

Book Chapter - Political Branding -
A Research Agenda for Political Marketing

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- To consider the different typologies of political brands and reflect on their strategic orientations [see STP catalogue]
- To discuss strategic political segmentation and different typologies of political brands
- To consider political brand identity, image and reputation
- To reflect on an example of a political brand in an international context

Introduction

Politics and the political process remains a complex often controversial area of study. Indeed, in order to simplify our understanding of political organisations, institutions, groups and individuals we have witnessed the use of *commercial branding* concepts, theories and frameworks applied to politics. A brand is not merely a name of an organisation, product, service or person; a brand is a communication device, which represents a complex cluster of values, vision and personality. Brands represent promises and quality assurances made by organisations to give their target markets propositions of what they can expect and potentially benefit from their brand offerings. Brands are “*everywhere and everything is a brand...throughout the years, ‘brand’ and ‘branding’ have become so pervasive in the literature and business strategy discourse, it seems that everything thing, even everybody, has become a brand in its/their own right*” (Richelieu 2018, 354).

Indeed, brands are made up of tangible and intangible dimensions, designed, managed and communicated by organisations and brought to life in the minds of consumers. Brands have the potential to aid the decision making process by differentiating their offering against competitors and allow consumers to develop identification and form long-term relationships-communities. Nevertheless, just as brands can signify membership, build a following, and express aspects of a consumer’s personality matching with consumers’ wants and needs, brands can alienate, become irrelevant and weak. Successful brands should be consistent, relevant, authentic, and trustworthy, communicate clear identities and leave no room for confusion and ambiguity. Further, in order to build and maintain strong brands, organisations must continually explore and manage current associations and perceptions in the mind of consumers to keep control and safeguard brands from becoming meaningless, irrelevant and disconnected from its target market. Therefore, after briefly discussing the benefits of branding, it is not surprising that *commercial branding* concepts, theories and frameworks have been transferred to multiple settings and contexts including politics.

Indeed, *political brands* act as short-cut mechanisms to communicate desired positioning to a multitude of stakeholders such as supporters, activists, the media, employees and most importantly voters. In addition, political brands are designed to

act as points of differentiation from political rivals in terms of policy initiatives, ideology, and values. Furthermore, political brands are developed to encourage identification and support and signify a series of promises and desired aspirations, which they will enact if successful on polling day. This chapter will discuss typologies of political brands, political branding strategies segmentation and tactics that can be used to understand how political brands develop and present desired positioning and recognise that this may be different from actual interpretation in the minds of citizens. This chapter will conclude with reference to an example of a political brand in an international setting.

Typologies of Political Brands

Just as there are various types of commercial brands, the same can be said for political brands. For example, it is widely accepted that political parties, candidates-politicians, party leaders, election campaigns, political groups, policy initiatives and legislators can be conceptualised as *political brands*. More specifically, the different categories of political brands such as corporate, candidate, leader, local-regional, internal or external in orientation can be seen as an extension of research carried out in the for-profit and non-profit sectors, where citizens in the political marketplace can be viewed in a similar context as consumers in the commercial marketplace (Newman and Newman 2018). Further, we have catalogued some of the diverse typologies of political brands, which in turn represents the complexity and multifaceted nature of political brands across different political settings, systems and contexts.

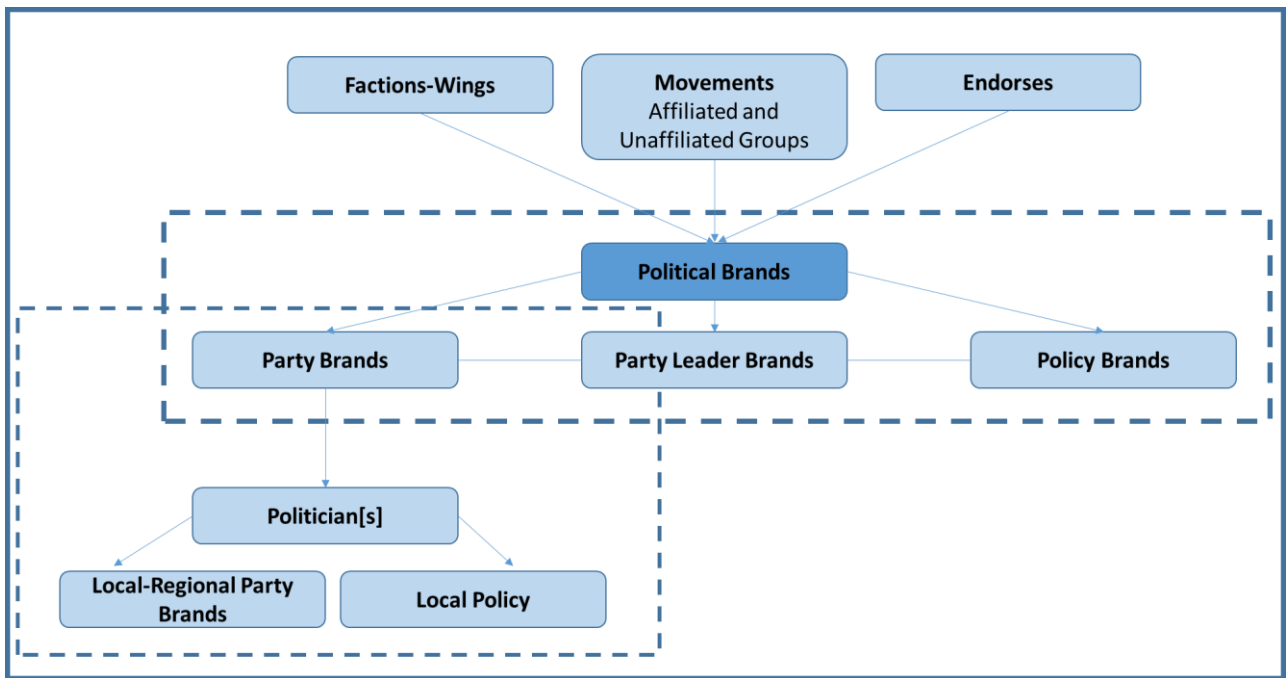
Political Brand Typologies	Example	
Corporate	Often conceptualised as the central 'Party' or Parliamentary 'Party'	National and international level such as the Democratic Party [US], The Conservative Party [UK], Bharatiya Janata Party [India].
Local-Sub	Regional level yet affiliated with the corporate political brands	For instance the Nottingham Labour [UK], New York Republican State Committee [USA], Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Women Wing [Pakistan].
Politician-Personal	Politicians-personal brands of individual politicians/candidates at national level	For example President Macron [France], Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern [New Zealand], Chief Minister Gavin St Pier [Guernsey], or regional-local level such as Members of Parliament, Assembly

