Pre-Election Branding Strategies of Bhartiya Janta Party in Indian General Election 2014: A Content Analysis

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Abstract: The branding strategies of the Presidential and Prime Ministerial candidates of the US and the UK respectively have great learning implications for the political marketers worldwide. Especially the branding campaigns of Barack Obama have been much appreciated. Recently, the insurgent Pre-election Presidential branding campaign of President Donald Trump is also taken lessons from. Similarly, the Bhartiya Janta Party's (BJP's) branding campaign in India has been revolutionary in Indian Politics, often cited as Presidential Style campaign. One of the remarkable features in this election was an intensive use of Social Media and Integrated Marketing Communications. Hence, the objectives of this study are to perform qualitative and quantitative conceptual content analysis of the pre-election Facebook posts of BJP for duration of six months to identify the political branding strategies deployed by the party. The outcome of the study endeavors to draw branding lessons from this campaign and propose future scope of study in the arena of political branding.

Keywords: Politics, Marketing, Branding, Political Marketing, Political Branding, Political Communication, Content Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Political Marketing, an amalgamation of commercial marketing with politics is proliferating in its significance in various democracies worldwide. Especially, the political branding strategies of the Presidential campaigns of the US and the Prime Ministerial (PM) campaigns of the UK are widely researched and provide a great deal of branding lessons for the political marketers globally.

Especially the branding campaigns of the Past President of the US, Barack Obama have been much appreciated, researched and taken lessons from. Even the recent, insurgent Pre-election Presidential branding

campaign of the US President Donald Trump is also much researched, discussed and is a great source of knowledge for contemporary political branding practitioners.

Similarly, the Indian General Election 2014 has served as a catalyst for a wider paradigm shift in the political scenario in India. The multiparty system and the reducing points of differences between various political parties had led to a consistent challenge for the parties to differentiate themselves. Besides, the advancements in commercial marketing and branding principles; as well as growth in Information and Communication Technology have also provided a great deal of opportunities for the parties to create a distinctive image in the minds of the electorate.

This election has witnessed a sophisticated and well planned application of political marketing and branding strategies. Political parties and products have been witnessed as endeavoring to brand themselves. Especially, the Bhartiya Janta Party's (BJP's) branding campaign has been revolutionary in Indian Politics, which was often cited as Presidential Style campaign. One of the remarkable features in this election was an intensive, well planned and executed Social Media and Integrated Marketing Communications strategies; which can also be attributed to party's triumph in the election.

Hence, the objectives of this study are to:

– Perform qualitative and quantitative conceptual content analysis of the pre-election Facebook posts of BJP to identify the political branding strategies deployed by the party.

– Draw branding lessons from this campaign and propose future scope of study in the arena of political branding.

To address the research objectives, the paper is structured as follows: after the introduction (section-1), section-2 builds the theoretical foundation for the study, followed by methodological approach adopted for the study (section-3), analysis (section-4), discussion & implications of the study (section-5), and conclusion (section-6).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section provides a concise overview of the theoretical foundation for this paper, to show the applicability of commercial marketing and branding concepts in politics.

As Kotler, Keller, Koshy & Jha, 2013 quoted that anything can be marketed; whether it is physical goods, services, place, property, organizations, persons, ideas or experiences. The inquiry hence arises is whether politics can be marketed, and if yes, then what is to be marketed and how? These inquests are satiated in this section.

Marketing is identifying and satisfying customer needs profitably by creating, communicating, exchanging and delivering offering (value). Hence, marketing strategies envisages strategies related to "STP + 4Ps + Branding + Competition" that is, segmenting the market, deciding the target market whose need to cater, creating offering for the market (product), exchanging the value with the market (pricing), delivering the offering (placement), communicating about the offering/value (promotion), and differentiating to attract customers, build and retain relationship with them (branding and competition). Applied to political processes, commercial marketing and branding respectively becomes "political marketing" and "political branding".

The pedestal of marketing concept is the understanding of consumer need; so is with the political marketing. As a part of the exchange process, candidates must understand the electorates' needs and desires (Kotler and Kotler, 1999). Thus developing the product, price, place and promotion strategies considering the electorates' needs is known as market-orientation or voter- centeredness. For this, Hooley and Saunders, 1993 has come up with the theory of first-order and second-order segmentation. Segmenting the market on geographic and demographic basis is said as the first-order segmentation; whereas segmenting the electorates' needs on the basis of ideological, psychographics and class, image perception basis is second-order segmentation. Further, staying in tune with the popular culture in the society to gain competitive benefit is acknowledged as cultural branding (Smith and Speed, 2011).

