desired greater representation of younger candidates elected to parliament, which could strengthen engagement with the electoral process in Guernsey. Young voters perceived that the lack of young people in parliament was a factor for disengagement and current political brands in Guernsey were not considered representative of all islanders. Further, research on brand image has the potential to reveal desirable associations, appealing characteristics and favourable attitudes associated with political brands, which can have an impact on perceived authenticity, loyalty, satisfaction and engagement (Foroudi et al. 2018; Gaustad et al. 2019; Grimm and Wagner 2021; Hartono 2022; Pich and Armannsdottir 2022; Plumeyer et al. 2017). Therefore, brand image can be considered a 'dynamic' area of study (Panda et al. 2019:237) and understanding how consumers positively and negatively perceive brands is 'essential for successful brand management' (Plumeyer et al. 2017:227).

The Consumer Brand Image Schema

This study demonstrates the importance and implications of investigating brand image from a multidimensional approach and to consider the attributes, benefits and attitudes associated with brands (Malik et al. 2012; Martinez and De Chernatony 2004). Indeed, capturing current brand image reveals positive and negative perceptions and attitudes and allow organisations to maximise strengths and opportunities and manage weaknesses and areas for improvement (Hartono 2022; Pich et al. 2020). Marketing researchers have stressed the importance of understanding how consumers form, organise and access these mental associations with brands

(Chan et al. 2018; Lee and Atkinson 2019; Plumeyer et al. 2017). Nevertheless, debate continues around *how* to understand, explore, and investigate brand image, with very few frameworks dedicated to understanding the process of uncovering brand image (Chan et al. 2018; Martinez and De Chernatony 2004; Pich et al. 2020). Therefore, based on our findings, and support of the existing literature, we developed a systematic framework to uncover brand image entitled the '*consumer brand image schema*'.

Stage	The Consumer Brand Image Schema Brand Image Dimensions	
One	**Attributes**	**Benefits**
Identification	*Attributes* can be defined as descriptive features includes product, price, place, promotion, tangible and intangible elements both functional and symbolic. Descriptive features can be functional [tangible] and/or symbolic image related attributes. Functional and symbolic attributes can lead to differentiation from competitors.	*Benefits* can be defined as personal values, perceived or actual experiences or expectations consumers associate with the brand. and benefits the brand offers the consumer. Benefits can also relate to the functional [tangible] and/or symbolic [intangible] features associated with the brand.
Two	**Attitudes**	
Analysis and Reflection	*Attitudes* can be defined as the overall evaluation of the brand derived from the attributes and benefits. Attitudes can be positive and negative and relate to the functional [tangible] and/or symbolic [intangible] features associated with the brand. Following the identification and analysis of current attributes, benefits, and attitudes, strategists can appraise the current brand image and refer to the 'reflection markers' to assess whether brand. *Reflection Markers* include is the brand interpreted as authentic, relatable, engaging, accessible and identifiable [connection-relationship], consistent with desires-aspirations.	
Three	**Behaviour-Opportunities-Impact**	
Strategic Planning	Understanding the *current attitudes* [brand image] will provide insight into retrospective and current brand image, which will provide strategists with opportunities and approaches to maintain strong brand image or address any issues associated with current brand image. *Reflection Markers* become *Envisaged Goals* for brands to ensure they communicate unambiguous attributes, connect with stakeholders through positive, clear, and relatable benefits, and be clearly positioned in terms of aspirational attitudes. For example, brands should aim to be clearly differentiated, authentic, relatable, engaging [using appropriate tactics/language], accessible and identifiable [connection-relationship], consistent with desires-aspirations.	

	The three-stage systematic approach is a process that should be carried out on a routine basis for strategists to monitor current brand image, ensure brand image is aligned to desired brand identity.