		Ministers, Councillors or local representatives.
Coalitions-Groups Co-Brands	Multi-party governments at national level	For instance the Republic of Iceland, Grand Coalition in Germany and international level such as the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats For Europe in the European Parliament.
Political Movements	Political campaign groups at local, national and international level that are independent yet endorse political parties, politicians or campaigns to achieve a common goal	For instance <i>Momentum</i> [UK], <i>Greta Thunberg's fight against climate change</i> or <i>Greenpeace</i> .
Pop-up Brands	Created around campaigns, political events or key issues which unite the group/political brand.	Such as 'Yes Scotland' referendum group in the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, 'Vote Leave' campaign group that supported a leave vote in the 2016 UK EU membership referendum or Education Bill/Requete in the Bailiwick of Guernsey.
Political Events	Campaign activities during elections as local, national and international level	For example the 2021 London Mayoral Election [UK], 2020 Presidential Elections [USA] and 2019 European Parliamentary Elections [EU].

(Table 1: Different Typologies of Political Brands developed from

Armannsdottir et al. 2019; Pich et al. 2020b; Pich and Newman 2019)

In addition, the different typologies of political brands also represent a complex 'ecosystem' of inter-related political brands and sub-brands. This 'ecosystem' suggests that the political environment includes numerous political brands and sub-brands each related yet distinct. For example, traditionally, *party/corporate* political brands can be characterised into a trinity of dimensions including party, leader and policy. This trinity of dimensions has been adopted by academics and practitioners over the last twenty years as a simple approach to 'make sense' of political brands. However, the existing trinity of dimensions fails to acknowledge the complexity of political brands, the recognition the different typologies of political brands or the interconnectedness of political brands. Nevertheless, Pich and Newman (2019) responded to this and mapped out an initial 'ecosystem', which goes beyond the *party, leader* and *policy* trinity and illustrated in figure 1 as the political branding environment.



(Figure 1: The Political Branding Environment Ecosystem reproduced from Pich and Newman 2019, 10)

Further, figure 1 demonstrates that the *party* dimension that can be divided into a series of sub-brands. For example, *politicians or Members of Parliament* political brand will be the leader of their local party/constituency. This can include local supporters, local sponsors-endorsees, local activists and party members. Further, the *politician or Member of Parliament* may also have localised policies and initiatives, which could be distinct from party policy. Therefore, this represents a sub-political brand, which again needs a degree of alignment with the party political brand. The importance of alignment will be discussed later in the chapter. Alternatively, there are many different categories of *sub-political brands* and examples can be seen in table 1. More specifically, political groups, lobbyists, movements, campaigners-endorsees, charities, not-for-profit organisations can be seen as political brands in their own right. These *sub-political brands* are often officially affiliated or can be unaffiliated with the corporate or localised political brands. Further, factions-wings can also be considered *sub-political brands* as they can be highly influential as they can be seen as ‘a party within a party’, and represent a distinct ideological position within the corporate/local political brand. In addition, the factions-wings can often put forward a clear vision, agenda and/or initiatives which they attempt to persuade the corporate/local political brand to adopt as official policy. Therefore, the political branding environment [figure 1], is a complex intricate ecosystem, which represents some of the different typologies

of political brands but also the inter-related nature of political brands. However, the political branding environment [figure 1], represents our first agenda for future research and should be extended and developed by researchers to build a comprehensive understanding of political brand ecosystems in different contexts and international settings.

Political Brand Strategy

In the previous section, it was acknowledged there are many different typologies and categories of political brands, which make up the political branding ecosystem. However, the examples provided only provide a snapshot of the diverse nature of political brands and other examples will exist in other political systems and jurisdictions. Future empirical research will continue to advance our understanding of the political branding environment ecosystem. All this demonstrates that political brands are complex, inter-related in nature and often tailored to their political systems of governance. In addition, the typology of political brand will also have limits on its ability and influence in the political environment as not all political brands are destined for high-office. For example, political brands can be categorised into four impact-principles, political brands seeking power, political brands maintaining power, political brands that seek influence [or be influential], and political brands that are a force for change [policy, behaviour, attitudes]. Table 2 below discusses the four impact-principles with examples.

