Exploring the Creation and Development of Political Co-Brand Identity: A Multi-Case Study Approach

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Exploring the Creation and Development of Political Co-Brand Identity: A Multi-Case Study Approach

Structured Abstract

Purpose

Research on the creation and development of candidate-politician brands otherwise known as political co-brands remains an under-researched area of study. This is supported by calls for more understanding on political co-brands and how they are positioned and managed by their creators. Framed by the concepts of internal brand identity and co-branding, this study investigates how political co-brand identity is constructed and managed over time, exploring alignment between the political co-brand and political corporate party brand.

Methodological Approach

An interpretivist revelatory multi-case study approach, utilising in-depth interviews, was conducted with three political co-brands [candidates-politicians] from the UK Conservative Party. The three cases represented constituencies across the United Kingdom from the North, Midlands and South of the country. The in-depth elite interviews were conducted July 2015 to September 2015. Methodological triangulation was also adopted to assess the coherency of emerging themes with online and offline materials and documents. A two stage thematic analytical approach was utilised to interpret the findings.

Findings

This multiple case study demonstrates how successful political co-brands create and develop identities tailored to their constituency, often distinct from the corporate political brand and developed several years before electoral success at the ballot box. In addition, this study reveals that political co-brands are dichotomous in terms of strategically managing a degree of alignment with the corporate political brand yet maintaining a degree of independence.

Originality/value

This study has implications for brands beyond the world of politics. Brands can adopt the political co-brand identity framework developed in this study as a pragmatic tool to investigate internally created co-brand identity and explore alignment with the corporate party brand identity. In addition, this research adds to the limited research on non-fictitious co-brands and co-branding literature at large and addresses the calls for more research on brand identity in new settings.

Keywords: Co-brands, political branding, brand identity, candidate-individual brands

Article Classification: Research Paper
Introduction

Political brands are complicated multi-layered entities (Billard 2018; Jain et al. 2018; Nielsen 2016; Scammell 2015; Speed et al. 2015). Researchers have accepted that there are various typologies of political brands, such as parties, often referred to as the corporate brand, candidates-politicians, movements, nations and campaigns (Grimmer and Grube 2017; De Landsheer and De Vries, 2015; Milewicz and Milewicz 2014; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Speed et al. 2015). In addition, political brands are powerful tools used as a short-cut mechanism to deconstruct the rational and irrational elements of the political offering (Billard 2018; Scammell 2015). Further, to ensure development and advancement of political branding as an area of study, further research should build on existing concepts, theories and frameworks periodically as a means of critical application offering an element of replication and comparison (Ahmed et al. 2015; Lock and Harris 1996; Nielsen 2016; Nielsen 2015; O’Cass 2001; O’Cass and Voola 2011; Orrod and Henneberg 2011; Scammell 2015; Speed et al. 2015). This in turn will refine and update the academic argument and offer direction for future research (Nielsen 2015; Speed et al. 2015). Nevertheless, despite progress made in this area there continues to be calls for further research which should focus on uncovering detail and knowledge ascribed to different types of political brands particularly from a candidate-politician perspective (Jain et al. 2018; Nielsen 2016; Nielsen 2015; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Phipps et al. 2010; Speed et al. 2015). Indeed, existing political branding research focuses on corporate party brands and negated candidate or politician political brands. This is supported by explicit calls for future research to investigate how candidate-politician political brands are created, developed and communicated (Nielsen 2016; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Phipps et al. 2010; Serazio 2017; Speed et al. 2015).

However, how can we conceptualise candidate-politician political brands? Could the construct of co-branding provide future researchers with an approach to understand a different type of political brand and reveal how candidate-politician political brands are created, developed and communicated? Co-branding is a complex, strategic approach defined as a combination of two existing brands amalgamated to create a unique single identity manifested in the form of a new brand (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; d’Astous et al. 2007; Kumar 2005; Nguyen et al. 2018). However, co-branding research remains ‘relatively limited’ (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014:112) particularly in different contexts and settings (Leuthesser et al. 2002; Ronzoni et al. 2018; Wason and Charlton 2015). In addition, existing research seems to have overlooked co-branding from a brand creator perspective particularly how they are created, communicated and managed (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Volekner and Sattler 2006; Wason and Charlton 2015). This suggests that a strategic approach for co-branding could support the conceptualisation of candidate-politician political brands. Therefore our study puts forward a working definition of political co-brands as a ‘system of brands’ manifested from the combination of two existing brands. This includes elements of the ‘corporate party brand’ and characteristics of the ‘candidate-politician brand’ which are amalgamated to create a unique single identity (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Aqeel et al. 2017;
Indeed, investigating a brand’s internally created identity is crucial to its long term success as it provides insight to the brand’s current and desired vision and values, which it communicates to consumers and citizens (Cheng et al. 2008; Dahlen et al. 2010; de Chernatony 2006; Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Saaksjarvi and Samiee 2011; Srivastava 2011). More specifically, Pich and Dean (2015) indicate that further studies should be undertaken so as to reveal a deeper understanding as to how candidates-politicians as political brands are created, and built and how they strategically manage their identities and develop long-term relationships with citizens. This study therefore explores how political co-brand identity is created and managed from an internal stakeholder perspective. Contextualised after the 2015 UK General Election, this research reveals three diverse case studies from three Members of Parliament from the UK Conservative Party. This exploratory study offers a rich understanding into each political co-brand and uncovers consistency and incoherency within the corporate ‘Conservative’ political brand. Further, this research:

- Provides three distinctive first-hand accounts on how co-brand identity is established, developed and managed within the related yet distinct environment of corporate-party brands.
- It examines and develops the conceptualisation of political co-brands and demonstrates how to explore political co-brands from its creator’s perspective.
- It also reveals political co-brands can be personalised to the ‘wants and needs of each distinct constituency’ while maintaining a degree of alignment with the political ‘party’ brand.

Further, this study goes some way in addressing the contention at the forefront of political branding research particularly relating to the limited development of ‘appropriate models’ and frameworks such as political co-brand identity that could be used to assist political entities in understanding their offering and support co-branding strategy development (Billard 2018; Nielsen 2015; O’Cass and Voola 2011; Ormrod 2011; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Scammell 2015). The first section of this paper will set out the existing literature, highlight the core argument that underpins this study and conclude with the conceptual framework and research objectives. This will be followed by presenting the research design which sets out the exploratory multi-case study approach. The findings section will present a deep insight uncovered in relation to the political co-brand identities and this is followed by a discussion section that highlights our addressed objectives and contribution. The study will conclude with a focus on limitations, implications to theory and practice and explicit calls for future research.

**Literature Review**

**Political ‘Branding’**

Political branding has evolved into a distinguished sub-discipline of marketing that focuses on the application of commercial branding concepts and theories to the political landscape (Billard 2018; Harris and Lock 2010; Needham and Smith 2015). Political brands are manifested by
multiple stakeholders internal and external to the organisation and reflected through physical and intangible such as communication tools, relationships and values (Grimmer and Grube 2017; Milewicz and Milewicz 2014; Smith 2008). Indeed there is shared agreement that political parties [local-regional, national and international], pressure groups, movements, politicians, candidates and campaigns can be represented as political brands (Ahmed et al. 2015; Davies and Mian 2010; Jain et al. 2018; Scammell 2015).

Effective political brands should be strong, appealing, trustworthy, offer resonance, act as a decision-making driver that supports strategy development and builds awareness in the mind of voters-citizens (Ahmed et al. 2015; Baines and Harris 2011; Jain et al. 2018; O’Cass and Voola 2011). Nevertheless, political brands are complicated, multifaceted entities that are often difficult to capture and comprehend (Billard 2018; Lees-Marshment 2009; Needham and Smith 2015). This is particularly evident with ‘corporate’ political brands, which can be seen as a “coalition of complex, often competing local-individual political brands each with its own distinction and carefully crafted identity” (Pich et al. 2017:340). Further, ‘corporate’ political brands can be structured via a trinity of dimensions. This includes the party, leader and policy (Smith and French 2011; Speed et al. 2015) and all dimensions need to provide distinct identification for citizens-voters and a clear differentiation from political rivals (Davies and Mian 2010; Guzman and Sierra 2009; Jain et al. 2018; Nielsen 2016; O’Cass and Voola 2011; Smith 2009). Yet, this raises a series of over-arching questions such as how does the trinity of dimensions apply to different types of political brands such as candidate-politician political brands? How can we construct other forms of political brands? This latter point is especially topical as existing studies have tended to focus on corporate political brands compared to other conceptualisations such as politicians and candidates as political brands (Busby and Cronshaw 2015; Jain et al. 2018). In addition, this is supported by explicit calls for future research to investigate how candidate-politician political brands are created, developed and communicated (Nielsen 2016; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Phipps et al. 2010; Serazio 2017; Speed et al. 2015).

