Rajagiri Management Journal
Volume 11, Issue 1, June 2017

A Contemporary Perspective on Political Branding and the Permanent Campaign

Amit Kumar* **& Prof. Somesh Dhamija****

Abstract

Politics has been characterized by the phenomenon of campaigning since the advent of such electoral exercises like elections in modern times. The significance of the same is felt the most when an election is round-the-corner. However, with time, political parties have come to realize that election-based campaigning is not sufficient to stay atop the minds of consumers. Hence, the concept of permanent campaign has got ascendancy in modern-era politics. It highlights the need of being consistently relevant rather than sporadically. This research paper is an effort to explain the phenomenon of permanent campaign and how it derives from political branding as a concept. It makes an attempt to correlate permanent campaign with political branding and how together they have come to characterize the modern-day political affairs for a party. Also, the research paper highlights the relationship as it exists between political branding and political participation.

Keywords: permanent campaign, politics, election, branding, political branding.

* (Corresponding Author), Assistant Professor, Institute of Business Management, GLA University Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, amit.kumar@gla.ac.in, +91-9568749565

** Head-Management (UG), Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, somesh.dhamija@gla.ac.in, +91-9412280122

1. Introduction

The concurrent political environment is such that globally the need of staying connected with the electorate irrespective of it being election season or not has been felt by political parties and leaders alike. Hence, the concept of permanent campaign has gained prominence in the past few years.

Such a phenomenon is pretty common in the western countries as its importance has been felt by the politicians and parties for quite some time now. This is more applicable in the oldest democracy of the world, namely, United States of America. This is so because in the United States, elections keep on happening round-the-year for various bodies. In the Indian context, parties and leaders are becoming more conscious towards it after understanding its importance in the overall scheme of things. One of the reasons for the same could be the aspect that one or the other elections (for central bodies, state bodies, and local bodies) happen every now and then. Hardly a year passes when elections to the state assemblies of one state or the other doesn't take place. Later in the paper, the authors would discuss the cyclic occurrence of state assembly elections in the past five years to highlight the same.

Permanent campaign has been one of the hallmarks of the modern political communication. As had been the case with traditional times, campaigning was something which was to be found only during the time-frame of an event like election. Political parties used to engage in a high-voltage campaign in the lead-up to an election. Once it was over, campaigning took a back seat. Political campaigning was often confused with advertising for election. However, in the modern perspective things have changed.

Another perspective which one needs to bring forth is the aspect that traditionally advertising had been the most extensive as well as expensive tool used for political campaigning. The parties and leaders used advertising comprehensively during the elections to connect with the electorate. However, once the elections were over, the role of campaigning was not felt much. Well, not any longer.

People might find it surprising but now-a-days, political parties and leaders could be very well found to be actively campaigning for their particular party or leader even in the absence of an impending election. This is so because permanent campaigning has found ascendancy with time and has been taken up by them. The present research paper would explore the concept of permanent campaigning,

its relationship with political branding, and how the two are linked with political communication. Further, the paper would explore the relationship between political branding and political participation as found during a political event like election.

Understanding Permanent Campaign

As per Heclo (2000), permanent campaign is a process seeking to manipulate sources of public approval to engage in the act of governing itself. Campaigning is non-stop as it talks about politicians remaining on a 'stand-by' mode with regard to their reelection bid even before the bugle has been sounded for the official campaign. This indeed explains the relevance of permanent campaign. Blumenthal (1982) asserts that there is not much difference with regard to campaigning and governing given that the personnel, tactics, and tools of the election campaign followed the successful candidate into office. This assertion, in effect, talks about the extension of the policies of the incumbent political party or leader thereby translating into an effective campaign which would pitch for their reelection bid.

Ornstein and Mann (2000) second the views of Blumenthal with regard to permanent campaign. They are of the opinion that in the permanent campaign, "the process of campaigning and the process of governing have lost their distinctiveness". What this basically implies is it would be a fallacy to equate permanent campaigning with propaganda. It is much more than that. In fact, as per many thinkers, permanent campaign has extended to the act of governance itself. The deeds performed by the incumbent during their tenure become the point of distinction in the next electoral exercise more than any other form of campaigning.

Permanent campaign has been bolstered by social media in recent times. Outlets like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have given avenues to the leaders and parties to stay abreast with the expectations and thought-processes of the electorate. What makes social media unique is the aspect that its reach is much more than the intended user (it is for this reason that is called 'viral') as well as there is no age-restriction as is the case with voting. Further, it is literally free for anyone to access. All this makes social media a potent tool for staying connected with the electorate round-the-year. People comment, like and share the updates related to political parties and leaders irrespective of the fact whether an election is on the horizon or not. Political parties and leaders have took notice of the same and even those who were traditionally technology-averse have taken to social media to get a feel of the mindset of the online populace.