(Table 2. *The Consumer Brand Image Schema* inspired by (Foroudi et al. 2018; He and Lai 2014; Keller 1993:4; Lee and Atkinson 2019; Malik et al. 2012; Plumeyer et al. 2017; Propheto et al. 2020)

The developed consumer brand image schema operationalises the complex concept of 'brand image' and provides a three-stage approach to examine and manage brand image (table 2). Further, the developed framework is structured around multiple rather than single dimensions of brand image as this will potentially reveal deeper insight and greater understanding of the perceptions, associations and imagery ascribed to brands (He and Lai 2014; Malik et al. 2012; Martinez and De Chernatony 2004; Plumeyer et al. 2017). In-depth understanding of brand image will guide internal stakeholders as part of the brand management process (He and Lai 2014).

Stage one focuses on brand attributes and benefits (He and Lai 2014; Keller 1993; Lee and Atkinson 2019). By identifying attributes and perceived benefits, this will provide strategists will deep insight into core characteristics related to a brand's current image. Stage two focuses on brand attitudes (Foroudi et al. 2018; Keller 1993; Propheto et al. 2020). Further, brand attitudes are considered significant because they often form the basis of consumer behaviour (Propheto et al. 2020). By identifying attitudes, this will provide strategists with an understanding of current brand image and form the basis for developing strategies and tactics to manage a brand's desired identity (Foroudi et al. 2018; Pich et al. 2020; Savitri et al. 2022). Following the identification and analysis of *current* attributes, benefits, and attitudes, strategists can reflection the *current* brand image and refer to the 'reflection markers' to assess whether brand is differentiated from competitors, authentic, relatable, engaging [using appropriate tactics/language], accessible and identifiable [connection-relationship], consistent with desires-aspirations. Stage three focuses on developing strategies to manage brand image. Uncovering brand attitudes will provide insight into retrospective and current brand image, which will guide strategists to take advantage of identified opportunities. Further, it will allow strategists to design approaches to maintain strong brand image or address any inconsistencies or undesired characteristics associated with current brand image (He and Lai 2014). For example, strategists need to ensure brands possess and communicate unambiguous attributes,

connect with stakeholders through positive, clear, and relatable benefits, and be clearly positioned in terms of aspirational attitudes. This can be achieved in part by using the 'reflection markers' as envisaged goals to ensure brands aspire to be clearly differentiated, authentic, relatable, engaging [using appropriate tactics/language], accessible and identifiable [connection-relationship], consistent with desires-aspirations. The arrow represents that the three-stage systematic approach is a process that should be carried out on a routine basis to monitor current brand image, ensure brand image is aligned to desired brand identity (Foroudi et al. 2018; Pich et al. 2020; Savitri et al. 2022) and determine whether a brand demonstrates differentiation with competitors and continues to encourage identification (Lee and Atkinson 2019; Hofmann et al. 2021; Panda et al. 2019). Subsequently, this study goes some way in addressing the confusion and lack of consensus with the concept of image (Chan et al. 2018; Foroudi et al. 2018; Hartono 2022; Keller 1993; Malik et al. 2012) achieved by applying and developing the consumer brand image and engagement schema.

Conclusion

According to Opara (2022:18), 'for a political candidate or party to achieve phenomenal support in the vote market, the candidate or party must have brand image'. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate how young citizens interpret independent political brands through the theoretical lens of brand image. Further, as 'brand image has shifted from the party to the candidate', further research on the brand image of individual candidates-politicians rather than party brands represented an under-researched and under-developed area of study (Das Gupta and Sarkar 2021; French and Smith 2010; Opara 2022:25; Pich et al. 2020; Setiwan et al. 2021). The British Crown Dependency of Guernsey which had traditionally been dominated by independent and unaffiliated elected representatives served to contextualise this study. Indeed, this study fills identified gaps for further research by examining how citizens perceive and understand political brands from a 'voter centric perspective' (Ahmed et al. 2015; Nielsen 2016).

