

## Toward a Conceptual Framework of Emotional Relationship Marketing: An Examination of Two UK Political Parties

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## **Toward a Conceptual Framework of Emotional Relationship Marketing: An Examination of Two UK Political Parties**

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*The purpose of this paper is to review the notion of branding and evaluate its applicability to political parties. As ideological politics is in decline, branding may provide a consistent narrative where voters feel a sense of warmth and belonging. The paper aims to build an understanding of the complexity of building a political brand where a combination of image, logo, leadership, and values can all contribute to a compelling brand narrative. It investigates how competing positive and negative messages attempt to build and distort the brand identity. A critical review of branding, relationship marketing, and political science literature articulates the conceptual development of branding and its applicability to political parties. The success or failure of negative campaigning is due to the authenticity of a political party's brand values—creating a coherent brand story—if there is no distance between the brand values articulated by the political party and the values their community perceives then this creates an “authentic” brand. However, if there is a gap this paper illustrates how negative campaigning can be used to build a “doppelgänger brand,” which undermines the credibility of the authentic political brand. The paper argues that political parties need to understand how brand stories are developed but also how they can be used to*

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*protect against negative advertising. This has implications for political marketing strategists and political parties. This paper draws together branding theory and relationship marketing and incorporates them into a framework that makes a contribution to the political marketing literature.*

**KEYWORDS** *branding, political marketing, relationship marketing, emotional branding*

Since May 2005 and the Conservative Party's third general election defeat, there has been a change in leadership that has heralded a change in party identity and image. Attempts to woo voters back to the Conservatives reflecting the halcyon days of the Thatcher governments have been unsuccessful—consider William Hague, Ian Duncan-Smith, and Michael Howard—sales-oriented rather than market-led. Although the use of marketing tools such as marketing research and marketing communications have increased, the Conservatives remained locked in an elite sales-driven campaign strategy (Lees-Marshment 2004). Only recently, as the Conservative leadership election drew to a close, Andrew Tyrie claimed that they needed “a better product to sell” (Tyrie 2005). There appears to be a fundamental misunderstanding of what the “Conservative product” is, or how Conservative values and ideology contribute toward the creation of a “Conservative brand.” This is partly due to the problems of applying marketing concepts to politics and political parties (Lock and Harris 1996)<sup>1</sup> but also because the marketing literature cannot decide on what a brand is (Simões and Dibb 2001; Blumenthal 2004; Jevons 2005). Hence, this paper will critically evaluate the concept of branding and evaluate the application of branding theory to political marketing. The argument will follow that political branding is more complex than ideology or policies as it also incorporates leaders, candidates, and party members that personalize the political offering and also provide symbolic identification through logo and color. Hence, branding strategies may offer political parties an opportunity build a clear emotional identity with a clear heuristic device that the electorate can recognize and engage with in a more meaningful way. Using a combination of relationship marketing and emotional branding, this paper provides a tentative framework that help can build an understanding of the problems facing the Conservative Party when looking to develop a coherent, convincing brand identity. These include building relationships in a complex political environment, reducing the distance between the authentic Conservative brand and the “doppelgänger” Conservative brand, and dealing with the impact of negative campaigning.

## BRANDING

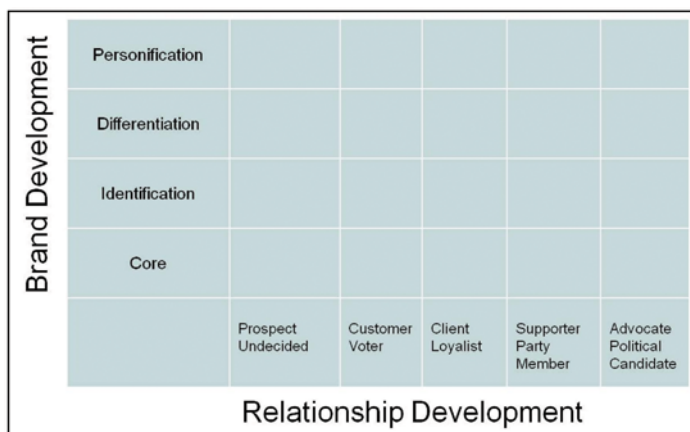
Brands are ubiquitous; they are all around us, in supermarkets, fashion retail, services, business to business, and charities. We know them; we recognize