Political Brand Impact-Principles	Defined	Application
1. Seeking power	Applies to political brands such as large political parties in a position to form majority governments	For example, the Labour Party [UK], The Republican Party [USA], National Party [New Zealand].
2. Maintaining Power	Applies to political brands such as large political parties currently in office/government	For example the Conservative and Unionist Party [UK], The Democratic Party [USA], Labour Party [New Zealand]
3. Seeking Influence	Applies to political brands such as smaller parties or independent politicians in a position to form coalitions in government	For example, Scottish National Party [UK], Green Party [New Zealand], Lega Nord [Italy]
4. Force Change for	Applies to political brands such as lobby groups, campaign groups, endorses, businesses, media or citizen-led groups that seek to change policy, behaviour or attitudes.	For example, Association of British Insurers [UK], Greenpeace [USA], Catalan Independence Movement [North Catalonia-Spain], #FridaysForFuture [Greta Thunberg – Sweden].

(Table 2: Four Impact-Principles of Political Brands developed by the author)

The impact-principles discussed in table 2 highlights four simple aspirations, abilities and limits, which can influence the strategies of political brands. The impact-principle adopted by a political brand not only highlight the ability and influence of the political brand but also determine their objectives or vision, strategies, tactics, desired position and potential effect they have on governance. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there may be additional impact-principles in different political systems and future research should investigate this area of study.

In addition, it is important to recognise that political brands often have specific goals, objectives or vision, which ultimately influence the strategy they adopt, their targeting strategies and tactics used to realise their goals, objectives or vision. More specifically, political brands will develop their goals, objectives or vision based on *what they want to achieve* in short-term campaigns [day-to-day governance, campaigning initiatives and policy changes]. For example, the UK Labour Party [currently the Official Opposition in Parliament in the United Kingdom] campaigned to provide 1.4 million 'free school meals' for qualifying children in England during the school holidays during the COVID pandemic (Rayner 2021). This campaign inspired by Marcus Rashford MBE an English professional footballer gathered momentum during the pandemic and was supported by the UK Labour Party and other political brands designed to pressurise the UK Government [Boris Johnsons Conservative Party] into adopting this initiative. The grass-roots inspired campaign elevated to prominence by the UK Labour Party were in part responsible for the change in policy by the UK Government who pledged to distribute a £170m winter grant to support this campaign in 2020-2021 (Lawrie 2020).

In contract, political brands will develop their goals, objectives or vision based on *what they want to achieve* in long-term campaigns such as elections [local and national] and continuous campaigning between election to election. This could focus on maintaining a distinct position [the UK Conservatives desired position of economic competence], unremitting activism for causes and changes in policy for example the SNP and the Scottish independence referendum. Alternatively, the UK Labour Party's recent position of 'under new leadership' designed to emphasise a move away from the policies and vision of former leader Jeremy Corbyn and communicate a change of

direction for the political brand. However, political brands in the early days of a new parliament or new leadership often years away from the next general election will hold off committing detail and substance to positions and will use the desired position as a starting point. Over time, research will be carried out by political brands and policies will be developed and piloted in order to bring substance to the broad symbolic propositions such as '*under new leadership*', '*for the many, not the few*' or '*build back better*'.

Nevertheless, strategies are also shaped by other influential factors linked to the political brand. For example, factors such as the ideological position of the political brand, life-cycle of the political brand [new party, independent] or localised party], experience and establishment of the political brand resources, size, potential reach and impact. Further, strategies are also influenced by the political brand's existing profile, perceived relevance, existing-potential support at the ballot box [and support from other stakeholders and entities like media, unions, lobbyists and endorses], for example small-minority parties. Therefore, these additional factors need to be considered by political brands, as they will underpin their goals, objectives and vision of the political brand. All this will have an impact on the segmentation [and targeting] strategy. However, it's worth noting that some political brands may not like to admit they ascribe to marketing strategy or business rhetoric yet in reality, very few successful political brands adopt a 'catch all' or undifferentiated approach as part of their segmentation and brand management.

Political Brand Segmentation

As we identified in the previous section, political brands need to continuously consider and reflect on their impact-principles, influential factors, and overall goals, objectives and vision to ensure alignment of their strategies and tactics. Part of this process is recognising that political brands need to design and develop their segmentation strategies targeted towards specific groups as undifferentiated strategies [same strategy/message targeted to everyone] in unlikely to be successful.

If we return to the opening arguments of this chapter, there are many typologies of political brands and each political brand will have to consider the wants and needs of different internal and external stakeholders. Further, political brands are manifested not only through the intangible dimensions [as outlined in the opening chapter] but

also through the physical actions and engagement practices [behavioural, emotive and cognitive] of different groups and citizens. Indeed, the world of politics has come to realise the importance of establishing, nurturing and maintaining long-term relationships with different stakeholders as this can have an impact on the success of the political brand particularly at the ballot box. Political brands understand the significance, value and opportunity of addressing the wants of needs of individuals and often tailoring messages, identities and the framing of policies, initiatives and values to different groups of citizens. Politicians may not care to admit this but they regularly utilise segmentation strategies and tactics borrowed from commercial marketing particularly as they face difficulties standing out from competitors and need to provide citizens with reasons why they should identify with their political brand. Therefore, the use of political segmentation is a strategic approach designed to ‘emphasises a long-term customer focus and requires integration of segmentation, targeting and positioning’ to divide the political marketplace into distinct groups (Smith and Hirst 2001, 1059). An illustration of the political segmentation process can be seen in table 3.