The pertinent usage of social media by Barrack Obama in the historic 2008 US Presidential Election made the world notice the power which this phenomenon brings with it. Then again in 2012 he won the mandate and social media played its role, this time not to the same extent as its predecessor. Closer home, the historic election of 2014 to elect the fifteenth prime minister of India, was characterized by the prudent use of social media by the major players, none more profound than the present PM Mr Narendra Modi, so much so that he emerged as the 'second most-followed politician on social media in the world' trailing only Barrack Obama. Even today he is the second-most followed politician in the world.

The World of Brands, Branding and Its Extension to Politics

When it comes to defining what a brand is, the definition as given by AMA (1960) is quite comprehensive on the virtue of covering almost every entity - 'A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors'.

When we go by the above thought-process on brand; political parties, leaders and their views definitely qualify for the same. The voters could easily recall the names of the parties, whether national (BJP, INC) or regional (AIADMK, Trinamool Congress) depending on the type of election. Also, the symbols (Lotus-BJP, Hand-INC, Cycle-SP, Elephant-BSP) are very much recognized by the electorate. What is of significance here is to understand that the voters become attached to the parties, leaders, symbols, slogans of their choice over a period of time thereby creating mental short-cuts (heuristics) thus helping them in making decisions about their preferred political brand/s.

There are apparently six attributes of a successful brand: simplicity, uniqueness, reassurance, aspiration, values; and credibility. When one thinks about a successful brand in any domain, it is not difficult to relate these characteristics with such a brand. Messages delivered by political brands should be simple and appeal to the voters. Likewise, credibility plays a momentous role in the appeal of a political party/leader.

The concepts of branding and relationship marketing can be used to highlight the difference between gaining support in the one-off transaction of an election and retaining voter loyalty in a post-'purchase' situation.

Based on the discussion, it is quite apparent that there exist interesting perspectives with regard to whether or not political leaders and parties could be treated on similar lines as products and be branded accordingly.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) have their own perspective in this regard. They are of the view that brands could be analyzed from two distinct points – brand management and consumer perspective. The former is about applying the practices of one market to the other without considering the differences which exist between them. It is this approach which has been taken into consideration while criticizing the application of branding to the field of politics. On the other hand, the latter is about how consumers gain knowledge about a certain brand and engage with it. This includes formation of a certain image in the mind of the consumer about that brand. It is this approach which is used to justify the application of branding principles to political parties and leaders. ***In the current research paper, the authors would focus upon the consumer-centric approach thereby considering political leaders and parties as brands. This is so because they are perceived as brands by the consumers.***

Keller and Lehmann (2006) have been one of the foremost thinkers in the field of branding and the content, as propounded by them, in this regard, on the virtue of its comprehensiveness, assists the authors of the current work to adopt a consumer-centric approach thereby explaining as well as analyzing political parties as brands.

Hence, based on the above discussion it could be implied that when it comes to developing an understanding about how the electorate votes, we need to realize that consumers have an inherent motivation to learn and decide about the political brands in fray.

Carrying this thought process forward, Schweiger and Adami (1999) have propounded that just as a consumer is well aware of features of such famous brands as Ford or VW in auto or McDonalds in Pizza Hut in QSR. They have a similar understanding and knowledge of political leaders and parties.

Schneider (2004) is of the view that owing to the knowledge which consumers have about the names of political parties or politicians, the brand value of the same could be arrived at accordingly.

French and Smith (2008) opine that the brand value which is associated with political outfits, the policies formulated and communicated by politicians, is fairly accurate and results in a consistent message as conveyed to the electorate. Aaker (1997) has been the prime authority when it comes to brand personality. Aaker has given shape to the human aspect of personality, combining it with other marketing scales to come up with a set of human traits which are associated with a brand.

As per Nielsen and Larsen (2014), there exists a correlation between the brands and the choices made by voters in the sense that a strong political brand has got more chances of getting voted (and ultimately selected) over its contemporaries. This holds true even when one accounts for demographics and other factors in a democracy like India where they do play an influential role in the final selection. The selection of brand Modi over the rival brands despite many sections of the society not identifying with the ideology of BJP is a testimony of this phenomenon.

Political Branding: The Concept

According to Scammell (2007), for a brand to be successful, it needs to be both functional and differentiated from its competitors, with the latter lying largely in the realm of emotional attachment. Candidates who ignore emotional appeals are just as flawed as those who focus solely on emotional appeals.

Many experts (Scammell being one of them, as highlighted above) have underlined, over different points of time, the thought process that brands have two aspects – emotional and technical (functional). Consumers find it much easier to connect with a brand emotionally than technically. The emotional engagement, if done correctly, makes the functional aspect of the brand redundant [the precise reason why an iPhone delivers despite lacking the 'functionality' of a lesser-priced phone. The attachment it has developed with its loyal following is unmatched and vaunted. No matter how advanced the features of its rivals are (the features of its 'latest' model 7 and 7plus were already very much present in Google Nexus 6P which was launched way back in 2014), there is still a 'halo' effect which surrounds the launch of an iPhone riding on its emotional 'connect' with the target customer].