Notwithstanding the demand for more insight into this area, there are a limited number of studies that have examined political brands from a candidate-politician standpoint. More specifically, studies have focused on politicians or candidates in terms of brand ‘personality’, ‘equity’ or ‘image’ rather than generating a deeper understanding on how internal brand ‘identity’ is created, developed and managed over-time (Billard 2018; Cwalina and Falkowski 2014; De Landtsheer and De Vries 2015; Guzman and Sierra 2009; Jain et al. 2018; Milewicz and Milewicz 2014; Phipps et al. 2010; Smith and Spotswood 2013; Speed et al. 2015). This supports explicit calls for further research targeted towards uncovering detail and knowledge ascribed to different types of political brands [candidate-politician] particularly from the perspective of the brand’s creators (Jain et al. 2018; Nielsen 2016; Nielsen 2015; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Phipps et al. 2010; Speed et al. 2015). Therefore, more in-depth from an internal stakeholder perspective would reveal greater understanding into the candidate-politician brand (Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Phipps et al. 2010; Smith and Spotswood 2013; Speed et al. 2015). However, this poses a dilemma. How can we conceptualise candidate-politician political brands that are complex and represent a multitude of entities (Guzman and...
Sierra 2009; Jain et al. 2018; Nielsen 2015; Peng and Hackley 2009; Serazio 2017; Scammell 2015; Smith 2009; Speed et al. 2015). One popular strategic approach that can be used to conceptualise and understand candidates-politicians as political brands is the concept of co-branding (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat and Langan 2014; Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Volckner and Sattler 2006).

**Political ‘Co-Branding’**

Co-branding is a complex and multifaceted construct yet there is no universal definition or agreed consensus on its conceptualisation (Aqeel et al. 2017; Besharat 2010; James 2005; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Voss and Gammoh 2004). For example, co-branding is often interchangeably referred to as ‘joint marketing’, ‘brand extension-development’, ‘ingredient branding’, dual branding’, ‘co-marketing’ and ‘strategic alliances’ (Ahn and Sung 2012; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni et al. 2018). Nevertheless, co-branding can be defined as the combination of two existing brands amalgamated to create a unique single identity manifested in the form of a new brand (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; d’Astous et al. 2007; Kumar 2005; Nguyen et al. 2018). Further, co-branding represents a ‘system of brands’ built from two or more well-known brands ultimately generating a sole entity representing a positive win-win situation for all parties concerned (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Nguyen et al. 2018; Washburn and Priluck 2000). The newly formed co-brand represents a cooperative agreement that utilises the partner brand’s intangible and tangible features (Besharat 2010; Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017). For example, both partner brand names, logos and other identifiable features should appear on all communication touch points of the co-brand to signify a committed partnership (Besharat and Langan 2014; Ronzoni et al. 2018). Therefore, each party or partner help create the alliance [co-brand] and can bring unique qualities such as consumer awareness, new target markets, expertise, resources or complimentary reputation to the strategic arrangement (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; d’Astous et al. 2007; Kumar 2005; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Nguyen et al. 2018; Wason and Charlton 2015). Ultimately, this newly developed co-brand communicates its offering to the desired target audience and signifies the long-term collaborative relationship between the two partners (Aqeel et al. 2017; Helming et al. 2008; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Ronzoni et al. 2018). This suggests the strategic approach of co-branding could serve to conceptualise and underpin candidate-politician political brands.

Further, co-branding can be utilised to develop brands for new national and international markets, create points of identification and differentiation, attract a wider support base and appeal to new audiences (Aqeel et al. 2017; Helming et al. 2008; Nguyen et al. 2018; Thomson 2006). In addition, co-branding can be adopted to communicate a desired identity, personality or representation (Aqeel et al. 2017; Besharat and Langan 2014; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Wason and Charlton 2015). Co-branding can also support organisations in terms of how they allocate resources, how they expand and structure their brands [brand architecture] and support organisations as they facilitate and manage their brand portfolios (Besharat and Langan 2014). The purpose of co-branding is strategic in nature as it aims to transfer strong appealing associations, perceptions and imagery from the two existing brands to the new composite brand.
(Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Helmig et al. 2008; Washburn et al. 2000). This process of image transference, often referred to as the ‘spillover effect’, should complement both parties and provide positive outcomes and opportunities for all partners (Baumgarth 2018; Helmig et al. 2008; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Washburn et al. 2000). This highlights the importance of an authentic, legitimate, respectful and consistent fit between the two partners (Thomson 2006). Therefore, successful co-brands provide a sense of ‘complementarity’ as this allows all parties “to inherit the desirable qualities of the parent brand” and a strong value exchange for each member (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Leuthesser et al. 2002:39). However, who has ultimate control and responsibility of the co-brand? Can competitors have an impact on the co-brand and will partnerships limit its success? In addition, little is known about negative image transference [spillover] or lack of ‘complementarity’ from one partner to another. Further, knowledge on whether the partner brands help or hinder co-brands appears under-researched (Baumgarth 2018; Leuthesser et al. 2002). Nevertheless, there are explicit calls for future research to consider the relationship between partners and whether negative image transference can dilute or have a negative impact on the co-brand (Besharat and Langan 2014; Besharat 2010; Ronzoni et al. 2018).

Despite some progress on co-branding, the topic remains ‘relatively limited’ (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014:112) and complex particularly in different contexts and settings (Leuthesser et al. 2002; Ronzoni et al. 2018; Wason and Charlton 2015). Existing research in this area tends to focus attention on fictitious brands with additional insight needed on existent co-brands (Ahn and Sung 2012; Leuthesser et al. 2002). In addition, these studies tend to focus on two broad areas. The first addresses the exploration of perceptions, associations and images ascribed to the co-brand from a consumer standpoint. The second focuses on the implications of pursuing a co-branding approach compared to other strategic orientations (Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Leuthesser et al. 2002). However, research seems to have overlooked co-branding from the perspective of the partners [co-brand internal creators] particularly how they create, communicate and manage their co-brand in terms of the desired identity and whether the new co-brand is helped or hindered by the identity of the partner brands (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Volckner and Sattler 2006; Wason and Charlton 2015). This is supported by explicit calls for further research into co-branding and new settings and contexts (Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Helmig et al. 2008), which may address the confusion and lack of agreed consensus (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat 2010; James 2005; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Ronzoni et al. 2018; Thomson 2006; Voss and Gammoh 2004). Therefore, the existing literature highlights opportunities of the strategic approach of co-branding and its potential to help conceptualise candidate-politician political brands.

For the purpose of this study, we define political co-brands as a ‘system of brands’ manifested from the combination of two existing brands including the ‘corporate party brand’ and ‘candidate-politician brand’ amalgamated to create a new brand with a unique single identity developed (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; d’Astous et al. 2007; Kumar 2005). However, do political co-brands represent a positive win-win situation for all parties involved (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014;
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Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni et al. 2018; Washburn and Priluck 2000)? Nevertheless, in order to explore candidate-politician political brands henceforth known as ‘political co-brands’, from an internal brand creator perspective we need to consider an appropriate theoretical lens to help understand the reality and aspirations of the co-brand. Brand identity can be seen as an ideal construct to investigate the reality of a brand from an internal perspective (Nandan 2005; Silveira et al. 2013; Ross and Harradine 2011; Saaksjarvi and Samiee 2011; Srivastava 2011; Wheeler and Millman 2017), therefore the concept of brand identity seems an applicable lens to examine political co-brands.

Political ‘Brand Identity’

Brand identity can be seen as the intended representation, formulated by the brands creator, and communicated to multiple stakeholders (Cheng et al. 2008; Dahlen et al. 2010; de Chernatony 2006; Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Saaksjarvi and Samiee 2011; Srivastava 2011). Brand identity originates from brand managers who develop “aspired associations” (Bosch et al. 2006:13) into a focused visualisation of what the brand symbolises and therefore signifies its envisaged reality (Nandan 2005; Silveira et al. 2013; Ross and Harradine 2011; Saaksjarvi and Samiee 2011; Srivastava 2011; Wheeler and Millman 2017). In addition brand identity is all about an organisation’s vision and values (Alsem and Kosteljik 2008; Ponnam 2007), and “has to be coherent, integrated, adaptable, durable and therefore dynamic and ready to change” (Dahlen et al. 2010:204). Therefore, brand identity should be consistent yet flexible and routinely monitored to respond to environmental changes (Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Silveira et al. 2013).