Political products are more susceptible to free media scrutiny and hence, require a consistent effort to building strong, favorable and unique association and image in the minds of voters. This is why positioning, an act of designing a distinct image in the minds of customers (Kotler *et al.* 2013), accentuated by Lock and Harris 1996 in political marketing, becomes imperative.

Political marketing practitioners market parties and their ideologies, issues, policies, and personalities of candidates like brands. The pricing is the exchange of promise to satiate the problems, the needs of the voters in exchange of their support (Henneberg, 2002) and donations (Wagen, 1983).

Place strategy in political marketing, is in milieu of reaching out the voters to deliver the promise to satisfy their needs. It can vary from party at the grassroots level; local electioneering (Wring, 1997); and rather persistent efforts when in power that is, permanent campaigning (Nimmo, 1999; Butler and Collins, 2001; Smith, 2001; Sparrow and Turner, 2001; Newman, 2005; and Butler *et al.*, 2007).

Political brands may bring into play various tools of promotion such as advertising, publicity, internet and interactive marketing to communicate about themselves. Sales promotion and personal selling (e.g. local canvassing) as strategies are less effective and hence, lesser used strategies these days. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has led to a remarkable insurgence in the way parties communicate. Social media principally has been extensively deployed by political parties and candidates. Message content, characteristics and frequency are also vital in communication.

Political branding is the strategic use of consumer branding tactics in the building of a political brand image (Scammell, 2007). Kotler et al. 2013 provided three sets of drivers to build brand equity which envisages:

(i)   The preliminary selection for the brand elements or identities enabling the brand building (for instance, brand names, logos, symbols, slogans, jingles, URLs, characters, signage, packages and spokespeople).

(ii) All marketing actions and backing marketing programs accompanying the offering (value to be delivered).

(iii) Leveraging and taking the advantage of other secondary associations (for e.g. associating brands with some famous place, thing, person, or similar with a desirable band equity). This strategy can be said as peripheral route to persuasion.

As branding strategies, political parties select logos and other brand elements; communicate their positioning with their brand slogans; select target electorates; exchanges promises of fulfilling their needs

in exchange of electorates votes and donations; use Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) to communicate about themselves; and relate themselves with celebrity endorsers, national symbols, and similar secondary associations. This shows their usage of political branding.

Hence, from the theoretical framework it can be inferred that the doctrine and practices of commercial branding can competently be translated to the political ambit.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Qualitative and Quantitative Conceptual Content Analysis is the primary method adopted for this study. Content Analysis has been performed for the pre-election Facebook posts of BJP for duration of six immediate and consecutive months to identify various branding strategies used by the party for the Indian General Election 2014.

The detailed methodological approach is depicted as underneath:

Table 1
Research Methodology for Content Analysis

Units of Analysis	Pre-election Facebook posts of BJP from official BJP Facebook page
Units of Sampling	All the Facebook posts in depth; including message texts (their latent and manifest meanings), images, and videos for a duration of six immediate and consecutive months before the election date.
Duration	Facebook Posts of six months before the elections (December, 2013 to May, 2014). Specific dates envisage: 8th December, 2013 to 6th May, 2014. The election was conducted in 9 phases, however, the posts till before the last election on 12th May, 2014 has been considered.
Sample Size (Number of total Facebook posts in the stated duration	50 (including texts, images and videos). 24 full video contents posted on the Facebook on the above dates were also analyzed in detail.
Sampling Frame	Official Facebook page of BJP (https://www.facebook.com/BJP4India/)
Sampling Technique	All the posts in depth, for all the dates in the six months duration before the date of election, on which BJP had posted texts, images, and videos. Rather for a period of 6 months, entire population (all the Facebook posts) was investigated.
Coding Frame	Discussed in detail separately in Table-2
Content Analysis	Qualitative analysis of the content in context of the coding frame as well as Quantitative analysis on the basis of frequencies/ percentages of occurrence of a particular concept in the content

The coding frame has been developed by performing literature review, analyzing the work of various eminent scholars in context of theories of political branding and marketing practices, as well as those adopted by various political practitioners in different countries. The literatures and text reviewed for developing the coding schema are listed in references.