them; they communicate certain values to us; they can, of course, be an effective heuristic device. So what is a brand? Knox (2004) suggests that a brand is “*an entity that offers customers (and other relevant parties) added value based on factors over and above its functional performance. These added values . . . differentiate the offer and provide the basis for customer preference and loyalty.*” For Smith (2001), the brand as a value generation mechanism is crucial in politics, and he suggests that this is twofold: first, loyalty to the party and, second, image as a heuristic enabling efficient information processing in electoral decision making. However, the notion and study of branding has become increasingly complex (Jevons 2005) as the concept is stretched across sectors far removed from fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) products. We talk about the political product and the political brand; how is this different? For Kotler and Armstrong (2001), there are three levels: the core product, the actual product, and the augmented product. These are levels that increasingly distinguish a product from competitors in the market place; in short, the brand is a series of values that are over and above generic or core products in the market place (Meenaghan 1995; Kotler and Armstrong 2001: 294; De Chernatony and McDonald 2002; Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott 2002; Palazzo and Basu 2007). Bagozzi (1975) argues that “*people buy things not for what they do, but for also for what they mean.*” In politics, parties and candidates were distinguished from competitors through their ideological positions. Downs (1957) advanced the argument that political parties are a means of political shorthand in that they stand for a whole range of issues on a section of the ideological continuum. His spatial model proposes a left/right one-dimensional space where political parties position themselves and voters identified with the party closest to them (Whiteley et al. 2005). For Butler and Stokes (1969, 1974) party identification was influential and strongly reflected the class base (Butler and Stokes 1969, 1974; Heath et al. 1985; Rose and McAllister 1990). However, as party identification declined in both the U.S. and the UK (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Denver 2007) and political parties moved toward the center (Downs 1957; Clarke et al. 2004:73), we saw the development of “catch-all parties” (Kirchheimer 1966), where there is little ideological space between the parties. Hence, voters focused upon issues rather than long-term party preferences (Denver 2007:97). Nevertheless, for an issue-based model to be borne out, the voter must be aware of the issue; hold an attitude toward it; understand the policy stance of the political parties toward the issue; and vote for the party that most closely matches his or her view on the issue. But they can be wrong (Lakoff 2004; MacKuen and Parker-Stephen 2006); they can misunderstand the issue and also misunderstand which party holds the position closest to their own position (Kuklinski et al. 2000). The valence model was first articulated by Butler and Stokes (1969, 1974) and developed further by Clarke et al. (2004), who argued that citizens focused upon universal issues such as health, crime, and the economy. They claimed that voters did not think about

politics on a regular basis and made “rough and ready” judgments (Clarke et al. 2004: 326) based upon heuristic devices such as party leaders. Moreover, “valenced partisanship,” as a store of “party and party leader performances” (Clarke et al. 2004:211) served as another heuristic for electoral choice. Moreover, citizens considered voting for a particular party based upon their perceived ability to address these valence issues. They concluded that “partisanship is fundamentally connected to notions of performance” (Clarke et al. 2004:316). This is in line with Smith’s (2001) view of the political brand, as it provides a heuristic on capability to deliver the political brand promise on valence issues and, according to Clarke et al. (2004), will then be able to generate brand or party loyalty.