Nevertheless, brand identity is a contemporary and multifaceted concept (Black and Veloutsou 2017; Dahlen et al. 2010; Kapferer 2008; Silveira et al. 2013; Viot 2011). For instance brand identity can be applied not only to corporate political brands but also candidate-politician political brands “which can possess their own culture and unique identity” (Pich and Dean 2015:339). Indeed, given that candidates and politicians can hold distinct identities, they must not be incoherent or contradictory with the corporate brand identity (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum 2013; Kornum and Muhlbacher 2013). Alignment needs to be as coherent as possible in order to avoid confusion in the mind of stakeholders (Dahlen et al. 2010; de Chernatony 2006; Gyrd-Jones and Kornum 2013; Wheeler and Millman 2017). This suggests the construct of brand identity can be used to investigate how political co-brands are created, communicated and managed (Besharat and Langan 2014; Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Pich et al. 2017; Silveira et al. 2013; Wason and Charlton 2015; Wheeler and Millman 2017).

Nevertheless, the application of brand identity to ‘politics’ remains an under-researched area of study with existing studies favouring more consumer-voter focused perspectives such as political brand image, equity and reputation (Black and Veloutsou 2017; Cwalina and Falkowski 2014; De Landtsheer and De Vries 2015; Milewicz and Milewicz 2014; Phipps et al. 2010; Smith and Spotswood 2013; Speed et al. 2015). Despite limited exploratory research on ‘political brand identity’, Pich and Dean (2015) was one exception as they investigated the ‘corporate’ political brand of the UK Conservative Party under the leadership of David Cameron. This was achieved by transferring Kapferer’s (2008) six dimensions of brand identity...
as a framework to explore the political ‘corporate’ brand identity. The internal expression included three dimensions; personality, culture (core values and heritage) and self-image. The internal expression related to intangible characteristics and behaviours whereas the external expression related to outward facing, often physical characteristics and behaviours (Kapferer 2008). However, despite acknowledging that the corporate political brand was a coalition of unique identities or local-brands (in our case political co-brands), Pich and Dean (2015) did not reveal any insight and understanding associated with the candidate-politician brand identities. They concluded by revising the brand identity prism to an updated framework known as the brand identity network tailored to the sub-discipline of political branding. Consequently, Pich and Dean (2015) deemed the brand identity network as a workable, transferable tool designed to capture internal brand identity. However, despite these claims made for future research, it must be remembered that their study only explored corporate political brand identity and called for future research to consider other typologies of political brands such as candidates-politicians. Therefore, we extend the brand identity network and refine the dimensions to reflect the unique nature of political co-brands rearticulated as the political co-brand identity framework illustrated in figure 1 and outlined in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Political Co-Brand Identity Framework</th>
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<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Refers to the political brand’s figurehead. In the case of the political co-brand – the constituency politician-candidate represents the figurehead. Therefore, themes relating to the figurehead should be included in this section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Refers to the heritage, ideology and core values of the political co-brand. Successful political brands should project consistency between political party values and party leader values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Image</td>
<td>This relates to personal opinions, private statements and beliefs of the corporate political brand from the perspective of the political co-brand. Self-image along with culture and personality dimensions form the inward expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Refers to the political co-brand’s perception of ‘who’ identifies with the corporate political brand and constituency political brand. Reflection along with relationship and physique dimensions form the outward expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Refers to the internal relationship between the political co-brand and the corporate political party brand. Additionally this dimension includes reference to the relationships between the political co-brand supporters, voters and constituents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physique</td>
<td>Refers to the physical properties and communication tools used by the political co-brand.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Key Elements of the Revised Brand Identity Network developed from Pich and Dean (2015)
Figure 1: Political Co-Brand Identity Framework developed by authors adapted from Pich and Dean (2015); Abratt and Motlana (2002); Besharat and Langan (2014); d’Astous et al. (2007); Kumar (2005)

Subsequently, the framework set out above [table 1; figure 1] serves as a tool to explore how political co-brand identity is created and developed from the perspective of three distinct cases. Therefore, the research objectives of this study are:

- To reveal how political co-brands create and develop internal brand identity
- To compare political co-brand identities within the UK Conservative corporate brand
- To assess the applicability of the political co-brand identity framework as a mechanism to understand the internal perspective of political co-brands

This study will generate deep insight into a different typology of a political brand and from a brand creator standpoint (Jain et al. 2018; Nielsen 2016; Nielsen 2015; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Phipps et al. 2010; Speed et al. 2015). This in turn will advance political branding research by addressing the contention at the forefront of the subject area particularly relating to the limited development of ‘appropriate models’ and frameworks such as political co-brand identity that could be used to assist political entities in understanding their offering and support strategy development (Billard 2018; Nielsen 2015; O’Cass and Voola 2011; Ormrod 2011; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Scammell 2015). The following section outlines the methodological approach which underpins this study.

Methodological Approach

According to Creswell (2007) and Saunders et al (2012), the methodological approach, research methods, sampling framework and analytical processes should be guided by the research problem-purpose and directed by the project’s objectives. As this research aimed to explore how political co-brands create and develop internal brand identity the study demanded an interpretive approach to data gathering. Therefore, a qualitative revelatory multi case study approach was adopted to obtain first-hand accounts and capture detailed descriptions (Gustafsson 2017; King and Grace 2012; Yin 2009). Further, this approach is also useful at the early stages of a relatively unknown area (Davies and Chun 2002) and does not formulate
hypotheses/propositions with the aim of research a conclusive end (Gephardt 2004; Maxwell 2005).

A multi case study approach is a suitable method for grounding the study as it considers “exploration of multiple perspectives which are rooted in a particular context...” (Lewis and Nichols 2014:66). Indeed, case studies are ideal for exploratory research (Gerring 2007) and aim to capture the phenomenon “through the eyes of participants” (Cohen et al. 2007:257). A multi case study approach “seeks to understand the particular rather than generate law-like explanations” (Welch et al. 2011:741) and aims to uncover rich contextual understanding of human experiences rather than generate generalisations (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Welch et al. 2011; Yin 2009). In addition, the purpose of a qualitative exploratory approach is to “document the world from the point of view of the people studied” (Bryman et al. 1999:75) and uncover thick description (Geertz 1993) and emphasise meaning and intimate knowledge and depth rather than breadth (Saunders et al. 2012). The desirability of adopting qualitative research can provide the researcher with rich knowledge, hidden meaning and unique data which is achieved by delving deep into the respondent’s attitudes, feelings, perceptions and beliefs (Malhotra and Birks 2003; Rubin and Rubin 2005; Warren and Karner 2005). In addition, multiple case studies can focus on individuals, organisations or several locations (Creswell 2009; Rolls 2005; Yin 2009). Therefore, the overall aim of a multiple case study approach is to uncover common themes and deep insight from perspectives of critical and key participants [cases], which in turn will extend emergent theory and frameworks (Lewis and Nichols 2014; Pettigrew 1988; Yin 2009).

Data Collection

In-depth elite interviews were selected as an appropriate method to explore political co-brand identities. Elite in-depth interviews are ideal methods for exploratory, empirical research, flexible in nature and “potentially a Pandora’s box generating endlessly various and abundant data” (McCracken 1988:12). Elite interviews have also been used extensively in political research (Beamer 2002; Radice 1994; Radice 1993) to understand the influence of experts or political leaders on the strategic development of policy or the political brand (Lees-Marshal 2011). Indeed, in-depth elite interviews are often seen as a ‘special conversation’ or conversation with a purpose (Rubin and Rubin 2005), structured via open-ended questions and used to encourage a spontaneous yet guided discussion with the support of prompts and probes (Gillham 2005; Foddy 2001). Therefore, this form of interviewing was deemed an appropriate tool to uncover the internal political co-brand identity from the perspective of internal Conservative stakeholders. All topics in the discussion guide were covered but there was also flexibility to explore responses that emerged from the discussions.

In order to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings, the process of methodological triangulation was adopted (Farmer et al. 2006; Saunders et al. 2012). This approach can involve the use of multiple research methods such as numerous interviews, documents, archival internal records, and communication tools (Jack et al. 2006; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Further, methodological triangulation strengthens the reliability of research findings as it “helps tap into different elements of the issue and provides more of a complete picture” by assessing the
coherency of key themes and offers the opportunity to capture deeper insight and interpretation (Farmer et al. 2006:390; Scandura and Williams 2000). With this in mind, this study enhanced the in-depth elite interviews with secondary research and material such as the political co-brands published materials, manifestoes, official websites including social media platforms and published news articles. The variety of internal and independent sources provided greater corroboration into the phenomenon, which in turn strengthened the exploration and trustworthiness of the political co-brands from a relational-internal perspective (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015; Scandura and Williams 2000).