Step 1: Segmentation	Step 2: Targeting	Step 3: Positioning
Understand the potential groups for segmenting the electorate. This includes internal and external stakeholders.	Identify most attractive, stable and ease of access segments to focus political marketing communications	Desired position in the mind of the target segments realised through the marketing mix of the political brand.
Segmentation Characteristics	Targeting Strategies	Positioning Considerations
Demographic: <i>Age, gender, occupation, socio-economic group, education</i>	Differentiated: <i>Communications and branding tailored to different segments</i>	Brand Identity
Behavioural: <i>Loyalty, party membership, engagement in elections/campaigns/parties, activism, benefits sought</i>	Undifferentiated: <i>Communications and branding universal to all segments in society</i>	Brand Image
Psychographic: <i>Lifestyles, personality, social class, personal attitudes, past experiences, ideology</i>	Concentrated: <i>Focus on one or very few segments and communications and branding tailored to niche segments.</i>	Brand Reputation
Geographic: <i>Live, work, constituency level, regional, national level, rural, urban, online, offline, ACORN classification</i>	Micro-targeting: <i>Communications and branding tailored to individuals segments or at a local level.</i>	Based on rationale or emotive stimuli

(Table 3: Strategic Political Segmentation developed from Smith and Hirst 2001; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019).

Table 3 sets out the three steps of strategic political segmentation. Step one focuses on understanding the potential groups for segmenting the electorate. This includes *internal stakeholders* such as the media, activists-campaigners, party officials-candidates, and endorses and also *external stakeholders* such as voters. Political strategists often categorise voters according to behaviour, cognition and emotion and this can vary from election to election and dependent on the ultimate goal of the political brand.

Nevertheless, once segments are identified, specific groups can be selected to build a deeper understanding into their wants, needs and appropriate targeting strategies and tactics can be identified. Just like commercial marketing managers, campaign managers for political brands must ensure the identified segments are identifiable, accessible, stable, differentiable and substantial in order to design appropriate messages to communicate how the political brand will address the target market's wants and needs. Therefore, step two also involves selecting the most appropriate targeting strategy and this will determine not only the number of segments to target but also the political brand's strategic approach to designing and managing efficient tactics and communications. This links to step three, which focuses on designing an envisaged position in the mind of the target market, which is brought to life from the physical and intangible elements [including policies] of the political brand. In addition, key concepts such as brand identity, image, reputation and personality can be adopted to help structure the desired position. We will return to specific branding concepts later in the chapter.

Subsequently, political segmentation is a strategic process that should be adopted by political brands on an ongoing, long-term, 'permanent campaign' basis rather than utilised during short-term election periods. Indeed, political segmentation should be used to monitor public opinion, current and potential trends and the wants and needs of citizens as these are all subject to change. Further, political brands need to consider multiple target segments in order to achieve success at the ballot box and should reflect on who they target and how many segments they target. New target markets will appear from election to election, from campaign to campaign and from initiative to initiative. Political brands need to regularly assess and reassess their desired target market[s] as core target segments are susceptible to change over time. Therefore,

segmentation principles can be applied to politics but political brands may chose not to admit this. Political brands should be strategic with their choice of target segments and not overly ambitious and select too many segments to target. Otherwise, this can have an impact on efficiency of touchpoints and limit the effectiveness of the overall message. For example, this can result in political brands being accused of hypocrisy, inconsistency, confusion by representing '*all things to all people resulting in them looking short-term and opportunistic in the eyes of the electorate*' (Smith and Hirst 2001, 1070). Irrespective of the typology, political brands need to understand their current position in the mind of key segments as this will enable them to identify any misinterpretation and develop a desired identity/position. Therefore, in order to understand desired and actual positioning of political brands, the concept of brand identity serves as an appropriate theoretical lens to frame the discussion.

Positioning Political Brands – Political Brand Identity

In order to build and manage political brands, the concept of *brand identity* is a useful construct to consider the internally created position. Brand identity relates to the "*distinctive and relatively enduring characteristics*" (He *et al.* 2016:1310) of a brand's envisioned position. The construct of brand identity can be understood from an organisational perspective and can be applied to all typologies of brands including political brands. Therefore, political brand identity can be interpreted as the desired projection, a narrative formulated and communicated by individuals within the political organisation. Further, political brand identity represents what the strategists, politicians and communication directors want their brand to 'stand for' in the minds of multiple stakeholders inside and outside the organisation. More specifically, individuals such as politicians, strategists, paid/voluntary staff, activists and supporters create an envisaged identity developed around physical elements such as logos, symbols, communication platforms-tools, messages and policies often designed to appeal to different groups or target markets.