The relationship consumers have with a brand has been explored in a number of ways; there is extensive literature on brand loyalty that has been extended by Fournier (1998), who suggests that a more fruitful alternative to brand loyalty would be “brand relationship quality.” This takes into consideration the emotional attachment the consumers feel for the brand (see, for instance, Atkin 2004; Cova and Cova 2002; Lindstrom 2005; and Aaker 1997, among others). This emotional attachment also manifests itself in a sense of belonging to a particular brand community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Hermann 2005; Cova and Cova 2002). This community generates its own interpretation of the brand and these should relate to the brand values espoused by the brand owners themselves. Roberts (2004) suggests that:

*[B]rand strategists should focus on telling stories that inspire and captivate consumers. These stories must demonstrate a genuine understanding of consumers’ lifestyles, dreams, and goals and compellingly represent how the brand can enrich their lives (cited in Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006).*



**FIGURE 1** Brand/relationship framework.

Moreover, Schweiger and Adami (1999) argue that “culture, society, and social ideas have taken up marketing instruments that create the values of brand capital.” Brands reflect and project contemporary culture (Harris and De Chernatony 2001; Reeves et al. 2006); they are social objects, socially constructed by the consumer, creating a personal relationship and sense of ownership between the consumer and the brand (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Lavine and Gschwend 2006; Burnett and Hutton 2007).

In politics, a sense of belonging through party identification has also been in evidence in the UK, and when “New” Labour were elected they sought to increase the notion of a brand community through party membership. Emotional branding is built upon a “consumer-centric, relational, and story-driven approach forging deep and enduring affective bonds between consumers and brands” (Thompson et al. 2006). This “brand story” creates a sense of authenticity, believability, and ultimately trust, and in politics these are crucial values that extend beyond ideology. A political brand story is richer, as it incorporates the personal characteristics of the candidate or leader who embodies the affective characteristics of the political brand. It is also more flexible than ideology as it can be adapted, updated, and developed in line with citizen needs. However, in relational terms this authenticity can be eroded due to alternative negative stories circulated within the community by competitors or opponents creating an alternative brand story and a “doppelgänger brand” (Thompson et al. 2006). The negative brand story can undermine the political brand by creating a series of negative brand attributes that create a different story; this story also has some notion of authenticity or believability that is gradually built upon through the media and other sources such as the opposition and in some cases internal members of the political party.

The political environment consists of a complex system of positive and negative relationships just as competitive as the market environment. However, in consumer marketing the relational aspect of branding has been extended along the supply chain (Knox 2004). As the development of relationship marketing continues, the complexity is increased as the brand owners need to build a brand identity or story that resonates with all stakeholders such as shareholders, consumers, and suppliers alike (Simões and Dibb 2001). So how can relationship marketing contribute toward a consistent political brand story?

## RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

Presented as a panacea to alleviate the marketing “crisis,” relationship marketing extended the boundaries of the exchange process familiar in transactional marketing, and since the 1990s there has been a paradigmatic shift in marketing toward “relationship marketing” (Sheth and Parvatiyar 2000). While this

continues to focus upon the exchange process between the consumer and the seller, it also recognizes the importance of the nano and macro associations. Nano relationships (Gummersson 2002) are what Christopher, Payne, and Ballantyne (1994) defined as the internal market in the six markets model, and in relationship marketing it is the employee who holds a pivotal relationship with the customer (Varey and Lewis 2000). The organization is structured in such a way that all employees, whatever their role or position within the organization, work toward customer satisfaction, delivering the brand promise. Customer satisfaction is not only the domain of the sales and marketing departments but also the domain of research and development, human resources, purchasing, and of course production and quality control. This interpretation of internal marketing extends the boundaries of the exchange process and provides a clearer understanding of the interrelationships between the members of the internal market and the customer.

In politics, however, the internal markets appear to be more complex than the commercial domain, with the added difficulties related to the levels of autonomy and hierarchy (Dean and Croft 2001). The strategic task facing any political movement when building a political brand corresponds in some ways to that of Christopher et al.'s (1994) marketing equivalent: to ensure that the citizen receives a coherent message, reiterating the aims and objectives of the organization. The nature of this citizen/candidate relationship should be in the short term to encourage the citizen to vote at the impending election, but it should also build sufficient loyalty to ensure continued voting for the party at later elections. In a successful political campaign, voters are reassured about a unified political party communicating a coherent message while it appears that they punish parties they perceive to be disunited (Butler and Kavanagh 1997; Whiteley 1997). Hence, this emphasizes the need for the internal market to be "on message."