The categories and their explanation (description) are envisaged in the table underneath:

Table 2
Coding Schema for Content Analysis

Strategic Focus	Tactical focus	Description
Products Highlighted	Party	Political party
		Its Past success
		Its Competence (ability) to satisfy voters needs
	Ideology	Ideology of the party
	Issues	The problems of the electorate addressed by the party or the candidate
	Policies	Policy measures to deal with the issues of the electorate
	PM Candidate	Highlighting PM Candidate
Price	Promise	Promise to satisfy the problems in exchange of votes (support)
	Funding/ Donation	Funds to support the party
Promotion	Use of IMC	Usage of tools of promotions in integration with each other
	Message appeal	The usage of informational versus transformational appeal in messages
	Negative campaign	Use of direct or indirect attack
	Tools of promotion	Publicity & Public Relations (word-of-mouth, free media); Internet Marketing; Events (rallies & debates)
Brand Elements	Brand name (party, PM candidate, leader); logo; slogan, URL (website for the campaign related issues)	
Brand Personality	Party, leader or candidate - Competent, confident, enthusiastic, caring, critical, defensive, modest/ simple, strong, brave	
Brand resonance	Relationship focus - Relationship building with internal party members (leaders, volunteers), stakeholders, people, international community	
	Empowering people - Motivating people to contribute, participate in voting, support party, support nation	
Secondary Associations	Associating with historical anecdotes, national symbol or celebrities, co-branding	

Further, in the analysis section the texts, images and videos have been analyzed to find the frequencies of the keywords in light with the above coding schema, along with their qualitative justification. Repetition of one concept in an article will be considered only once; duplication of the concept inside the same article shall be considered as one variable (category) only. Then, finally the implication will be drawn from the frequencies as to which of the strategies has been widely used by the brand BJP and the future scope of study in the ambit of political marketing and branding.

4. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The data analysis, both quantitative (in terms of the occurrence of each of the above concepts) as well as qualitative (communication statements and material justifying the categories mentioned above) are discussed here.

Product Strategy

The political product that was highlighted the most was the party name (100%), followed by PM candidate (76%) and party leader (72%). Issues projected were 54% times.

In context of issues, development-oriented issue was highlighted 26% times, good governance-24%, corruption & scams-22%, issues of unprivileged (farmers, unskilled workers)-20%, economic issues-18%, national security-16%, law & order-14%, national peace (including Jammu & Kashmir issue)-10%, unity-8%, youth-related issues-8%, communalism-8%, environment-8%, national pride-6%, negligence towards armed forces-6%, international peace and relationship-6%, women-related issues-4%, equity and justice-2%.

The issue that was projected the maximum was development-orientation, followed by good governance, corruption and scams, issues of unprivileged sector of the society, economic issues, national security and law and order. Less highlighted issues are equity and justice, and women-related issues, international peace and relationship, and national pride. Rests of the issues were projected moderately.

BJP's ideologies are based on pillars of 'Integral Humanism', 'Social Conservatism', 'Foreign policy based on nationalist principles'. The ideologies of 'Integral Humanism' seem to be highlighted almost 70% times in its relation-orientation; care and concern for people and their problems and; trying to empower people by inviting them to participate in discussion, providing ideas for good governance; concern for various sectors, class and demographics of the society. The national conservatism has been identified very less like in one instance; PM Candidate acknowledged the family system of India as one of its strengths, which should be continued. The ideology of foreign policy based on nationalism can be seen in two incidences. It was evident in PM Candidate's statements on 20th January, 2014 in a speech where he emphasized on nation branding of India, and on the second incidence while addressing NASSCOM India Leadership Forum 2014, he said that "IT sector can be the shining light of Brand India". This shows that the party focuses nationalism aspect for branding itself and creating an impression on the world.

Policies were highlighted very less, only 8% times, wherein for instance, on 20th January, 2014, the PM Candidate proposed few of the policy measures the party shall make if it gets into the power; policy measures like price stabilization fund, skill development program.

Price Strategy

Every time the party has addressed the issues, it had latently or manifestly focusing on then existing government's incompetence to solve them effectively. In exchange of the issues to be solved if it assumes power, 44% times, it had tried to manifestly appeal for votes and support the party in the upcoming elections.

50% of the times, manifestly the text and URLs had been displayed on Facebook page or on the bottom of the videos displayed; appealing the voters to donate for the party and support it by donating.

Promotion Strategy

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has become the integral pillar of branding through which companies (here, parties) can create the desired positioning. BJP had seemed to utilize IMC at its best. The

party brand had seemed to make the best utilization of Interactive tool of promotion, Publicity & Public Relations, Events and Social Media.