When one talks about the application of the emotional aspect of brands in the field of politics, it is very much there to be found and forms the core of the concept of political branding. The aura which surrounds the personality of

leaders, their charismatic presence, oratory skills, and emotional appeal cut across myriad segments of the society and such voters who might be ignorant to their manifesto, the very issues on which the leader is fighting election, could very well associate themselves with such leaders. The emotional engagement which consumers develop with a certain product is, in general, independent of the technical traits (Patterson, Khogeer, and Hodgson 2013) of the product. The three have propounded the concept of anthropomorphisation, which implies that as brand personality has evolved in the contemporary times, it represents the character of the brand as if it were a person. This is the premise on which political branding has found its reckoning.

The western democracies have been home to the concept of political branding. Its significance has been realized by them quite a few decades ago. However, the same has found traction in the Indian context in the past few years thanks to the advent of information technology in a major way. The consumer-citizens have found it easier to stay connected with the political parties and leaders outside of an exercise like election. The reinforcement effect which results from the numerous interactions which the electorate have with the parties and leaders help in the building of a political brand. The continuous scrutiny which they are subjected to makes them more vulnerable than they ever were. At the same time, it also makes them approachable and believable, traits which are essential for a brand to succeed. The present External Affairs Minister Ms Shushma Swaraj and Railways Minister Mr Suresh Prabhu are leaders who have made a mark for themselves by being responsive to the tweets which they receive on their twitter handles, a micro-blogging site which supports 140 characters. They have touched a chord with the electorate and have been praised for their timely responses and befitting replies.

When it comes to defining political branding, it is the manifestation arising out of the perception developed towards a political outfit, leader, campaign, strategy, policies, and other related terms which define the existence of a political entity. This is done both with the help of material cues such as political rallies, buttons, bill boards, campaigns, public appearances, as well as immaterial hints such as belief, trust, relatedness, interest, awareness, curiosity, etc. Language, symbols, signs also play a crucial role in the formation and popularity of a political brand. It is for this reason that some political brands are more popular than others.

Thinkers like Jevons (2005) have advocated the significance of political branding in terms of being a worthy concept in contemporary politics and have popularized

it for the pragmatism which comes with it. The broad perspective which characterizes political branding has made even its detractors sit up and take notice of its efficacy.

Further, Jevons (2005) has also talked about the singularity which one normally relates to consumers. Branding is something which is characterized by it. However, political branding talks about multiple scenarios which beckon a consumer-citizen in a much profound manner than found in the case of a regular product. Further, he asserts that political branding is also characterized by the comprehensive manner in which political campaigns are being managed in contemporary political environment thus linking the two concepts together which is the central idea of the present research paper.

As per Speed, Butler, & Collins (2015), political branding has evolved as a multidisciplinary concept relying on traits of journalism, management, sociology and economics. This is so because campaigning is an economics-based activity whereas sociology does influence the way political brands behave in a certain way. Management is another arena which political branding touches in more ways than one. Journalism is an arena which influences every politician by the virtue of its work. In that sense, political branding indeed touches multiple areas and in the process brings a layered approach towards the leaders and parties.

Brand Personality, Brand Image, Political Branding and Permanent Campaign

When it comes to developing an understanding about permanent campaign, it is the continuous interweaving of government and politics extending beyond advertising or such activities which define election. The numerous other activities which are applicable to the field of politics characterize the phenomenon of permanent campaigning.

The significance of permanent campaigning could be understood from the pervasive nature which modern technology has assumed. Media has come to be associated with unending rally of news and information on parties and leaders. This has led to the formation of permanent campaigning. The wide spectrum of options which one could associate with modern media has given new facet to political campaigning.

Guzman and Sierra (2009) have studied well the concepts of brand personality as well as brand image in the context of political campaigning and made their own observations in this regard. According to them, political campaigning borrows heavily from the personality of the charismatic leaders and goes with their image in the public domain.

Smith (2001, 2009) has expressed his views on similar lines on this issue twice throwing light on how political campaigning has come to be associated with the ideas of brand image and brand personality which have been conventionally being termed as commercial marketing terms. He is of the opinion that the branding has found its way in the phenomenon of campaigning as found in the political field riding on the persona of the leaders and pull of the political parties. Likewise, Rutter and Lettice (2014) have been pretty much convinced by this aspect of political campaigning wherein branding plays a crucial role in the overall build-up and has come to be linked increasingly with the field of politics. They opine that contemporary politics is characterized by the need of individual charisma as well as reinforcement effect which are very much the hallmarks of branding and campaigning can very well do with it.

Such has been the overall acceptance of the branding angle in political campaigns that French and Smith (2010) have considered this alliance as essential for the political parties and leaders of today if they intend to make a mark. They are of the opinion that having a successful and continuous campaign (permanent campaign) is a pre-requisite for a political brand to succeed in today's highly competitive times in the political world.