However, relations among the seller, manufacturer, and suppliers are also recognized as vital elements in the marketing environment (Easton and Håkensson 1996). Relationship marketing recognizes that there is a network of players in the market. This defines links between suppliers and manufacturers and how costs can be reduced if this is a profitable relationship. This notion of relationship marketing has been applied to politics where the multiple markets model was introduced (Dean and Croft 2001). This again highlighted the complexity of the exchange process in politics, identifying key players and relationships that were important in order to inform, influence, and motivate the citizen. This model highlighted the complexities when developing and maintaining relationships; it recognized that message controllability became more problematic, and this was dependent upon the synergy among the stakeholders, political party, and political environment. Consequently, the creation of the brand story is complex, and in politics the strategy needs to be more sophisticated (Schewieger and Adami 1999), recognizing the dynamics of the market and also the competitive



environment. So if there is little ideological difference, there needs to be an emotional difference, and the development of a brand story that underpins that emotional difference. As a heuristic device, the political brand (complete with the logo, symbols, values, and brand narrative) are used by citizens during the electoral process. Moreover, they are personalized through the political leader, who is the embodiment of the emotional political brand.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There appears to be a difference between how the political brand is perceived among the electorate. For instance, some have a very limited understanding of the brand and what it stands for relying in heuristics; others engage more heavily in the brand values, understanding how these fit into their own life words (Dean 2007).

The model developed here is a combination of two models, namely Roper and Parker's (2006) conceptualization of the levels of branding and Payne's loyalty ladder from relationship marketing theory.

The model has adapted the Roper and Parker model to include the "core" brand but also to recognize that the electorate has both positive and negative perspectives of political brands. However, this does not suggest that the applicability of the model is restricted to politics but could also be applied to the consumer or business to business sectors.

## EMOTIONAL POLITICAL BRANDING

The creation of political brand narrative is problematic: First, there is the historical story that needs to be amended or deleted; second, there are the different stakeholders through which the story is told or retold; and finally, there are opponents who attempt to discredit the story by creating a "doppelgänger" political brand.

Political parties need to create a sense of belonging or community; relationship marketing can help create a community, whether it is real or virtual. Who can forget the sense of euphoria throughout the country when Labour were elected in 1997, clearly a successful emotional branding strategy in action. The success of the Labour Party since 1997 has been well documented by Gould (1998), who argued that motivational research methods helped the metamorphosis of Old Labour into New Labour, but it was a long process precipitated by the 1983 election defeat. Gould (1998) identified a number of negative values that were associated with the Labour Party. The brand story coming out from the focus groups described a party that had no understanding of the needs of their core voters, that had lost its identity, and whatever identity it had was strongly associated with nationalization, public ownership, and trade unions (Bartle 2002), factors that were



discredited by the Thatcher government. Following the 1979 and 1983 election defeats that “traumatized Labour” (Wring 2005), Neil Kinnock was elected leader and embarked upon a “new professionalism” (Wring 2005). Through research (Radice 1992, 1993, 1994; Gould 1998), the modernizers sought to develop a new brand story that was modern and eschewed the traditional Labour principles such as the Trade Union Block vote and Clause IV. They began a process of building an emotional brand story, one that emphasized a compassionate side, one that was capable, responsible, and trustworthy. Labour also sought to present their leader Neil Kinnock in a very personal party election broadcast (PEB) later called *Kinnock–The Movie*; this emotional PEB was designed to build brand narrative around the leader, highlighting his strength—taking on the more left wing extremists; his working class background—emphasizing that he was the first Kinnock to go to university; and showing his “leadership and vision” (Wring 2005: 96). However, building an emotional brand is not something that can be done overnight, as Gould (1998: 295) noted: “Campaigns now go on not for just weeks but for years”—they were in for the long haul. So even as “Labour entered the 1992 election with transformed policies, a more attractive image, a substantially changed organization, and a good chance of victory” (Butler and Kavanagh 1992:44), the successful election of John Major indicated that the voters had not bought into the Labour brand story. It is this buy-in that separates the “presented” brand from the “authentic” brand. So the historical story was changed, substantive party reorganization occurred, building a more attractive image, but what was stopping the brand moving from presented brand to authentic brand?