This study contributes to theory and practice. First, this study contributes to theory by revealing convincing accounts into the relationships between young voters and political brands (Needham and Smith 2015) and addresses calls for more insight into diverse typologies of political brands in new settings and contexts (O'Cass and Voola 2011; Pich et al. 2020; Rutter et al. 2015; Scammell 2015; Simons 2016). For instance, this study highlighted that apart from one exception, there was limited differentiation and clarity regarding the brand image of

political brands in Guernsey. Despite that Guernsey's political brands were seen as 'accessible' there was little identification and connection between young voters and politicians. Therefore, creating and developing a successful brand image goes beyond accessibility and thought needs to be given to establishing and maintaining long-term emotional and authentic relationships with voters, alongside clarifying expectations, what politicians 'stand for' and signifying brand performance to constituents (Aghekyan-Simonian et al. 2012; Hartono 2022; Lee and Atkinson 2019; Rozikin and Sholekhah 2020; Sasmita and Mohd 2015). In addition, the findings suggest that many of Guernsey's politicians possessed weak and confusing brands and failed to convey clear narratives and imagery communicated through their brand identity signals (Foroudi et al. 2018; Gaustad et al. 2019; Pich et al. 2020). Further, this study demonstrates that brand image continues to be a 'crucial' theoretical lens (Plumeyer et al. 2017: 251; Setiawan et al. 2021:3) for branding practitioners, researchers and academics within and beyond the political environment as the concept grants access into the perceptions, attitudes and opinions consumers associated with brands. Understanding the attributes, benefits and attitudes associated with brands equips strategists with knowledge of how to develop, manage and safeguard brands (Plumeyer et al. 2017). Nevertheless, this study uncovered a series of opportunities for strategists such as the desire for a younger generational view and representation in the Guernsey Parliament and explicit calls for greater clarity, distinction and authenticity related to a politician's political brand image.

Based on the findings and the desire for further exploration of brand image research (Azam and Qureshi 2021), this presents the '*consumer brand image schema*'; a systematic framework which can be used to uncover brand image within and beyond the setting of politics. This represents a contribution to theory and practice. For example, this research and framework (table 2) operationalises the complex and dynamic concept of 'brand image' (Panda et al. 2019) and provides a three-stage process to examine and manage brand image. Further, the developed framework will provide insight into the current physical and intangible attributes, perceived and experienced benefits and overall positive and negative attitudes related to brand image. This in turn will enable strategists to develop targeted strategy and adopt appropriate tactics in order to maintain and manage brand image to ensure brands possess positive awareness/familiarity, clear authentic and relatable positioning and strong long-term meaningful relationships with consumers (Aghekyan-Simonian et al. 2012; Bilgin et al. 2022; Hofmann et al. 2021; Sasmita and Mohd 2015; Plumeyer et al. 2017; Propheto et al. 2020). Therefore, this study provides greater clarity into the 'nebulous', complex construct of brand

image (Chan et al. 2018) and presents a focused conceptualisation and operational framework for practitioners and researchers (Chan et al. 2018; Foroudi et al. 2018; Hartono 2022; Keller 1993; Malik et al. 2012).

Subsequently, capturing current brand image reveals positive and negative perceptions and attitudes and allow organisations to maximise strengths and opportunities and manage weaknesses and areas for improvement (Hartono 2022; Pich et al. 2020). This study demonstrates the importance of understanding how consumers form, organise and access these mental associations with brands (Chan et al. 2018; Lee and Atkinson 2019). As debate will continue around *how* to understand, explore and investigate brand image (Chan et al 2018; Martinez and De Chernatony 2004; Pich et al. 2020), future research should critically apply and appraise the developed the '*consumer brand image schema*' (table 2) as a systematic framework to deconstruct brand image in different contexts and settings. Secondly, further research should carry out longitudinal and/or comparative research to investigate brand image within and beyond politics as this will highlight how brands develop over time, identify the consistency of differentiation and whether brands maintain long-term meaningful relationships with consumers and continue to encourage identification. This in turn will ensure brand image remains a crucial construct for practitioners and researchers (Chan et al. 2018; Plumeyer et al. 2017:227; Savitri et al. 2022) and 'one of the core essences in branding' (Setiawan et al. 2021:3).