62% times Event as a tool of promotion had been used. These events envisaged various BJP National Council Meets and Rallies; for instance, National Council Meetings on 18ᵗʰ and 20ᵗʰ January, 2014. The April month was flooded with lot many rallies addressed by the PM candidate in many cities across India. Even the rallies were branded by providing the names like "Bharat Vijay Rally". In fact, it was the first political party in India to make use of 3D Hologram technology to address electorates of multiple regions at once; a buzz was created even for this technological initiative.

The party has found to understand the importance of free media, and has even, acknowledged the power and importance of media 4% time. This is even witnessed in the number of press conferences being addressed by the party leaders. Almost 52% of the press conference videos on various agendas were found in these Facebook posts.

The party has been found to use a right blend of emotional as well as rational appeals depending on the issues and agenda being addressed. For instance, when the issues were regarding anti-incumbency and the miserable plight of the people in the existing Central Government's regime, a mix of emotions like concern, care, sympathy, anger, unrest were found to be projected. While the party leaders defended themselves before media or public on various stands/ or allegations, they were found to reflect the emotions of confidence, firmness with some anger. Where they were trying to appeal people to vote for them, and show their eligibility to hold office in Central, emotions of confidence and enthusiasm could be witnessed. At some instances, where the PM Candidate wanted to be one of the people, addressing his past background being a tea vendor, he addressed emotions of modesty. At some instances, few leaders tried to lighten the environment during the press conferences by giving a gentle smile. Emotions of patriotism were created for the party by associating party with national symbols like national song "Vande Mataram", Iron man of India "Sardar Patel".

Also, wherever required, the party leaders in their speech provided logic to support their arguments; for instance, facts and figures used to show growth in various sectors in the regime of BJP ruled states; facts and figures of the past successful regime Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee led NDA alliance (alliance of BJP with its allied parties).

Besides, negative campaigning has been found in political communication strategies of parties in various democracies. BJP also had been found to be heavily relying on negative campaigning (attacking the opposition parties and their leaders, it can be direct or indirect attacks). In 44% communication, it had been directly attacking its opponents with citing even the names; whereas, 10% times the attacks were indirect and latent. For instance, in most of their speeches, they attacked its opponent Indian National Congress (INC) projecting faults in its governance on various issues addressed above. Majority of the time the then existing government in the Central UPA (INC led alliance), INC and its key leaders were attacked. In many speeches, the attempt was to create unrest in the people with the existing government and create an anti-incumbency behavior in them.

Brand Elements

Brand elements have been found to have a very strong presence in the select communication material of the party. As discussed earlier, and even quite obvious, party brand name, logo and symbol had been addressed 100% times.

Overall the brand slogan had been addressed 40% times, URL (the web link of other issues, twitter handle and such) were found 60% of times. For instance, india272.com, the mission of BJP was branded in terms of URL, which was being scrolled many times in the bottom of the videos played.

Other brand signage like the "BJP orange turban", "the cap endorsing Modi for PM", "the orange BJP neck stole (scarf) endorsing the party name and logo" were widely being used as props by the volunteers and other party members.

Brand Personality

In context of brand personality, the party brand has tried to show its caring personality in all the instances where it has tried to address upon various issues and shown concern for people as discussed above. In almost 74% cases the party brand had tried to show its confidence when reflecting its past success and performance, and its self-confidence that this time voters will elect them. Party's past success was highlighted 26% times and its competence to solve the problems of the people was highlighted 16% times.

For instance, in many press conferences, senior party leaders quoted the competence of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji's lead government in the central, in curbing inflation, GDP growth rate, and the appreciation of Indian currency during his regime. In some of the speeches the party leaders appreciated the commendable work done in various BJP ruled states. All these can be inferred as an attempt to persuade voters by justifying their competence for being elected in the power.

In all the cases it had been using negative campaigning, the brand personality reflected was critical. In all the 52% press conferences the leaders defended their stand and arguments confidently. Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman in fact once manifestly quoted that they would always be ready and strong enough to face media and answer them confidently. This statement of the senior party leader also shows strong/ brave personality trait of the political brand which was reflected in other incidences too (14% times).

All the party leaders carried the formal traditional Indian attire with simple colors. Besides, their statements as well as body language at many instances were also simple. For instance, at one place, PM candidate said that he was a 'tea-vendor' and still feels himself not as ruler of his regime (state) but a volunteer and a elected member of the government who is at the service of his people. All these reflected the simple/ modest brand personality attribute of political party and its candidates.

Brand Resonance

A considerable amount of effort was evident in the political brand's message strategies to build brand resonance (38% times). The relationship building focus of the party was manifest in various incidences.