**Cases - [Political Co-brands]**

Three unique case studies, in the form of Members of Parliament from the UK Conservative Party, served as participants for this study. The UK Conservative Party represents one of the oldest yet most complex ‘corporate’ political brands in the English-speaking world (Campbell 2008; Lloyd 2006; Pich and Dean 2015). Further, the UK Conservative Party corporate brand has been considered a multidimensional ‘broad church’ of diverse often-contrasting values (Bale, 2011). Following the 2010 and 2015 UK General Elections, David Cameron’s Conservative party formed the Government of the United Kingdom. However, despite David Cameron’s best efforts to reposition the corporate political brand and communicate a clear, positive, unified identity, the Conservatives continued to face challenges particularly in terms of negative stereotypical associations, internal divisions and inconsistent messages (Pich and Dean 2015). Therefore, the UK Conservative Party served as an appropriate corporate political brand to focus the multi case study approach. A profile for each case is outlined in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Firstly Elected</th>
<th>Re-elected</th>
<th>UK Constituency</th>
<th>Selected Constituency</th>
<th>Joined Party</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Profile of Cases – Three Political Co-Brands

The three cases represent constituencies across the United Kingdom from the North, Midlands and South of the country. The three cases were the first to acknowledge the researchers’ request to take part in the study and granted access. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, no additional cases granted access to take part in the study. Nevertheless, the three cases were elected under the leadership of Conservative Party leader David Cameron [2005-2015]. For example, each political co-brand was elected or re-elected in May 2015. Indeed, there is no ideal number of cases for a multiple case study approach, which traditionally ranges from three to ten cases (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2009). Fewer than three cases can limit the development of theory and fail to provide a convincing understanding of the problem at hand (Eisenhardt 1989; Pettigrew 1988). Therefore, the elite in-depth interviews with the three cases provided an opportunity to uncover deep insight and rich understanding into the creation, development and management of political co-brands from three areas of the UK. In addition, they revealed a
snap-shot into several political brand identities (Cohen et al. 2007; Welch et al. 2011; Yin 2009). The in-depth elite interviews were conducted July 2015 to September 2015. Participants-cases were briefed on the objectives of the study and all ethical procedures were outlined and approved before the commencement of the study. Each political co-brand was granted anonymity to avoid recognition.

Analysis

This study adopted a two-stage process of thematic analysis; coarse-grained followed by fine-grained (Bird et al. 2009; Butler-Kisber 2010; Hofstede et al. 2007; Warren and Karner 2005). The coarse-grained stage included familiarisation of all findings and assessing emerging themes. For example, each in-depth elite interview was recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed by the researchers (Butler-Kisber 2010; Kvale 1996; Rubin and Rubin 2005; Warren and Karner 2005). More specifically, interviews were transcribed verbatim; re-read by the researchers, notes and memos compared. The data was coded manually and themes and subthemes were identified. The fine-grained stage was more focused and involved reviewing formulated categories, analysing for hidden meaning and revisiting themes identified from the coarse-grained stage (Bird et al. 2009; Butler-Kisber 2010; Hofstede et al. 2007; Warren and Karner 2005). This included comparing and contrasting the themes and sub-themes identified across cases, which in turn expanded themes or redefined themes (Yin 2009). In addition, the researchers reviewed the notes taken during the interviews designed to preserve ideas often forgotten in the data collection process (Glaser 2014; Goulding 2002). Finally, the researchers continued to practice the process of methodological triangulation and revisited the multiple research artefacts-methods such as reviewing the archival internal records, memos and communication tools used by each case (Farmer et al. 2006; Saunders et al. 2012). The researchers discussed the emerging themes and clarified any discrepancies following Butler-Kisber’s (2010) approach to thematic analysis. This study sought depth and insight rather than conclusive generalisations. These personal accounts provided rich insight into the identities of the political co-brands, which is consistent with the philosophical assumptions of this study (Gephart 2004; Saunders et al. 2007, van Manen, 2014). Further, an ‘external validation strategy’ (Warren and Karner 2005) was adopted to strengthen the transparency, reliability and validity of the analytical process. This included sending the political co-brands copies of the interview transcripts to assess whether they represented a consistent reflection of the interview. All cases corroborated the transcripts, which in turn strengthened the trustworthiness, transparency and reliability of the research (Farmer et al. 2006; Saunders et al. 2012; Warren and Karner 2005).

Finally, the dimensions-variables from the revised brand identity network [table 1] were used as broad headings [or probes] to guide the discussion for the elite interviews as the dimensions-variables underpinned the conceptualisations of internal political co-brand identity. However, the dimensions-variables did not limit the exploration and generation of themes developed from the cases’ perceptions, opinions and feelings in relation to the political co-brand (Creswell 2007; Gephart 2004; Trochim and Donnelly 2007). The following section presents the findings
uncovered as part of the investigation into the construction and management of political co-brand identity and alignment between political co-brand and political corporate party brand.

Findings

This section demonstrates how the political co-brand identities were constructed, managed and highlights alignment with the corporate political brand. This exploration was achieved by deconstructing each political co-brand with the aid of the ‘political co-brand identity framework’. The findings section is discussed with reference to the six dimensions of brand identity; physique, personality, culture, relationships, reflection and self-image. In addition, ten interconnected themes were uncovered as part of the creation and development of political co-brand identity namely; limited funding, core premise, broad-church values, personal beliefs, blended identity, personalisation, nature of constituency, profiling, strong corporate-local relationship and corporate tensions. Each dimension and theme will be explained and evidenced below. In addition, the applied findings [figure 2] highlight significant transfer potential and applicability of the brand identity network and demonstrate that the framework can be adopted to explore the internal-relational orientation of political co-brands with little difficulty. The findings section concludes with a short discussion and concludes with limitations, implications and areas for future research.
Figure 2: Applied Political Co-Brand Identity Framework including Identity Dimensions and Uncovered Themes
Physique

The physique dimension captured insight into the physical properties-elements of the political co-brand identities. This included elements such as localised strategies and tactics, constituency focused campaign messages and visual touch points such as logos, colours and the adoption of market research techniques. In addition, all cases maintained that developing a successful political co-brand identity was a long-term process that required a consistent localised message, some coherency with the corporate political brand and the use of various often cost-effective communication tools. Further, the localised strategies and tactics supported the constant need for a local presence across the consistency inside and outside the election campaign period. However, creating and managing this blended identity was often challenging given the limited funding available to political co-brands.

Limited Funding

All cases highlighted the challenges of establishing an identity particularly with limited funding and resources at the local level. For example, case one argued ‘it was difficult, at the time the association [local Conservative party] was bust. It has way, way ridiculously overspent for the 2001 election. It had taken out loans here, there and everywhere…so we had no money’ (C1). In addition, each candidate would attend community wide events such as neighbourhood forums, coffee mornings, host surgeries for constituents, hold jobs fairs, an over 65s tea dance, local galas, local radio, agricultural shows and horticultural shows (C1; C2; C3). Further, case one tactically wrote often controversial letters to the local newspaper, organised meetings with local opinion leader-formers and engaged in door-to-door leafleting [printed by the candidate]. Therefore, despite limited funding, all cases attended as many community events as possible, often free to attend, with the aim of raising awareness, visibility and establishing a local presence.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges of limited funding each case argued that a ‘localised’ rather than a ‘national’ approach is crucial to engage the hearts and minds of constituents when developing a clear political co-brand identity. For example, case one argued ‘I focus on what I do locally for my campaign and I think people are now more interested in what’s going on locally than nationally’ (C1). In addition, case three created their political co-brand identity grounded on a ‘huge consultation’ in the form of conducting market research and meetings with constituents after being selected as the Conservative Parliamentary Candidate in November 2013. The soon to be Member of Parliament [elected 2015] wanted to ‘find out what issues matter most’ across the constituency and uncovered ‘transport’, ‘town parking’, ‘congestion’, ‘air pollution’, ‘local affordable housing’ and the uncertainty of the local ‘NHS hospital’. A strategic ‘6-point plan’ (C3) was developed and ‘basically sold the public what they wanted us to deliver…so applied national policies to a local level. Everything has to be about localism’ and this underpinned the initial political co-brand identity (C3).
Blended Identity

It was revealed that all cases adopted a blended approach in creating and developing their identities and were consistent with the visual touch points such as party slogans, colour, corporate message and use of the corporate ‘Conservative oak tree’ logo on all communication tools. In addition, it was revealed during the official general election period, all cases were offered additional support in terms of campaign material, which often focused on the corporate political brand identity, national campaign slogans and key party messages. For example, case one highlighted that in national elections they ‘went with the Party’s central election literature packs, we didn’t do our own thing. The articles in there we do them, but we went with all the corporate stuff and parts of it was on the Party’s central message…we don’t want to pretend we’re not part of the Conservative Party…We don’t want to distance ourselves from the Conservative Party far from it. We’re proud of the fact we are the Conservative Party here. But I guess the message you could give to voters in [northern constituency] might be slightly different to the one you would give in Surrey Heath’ (C1). Similarly, case two argued that their political co-brand identity was co-created from a ‘bit of both’ from corporate and localised messages and communicated via leaflets, newsletters, campaign posters, placards and personalised constituency focused letters. Therefore, the political co-brands were a combination of corporate and localised messages designed to offer a co-created blended identity.