When it comes to understanding what goes in making a permanent campaign and its associated terms, positive ads attempt to create an emotional 'connect' with the electorate (leaders evoking sympathy on the ground of work done by their predecessors) whereas negative campaigning usually consists of attacks on performance indicators such as competence, track record and policy formulation of the opponents. The material which is used by the political parties to launch a campaign acts as a significant source of information about the means by which parties communicate brand personality to voters. It goes without saying that such activities are not simply confined to elections but transcend to being all-year activities thus lending the 'permanent' trait to political campaigning Branding best explains the constantly adjusting connections (and disconnections) among political parties, governments and voters. One such example is that of the extensive campaigning taken up by Narendra Modi during

the 2014 Lok Sabha election where he developed a connect with the crowd (mostly) wherever he went. He travelled 3,00,000+ kms and addressed 400+ gatherings during his entire campaign period. Simultaneously, he was connected with the online population on facebook, twitter and youtube. His humble background helped the audience/followers to relate with him in a better way than his principal opponent Rahul Gandhi owing to his illustrious political background and the most famous surname in Indian politics. Also, the experience which Narendra Modi brought to the table on the back of serving the state of Gujarat for close to one-and-a-half decade was something which was unmatched and the opposition couldn't find its counter. To top all this, the 'chaiwala' remark as famously quipped by one of the veterans of the opposition party only reinforced the common-man image of Narendra Modi thus leading to strengthening of his brand appeal.

The most successful political campaigns are about topics that are believable (and relevant) to the voter and that connect with them emotionally or convince them to care for the cause and stay with them even after the election is over. They help the voters to gauge the elected party and its ability and willingness to fulfill upon the promises thus extending to become permanent in nature. It is for this reason that a political novice like Aam Aadmi Party was able to turn the tables and emerge victorious by winning an unbelievable 67 out of the possible 70 seats in the Delhi Assembly Election of 2015. They highlighted issues with which the electorate could relate better than the other parties, most notably, BJP and Congress. Hence, despite the Modi-wave which enable BJP to win all the 7 Lok Sabha seats from Delhi just a year ago, proved to be insufficient after a year during the assembly polls and it had to make do with a mere 3 seats. Congress, which ruled Delhi for continuous three terms under the leadership of Sheila Dixit was rendered seat-less.

Branding, and the communication of brand identity, help voters understand and identify with political parties emotionally and symbolically (White and Chernatony 2002, Urde 1999). This is very much relevant in today's political clutter (more than 1800 political parties are registered with the Election Commission of India at national, state and local levels. More than 8000 candidates contested the general election of 2014 for the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha). Thus, it does make sense to stand out from the crowd and have a distinct presence and appeal in politics with one's unique communication strategy.

Benn (1994, 2002) has been at the helm of affairs, over a period of time, with regard to bringing to the forefront the significance of the phenomenon of

branding and the projection of political parties and leaders as brands as far as political campaigning is concerned. He is of the opinion that political communication and the application of political branding to it go hand in hand. This is so because to create a strong image and subsequently a reliable and trustworthy brand in the eyes of the voters, political parties and leaders need to have a well-built communication strategy.

One of the foremost authorities on marketing (and by extension branding), Keller (2002) is of the view that 'branding principles have been applied in virtually every setting where consumer choice of some kind is involved, e.g., with physical goods, service, retail stores, people, organizations, places or ideas'. When one looks at this definition, the presence of words people, organizations and ideas clearly fit the bill for politics. After all, politics is a phenomenon which is characterized by the coming together of people, their ideas and organizations which represent them (political parties). Thus, there has been growing acceptance to the school of thought which considers political leaders and parties as brands. In this regard, political communication has also been dealt with by highlighting its role in getting across the thought process of parties and leaders to the voters.

Permanent Campaign, Political Brands and Indian Politics

The role of approval polls, polls about the current working of government and the satisfaction of the electorate towards them have become frequent. They gauge the public sentiment towards the incumbent government and ask it to assess the government on various parameters keeping the manifesto (riding on which the party or the candidate won the election) as the benchmark. Two recent polls, conducted in 2016, by Zee News and Pew Research were directed towards the performance of the Modi government on the completion of two years of its governance in which the respondents were asked about their views on the various initiatives taken by the government as well as the suitability of Mr Modi to continue as the next PM of the country. In both the surveys, the public gave a nod of approval to Mr Modi as the next PM, the Zee News survey (in May 2016) saw an approval rating of 72% whereas it was even better in the Pew Research survey (in September 2016) standing at a whopping 81%. Another important survey regarding the status of Indian politicians in the minds of youth of the country was conducted by Hindustan Times and MaRS (Monitoring and Research Systems) in 15 state capitals and major cities of India with the target respondents being men and women in the age brackets of 18-21 and 22-25

whose results were published on December 25, 2016. More importantly, the duration of this survey was November 3-20, 2016, a time frame during which PM Modi took the step of demonetizing the currencies of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 thereby reflecting on the thought process of the youth of the country. Even the sample size was formidable at 5,200. He got 48.1% favourable views from men and 50.7% from women. On the other hand, Congress Vice-President, Rahul Gandhi got only 2.7% of the favourable votes, much lower than Arvind Kejriwal, mostly a regional political brand, who got 14% of the favourable votes. The charisma of brand Modi was also well reflected in the findings of the survey as he was chosen by 18.4% of the respondents as the best living role model for young people all over the world.