In addition, political brand identity can be crafted from intangible elements such as a distinct set of values, narratives, mission, vision, personality ideology, and culture-heritage often brought to life through preferred imagery and associations. Everyone inside the political brand have a responsibility to ensure there is consistency between the physical and intangible elements, remain united and ensure all individuals remain

'on message'. This increases the likelihood of projecting a clear, unambiguous identity and maintaining an authentic, credible political brand. Further, clear, understandable, relatable and relevant political brands have the opportunity to design and develop an appealing and positive identity that resonates and corresponds with the personal identity of citizens. This resonance can lead to the establishment of a close relationship and a sense of loyalty between the political brand and citizen. Therefore, political brands need to ensure their identities are believable, grounded on style and substance, live up to expectations, coherent across all touchpoints and be prepared to amend their offering in relation to an ever-changing dynamic political environment. Nevertheless, strategists, politicians and communication directors need to regularly reflect on the identity of their political brands and recognise the benefits and implications of strong political brand identities.

Building and managing political brand identity is not just about creating and raising awareness. Indeed, political brand identities should demonstrate positive unique characteristics that allow political brands to project a clearly differentiated position compared with political rivals. Further, it is important that citizens recognise the uniqueness and distinct identities and this can lead to alignment between the communicated identity and understood image in the mind of the public, which in turn can lead to success at the ballot box. Further, periodically assessing political brand identity is not the only construct that needs to be monitored and individuals need to consider the concept of political brand image.

Positioning Political Brands – Political Brand Image and Reputation

In contrast to brand identity, brand image refers to how a brand is perceived externally by consumers and public. Further, brand image is generally defined as the “*perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumers memory*” (Keller 1993, 3) and considered “*a network of linkages between all the cognitive and emotional elements*” evoked by the name of an organisation (Gutman and Miaoulis 2003, 106). It is important for organisations to understand how consumers develop, categorise and access these associations and this constitutes as the actual position in the mind of consumers (Aaker 1997; Anana and Nique 2010; Kunkel and Biscaia 2020).

In a political setting, political brand image is the manifestation [actual position] of the communicated identity [desired position] combined with perceptions, associations and attitudes in the mind of the citizen or voter (Pich et al. 2018). Indeed, political brand image can be seen as the *immediate* understanding of the political brand brought to life through top of mind associations, understanding of the physical and intangible elements, perceived expectations of how the brand will perform and supported [or not] by past direct and indirect experiences (Nielsen 2017). Political brand image should also reveal distinct factors of differentiation, which can represent unique selling points for the brand (Pich et al. 2020a; Pich et al. 2018).

Political brand reputation on the other hand, can be defined as a collective representation or aggregate of images associated with a brand *over-time* (Pich et al. 2018). Further, in order to uncover a political brand's reputation *both current* and *past* brand images must be captured, which would reveal consistencies and contradictions with the brand and highlight potential opportunities to make strategic management adjustments to the brand if required (Balmer and Liao 2007). Consistent representations should reveal a brand's reputation whereas incoherent *current* and *past* associations are not recognised as long-term 'brand reputation' and instead reveal current 'brand image' (Pich et al. 2018).

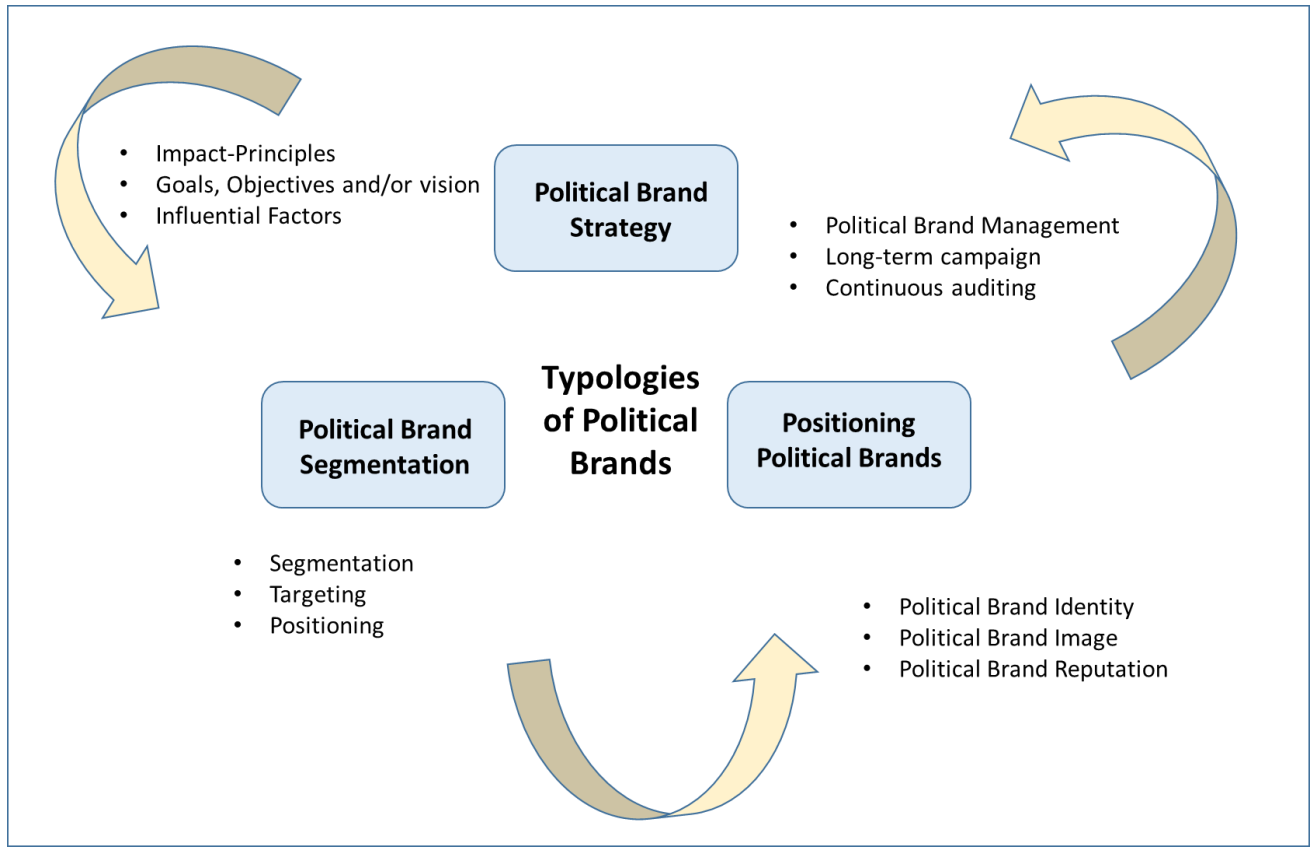
It is important to reiterate, political brand image and political brand identity are related yet distinct concepts [as outlined in table 5] and can be adopted to examine how political brands are created, communicated and perceived by various internal and external stakeholders (Nandan 2005; Pich and Newman 2020; Pich et al. 2020a). However, whilst political strategists can create and manage their brand identity, they have little control over how citizens understand their brands, and this can be tricky to manage (Marland et al. 2017; Smith and French 2009). It is therefore the role of political strategists is to ensure there is a degree of alignment between communicated identity and understood image-reputation (Marland 2016; Marland et al. 2017). Misalignment between communicated identity and understood image-reputation can weaken political brands as it can damage the clarity of message and positioning. Strong brand image-reputation can help politicians and political parties to build a relationship with voters and citizens and increase brand trust. This is likely to influence brand loyalty, which supports the notion that a political brand image-reputation is vital for understanding and managing relationships with citizens (Pich et al. 2020a).