Personality

The personality dimension referred to themes relating to the political co-brands figurehead. In the case of political co-brands the candidate-politician is the figurehead of their political brand in their constituency. For example, this dimension included the political co-brands core campaign slogans as the cases revealed these were created and developed from their own personal beliefs and represented the overarching theme of their ‘personality’. Further, the findings suggested the creation of the political co-brand was complex, multifaceted and strategic in nature for example, the identities were tailored to each unique constituency and the wants and needs of the constituents. Nevertheless, ‘personality’ was a cornerstone of the creation and development of political co-brands developed from core premises.

Core Premise

The core premise developed by each case represented their core message which underpinned their identity and the core message, which was tailored and developed for their constituency. For example, case one put forward a concise message of being ‘outspoken, independently minded and working hard in the local community and being really focused on the service I give to my constituents’ (C1). Similarly, case two summarised their desired identity in the premise of ‘a local pragmatic voice’, which linked to the candidate’s personal values and characteristics (C2). This simple principle highlighted that the candidate had entered the world of politics born out of frustration with the existing local council and decided to leave the profession of farming to pursue a career in politics. For example, ‘you can either sit there and moan or do something
about it…if you have a big mouth like myself it’s always a good thing…so I stood for election
on the county council and then people told me to run for [general] election…my job is to be a
public representative and to fight for what is right locally’ (C2). On the other hand, case three
embarked on a career in politics following the threatened closure of a local school, which
galvanised the candidate’s political interest and support. For example, ‘I became interested in
politics back in 2004 and it was because of a special needs school that was closing down…the
local [Conservative] candidate there was helping run a campaign to save it and the campaign
group got me involved’, (C3). Further, this initial personal issue formed the basis for the
candidate’s core theme of ‘social mobility and equality for all’ when selected as a local
parliamentary candidate six years later. Therefore, all cases put forward simple propositions to
underpin their desired political co-brand identities which manifested from personal
experiences, beliefs and attitudes.

Culture

The culture dimension referred to the heritage and core values of each political co-brand. The
broad church values manifested from personal beliefs, perspectives, and attitudes aligned to
political party ideology. Successful political brands should project consistency between
political party values and party leader values.

Broad Church Values

The personal core values and heritage of each case formed the rationale for political co-brand
identity and each political co-brand represented a degree of alignment or strategic partnership
with the corporate political brand. For example, each political co-brand revealed a range of
Conservative ‘broad church’ values and principles such as the belief in decentralisation, low
taxes, free markets, aspiration, pro-business and respect for law and order. However, each
political co-brand provided elements of distinction and placed greater emphasis on personal
‘Conservative’ values and principles. For example, case 1 argued their core ‘Conservative’
values represented ‘broad church’ thinking and were ‘a curious mixture of things but mainly a
libertarian Conservative you know freedom is the biggest thing for me. But I’m also a slightly
traditional Conservative in that sense I do subscribe to the view if it’s not necessary to change
then it’s necessary not to change’ (C1).

Similarly, case 2 believed his values evolved from ‘the liberal side of the party. I think the
government shouldn’t poke it’s face in other people’s lives…also law and order, I think it is
very important to communities…I think you can only do what you want to inspire through
government if the economy is generating the tax for you to do so, which also makes me a
Conservative’ (C2). Whereas case 3, newly elected in 2015, maintained the ‘broad church’
values focused on ‘standing up for choice, responsibility…we shouldn’t allow people to get
stuck in a rut and help them up out of it and empowering them to take more responsibility of
their own lives through the Big Society’ (C3). Therefore, each co-brand communicated clear
cultural values and these values linked to the overall ideology and heritage of the corporate
political brand.
Relationship

The fourth dimension represented several distinct ‘relationships’ connected to the political co-brands. The relationship dimension included reference to the relationships with the localised-constituency focused ‘party’ and key internal stakeholders such as local supporters, campaigners, employees and constituents. In addition, the relationship dimension referred to the relationship between the political co-brand and political corporate brand. For example, it was revealed that the creation and development of the political co-brand identity involved a personalised relationship between politicians and constituents and a strong, often challenging relationship with the corporate political party.

Personalisation

Each political co-brand maintained the importance with exclusively dealing with correspondence to constituents as this ‘personalised’ communication strengthened the relationship between elected representatives and the political co-brand [C1 C2; C3]. Further, this personalised response was crucial to developing a strong relationship with constituents, and candidates would not be ‘successful’ if this personalised approach was neglected. In addition, one political co-brand argued they received over two hundred emails a day from constituents and ‘the most important thing that the people who contact you get the best possible service. You reply the same day, you take stuff up for them, you keep them updated with how their case is going…because not only can you impress them, they’ll all tell their friends you know they’ll say “I contacted my local MP and I sent an email and he replied in half an hour” you know that kind of reputation is priceless’ (C1). Similarly, the Southern political co-brand outlined ‘one thing I do is write to people still and send them a letter rather than emailing them back, I think it’s more appropriate and people want to get a response back from their MP…it sounds old fashioned…it is also a nicer experience for them in the end rather than just sending an email back they get a letter and they feel their views have been considered. It’s more personal in mind’ (C3). In addition it was revealed that managing this personalisation often involved a small number of individuals working on the local candidate-politician. In some cases the small-localised teams involved two or three individuals designated as ‘campaign managers’ or ‘support-case workers’ either paid or in a voluntary-intern capacity, each performing multiple-roles [C1; C2; C3]. This personal and relational approach supported by a small-localised team was practiced by all cases as a mechanism to connect candidates-politicians and constituents, which in turn created and managed the political co-brand identities.

Strong Corporate Relationship

Nevertheless, although all three political co-brands were huge supporters of localised, distinct identities, there was agreement with the notion that there was unity in diversity with the
corporate political brand and political co-brands. For example, ‘we don’t always agree [with corporate brand-party] but it doesn’t mean we’re falling apart, it just means that we’re all individual. We do disagree on policies but that is part and parcel of being in government but I can say we all want to see the same result which is winning’ (C1). Similarly, the Southern Member of Parliament claimed they were ‘not all sitting comfortably [within the corporate party] but that’s part and parcel of being in government you have to come to an understanding as a party’ (C2). In addition, all respondents argued that they had a good working relationship with the corporate political brand ‘we actually work very well with central office, they say we are going to put this leaflet out on this date, it’s going to cost this much and is there any shared messages you want to add locally’ (C2). This suggested the relationship between the corporate political brand and political co-brand was complex and multifaceted and political co-brand identity was a coalition of values, heritage and relationships tailored to respond to the wants and needs of constituents.

Reflection

The reflection dimension refered to the perceptions of ‘who’ identified with the political co-brands which may be different from the perceived and actual ‘target market’ of the corporate political brand. Reflection along with relationship and physique dimensions form the outward facing parts of the envisaged brand identity. The reflection dimension revealed that profiling constituents, tailoring identities to the wants and needs of constituents and developing identities based on winnable nature of constituency [nature of constituency] were crucial factors in the creation and development of the political co-brands.

Profiling

All political co-brands highlighted the importance of appealing beyond the political spectrum to a broad set of voters but also the importance of building a detailed understanding of voters in the constituency. This was regularly done by conducting constituency wide surveys with constituents’ wants and needs and combining this with research on consumer behaviour and voting intention conducted by external organisations such as Experian. For example, ‘we use MOSAIC stuff like the Experian data that helps us when we don’t know someone’s voting intention. The MOSAIC stuff combined with things like they’ve answered in surveys gives you a pretty good idea of what they might vote for’ (C2). In addition, this detailed understanding of constituents allowed the political co-brands to tailor their messages to their wants and needs. For example, ‘we find out those who are staunch in their opinions, some who are floating and would vote for and who they might consider voting for, and also like what issues they’re interested in so you can really send a targeted message out to people. It’s no good telling people about stuff they’re not interested in you want to tell them about what they are interested in’ (C1). Nevertheless, when probed to ascertain whether this targeted approach equated to multiple identities across the constituency the political co-brand argued ‘it’s not shaping my identity I mean I don’t compromise on what I believe in or whatever it’s just basically it’s no good me banging on to somebody about Europe who’s not interested in it…so if you know
someone’s interested in education issues well then you target you talk to them about education…we don’t give messages to different people on the basis of what we think they want us to hear we don’t do that at all. We tell people, everyone the same thing but it just means you’re telling them about something they’re interested in’ (C1). Therefore, the political co-brands do not tailor their identities rather the message, to make it relevant and reflect the audience.