For instance, a focus on internal relationship was reflected in party's attempt to hold various BJP Council Meetings with senior leaders as well as with other volunteers of the party, and quoting that decision shall be made in consultation with other senior party leaders. On 17th January, 2014 importance was given to the volunteers by quoting, "every party fights election by the support of its volunteers" (said in Hindi language). Also on 20th April, 2014 it was quoted that BJP respects its elders, that is, senior party leaders. All these incidences reflected attempts to focus on the relation building with internal party members.

Besides, several incidences reflected party's attempt to establish connection with people. For instance, the party's concerns for people on various issues like poverty, inflation, corruption and such. A press conference on 11th March, 2014 had an important agenda of expressing concern on the death of Indian soldiers in a Naxal affected area. Not only for people of India but the party conveyed concern for international peace, for instance, a press conference on 8th January, 2014 expressed concern for Hindus attacked in Bangladesh.

The relationship focus was also evident in party's approach to empower people; by motivating them to contribute – participate in voting, support the party and support nation at large. One of the brand slogans "Sabka sath, sabka vikas", everybody's contributions is everybody's development. A video release on 18th January, 2014 even created an emotional song to motivate people to arise and realize their powers to create a better India. Few of the words of that song in Hindi language were "Bharat jaag re, alas nidra tyaag re, shahidon ka aarman tu, tukadon me tu bat raha, ekta ka byugal baja…"; that means wake up Indians for you are the hope of the martyrs of freedom, why are you getting divided, come and get united. In an address to NASSCOM India Leadership Forum 2014, the PM candidate Shri Narendra Modi appreciated and motivated Indian IT technocrats to realize their power to contribute to brand India.

Hence, relationship orientation employed by the political brand was manifest in its various maneuvers.

Leveraging secondary associations

Associating one's brand with the objects/ persons with which customers unconditionally associate, leads to an indirect association of customers with one's brand. This application of classical conditioning theory of learning could be witnessed in BJP's strategy to leverage secondary associations.

For instance, the party linked itself with national symbols like national song and national flag. In some instances "Vandemataram" was being played and in some instances national flag was shown. It also associated itself with respected national images like Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. All these were visible 12% of the times.

It also associated itself with few of the historical anecdotes and personalities like Maharanapratp and Shivaji Maharaj. Association with celebrities for endorsing was found to be less (like in one press conference, BJP National President, Shri Rajnath Singhji was with TV star turned politician Late Shri Vinod Khanna). Co-branding by alliance with other parties was evident 6% of the times, like for example, leaders in their speech addressed their alliance with Shiv Sena and Udhav Thakrey, and expressed that they respect the alliance with Shiv Sena (11th March, 2014 Press Conference).

Thus, the party brand had also endeavored to leverage secondary associations in various ways.

5. DISCUSSION & IMPLICATION

Political branding connotes application of commercial branding strategies by political brands to create a distinctive image in the minds of the electorates; compared to other competing parties. The political brands are existing in an era where political parties and brands have become look alike; with decreasing voter turnout and voter loyalty; a dynamic national and international climate posing incessant challenges; whereas proliferation of ICT can be a challenge as well as opportunity; to name a few. Hence, in this contemporary political market, parties need to adopt sophisticated and well crafted political branding strategies.

The application of political branding and marketing strategies by BJP in Indian General Election 2014 was widely discussed upon, especially the powerful emergence of brand Modi. The same was apparent in the content analysis of the Facebook post of BJP (six immediate and consecutive months prior to the elections). Various branding strategies were deployed by the party however, the extent of them varied.

Product Strategy

As far as product strategy is concerned, the product that was highlighted the most was the party itself, followed by the PM candidate and party leaders. The projection of issues was found to be moderate; whereas the party ideologies were highlighted the least.

From the product strategy it can be inferred that in the case of political products, the customers (voters) eventually have to select the party in totality. Ultimately, on the day of voting, voters have to punch against the name of the party itself; requiring the top of mind awareness of the party name. This is also in line with the philosophy given by Lock and Harris, 1996 that political party is a complex and intricate intangible product which electorate cannot unbundle and consequently majority of electorate have to vote on overall package or brand image. This implies that, the party name cannot be unbundled and is interrelated to anything and everything a party or its other political products does. This would hence require a strong integration and synchronization between various political brands.

Further, it has been found that the PM candidate was highlighted intensively; which can also be associated with the concept of personalization or personification of the political brand. Personalization of political brands is a practice where political leaders turn out to be the major anchor of evaluations and interpretations in the political process (Holtz-Bacha *et al.,* 1998).