The latest survey in this regard was conducted by India Today, titled, "Mood of the Nation", whose findings were published on January 27, 2017 which registered widespread support for the government's demonetization initiative and surgical strikes in Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Around two-thirds of the respondents saw Modi as the top pick to become the next Prime Minister, leading his nearest rival- Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi- by 55 percentage points. It was conducted by market research firm Karvy Insights Limited across 19 states from the end of demonetization deadline on December 30 until January 9. A total of 12,143 interviews were carried out (53% in rural & 47% in urban), spread across 97 parliamentary constituencies in 194 assembly seats. These are no small numbers and talk about the mass popularity which PM Modi still enjoys and the faith reposed in brand Modi, over others, by the masses.

Surveys like these give an incumbent government shot in the arm in terms of assessing its popularity as well as pave the way for its performance in the next election. ***In a democracy like India where state-assembly elections keep on happening in-between two General Elections as is the case in 2017 as well, the role of permanent campaign assumes even more significance.***

Sample this, two years prior to the General Election of 2014, a total of seven states (Goa, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur and Uttarakhand) went to elections in 2012. One year prior to it, eight states (Rajasthan, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Karnataka, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya) went to election in 2013. An impressive nine states (Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Telangana) went to polls in 2014, the same year

when the General Election took place. What was notable of the outcome of these state assembly elections was seven of the nine states, except Odisha and Telangana, were won by either BJP or one of its allies. The allure of Brand Modi pushed BJP to its best-ever state result performance in a calendar year. Bihar and Delhi witnessed state assembly election in 2015 during which the Modi-wave failed to create the same impact as last year. West Bengal, Puducherry, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala were testimony to the power of ballot at the state level in 2016 in which BJP did well to form the government in Assam whereas it broke ground in Kerala for the first time. The pull of strong regional brands, Late J Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu and Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal, was head and shoulders above other brands, including that of the current PM. The cycle of 2012 is being repeated again in 2017 as the seven states mentioned above went to (or will go to) polls which also include the two most significant states as far as the Modi government is concerned- his home state of Gujarat (last time Gujarat sent Narendra Modi as CM for a record fourth tenure in 2012, a position which he gave up in 2014 to become the PM of the nation) and politically the most heavy-weight state of Uttar Pradesh [presently, Mr Modi (Varanasi) and many of his ministers, most notably Home Minister Rajnath Singh, are sitting MPs from Uttar Pradesh]. The outcome of these 2017 state elections would pave the way for the 2019 general election and would assert whether the pull of brand Modi is still intact or on the wane. Another point worth mentioning is the larger-than-life image of some of the political brands who leave a void behind which people find hard to fill. A case in point is that of the former Tamil Nadu CM Late J Jayalalitha. After her demise late last year, her followers have been struggling to come up with a replacement which enjoys the same level of following among the followers as was well reflected in the power struggles which took place in Tamil Nadu.

The outcome of the state elections held during 2014-16 brought mix fortunes for brand Modi as highlighted above. What is of importance here to understand is the fact that regional political brands like Navin Patnaik in Odisha, Nitish Kumar in Bihar, KC Rao in Telangana, Late J Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu, Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal have proven themselves as heavy-weights, both during the Lok Sabha election in 2014, despite the Modi juggernaut, or in state assembly election. All these regional brands have held their fort by winning the state assembly election as well as performing remarkably well during the Lok Sabha election – Late J Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu (a massive 37 out of 39 seats), Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal (an impressive 34 out of 42 seats), Naveen Patnaik in Odisha (20 out of 21 seats), KC Rao in Telangana (11 out of 17 seats). The

authors would like to highlight the fact that they have taken into consideration only those regional brands which were/are not affiliated to NDA and still performed remarkably well. Another regional political brand worth mentioning in this regard is Shiv Sena since its parted ways with BJP in the local elections of Mumbai and Maharashtra and emerged as the largest party in the election for the richest municipal corporation of the country. This doesn't imply that there are no other regional brands which didn't perform well in the past 2-3 years but discussion about them is beyond the scope of this paper.

Customer Perceptions as Associated with Political Branding

When one talks about the perceptions which customers form with regard to political brands, the perspective given by Smith and French (2011) fits the bill. This is so because they have talked extensively about cognitive psychology learning theory, in particular, about associative network model of consumer memory. In the process, they have also highlighted the work of Keller (1993) in this regard who talks about the customer perceptions related to a brand which, in turn, are a result of the associations about a particular object stored in the person's memory. The customer perceptions related to a brand are formed based on the individual pieces of information, better known as nodes. These nodes are viewed as being responsible for formation of complex associative network, in the present context the case being for political parties and leaders. These memories could be recalled when the customer comes across tangible or intangible cues related to the political brand, such as Lotus symbol (for BJP) or Hand symbol (for Congress) as well as the background of the politician ('Chaiwala' image perception of present PM Modi). Also, such intangible cues as trust, connectedness, humility, belongingness play crucial role with regard to formation of customer perception in the case of political brands.