**Nature of Constituency**

As identified in the previous dimension, all the political co-brands created their identities based on limited internal and external funding and based on creative thinking for maximum impact. Nevertheless, the nature of the constituency governed the degree of support provided by the corporate political brands. This ‘internal’ support was rationed and strategically directed by the corporate political brand given the large number of contestable seats across the country and related to the nature of the constituency. For example, if the corporate political brand equated the constituency as ‘winnable-marginal-target’ then additional support in terms of funding, communication tools and management would be provided. However, if the corporate political brand designated the constituency as ‘safe’ [more than 10,000 majority] or ‘unwinnable’ [for example Labour stronghold] then the constituency would receive very little support. This often revealed some tension as political co-brands in ‘safe’ or ‘unwinnable’ constituencies not only had greater decentralisation in developing and managing their political co-brand they also received very little internal support (C1; C3). However, the nature of each constituency can change from election to election and once strong ‘safe’ seats can become ‘marginal’, and ‘unwinnable’ seats can become ‘marginal’ target seats depending on national or local policies, and the actions of the sitting government or local candidate.

Indeed, this was the case of the Southern political co-brand. Once the candidate had been selected by CCHQ [2013] to contest the seat for the 2015 UK General Election, the first duty was to create a local presence and develop a clear identity. This was challenging as the local long-standing incumbent [Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament] ‘had a 70% approval rating...he was very popular’ (C3). Further, the political co-brand initially believed there was little chance of local success at the 2015 UK General Election and looked towards the 2020 UK General Election. This long-term approach would provide the opportunity to gain experience of fighting an election campaign, build a coherent political co-brand and raise awareness in the mind of the electorate. However, the political co-brand found the prospect of gaining local recognition challenging and ‘...for six to seven months no one really knew who I was and we hadn’t done enough to show people we were working hard’ (C3). However, in February 2014 the local Liberal Democrat MP announced that he would not contest the 2015 UK General Election. This change in the local environment offered the political co-brand the opportunity to adapt their initial strategy and refresh their tactics in terms of creating and developing their identity. Overnight the constituency morphed into a Conservative ‘target seat’ and ‘central office sent over a lot of resources in the end and more money. Their support was invaluable in reality…I can’t underestimate the amount of literature that should go through peoples doors to start to make a dent to make an impression’ (C3). This resulted in a change of
strategy at a local and corporate level. At a corporate level, more resources in terms of professional literature, additional staff, visiting Government Ministers and funding were available to shape the local identity, raise awareness, strengthen the impact and intensify recognition.

Self-Image

The final dimension, self-image, refers to the personal opinions, private statements and perceptions-associations ascribed to the corporate political brand from the perspective of the political co-brand’s figurehead. The self-image, personality and culture dimensions form the inward facing [mainly intangible] parts of the desired brand identity. This dimension revealed each political co-brand was established and managed through personal beliefs, opinions and experiences. In addition, the personal beliefs also highlighted tensions with the corporate political party brand in terms of consistency of message and popularity of the corporate political party brand within the local constituency, which in turn had an impact on creating and maintaining a clear political co-brand identity.

Personal Beliefs

The personal beliefs and private statements linked to themes identified in the personality and culture dimensions such as values, heritage and rationale for entering politics as a career. For example, each political co-brand provided additional insight into their personal ‘journey’ and how they were eventually elected as a Member of Parliament. This included failing to secure places on the ‘approved candidates list’, the challenges of ‘which constituency to contest’ often selected strategically based on the ‘most winnable seat’ (C1) or personal admiration or ‘love’ (C3) for the local constituency (C2) and private struggles of ‘being a gay Conservative’ (C3). Nevertheless, all the political co-brands acknowledged that creating localised, recognisable and believable identities was a long-term strategic approach and the journeys provided candidates with opportunities to gain experience of the political process over time. Further, each political co-brand argued that it would take at least two-three years to create and develop a localised brand identity within the constituency. For example, the minimum time was ‘two and a half years to get established as a local candidate…it’s a massive advantage to be selected early to get yourself an opportunity to get out and about and get known in the community…it still amazes me we still select some candidates at the last minute’ (C1). Therefore, each narrative supported by personal beliefs and private statements not only formed the basis for creating the unique political co-brand identity but also underpinned how each identity would be developed and managed over time.

Corporate Tensions

It was also revealed that there appeared to be some tension between the political co-brands and aspects of the corporate political brand such as ‘consistency of corporate message’ and ‘strategic distance’. The consistency of the corporate political brand message was debated by the political co-brands. For example, the Midlands and Southern political co-brands were overly positive with regards to the corporate political brand and communicating a consistent
message to constituents and standing out from political competitors ‘I actually think we have learnt to stick to our messages and say what is important to us’ (C2) and ‘I thought the Conservative message was a lot stronger’ than the Labour Party (C3). Nevertheless, the Midlands political co-brand highlighted that the corporate political brand should not become complacent as they needed to ensure ‘people understand what we are trying to achieve…I mean we hope the message is getting across, and we can only do so much and then it’s out of our hands. We have a good message and getting it out to the public and reminding them of what we have done and how far we have come’ (C2). In contrast, the Northern political co-brand believed the corporate political brand message had become ‘fragmented’ which in turn ‘confuses’ the electorate ‘well I think sometimes we are not as proud or make decisions that are not really what the Conservatives should do, so people get confused and they then vote UKIP and think that’s the Conservatives that I recognise…we should be proud of being conservative and proud of what we believe in and over the last few years we have lost confidence in being Conservatives and what we believe in’ (C1). Therefore, the private statements linked to the consistency of the corporate message and highlighted the delicate nature of managing the corporate political brand, which could lead to perceptions of disunity within the organisation.

The political co-brands also highlighted some challenges with the corporate political brand. More specifically, depending on the popularity [or not] of the corporate brand, corporate policies or corporate leader [David Cameron] within the constituency, this would govern the development of the identity of the political co-brand. For example, the Northern political co-brand argued ‘David Cameron is a drag on the vote’ across the constituency and ‘he doesn’t gain votes he’s a drag on the votes…David Cameron made the biggest mistake when the public were crying out for a Conservative message and instead he abandoned it’ (C1). Therefore the Northern political co-brand identity placed greater emphasis on the local issues-values, and local candidacy rather than the corporate leadership or corporate policies [corporate identity]. Nevertheless, as outlined earlier the Midlands political co-brand developed a blended identity maximising the positivity of both corporate and local aspects and did not concur with the Northern political co-brand. In contrast, the Southern political co-brand developed their identity with some distance with the corporate political brand. For example, ‘We also know from our polling that the Conservative Party’s still pretty unpopular in [constituency] whereas my brand is a lot more popular so we decided to go down the “candidate name” rather than the “candidate name Conservative” root’ (C3). Subsequently, the political co-brands were strategic when designing and building identity and the degree of alignment depended on the localised popularity of the corporate party leader, party and policies and overall judgement of the political co-brands.

Discussion

Creation and Development of Political Co-Brand Identity

This study demonstrates how political co-brand identity is constructed and managed over time and explores the coherency between the political co-brand and political corporate brand. In
addition, this paper demonstrates the diverse typologies of political brands and highlights applicability of the political co-brand identity framework [figure 1; table 1] as a pragmatic tool to understand the envisaged reality of political brands (Billard 2018; Guzman and Sierra 2009; Jain et al. 2018; Nielsen 2015; Peng and Hackley 2009; Scammell 2015; Smith 2009; Speed et al. 2015). For example, the political co-brand identities were initially created from individual values, personal ideological beliefs and past personal experiences manifested by the ‘figurehead’ of each political co-brand. The ‘figurehead’ became the walking representation of each political co-brand and used individual values, personal ideological beliefs and experiences as intangible cues to develop a core premise designed to capture the mind of the electorate and serve as justification for the desired identity (Pich and Dean 2015). This core premise or key message was designed to construct a unique narrative to appeal and engage local constituents, translate corporate Conservative ‘broad church’ values to a local audience and make these relevant and comprehensible to constituents. Further, political co-brand identity is strategic in nature (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat and Langan 2014; Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Volckner and Sattler 2006) in the sense that each identity is tailored to suit the unique settings, wants and needs of the constituency. Further, each political co-brand is supported [by the corporate brand] to determine the political emphasis and agenda for the local community (Pich et al. 2017). This demonstrates the complex and multifaceted nature of political brands (Grimmer and Grube 2017; Milewicz and Milewicz 2014; Pich et al. 2017; Smith 2008).