The failure of Labour under Neil Kinnock’s leadership was due to a doppelgänger Labour brand, another negative version of Labour that chipped away at the repositioned “Labour’s changed.” These were the barriers to voting Labour: old fashioned nationalism, high taxation, and unilateralism (Butler and Kavanagh 1992:46). These perceptions emphasized that Labour was principally “unfit to govern” and “worse than the Tories” and that Kinnock lacked the necessary “prime ministerial gravitas” (Bartle 2002). In the political environment there are a variety of sources through which the voter is exposed to the message; the extent to which a political party can control the interpretation of the message depends upon how much those sources have bought into the presented brand. The stakeholders necessary for electoral success have been outlined by Dean and Croft (2001), and these range from business to trade unions to opposition to media to the internal market, but in the 1980s there was a dramatic resurgence in satirical entertainment coupled with nascent development of the Internet. However, negative messages came from a number of sources serving to undermine Labour, including the birth of negative websites (Croft and Dean 1997; Dean and Cox, 2000) deriding Kinnock as a “windbag,” turning his strength of oratory into a weakness. Although they had managed to shake off the shackles of the “winter of

discontent,” miners’ strike, and the three-day week, the prevailing story that remained was that of the “loony Left” (Shaw 1994; Wring 2005). However, this affected not only the Labour brand but also the Kinnock brand, culminating in the infamous *Sun* headline the night before the 1992 election “If Kinnock wins today will the last person in Britain turn out the lights” (Toye and Gottlieb 2005: 182), effectively ending the Kinnock leadership.

The internal market of the Labour Party was transformed during Neil Kinnock’s leadership, becoming increasingly autocratic with the role of the National Executive Council (NEC) and membership-driven mechanisms such as conference participation in policy development significantly reduced (Seyd 1992:92). However, Bartle (2002) argues that while this was supported by the majority in order to gain office, there was considerable opposition from traditional Labour members. In a brilliant branding coup, traditional Labour members were corralled into the “Old Labour” pen (Seyd 1992:82) along with all the electorally unpopular Labour policies. Hence the Old Labour brand was isolated from the pristine New Labour project and was to take much of the blame for the electoral failure in the late 1970s and 1980s (Brown and Coates 1996). This was not just an electorally sensitive political strategy, it was long-term plan to create a clear distance between Old and New Labour. All the negative aspects of Labour that were perceived to be the obstacle to electoral success (Gould 1998) were removed from the New Labour brand, which gave them an untainted brand to present to the electorate. When Tony Blair was elected leader and modernization began in earnest, they needed a story that said they were economically competent, or in valence terms, more competent than the Conservatives. Blair embarked upon a series of initiatives to distance New Labour from Old embracing the “free market and the private sector” (Wring 2005:138), dropping Clause IV. They successfully changed the Labour brand story, building a New Labour brand that was believable and ultimately electable.

They also needed to disseminate the economically competent story effectively, and that meant getting the media and the city on board. As Patricia Hewitt explained (cited in Gould 1998), “what was going to matter on television was the pictures—for each day there will be a theme and the pictures will be tied to the theme.” There needed to be a coherent presentation throughout all media activity, even down to dress, all were “on message” to avoid any gap between the authentic and presented brand.