All this helps the customer (in case of political brands, they are known as consumer-citizens) to form their own perception with regard to various political brands in fray. It is for a reason that brand Modi did exceptionally well in the elections which took place in the aftermath of the phenomenon of demonetization in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha where elections were held for the local bodies or the State Legislative Council in Uttar Pradesh. This is so because, owing to his humble background, people largely had this perception that the step taken by the PM is a 'bold' one, albeit unusual, that he is 'different' from his predecessors. Although the benefits arising out of the mammoth exercise of demonetization are still to be realized and its impact is being debated, the

consumer-citizens have perceived that the intentions of brand Modi were mostly good whilst announcing demonetization, though the execution could have been better. As usual, his detractors criticized the move and had their reservations in this regard. It is with this mindset that the customers developed their perceptions about brand Modi in the present political scenario.

Also, the various surveys which have been conducted in the past few months, most notably, the ones which followed the phenomenon of demonetization, have been quite a revelation as far as customer perception is concerned as contrary to predictions of the critics of brand Modi, consumer-citizens have not rejected the policies of the current PM. On the reverse, they have endorsed them thereby resulting in thumping victories of BJP at various levels and in such diverse states and territories as the Chandigarh Civic Polls, Odisha Panchayat Polls, MLC Elections in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra Municipal Council Election, By-polls in Assam and Madhya Pradesh (for Lok Sabha as well as Assembly seats), Gujarat Municipal Elections, Rajasthan Local Body By-polls. More importantly, these victories have came as much from the urban centres like Mumbai as they have came from rural regions of Odisha, a stronghold of a popular regional political brand Biju Janata Dal. *All the above results with regard to wins registered by BJP have been quoted from the report published in the website-version of indiatoday.in dated February 24, 2017.*

Hypothesis 1: The phenomenon of political branding leads to increased political participation

Hypothesis 2: Anti-incumbency leads to higher turnout of voters during an election

The authors intend to validate the above-mentioned hypotheses based on data which they have curated carefully over period of time exhibiting various traits of the participating population. The authors would like to highlight that they have taken into consideration the data related to the last general election for the validation of this hypothesis as well as studies conducted with regard to relating anti-incumbency with voter turnout.

Political Branding and Political Participation

Political participation has attained new hues in the contemporary societal setting. A simple like, share, tweet, comment, online support can be the ways by which

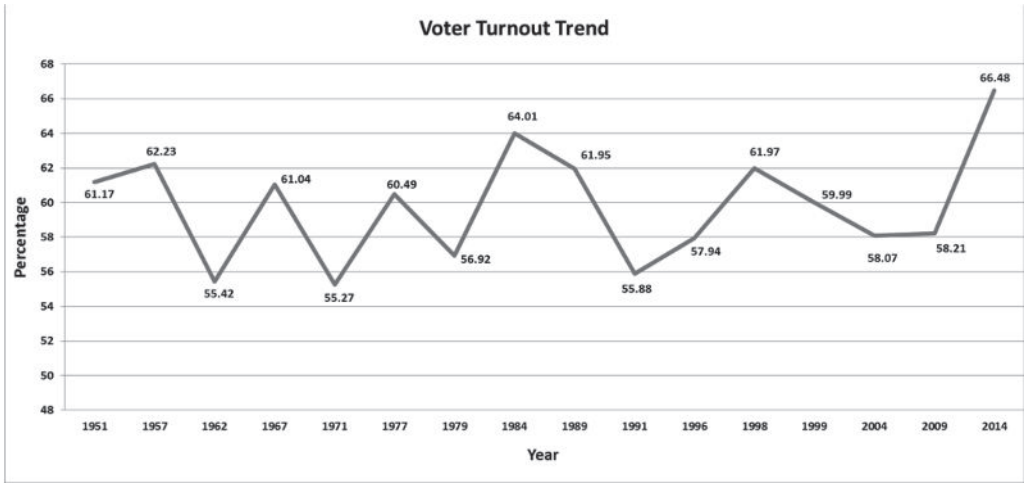
the modern electorate can participate in the political set-up of the country. Modern-day technology and the pervasive nature of smart phones have made the political leaders and their parties accessible and accountable to the socially-connected and online population on an almost daily basis as against the offline one which comes in the picture once in every five years (or earlier depending on the tenure of the government). In short, modern political participation is not dependent solely on voting on the Election Day to exhibit political participation of the consumer-citizen and it is this aspect which has made the social media the new darling of politics and its impact was felt the maximum in the last general election in India. To put things in perspective, more than 430 million Indians access internet today, second only to China (as per IAMAI, industry body for internet usage) and more than 370 million of them access it on their smart phones. Facebook and Whatsapp are used by almost half of the online population of India. Facebook India is home to the largest population for the popular networking site at 195 million. Although one might argue the effectiveness of a medium which is not accessed by the majority of the population but these online platforms have the tendency of being in the memory as well as 'share' thus increasing their reach manifold.