One of the benefits, and the rationale behind projecting the PM candidate intensively could be that ultimately he will be leading the nation and hence, a strong, favorable and unique association should be established in the minds of the voters towards him to get their support. Another rationale in this case could be the then existing strong and favorable image of Shri Narendra Modi as a CM of Gujarat since three consecutive terms and his Gujarat's Development model. That is, the capability of the leader to 'personify' meaning (Smith and French, 2011); and their lucid and consistent personalities, as well as wider connotations in the minds of the electorate (Schneider, 2004; Guzmán and Sierra, 2009). This strategy is even supported by Davin and Mian (2010), when he quoted that the leader's reputation and image impact the attitude of voters towards the party and vice versa. Also, Needham (2006, 2005) believed that triumphant parties build up brand attributes in their leaders to retain relationships with supporters ahead of the initial transaction. However, Needham (2006, 2005) also believed that over emphasizing on the leader may also create issues of leadership succession for the party in the future. Hence, the level and type of emphasis given on the PM candidate should be researched upon before applying it.

Issues as a product were highlighted 54% times, can be justified with marketing's fundamental theme of identifying and satisfying customer needs. Behind highlighting various issues pertaining to economic development, underprivileged, women, national security and others; the major objective was delivering message to the voters that the party understand their needs and problems, with a promise to solve those problems. The party was found to be focusing on both the levels of segmentation; first-order as well as second-order. However, the focus on second-order of segmentation was found to be more. This implies

that the party not only had limited itself on the demographic aspects of the voters but also had reached up to the roots of the problems faced by them as well as the benefits they would like to seek from the government.

The policies as political brands/ products were not highlighted much, except for few policy measures like price stabilization fund and skill development program. This is in line with what Smith and Worcester, 2001 said that image is a bigger component of voting behavior than the parties' issues and policies. The policies may be highlighted later during the permanent campaigning, if the party comes to the power and frame the policies for the issues it had promised to solve. Even a market research in UK confirmed that the images of party and leaders were more influential in appealing voters than their policies (MORI 2005). Same is the case for ideologies which was highlighted by the political party the least. For illustration, historically ideology was used by parties and politicians, whereas in contradiction numerous studies in recent years have recognized that when the ideologies, issues and policies become less distinguished, or voter participation is less, voters utilize mental shortcuts to base their voting choice on various extrinsic cues like personality of candidates, band elements and other related extrinsic cues rather than intrinsic and rational cues like issues and policies.

All these imply that the impact of various political brands (products) in influencing voters, vary. This may again be different in the context of the country, region or the segment parties are targeting. Hence, the future scope of study in context of product strategy of political brands may address questions like:

- What is the level and type of influence of each of these political products on the voters?

- Which political products should the political parties highlight more?

- What are the expectations of the voters pertaining to characteristics of various political products?

- What is the perception and attitude of voters towards political products in totality and how does this influence them and their voting decisions?

- How does brand personification impact the voters and the political parties?

Price Strategy

In the milieu of pricing strategy, Reid, 1988 recognized that political price is a mental and emotional purchase. This was even reflected in the works of Niffenegger, 1990 and Wring, 1997 who quoted price as feelings of voters in context of psychological, economic and national expectation and hope in exchange of their support, votes and trust they place on political parties. The same was evident here when the party tried to ensure voters to solve their issues if it comes to power. 54% of times where issues were highlighted, this promise was reflected. 44% of the time it manifestly communicated to the voters and appealed them to vote for the party. Also in the context of donations, it had almost 50% times tried to appeal voters to donate for the party. In 50% cases it tried to appeal for donation and in 24% cases it tried to instill hopes in the voters. Hence, it can be implied that the political parties should understand the needs and problems of the voters well, resolving which can be communicated as their brand promise and value proposition. Besides, as political parties are voluntary and non-profit organizations, they would require donations; which they can crowd source. However, the trust on the party, leaders and its image would determine this type of support of the voters.

Hence, the future scope of study in context of pricing strategy may envisage questions like:

- What do voters expect from the political brands in exchange of their trust, support, donation and votes?

- What are the reasons of decreasing voters' turnout, trust and loyalty; and the factors capable of increasing them?

- What are the factors and their extent of determining the voters' inclination to donate a political party?

- What are the characteristics of the electorate that are more inclined to donate for the political parties?