Therefore, utilising the theoretical lens of political brand identity and political brand image-reputation will reveal alignment between desired and actual positioning (Needham and Smith 2015; Pich et al. 2020a; Pich et al. 2018). However, just like commercial brands, political strategists need to be aware that universal alignment is almost impossible, as there will always be some misalignment between communicated identity and understood image (Dahlen et al. 2010; de Chernatony 2007; de Chernatony 1999). Therefore, successful political brands need to ensure alignment between their desired identity and actual image-reputation needs to be as narrow as possible. This demonstrates the importance of periodically assessing and monitoring political brand identity and political brand image-reputation with the aid of empirical research/market research (de Chernatony 1999; Needham and Smith 2015; Pich and Newman 2020; Pich et al. 2020a). This insight will enable political brands maintain and strengthen existing alignment or develop strategies to address any misalignment.

Political Brand Management

This chapter has discussed the complexity and multifaceted nature of political brands and introduced some of the diverse typologies of political brands. Further, this chapter has highlighted that typologies of political brands can develop distinct strategies, which are influenced driven by the political brand's impact-principles, goals, objectives and/or vision and influential factors. This was followed by acknowledging the multiple interrelated relationships and stakeholders, which are associated with political brands, which also effect the strategies adopted by political brands. More specifically, irrespective of the campaign, policy initiative, or election [short-term/long-term] political brands should remember to reflect on their segmentation strategy and avoid an undifferentiated 'catch all' approach in order to develop a successful position in the mind of the stakeholder. Following the identification of a suitable segmentation and targeting strategy, political brands can design and develop their designed position; brought to life through the concepts of envisaged political brand identity and understood political brand image-reputation. Understanding the consistency between communicated identity and interpreted image will highlight any discrepancies that need to be addressed or opportunities to maintain, expand or utilise. This in turn will lead to the development of a repositioning strategy or the conservation of the current positioning strategy, which form part of managing and sustaining political brands. An

illustration of the strategic process of managing political brands can be seen in figure 2.



(Figure 2: Strategic process of managing political brands developed by the author)

Furthermore, figure 2 acknowledges that the strategic process of managing political brands is an ongoing cyclical rather than linear and political brands and the political brand ecosystem should be routinely examined to understand the desired position [identity] and actual position [image] in the mind of stakeholders to manage any potential misalignment. This systematic practice should be embraced by all typologies of political brands irrespective of whether they are designing short-term or long-term campaigns, policies, initiatives, or fundamental changes to their positions. Therefore, positioning has a central place within political branding theory as it provides insight into the political brand's product offering; responds to the wants and needs of voters; and enables strategists to create a competitive differentiation in the political market place. However, understanding how political brands are positioned by political actors and how political brands are understood by citizens is often difficult to capture. Therefore, future research should consider this particularly longitudinal and

comparative research, which up until now remains scarce within political branding and political marketing.

Case Study: An International Application

So far, we have conceptualised political entities as brands, discussed the different typologies of political brands within the political brand ecosystem and highlighted the importance of strategic political segmentation. We then acknowledged that political brands are positioned by political actors and revealed how they are understood in the minds of citizens through two appropriate theoretical lenses namely political brand identity and political brand image-reputation. This section will focus on a specific example and discuss the *application* of identity and image-reputation to a real life international context. More specifically, we will discuss the identity, image and reputation of a political brand in the context of the United Kingdom. This demonstrates the transfer potential of branding to politics however acknowledges that core branding concepts and frameworks may need to be tailored to address the unique settings and contexts.