Sample this, the last general election in India saw 227 million comments, exchanges and conversations on facebook alone, the highest ever associated with a political event. It was later upended by the Brazil election. (Source: Facebook's director of institutional relations in Brazil, Bruno Magrani as quoted on rappler.com). Such was the magnitude and impact of the social networking on the election.

The last general election saw the highest-ever turnout of 66.5% of the voters. The eligible electorate also stood at an all-time high of 834 million. In all, close to 553 million voters exercised their right to vote their preferred leader and party to power, again an all-time high.

So, one could say that the traditional mode of political participation, namely voting on the Election Day, very much holds ground, in fact more so than ever before in the history of India and political branding played its fair share in the same. It cannot be discounted as a coincidence that the rise of political branding at a large scale, role played by social media and the high turnout, decisive mandate are not linked to each other.

In all, political participation has added new realms in the concurrent times and has reshaped itself to account for the recent changes in the behavioral pattern of 'citizen-consumers' with regard to their participation in the various offline as well as online avenues of politics.



Source : Jagran Josh Website, 20 May 2014. Article Mentioned in – 16th Lok Sabha Elections 2014 Results Declared

Based on the above graph and other secondary data mentioned earlier, the authors arrived at the conclusion that political branding does help in enhanced political participation. This is indeed a useful finding which ought to assist political parties and leaders with regard to devising their strategies surrounding a political event like election.

Hence, the hypothesis that the phenomenon of political branding leads to increased political participation holds ground.

Anti-Incumbency and Voter Turnout

To substantiate their second hypothesis, the authors would also like to throw light on the perspective which the naysayers might have thereby dismissing the impact of political branding on political participation by mentioning anti-incumbency as a factor. In this context, it would be pertinent to observe that the voter turnout was almost flat between 2004 and 2009 at an unimpressive 58% whereas it leapfrogged to 66.5% during the 2014 election. This holds even more

ground in the wake of the figure that the eligible electorate for the 2014 general election stood at a mammoth 834 million as compared to 713 million for 2009. Not only, 100 million new voters were added to the voting list, even the turnout was much higher (553 million for 2014 as compared to 417 million for 2009). This additional 40 million of first-time and women voters (which were further in addition to the 100 million newly registered voters) is worthy of discussion and deliberation.

Srinivas Ramani of the Economic and Political Weekly stated, in the aftermath of the election, that there was a weak yet statistically significant correlation between high voter turnout and the scenario of an incumbent retaining her/his seat! In other words, constituencies which witnessed high voter turnouts were the ones which were probably voting the incumbent back to office. One very pertinent observation in this regard is given by Sanjay Kumar, director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), leads its National Election Studies. "I don't know how this idea that high turnout is associated with anti-incumbency has persisted from generation to generation," he says. "This relationship has never existed." He further substantiates this finding by looking at the last 30 assembly elections out of which 24 saw high voter turnouts. 12 of these elections returned the incumbents back to the power whilst the remaining 12 didn't. So it becomes inconclusive to ascertain the anti-incumbency factor in the turnout rate of voters. *The above findings were presented in an article published in The Hindu dated July 24, 2016.*

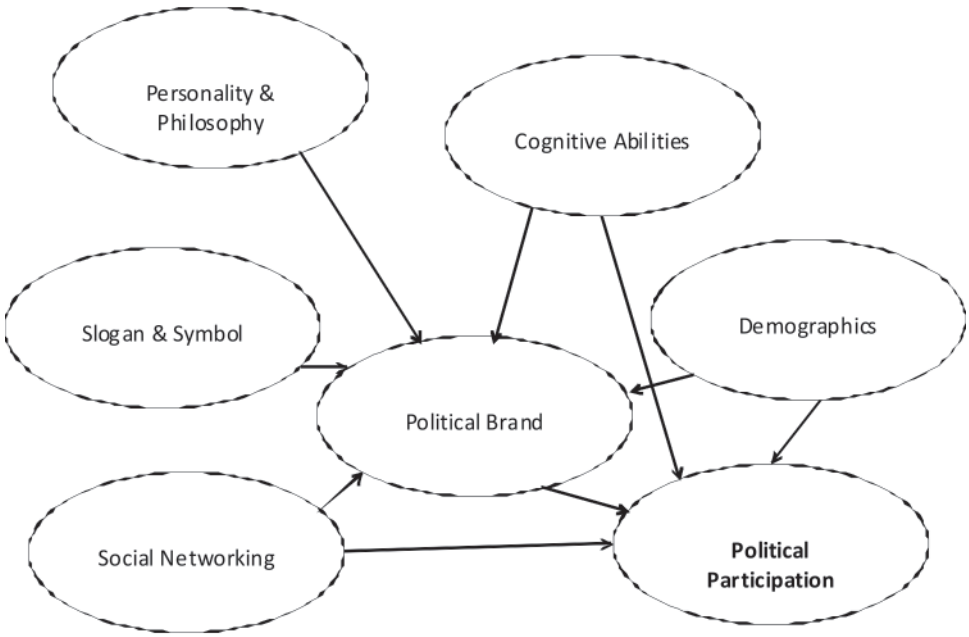
Hence, the hypothesis that anti-incumbency leads to higher voter turnout doesn't hold ground and as such there doesn't exist such a relationship.