Therefore, political co-brand identities are a cluster of individual values, personal ideological beliefs and past personal experiences aligned with corporate ‘broad church’ historical ideologies and pragmatic values, which in turn co-create the desired brand identity as illustrated in figure 4 (Aqeel et al. 2017; Gyrd-Jones and Kornum 2013; Helmig et al. 2008; Kornum and Muhlbacher 2013; Nguyen et al. 2018; Thomson 2006).
In addition, this study reveals (figure 3) that political co-brands are multifaceted, related yet distinct and often competing entities that are developed over time and by multiple internal and external stakeholders (Billard 2018; Jain et al. 2018; Milewicz and Milewicz 2014; Nielsen 2016; Pich and Dean 2015; Scammell 2015; Speed et al. 2015). For example, political co-brands face several challenges when creating and developing identities particularly with the support of small-localised teams with often-limited support from the corporate political brand. Further, political co-brands face challenges such as limited local funding, maintaining a consistent local identity with the pressures of a changing corporate identity, and unpopularity of the corporate brand or corporate-local tensions also seem to have an impact on how brands manage their identity (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni et al. 2018; Washburn and Priluck 2000). Nevertheless, the findings reveal that in order for political co-brands to secure success in the polls, a long-term approach is needed to build an identity and maintain a local ‘presence’ inside and outside the election campaign period. A consistent localised identity, grounded personalised values, yet developed-updated with local market research reflect the changing wants and needs of the electorate (Nandan 2005; Silveira et al. 2013; Ross and Harradine 2011; Saaksjarvi and Samiee 2011; Srivastava 2011; Wheeler and Millman 2017). This provides political co-brands with the opportunity to profile key constituents and develop personalised communication tools designed to deliver an appropriate targeted message (Pich et al. 2017). This is crucial as it keeps political co-brands relevant, perceived as approachable and truly ‘local’. Finally, the findings demonstrate that political co-brands can be conceptualised using the ‘trinity of elements’ [leader, party and policy] up until now reserved for corporate political brands (Ahmed et al. 2015; Nielsen 2016; O’Cass and Voola 2011; Smith 2008).

Political Co-Brand Alignment

This research also makes a wider contribution to the body of knowledge as it addresses the ‘relatively limited’ (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014:112) application of commercial co-branding to different contexts and settings (Helmig et al. 2008; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Ronzoni et al. 2018; Wason and Charlton 2015). Existing scholars within co-branding recognised limited understanding as to how co-brands create, communicate and manage their desired identity and questioned whether new co-brands are helped or hindered by the identity of the partner brand (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Volckner and Sattler 2006; Wason and Charlton 2015). In addition, this study responds to calls for more insight and understanding of non-fictional ‘living’ brands which represent a move away from a traditional focus of fictitious brands (Ahn and Sung 2012; Leuthesser et al. 2002). For example, the findings suggest that political co-brand identities are aligned to the overall corporate political brand identity (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Volckner and Sattler 2006; Wason and Charlton 2015). However, the degree of alignment or ‘image transference’ will be determined by the nature of the constituency [safe seat, winnable-target seat or unwinnable] and envisaged identity of the political co-brand. Indeed case two [Midland Constituency] represented closer alignment with the corporate
political brand compared to the other two cases. Case two developed a blended central-local identity and believed the developed political co-brand demonstrated a sense of ‘complementarity’ and inherited the positive and desirable qualities from the corporate brand infused with a localised perspective (Besharat and Langan 2014; Leuthesser et al. 2002). Likewise, case one [Northern Constituency] followed a similar approach when designing and building the political co-brand and highlighted the virtues of ‘image transference’ as it helped establish and develop the local identity (Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Washburn et al. 2000).

Nevertheless, case one highlights the political co-brand had became slightly more decentralised from the corporate political brand over time, which was a result of developing and strengthening a local identity from election to election. It could be argued that when political co-brands are initially created and developed, alignment or ‘image transference’ is greater and as political co-brands gain local prominence and form a stronger presence then a degree of misalignment is possible (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni et al. 2018; Washburn and Priluck 2000). For example, case one acknowledged that part of the corporate political brand [party leader] was unpopular within the constituency and would have a negative impact on local voting intention, therefore case one would place greater emphasis on the ‘party’ and ‘policy’ than reference to the ‘party leader’ (C1). Therefore, this suggests ‘negative image transference’ can cause the political co-brand to misalign with the corporate brand in order to safeguard the local identity (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Leuthesser et al. 2002). Similarly, despite being a ‘new’ political co-brand, case three [Southern Constituency] exhibited some misalignment or ‘lack of complementarity’ from the corporate political brand as part of its initial creation (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Leuthesser et al. 2002). For example, based on local market research the Conservative Party was ‘pretty unpopular’ across the constituency, therefore the political co-brand placed greater emphasis on the local attributes rather than a balanced approach when creating and developing local identity (C3). This therefore suggests that the management of ‘negative image transference’ or ‘lack of complementarity’ needs to be considered when creating and developing political co-brands to ensure that the corporate brand does not hinder the political co-brand. Further, this study suggests that misalignment between the two entities [centralised and localised] can be strategic and not necessarily a negative trait. Further, a degree of misalignment can actually be a positive opportunity for political brands as political co-brand identity can be designed to broaden its support base and appeal to voters beyond traditional ‘party’ lines. Therefore, contrary to the existing literature, limiting the ‘spillover effect’ or ‘image transference’ could actually complement both parties as it still provides positive outcomes (Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat 2010; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Washburn et al 2000).

Subsequently, each political co-brand represents an ‘alliance’ and possesses a unique, blended identity developed from a personalised core premise and positioned by a personal ideology manifested from the ‘broad church’ corporate values and heritage (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; d’Astous et al. 2007; Kumar 2005; Nguyen et al. 2018; Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Pich et al. 2017; Wheeler and Millman 2017).
Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that creating, developing and managing successful political co-brands requires a long-term collaborative approach [18-months-2 years] to establish a local presence and maintain a consistent localised message inside and outside the election campaign period (Leuthesser et al. 2002; Silveira et al. 2013). Further, the findings suggest that the relationship between the corporate political brand and political co-brands can vary in terms of alignment and strength and will be influenced by the nature of the constituency, personal position and beliefs of the co-brand and perceived tensions between corporate-political co-brands (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat and Langan 2014; Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Volckner and Sattler 2006). Indeed, the study suggests corporate political brands represent a ‘system of co-brand identities’ united by a desire to improve the lives of constituents, by implementing ‘broad church values’ into practice and securing power at the ballot box (Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Washburn and Priluck 2000). ‘Political’ co-brands are just as complex and multifaceted as conventional co-brands and share the desire to generate a sole entity, which represents a positive win-win situation for all parties (Aqeel et al. 2017; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Pich et al. 2017; Serazio 2017; Washburn and Priluck 2000). In addition, we can define political co-brands as a ‘system of brands’ manifested from the combination of two existing brands including the ‘corporate party brand’ and ‘individual-candidate-local brand’ amalgamated to create a new brand that embodies a unique single identity (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Besharat and Langan 2014; d’Astous et al. 2007; Kumar 2005; Pich et al. 2017). However, ‘political’ co-brands are diverse and can limit or expand the process ‘image transference’ depending on the desired political co-brand identity (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni et al. 2018; Washburn and Priluck 2000).

It must be acknowledged that all research studies have their own limitations and acknowledging this will strengthen the ability to draw conclusions (Farmer et al. 2006; Jack and Raturi 2006; Scandura and Williams 2000. As indicated earlier, due to time constraints (Lilliker 2003) and limited access to appropriate and relevant participants, three cases formed the basis of the sample. Nevertheless, as each case was considered an expert in the topic area, an elite interview approach, which tend to be a small group of the total population, provided a convincing understanding of the problem at hand (Beamer 2002; Eisenhardt 1989; Pettigrew 1988). In addition, as this study adopted a multiple case study approach, three cases represented an opportunity to uncover deep insight and rich understanding into the creation, development and management of political co-brands from three areas of the UK (Cohen et al. 2007; Eisenhardt 1989; Welch et al. 2011; Yin 2009).