There was a consistent effort to define the New Labour brand as distinctive from the Labour Party that was associated with trade unions, nationalization, and the “looney Left” (Gould 1998). Within popular culture the prevailing perception of Labour’s brand identity was associated with “extremism and disunity” and a feeling that “no one knew what the Labour Party actually stood for” (Davies 1996:416). Through the media, the Conservative Party capitalized on this, reiterating and reinforcing the popular notion of Labour’s mismanagement of the economy (Wring 2005:114; Shaw

1994:184), in effect creating a doppelgänger Labour brand. However, it was New Labour that was complicit in the development of this doppelgänger brand, even giving it the brand name of Old Labour. It was associated with all the negative connotations, while New Labour was presented as a brand new brand.

## LESSONS FOR THE CONSERVATIVES

This paper does not suggest that the Conservatives merely adopt the approach by the Labour Party, as there are significant differences both in contextual terms and organizational structure. However, changes did need to be made. At the Conservative Party Conference in 2002, Theresa May famously described the Conservatives as a “nasty party” that was out of touch with the needs of the voters. They were too narrow in their “focus and their sympathies”; in short, their brand story did not resonate with the aspirations of the voters. At this time, there was an urgent need to change the image and the brand story of the Conservatives. However, when repositioning a political brand there are number of factors that need to be considered, such as the party loyalists, existing core values, new or repositioned core values, and change in ideological position. Crucially, as Labour’s struggle to build an authentic brand story has indicated, it is a long-term strategy.

A new leader can provide impetus to generate a new focus, and it is interesting to note that the party leader appears to be easier to position than the party itself. David Cameron has been positioned as young, caring, family-focused, and environmentally aware. It appears that they are building these values into the Conservative brand story, shaping issues in the light of these values. Moreover, they have been at great pains to suggest the provenance of these values is right at the heart of traditional Conservative ideology (Norton 2008), which implies consistency over time and a long-term strategy. Introducing the notion of ideology here is important to the Conservative brand as this implies some historical standard that has guided Conservative values, although ironically the Conservative Party has always been too pragmatic to be burdened by anything as specific as an ideology (Blake 1985). For some time now, New Labour has been criticized for short-term, quick-fix solutions to problems, while Conservative Party policies are “built to last” ([www.conservatives.com](http://www.conservatives.com)). They focus on the valence issues that are Conservative strengths—building a traditional Tory story that resonates with their target voters, for instance, home ownership, family (in all its many guises), and quality of life—factors they can claim historical competence. However, this needs to be built around a core principle that is derived from the Conservative tradition. There needs to be a common thread that links policies together, and the notion of “conserve” is a core value that has traditionally resonated throughout Conservative policy (Norton 2008). Hence,

as policies are developed in preparation for the next general election, “conserve and protect” are values that can be applied to the environment, the economy, society, and foreign policy.

Although there is a temptation to attack Labour for being distrustful and the “cash for peerage” issue, the Conservatives are still too closely associated with sleaze avoid a counterattack (notwithstanding the recent revelations in the *Daily Telegraph* of MPs’ expenses). Although imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and despite Cameron’s mischievous taunt to be the “heir to Blair,” the Conservative party cannot become a “me too” Labour party; they cannot copy Labour’s strategy of distinguishing New Labour from Old. This would be perceived as short-term with no real direction; a fundamental quality for a successful leader is to demonstrate vision and an understanding of strategy coupled with the decisiveness required to engage in this strategy. In sharp contrast to the New Labour project that jettisoned “Old Labour” values, the Cameron Conservative Party is a modern Conservative Party with the rhetoric of “Conservative means, progressive ends” (Cameron 2010a). They emphasized the origin of their progressive credentials with a lineage dating back to William Wilberforce (Anonymous 2008), emphasizing heritage with traditional compassionate values that enables them to deal with the complex issues of today in a caring, competent way (Cameron 2010b). With this in mind, the Cameron leadership sought to attract younger voters with “soft” policies such as “Hug a Hoodie” (Hinsliff 2006) and other headline-grabbing initiatives. Ironically “Hug a Hoodie” was given strong support by Norman Tebbit, a renowned right-winger (Carlin 2006). So the modern Conservative brand has a radical, progressive agenda (Cameron 2009b) that is fiscally responsible and compassionate and, as David Cameron claimed, “The Conservative Party is back and it’s back where it belongs—in the center ground of British politics” (Cameron 2010a). Not only had Cameron moved the Conservatives back to the center ground, he also tried to present the Tory brand as inclusive rather than exclusive (Cameron 2010b). This was the biggest hurdle the Conservatives faced; they are seen as “for the rich,” “looking after big business,” and “fat cats” (Dean 2007). Hence, the idea that the Conservatives can be an inclusive party that can look after the interests of the middle classes is in stark contrast to the perception of many of the middle class citizens they are hoping to attract.