This goes against the popular belief that Congress lost the last Lok Sabha election riding on the anti-incumbency wave. Hence one cannot wish away the impact which brand Modi had on the election like no other factor did. Thus, the hypothesis which was assumed by the authors that political branding leads to enhanced political participation holds ground based on the secondary data as put up.

Based on the above discussion, secondary data and qualitative understanding on the topic as well as the thought processes of various experts as mentioned during the course of this research paper, the authors would like to propose a model. In this model, a political brand is seen to be made as much from the slogan symbol of the party (material cues) as it is from the persona and philosophy of the leader (immaterial cues) with whom the electorate ought to identify. Further,

social networking, demographics and cognitive abilities (as discussed above under various headings) of an electorate are such features which, as per the understanding of the authors, ***play dual roles whether it is in the formation of a political brand or overall political participation***. This becomes apparent because it is not necessary that if a person is active on the various social platforms then s/he supports a political brand. The fellow could very well participate in the electoral scheme of things without endorsing a political brand. Likewise, demographic factors do play a role in the making of a political brand but at the same time they also play a crucial role in the tendency of the person to participate in the political activities. Similarly, the cognitive factors which exhibit the mental abilities of the individual could as much help in the formation of a political brand as they could enable the person to participate in the political events. This model mostly derives from secondary data and is based on various findings as highlighted at various instances during the course of this research paper. The underlying perspective as related to political branding and political participation could be understood well from this model and would help those who intend to develop an insight in this regard. Also, the various interrelationships do help with regard to developing an understanding as to what all attributes characterize the phenomenon of political branding.

The Model



To Conclude...

The present research paper focused on such concepts as political branding (an extension of the phenomenon of branding to the domain of politics), permanent campaigning and their inter-connectedness. Also, it highlighted the aspect of political participation and proved, with the help of secondary data, the role of political branding in enhanced political participation. The authors talked about how, with time, political parties and leaders realized the significance of political branding and how they could utilize the same for their betterment. With the help of secondary data and observations of experts, the authors also highlighted that, as such, there doesn't exist a relationship between anti-incumbency and higher voter turnout. The paper highlighted the various traits as linked to brands, branding and how the same have come to be found in the arena of politics. Further, an understanding with regard to permanent campaign as a concept was brought to the fore wherein it was pointed out in contemporary politics, it no longer suffices to have an election-driven political campaign dominated by advertising. Rather, political parties and leaders need to take into consideration the fact that the policy formulation and execution as incumbent is like campaigning for the next term. On the other hand, for the opponents, they need to keep the governing party on its toes. In both the cases, the need for permanent campaign couldn't be ignored.

In democracies like India where state assembly elections and local bodies elections keep on happening every year, permanent campaign does pay dividend to stay afresh in the mindscape of the voters. Voters might be skeptical about the extent to which leaders embody values and come good on their proclaimed statements. In this regard, permanent campaigning could be an effective tool which helps the party and the leader to stay connected with the aspirations of the electorate thus gauging their mood. Overall, the research paper provided rich insights into the overall relationship between political branding and permanent campaign and how these two have come to be associated with each other in contemporary politics. The paper also highlighted how the Indian political landscape has changed for the past years to accommodate both these concepts.

Limitations of the Present Work

The research paper talks about the relationship between political branding and political participation which is mostly based on secondary data and work of

various authors. Thus, the lack of a primary data-based empirical study in this regard is something which the authors would have very much liked but is not the case in the present scenario. The authors would like to highlight the fact that although they have done a lot of research looking for relevant literature yet the comprehensiveness of the same is something which couldn't be ascertained. Also, the proposed model, as highlighted above, is based on secondary data and understanding of the authors and not on primary data-based empirical research. Also, the various aspects related to the phenomenon of permanent campaign are such that they need more in-depth analysis but due to limited work in this area and lack of time and resources on the part of the authors, the same could not be explored to the optimal extent.

Future Research Possibilities

Through this research paper, the authors made an attempt towards gaining insights into the phenomenon of political branding, a topic which is still in its nascent stage and like any nascent topic its significance would be reflected well in due course of time. Additionally, there is not much work in this area in the Indian context which makes this topic an exciting proposition to work upon. Similarly, permanent campaign, yet another topic which is at the center-stage of this research paper is a phenomenon whose importance in the overall scheme of political affairs of a leader/party is yet to be ascertained. There is scope for carrying a primary data-based empirical research which would establish the relationship between political branding and political participation, an exercise which the authors intend to pursue in near future. The paper talked about how political participation has come to be influenced by political branding. A logical extension of this would be a study which would measure the extent of political participation resulting because of political branding. There are numerous other opportunities to explore the phenomenon of political branding with regard to various entities as governmental bodies, public offices, and even nations. The possibilities are endless.

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