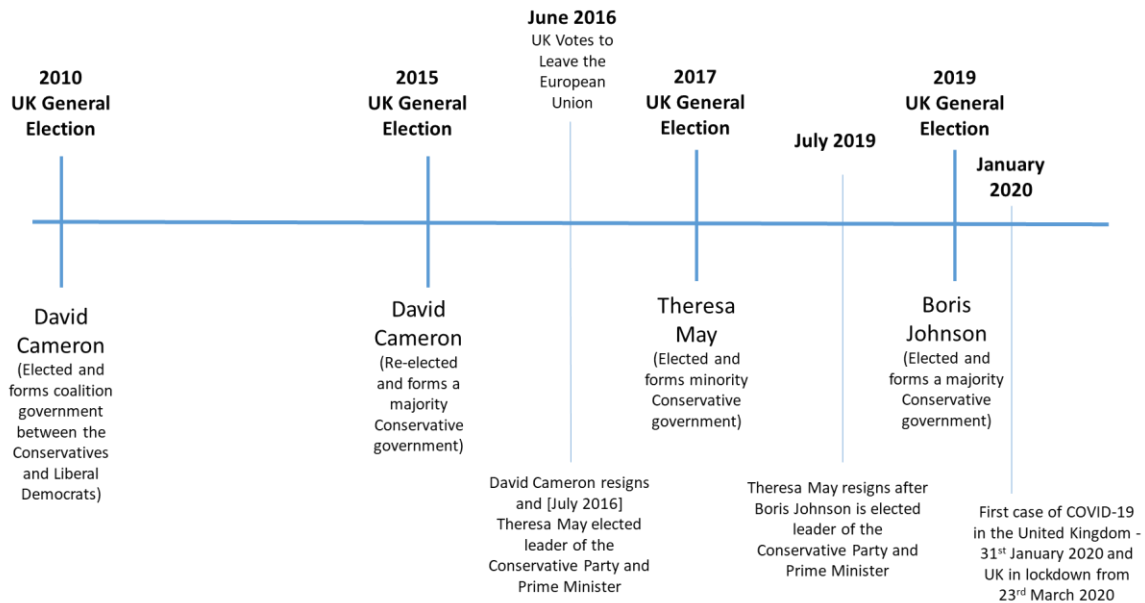
Case Study: Political Brand Identity and Image-reputation in United Kingdom

This case study focuses on the political brand identity, image and reputation of the UK Conservative Party brand from 2010-2020 under the leadership of *David Cameron*, *Theresa May* and *Boris Johnson*. More specifically, this case discusses the perceptions and messaging associated with the UK Conservative Party brand.

Vote for Change

The UK Conservative Party has been described as one of '*the two foremost UK political brands*' (Lloyd 2006:59) and had enjoyed electoral success at local, national and international settings. However, the 1997 UK General Election witnessed the rise of Tony Blair's Labour Party and the demise of the Conservatives resulting in thirteen years as the official opposition in the UK Parliament. Following the election of David Cameron as party leader of the Conservatives in 2005, the party set about attempting to reposition the Conservative Party brand to contest the 2010 UK General Election. David Cameron desired to position the UK Conservative Party brand identity as 'relatable', 'in-touch', 'economically responsible', 'compassionate' and the party of 'change'. This was in sharp contrast to Gordon Brown's Labour Party, which was

characterised by the Conservatives as ‘economic irresponsible’ and political brand that could not be trusted to safeguard the economy following the 2009 world wide credit crisis. Figure 6 outlines the development of the Conservative Party brand from 2010-2020.



(Figure 6: Overview of the UK Conservative Party Brand Image 2010-2020 developed by the author)

However, the 2010 UK General Election resulted in a hung-parliament forcing David Cameron to join forces with the Liberal Democrats to form a coalition government until May 2015. Research suggests that David Cameron’s failure to secure a majority in 2010, stemmed from ambiguity with the ‘Tory brand identity’ and people were not given clear reasons to vote Conservative. Many voters acknowledged David Cameron had made some progress with the detoxification of the ‘Tory brand’ and believed that David Cameron represented ‘change’. However, voters could not necessarily articulate the implications of ‘change’ and this combined with previously held perceptions that the party represented the ‘rich and privileged’ hampered the brand’s success (Pich et al 2018).

Consistency of Messages

Fast forward to the 2015 UK General Election, Cameron had recovered from the ‘nasty party’ reputation and had built a strong, identifiable and differentiated political brand identity compared with political rivals. Indeed, Cameron had positioned the UK

Conservative brand as credible, trustworthy, and responsible, with positive associations of ‘economic competence’ (Pich et al. 2020a). Therefore, at the 2015 UK General Election, there was greater alignment between communicated identity and understood image-reputation, which some have attributed to the Conservatives securing a majority in the UK Parliament – the first UK Conservative majority since Prime Minister John Major’s electoral success in 1992. Table 4 sets out the core messages and levels of consistency from 2010-2020.