This is the Achilles heel of the Conservatives. They have devoted considerable time presenting “progressive Conservatism” as fair, equal, empowering, and green (Cameron 2009a), but this story has not yet been bought into. Moreover, the attempt to build the “progressive Conservative” brand story has been attacked on two fronts. First, the Labour government has caricatured David Cameron and his team as “toffs,” reinforcing the “exclusive” perceptions of the party. During *Prime Minister’s Questions*, Gordon Brown responded to questions on economic policy by criticizing Conservative tax policy. He queried whether it was “services for the many or inheritance tax cuts

for the few?” and that “their inheritance tax policy seems to have been dreamed upon the playing fields of Eton” (Brown 2009). Alan Johnson (2009) underpinned this message, claiming that “The Conservatives are the party of inherited wealth, private education, and conspicuous affluence.” Some sections of the media have reiterated this through satirical cartoons and editorials, again contributing toward the Doppelgänger brand construction. Second, attacks come from the internal market, where Conservative MPs such as John Stanyers are so disillusioned that they have joined UK Independence Party (UKIP). Other disgruntled Thatcherite loyalists have also criticized the Cameron leadership through traditional communication channels (see, for instance, Hitchens 2010), as well as twitter and blogs. The extent to which blogging has an effect upon the political brand needs further research, but it is evident that the stories emanating from these sites do find their way into peoples’ attitudes and interpretation of the brand story (Dean and Cox 2000). However, since the Brown ascendancy to prime minister, the opinion polls showed an improvement in attitudes towards the Conservatives indicating that possibly their brand story was beginning to resonate with voters. Nevertheless, the British general election of 2010 illustrated that the electorate was not sufficiently convinced about the Cameron Conservative Party

## CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Within the political environment, the difficulties of creating an authentic political brand are diverse: first, the crucial aspect of dealing with the complexity of the political network and relationship marketing; and second, developing a political brand that shares voters’ aspirations and gives them something to believe in. The success of a political party is measured by the effectiveness of the political brand—by its perceived capability to deliver on those valence issues identified. There needs to be consistency between presented brand and the brand perceived by the voters. If Conservative Party brand is not perceived to be authentic, merely a “presented” brand, then this provides an opportunity for the opposition to create a doppelgänger brand.

Further research is required in determining how the authentic political brand is created in the voters’ minds and how they build up this picture. Further research is also required into how the brand is undermined, in what situation this occurs, and at what rate the doppelgänger brand grows. This has implications for electoral decision making, as an understanding is needed about how people actually form opinions about political parties; it appears there is less cognition than previously accepted. The conceptual framework needs to be developed and tested further to identify when and where the doppelgänger brand emerges and its strength, believability, and authenticity.

This is significant, as we see the growth of alternative personalized political communications tools. Building and protecting the authentic brand

is paramount, but as Thompson et al. (2006) argue, the doppelgänger brand can provide an indication of where the problems lie. By monitoring the political brand stories, political parties are able to identify where the problems may lie. This is why Gordon Brown should be looking at New Labour's doppelgänger brand created on his watch.

## NOTE

1. The extent to which marketing has been applied to politics still requires further consideration but is beyond the scope of this paper, which will just focus upon branding theory.

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