- What can be the various ways and tactics for crowd sourcing funds/ donations that can appeal the voters? (for instance, besides largely self-funding the campaign, brand Donald Trump in his Presidential campaign for 2016 elections was known to raise funds using the website for seeking donation; selling campaign merchandise, presidential shirts; and by use of paid search advertising to drive donations)

Promotion Strategy

Promotion is an important element in creating the desired image in the minds of the customers. The party seems to deploy this element very effectively. A very intensive and intelligent use of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), as discussed earlier had been made. The party brand also seemed to make the best utilization of Internet for promotion, Publicity & Public Relations, Events and Social Media. It had also made an extensive use of information and communication technologies like 3D hologram and more. As political brands are highly susceptible to free media scrutiny, the party had very well tried to manage the free media by addressing almost 25 press conferences which was evident on the Facebook posts (again, an use of IMC). It very well tried to communicate its stand to the media, and in fact, once quoted that they would always be ready and strong enough to face media and answer them confidently. The rallies of BJP were a buzz during the pre-election period, a glimpse of which was evident in the numerous rallies addressed by the party leaders and PM candidate. The party hence, seemed to apply a right blend of IMC and Luck *et al.* 2003 even acknowledged IMC a practical, logical and inevitable future for political brands.

In the milieu of message content, the party had made use of a right blend of emotional as well as rational appeal. However, a further research can be conducted on the impact of various types of message appeals on voters. Besides, Hackley 2005 said that even details like dressing style can aid the framing of expected message interpretation. The dressing styles of the leaders in least cases were western formal; in majority of the incidences they carried Indian formal wears; which had a point-of-parity with the stereotype image of the political leaders.

Further, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991 proposed diverse argumentation forms of attack such as direct attack, direct comparison and implied comparison ads. Surlin and Gordon 1977, Lang 1991, Newhagen and Reeves 1991, Shapiro and Rieger 1992, Pinkleton 1997 referred that voters are assumed to bear in mind negative ads better than positive ads and are in fact more influential. A wide use of negative ads has been found to be used by the party, especially direct attack ads. But, the negative implication of this

strategy may the concern shown by Savigny (2005), who argued that such ads may have unintended negative ramifications on sponsoring party as well as may restrain voter turnout. Llyod 2008 pointed that these ads may endow with short term advantage but may harm the political brand image and democratic system at large in the long term, and political consumers would have to select their Government on the basis of which political brands they dislike the least. This is again contradictory to what Lau and Pomper 2001stated, that apart from where extreme levels of negativity pervade, there exists some substantiation to propose that it in fact stimulates turnout. Hence, the negative ads and their influence on electorate are complex; requiring research on the same.

Hence, the future scope of study in context of promotion strategy of political brands may address questions like:

- Which medium of promotion the targeted voters are more exposed to?

- What is the perceived level of effectiveness of these medium to the voters in influencing them towards a political product/ brand?

- What is the level of perceived effectiveness of rational and transformational appeals in influencing voters towards a political brand?

- What is the level and type of influence of other message characteristics and sources of information on various segments of voters?

- What is the level of influence of free media in impacting the image about the political brand?

- What strategies should be used to manage the free media effectively?

- How can integrated marketing communications strategies be best crafted and deployed by the party?

- What are the attitudes of voters towards various types of negative campaigns?

- What are the factors favorably and unfavorably affecting negative campaigns?

- What are the significance and impact of strategies to create anti-incumbency behavior in the voters?

Brand Elements

Brand elements are imperative in enabling brand recall, brand recognition, brand image and brand associations. In fact, with the political brands, they are even more important because, the electorate press voting buttons on the party name and logo, which all the parties keep on highlighting for making top of mind awareness. The same was evident with BJP as its party brand name, logo and symbol in all its communication. One more evidence where party had extensively used IT was highlighting URL 60% times, for instance, india272.com, the mission of BJP being branded in terms of URL was being scrolled many times in the bottom of the videos played. This was a wonderful branding of the party's vision to gain majority seats to come in the power; and the mission was branded with this URL. Brand slogan was moderately projected, along with party symbols likes the BJP orange scarf, turban, broach with lotus symbol and similar props.

A solution to the reducing points-of-difference between the political parties, seems Bettman et al.'s argument that in such a condition voters will use their right brain and hence, support decision on peripheral pieces of information; supported by Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1968; Neuman *et al.* 1992; Lupia and McCubbins 1998 that voters rely on cognitive shortcuts as an substitute for exhaustive information. This is where brand elements in the form of well signified visual identity (Djakeli and Tshumburidze 2011) and extrinsic cues can be beneficial.