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Appendix

Studies on Political brand image

Author(s)	Key concept(s)	Method	Gaps	Context
Guzmán and Sierra (2009) *A political candidates' brand image scale: Are political candidates brands?*	Brand image and brand personality as measure of brand image Brand image framework of presidential candidates (competence, empathy, openness, agreeableness and handsomeness)	Quantitative Principal Component Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling procedures	Limited research identifying candidates as brands	Presidential candidates for Mexico's 2006 election, 3 candidates
French and Smith (2010) *Measuring political brand equity: a consumer-oriented approach*	Brand equity Analysing mental maps that voters create when asked to think about a political party	Quantitative	Limited studies focusing on measuring brand mapping process and analysis of brand maps	Party politics, Labour and Conservative party
Mortimore et al. (2014) *Asymmetry in leader image effects and the implications for leadership positioning in the 2010 British General Election*	Leader brand image and positioning	Quantitative, using national survey data	Positioning studies have not looked at association between specific image attributes and overall satisfaction for each leader. Positioning research hasn't measured public expectation	2010 British general election campaign – party leaders
Pich and Dean (2015)	Qualitative projective techniques in	Qualitative Focus groups	Little research that illuminates the complexity of the internal–external	UK Conservative party's brand image amongst young adults 18-24

Political branding: sense of identity or identity crisis? An investigation of the transfer potential of the brand identity prism to the UK conservative Party	political brand image		divisions within the brand identity prism and few qualitative studies how have addressed this	
Pich and Armannsdottir (2015) *Political brand image: an investigation into the operationalisation of the external orientation of David Conservative brand*	Brand image of the conservative brand – using Bosch et al (2006) framework	Qualitative Focus groups	Studies have focused more on brand identity Limited frameworks available – neglect the development and assessment of brand image framework	Party, leader, policy Conservative party in 2010 – with 18–24-year-olds
Guzmán et al. (2015) *Self- Refereencing and Poltical Candidates Brands: A Congruency perspective*	Self -referencing and political candidate brands	Quantitative Using Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale	Little know about the process voters go through when evaluate a political candidate based on congruity between the candidate and a voter's own characterises	Presidential candidates for Mexico's 2006 election, random sample representative of Mexican registered voters
Jain et al. (2017) *Exploring the influences of political branding: a case from the youth in India*	Brand Image and Political marketing	Qualitative	Few studies focus on brands from a voters perspective – and there are limited frameworks showing influences of political branding	India – Bharatiya Janata Young voters 18-28
Jain et al. (2018) *Developing a political Brand Image Framework*	Developing a Brand Image Framework	Qualitative	Limited studies dedicated to post-election scenarios, especially in the Indian context	India – Bharatiya Janata and their Leader Narendra Modi Young voters 18-35 and expert interviews
Pich et al. (2018) *Investigating political brand reputation with qualitative projective techniques from the perspective of young adults*	Political brand image and reputation	Qualitative – projective techniques	Calls for more pragmatic tools and methods to comprehend the external orientation of brands	Young voters -18-24 years of age prior to the General election in 2015