	2010 UK General Election	2015 UK General Election	2017 UK General Election	2019 UK General Election
Conservative Party Leader	David Cameron	David Cameron	Theresa May	Boris Johnson
Main Opposition Leader	Gordon Brown	Ed Miliband	Jeremy Corbyn	Jeremy Corbyn
Core Message	Vote for Change	Strong Leadership, A Clear Economic Plan And A Brighter, More Secure Future	Forward, Together Strong and Stable	Get Brexit Done. Unleash Britain's Potential. Britain Deserves Better
Clarity of Political Brand Image	Ambiguous yet some detoxification and leader focused	Some consistency and differentiation	Ambiguous, leader focused yet focused on Brexit	Some consistency and differentiation
Number of Seats Gained/Lost	96+ – total of 306	24+ - total of 330	-13 – total of 317	+47 – total of 365
Outcome	Coalition Government	Majority Government	Minority Government	Majority Government

(Table 4: Core Messages of the UK Conservative Party Brand Image 2010-2020 developed by the author)

Therefore, David Cameron’s core consistent message of ‘strong leadership, a clear economic plan and a brighter, more secure future’ cut through and resonated with more people than in 2010. This gave voters some idea of what they could expect if the Conservatives were re-elected. However, while the ‘nasty party’ imagery had declined, the UK Conservative brand continued to face challenges particularly in terms of longstanding negative associations especially the image-reputation that the brand represented the rich and privileged in society.

Strong and Stable to Get Brexit Done to Build Back Better

Following the 2016 Referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union and the UK voted for ‘Brexit’, David Cameron resigned and Theresa May was elected as Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister. In her early months as Prime Minister, Theresa May enjoyed high rankings in public-private polling compared with her political rivals and she decided to organise a snap-general election with the aim of increasing the Conservative majority and securing a mandate for her leadership. Sadly, for Theresa May, her anticipated majority did not materialise and the Conservatives lost thirteen seats resulting in the formation of a minority government. Research suggests that Theresa May consistently communicated a simple identity

slogan of 'strong and stable'. However, many voters were perplexed as to what 'strong and stable' represented and craved detailed policies and initiatives to underpin her core message. Therefore, it could be argued that Theresa May made a similar mistake with her brand identity-image-reputation strategy just as David Cameron did in 2010.

Boris Johnson was not going to make the same mistake. Following Theresa May's resignation as Conservative party leader, Boris Johnson won the leadership election and thus became Prime Minister in July 2017. Throughout Boris's leadership campaign, he vowed to 'deliver Brexit, unite the country and defeat Jeremy Corbyn'. However, after realising the challenges and difficulties of delivering Brexit with a minority government, Boris pushed for a general election to win his own mandate and secure a much-needed majority. The fourth general election in ten years was set for December 2019 and Boris redeployed his successful leadership message of '*Get Brexit Done - Unleash Britain's Potential*' however supported this message with a series of specific pledges such as '50,000 extra nurses' and '40 new hospitals'. Therefore, Boris projected greater consistency and a clearer, memorable and positive political brand identity and simple message, which in turn resulted in him winning a large majority taking 365 seats [out of 650] of the UK Parliament and securing a clear mandate in his own name. However, in early 2020, Boris Johnson's leadership and realisation of his political brand was put to the test after the outbreak of the coronavirus [COVID-19], which resulted in a series of national and regional lockdowns across the United Kingdom. Time will tell as to whether Boris Johnson's handling of the pandemic and applied political brand will *help* or *hinder* his brand's chances at the next UK General Election scheduled for 2024. Either way, Boris Johnson and the UK Conservative Party will attempt to position their identity as 'economic competent', 'relatable', 'aspirational', enablers of a decentralisation to the 'north' of the country and 'delivered Brexit' and hope this is coherent with the image-reputation in the mind of the electorate.

Case Summary

This case acknowledges that political brand identity-image-reputation can be paradoxical and changes over time. For example the UK Conservative brand image from 2010-2020 can be seen as multifaceted with some consistency yet changeable from leader to leader. Political leaders of the day aim to position their 'party brands' according to their vision, impact-principles, ideology, influential factors and values,

which translate into strategy, policies and campaigns. However, we must not forget that the success of political brands are not just based on the clarity of message, consistent of identity-image-reputation, inclusion of style and substance but also other factors such as weaknesses, incoherency and disunity of competitor political brands including their leaders, parties and policies. Finally, this case demonstrates that branding is a 'powerful mechanism' that can help academics and practitioners deconstruct and understand the image of political brands. All political brands project differentiation and attempt to communicate rationale to voters to identify with their vision.

Conclusions

Subsequently, this chapter discussed the complexity and multifaceted nature of political brands and introduced some of the diverse typologies of political brands. This chapter highlighted that typologies of political brands can develop distinct strategies, which are influenced driven by the political brand's impact-principles, goals, objectives and/or vision and influential factors. This was followed by acknowledging the multiple interrelated relationships and stakeholders, which are associated with political brands, which also effect the strategies adopted by political brands. More specifically, irrespective of the campaign, policy initiative, or election [short-term/long-term] political brands should remember to reflect on their segmentation strategy and avoid an undifferentiated 'catch all' approach in order to develop a successful position in the mind of the stakeholder. Following the identification of a suitable segmentation and targeting strategy, political brands can design and develop their designed position; brought to life through the concepts of envisaged political brand identity and understood political brand image-reputation. Understanding the consistency between communicated identity and interpreted image will highlight any discrepancies that need to be addressed or opportunities to maintain, expand or utilise. This in turn will lead to the development of a repositioning strategies or the conservation of current positioning strategies, which form part of managing and sustaining political brands.

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