Hence, the future scope of study in context of selecting brand elements as a strategy of political brands may address questions like:

- What is the perceived level of competence of various brand elements for voters in creating brand recall and recognition?
- What are the characteristics of brand elements that will lead to high brand recall and recognition?
- What meaning can be conveyed by the party through various brand elements?
- How should brand elements be selected to convey the meaning that party intends to convey?
- How do voters interpret the brand meaning of the party through the brand elements?
- Do brand elements help in enabling peripheral route to persuasion compared to other rational appeals?

Brand Personality

Brand personality is an imperative element of branding to create a desired association with the customers. The party had tried to create various types of brand personality images through their manifest as well as latent communication strategies. The party brand had tried to project varied facets of its personality in different contexts, like competent, confident and strong/ brave but modest and simple; caring but critical; enthusiastic but defensive.

Hence, the future scope of study in context of brand personality of political party as well as candidates/ leaders as a strategy of political brands may address questions like:

- Which brand personality characteristics should a political brand highlight more?
- What is the perceived level of influence of various types of brand personality characteristics on voters?
- What are the expected brand personality characteristics of the political brands by the voters?
- What is the self-concept (self-image) of voters about their own brand personalities?
- What are the aspired self-image (aspired personality traits) by the voters?

Brand Resonance/ Relationship

The ultimate objective of the brand as per Consumer-based Brand Equity (CBBE) model is to reach its apex, that is, level of brand resonance. The political brand had endeavored to build relationship not only with its voters but also with party leaders, volunteers and media. It seems to apply the concept of relationship marketing, which is an important pillar of holistic marketing.

Hence, the future scope of study to implement relationship marketing principles and create brand resonance by political brands may address several questions like:

- What is the current level of relationship of the political brands with various stakeholders?

- What should be the type and level of relationship of the political brands with various stakeholders?

- What should be the strategies adopted by the political brands to create desired type and level of relationship with various stakeholders?

- How can political consumers be empowered and what is the impact of the same?

Leveraging Secondary Associations

The application of classical conditioning theory of learning given by Ivan Pavlov which is widely applied in commercial organizations; is also seem to be applied in marketing in the concept of leveraging secondary associations. The theory states that, association of conditional stimulus with unconditional stimulus and repeating it for a period of time shall enable individuals to learn to respond to conditional stimulus irrespective of the unconditional stimulus. This was even witnessed in the party's usage of secondary associations like associating itself with national symbols like national song and flag; national images like Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel; and historical anecdotes like Maharana Pratap and Shivaji Maharaj. The repetition of these would enable transference of positive associations with these secondary brands on the party brand; and lead customer to indirectly develop strong, favorable and unique associations towards the party brand.

Hence, the future scope of study to leverage the secondary associations by political brands may address various questions like:

- What is the type and level of influence of current and past secondary associations on voters?

- What are the types of brands that voters are more associated with, which can also be associated with the political brand?

- What is the desired level and type of influence intended to be created in the voters by associating with these secondary associations?

- What is the impact of co-branding strategies for the party in short as well as long-run and how should it be planned and executed?

6. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that various practices of commercial marketing and branding can be applied for the political products; however the effectiveness of various strategies may vary in different context. This arise the need for incessant research on the effectiveness, impact and influence of intended political branding strategy in varied contexts. This study hence is a modest endeavor to investigate the branding strategies of BJP to provide possibility for future scope of study. Similar investigations as discussed in this study can be conducted in different countries and geographic contexts. Various other communication material like television advertisements, rally speeches, and similar could also be studied. Comparative studies could also be conducted on the political branding strategies of various parties. Also, each of the themes derived here could be taken in depth separately and various qualitative and quantitative studies could be carried out

from the perspective of political party leaders, candidates, volunteers, voters and other stakeholders. Besides, certain concepts like place strategy, brand extension, brand architecture and few other concepts of branding in political context are found to be scant, which can be researched upon. Hence, there lies a great potential in the proliferating arena of political branding which can be explored by researchers as well as political practitioners in various contexts.

Disclaimer: The analysis of the paper is as per the researchers' understanding of the subject and does not intend to hurt any party or any person's sentiments; if so is been apologized. The description of negative campaign in context of sponsoring or target party is not to hurt any party's sentiments, but purely as a part of academic work. The appreciation of the candidates and parties is again purely admiration of their marketing maneuvers and no political move of the researchers. Researchers express gratitude and sense of dignity for all the persons and parties addressed in this paper directly or indirectly.

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