Van Steenburg and Guzmán (2019)	Voters' self-brand image will influence their perception of candidates' brand image	Quantitative	Brand relationship has replaced traditional short term marketing paradigm	US presidential elections in October 2012 and 2016
The influence of poltical candidate brands during the 2012 adn 2016 US presidential elections			Previous research has demonstrated the candidate- brand relationship in presidential election in term of brand image, such a phenomenon has not been examined in the US presidential elections	
Pich et al. (2020) *Problematizing the presentation and reception of political brands: The strategic and operational nature of the pollical brand alignment model*	The paper looks at Brand identity and Brand image and creates a Brand alignment framework	Qualitative	Limited studies have addressed both brand identity and image Few models have been created which can build/monitor the positioning of a political brand	UK Conservative party Politicians were interviewed prior to the General election in 2015 Focus groups with young voters (18–24-year-olds)
Banerjee (2021) *On the relationship between online brand community and brand preference in political market*	Relationship between online brand community and brand preference in political market - India	Quantitative	Limited studies on how online political brand community impact in shaping voter behaviour.	18–35-year-old voters of political parties in India
Setiwan et al. (2021) *Scale development: Exploring successful political outsiders' brand image to determine reformist dimensions*	Successful political outsiders' brand image to determine reformist dimensions	Mixed method Interviews – document analysis - survey with voters	Studies on outsiders is centred on the rise of the far-right wing and Donald Trump case Previous studies use single approach	4 Indonesian party leaders
Das Gupta and Sarkar (2021) *Linking political brand image and voter perception in India: A political market orientation approach*	Political brand image and voter perception in India	Quantitative	More focus is needed to understand voter orientation which can be investigated from multiple dimensions Younger group is politically aware but disengaged	Political party – collected in 2017 (between consecutive general elections of 2014 and 2019 – from respondents 18-31

Opara (2022) *Political Party Brand Competence and Voters' Decision Making in Nigeria*	Political party competence and voters' decision making in Nigeria	Quantitative	Limited researched taken place in Nigeria	Political party

Response to Reviewers

Associate Editor – Comments to the Author

Comments to Author: Thank you for resubmitting your manuscript and addressing the reviewers' comments. The new version is much improved, however there are still some minor issues that you can address. Please carefully proofread your work as there are **many phrasing errors**.	Thank you for this opportunity. In addition, we are pleased the reviewers are happy with our amendments. We are happy to address the minor issues and have addressed each point [below] and also proofread the manuscript.

Reviewer 1 – Minor

Comments:

1. Line numbers 23 and 26 are the same - **We have removed repetition.**
2. Have you taken permission for Figure 1 and 3 - **We have added citations/references to clarify figures 1 and 3 were created by the authors but inspired by existing published studies.**

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: **Yes The research paper has new information to justify publication**	Thank you for your kind words and constructive comments.
2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?: **The literature review section is documented well. Few changes needs to be made. There is too much of information on Brand Image. The authors can synthesize it**	Thank you for your kind words for example, 'the literature review section is documented well'. We have removed large sections of the literature review on brand image for example, we identified sections on pages 3, 4, 5 and 8 that could be removed. We have deleted these sections from the revised manuscript. We hope this has improved and sharpened the literature review.
3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: **Good. The authors can elaborate more on how they have arrived with the subthemes**	We are happy the reviewers are pleased with our methodology. In terms of elaborating on how we arrived at our sub-themes, we have addressed this in several ways. First, we have updated figure 3 to clarify the processes we went through to demonstrate how we came we arrived with the subthemes and overarching themes. We believe this systematic applied process (including figure 3) provides transparency to our analytical strategy but also will help researchers reflect on the process of thematic analysis. Second, we have also clarified the process in the text on pages 12-13 – the additional text is coloured in 'orange'. We believe this compliments figure 3. Finally, we have updated figure 4 to include the headings 'codes', 'sub-themes' and 'themes'. This thematic map

	reinforces how the codes underpin the sub-themes and over-arching themes. We refer to figure 4 in the text [pages 12-13] and also in the 6 stages of analysis in figure 3.
4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: **Results are document well**	Thank you.
5. Implications for research, practice and/or society: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for research, practice and/or society? Does the paper bridge the gap between theory and practice? How can the research be used in practice (economic and commercial impact), in teaching, to influence public policy, in research (contributing to the body of knowledge)? What is the impact upon society (influencing public attitudes, affecting quality of life)? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: **Good**	Thank you. We are pleased the reviewer is convinced by our implications and contribution to theory and practice.
6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: **Good. Few errors in sentences. some lines are repeated**	We are pleased the reviewers are happy with the quality of community. We have identified and removed errors in the sentences and removed repetition. We hope this addresses this point. Thanks again for reviewing our paper and providing constructive and detailed feedback, which we have taken on board. This has clarified, sharpened and corrected the paper.