Nevertheless, interpretivist research is grounded in the ability to capture new discoveries and enrich understanding of the phenomenon rather than verify predetermined hypotheses and makes generalizable claims (Firestone 1993; Gummesson 2005; Riege 2003). Therefore this study does not make claims of generalisability rather it identifies deep insight. It supports the notion of broad similarities and differences transferred from study to study. This has the potential to build a more complete picture of the research problem, which in turn can strengthen
the quality, confidence, reliability and validity of the findings through the comparison with existing studies in different contexts and settings (Baxter and Jack 2008; Riege 2003).

Conclusions

Subsequently, political co-brands are strategic in nature as they aim to transfer strong appealing associations, perceptions and imagery amalgamated with tangible elements to create a new entity (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat and Langan 2014; Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Washburn et al. 2000). Therefore this study demonstrates that the updated political co-brand identity framework [figure 1 and table 1] can be used as a mechanism to understand the internal perspective of political co-brands and the six dimensions help structure the exploratory process (Pich and Dean 2015). This addresses the calls for future research within political branding to revisit and reframe existing concepts and frameworks to new settings-contexts. This in turn supports the advancement of the sub-discipline of political branding and set the agenda for future research (Ahmed et al. 2015; Billard 2018; Jain et al. 2018; Lock and Harris 1996; Nielsen 2016; O'Cass and Voola 2011; Ormrod and Hennéberg 2011; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Scammell 2015; Serazio 2017; Speed et al. 2015).

Responding to the identified gaps and explicit calls for more exploratory empirical research (Billard 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Jain et al. 2018; Nielsen 2016; Nielsen 2015; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Phipps et al. 2010; Serazio 2017; Speed et al. 2015; Wason and Charlton 2015), this case study revealed how three political co-brands [from the perspective of three distinct cases of three Members of Parliament in the UK Conservative Party] created and developed internal brand identity. This study also compared the related yet distinct identities within the corporate political brand. For example, each political co-brand was created from personal values and an ideological position [culture], individual characteristics [personality] and personal beliefs and private statements [self-image], and developed with the support of tangible-intangible communication tools [physique], multiple internal-external relationships and directed to local constituents beyond traditional corporate party lines [reflection]. In addition, the multi case approach revealed ‘broad church values’ connected and united each political co-brand with the corporate political brand. Nevertheless, each political co-brand developed their identity to local wants and needs and the strength of relationship with the corporate political brand was shaped by the nature of the constituency and local acceptance of the corporate political brand.

Implications

This study has implications for theory and practice. In terms of implications for theory, this study builds on limited existing concepts such as co-branding and political brand identity as a means of critical application. Existing research on co-branding remains a ‘relatively limited’ and complex area of study and generally focuses on fictitious brands. Similarly, research on political brand identity remains under-researched particularly with a focus on ‘candidate-politician’ brands. This study therefore demonstrates the importance of investigating political brand identity from an internal brand creator perspective. This in turn supports the development
and advancement of political branding as an area of study (Ahmed et al. 2015; Billard 2018; Lock and Harris 1996; Nielsen 2016; Nielsen 2015; O’Cass 2001; O’Cass and Voola 2011; Ormrod and Henneberg 2011; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Scammell 2015; Speed et al. 2015). In addition, this paper demonstrates the opportunities and merits of utilising the strategic approach for co-branding to help conceptualise ‘candidates-politicians’ as political brands which up until now, ‘candidate-politician brands’ have been difficult to define and understand unlike the extensive research on corporate political brands. More specifically, this study puts forward a definition of a political co-brand conceptualised as ‘a system of brands manifested from the combination of two existing brands including the corporate party brand and individual-candidate-local brand amalgamated to create a new brand that embodies a unique single identity’ (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Aqeel et al. 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; d’Astous et al. 2007; Kumar 2005). Therefore, this definition will go some way to address the confusion and lack of agreed consensus (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat 2010; James 2005; Leuthesser et al. 2002; Thomson 2006; Voss and Gammoh 2004). This study also contributes to theory as it builds on the work of Pich and Dean (2015) and develops the political co-brand identity framework [figure 1 and table 1] as a pragmatic tool to explore how political co-brand identity is created and managed and how this aligns with the corporate political brand and other political co-brands.

This study also has implications for practice. Organisations and policy makers will be able to adopt the definition of political co-brands as a construct to conceptualise candidate-politician brands. This will allow organisations and policy makers to create a personalised political co-brand with a distinct identity, develop an ideal position of alignment and manage its relationship with the corporate political brand based on the profile of the constituency and continued market research. In addition, organisations, policy makers and different typologies of political brands will be able to use the political co-brand identity framework as a diagnostic mechanism to investigate their co-brand’s current identity, assess alignment and make strategic changes or reposition the envisaged identity if desired. Similarly, organisations and policy makers can use this framework, key dimensions and factors as a blueprint to design and build new political brands, construct policies and create identifiable and unique identities at a corporate and/or local level tailored to address the wants and needs of constituents. Below we list a series of research objectives which future research should attempt to focus on in order to advance research:

- As this paper puts forward a working conceptualisation of political co-brands future studies could use this working conceptualisation and investigate other political co-brands within and beyond Europe and other jurisdictions to assess similarities and differences of often competing identities within corporate political brands.
- Future research should investigate the prospect that political co-brands do not represent a positive win-win situation for all parties and explore the impact of negative ‘image transference’ from corporate-to-co-brand or visa-versa.
- In addition, further research should focus not just on the ‘internal stakeholders’ but also the ‘external’ voter and assess the consistency between identity-image which would reveal more insight and depth into the political brand.
Future studies should continue to apply the revised ‘political co-brand identity framework’ to understand the creation and development of political co-brands and the alignment with the corporate political brand.

Finally, future research should assess the transfer potential of the revised ‘political co-brand identity framework’ to new settings and contexts to brands beyond political boundaries to assess its applicability and make adaptations-improvements where appropriate.
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**Reviewers Comments**

**Reviewer: 1**

**Recommendation: Minor Revision**

Comments:  
Thank you for allowing me to read your work. This is a well written paper with a very interesting and topical issue. However, there are several problems that the authors need to consider and improve.  
In short, these include justification of constructs, argumentation, methodological concerns and analysis problems. I strongly recommend the authors to address the following:

**Action taken**

Thank you for taking the time to review our work. We appreciate and respect your constructive and supportive feedback. We have attempted to address your concerns and you can see below how we have addressed each comment. The revisions are in **RED** in the manuscript and page number in the next column will correspond with each point. We are happy to clarify any additional points and concerns. We believe our refinements have strengthened the justification of each construct, strengthened the overall argument, provided more detail and explanation for the methodology sections, clarified the findings section and emphasized our conclusions, future research and implications.

Thank you once again.

<table>
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<th>Introduction</th>
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<td>• You need to explain and justify your choice for the sector in studying Political Co-Brand Identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The gap and mirroring key contribution should be made more explicit and clearer in the introduction section. In addition, the significance of this study should be highlighted as not every gap is worth filling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The authors need to redevelop the introduction significantly, include more theories/literature and justify and position the paper better.</td>
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<td>• Please add a definition table for each construct.</td>
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We concur with the reviewer. We have completely reshaped and extended the introduction. For example, we have introduced and defined each construct such as political branding, co-branding, conceptualizes political co-branding and political co-brand identity. This explains and justifies political branding, the adoption of co-branding and the development of political co-brand identity. This reaffirms the identified gap, which has been made clearer and more focused. We have also included a short section at the end of the introduction to direct the reader to the following sections of the paper, which in turn acts as signposting and improves the flow of the argument.

Each of the six constructs of the brand identity network are in a table and defined.

| The methodology section, data collection and analysis require further explanation |

All sections of the methodology section have been updated with additional explanation. For example the research approach [qualitative exploratory case study approach], method section [elite in-depth interviews], cases [justification and focus] and analysis sections [the thematic steps adopted to analyse-interpret the findings].
Please state your findings more accurately.

We have spent some time clarifying our findings section. We have removed the original figures of 2, 3 and 4. The original colour figures presented each case in relation to the six dimensions and some examples. We have replaced three figures with one figure [figure 2]. The revised figure is clear and focused and links back to the conceptual framework on page 7. The revised figure represents the applied conceptual framework [political co-brand identity framework] including the six dimensions of identity and core themes uncovered from the data collection. The dimensions and themes are subsequently defined, explained and evidenced in the findings section. The findings section is followed by a discussion where the findings are linked back to the existing literature.

In addition, the introduction section of the findings section has been refined to clarify the key findings. For example, ‘this study investigated three political co-brands of the UK Conservative Party brand. More specifically, this section demonstrates how the political co-brand identities were constructed, managed and highlights alignment with the corporate political brand. This exploration was achieved by deconstructing each political co-brand with the aid of the ‘political co-brand identity framework’. The findings section is discussed with reference to the six dimensions of brand identity; physique, personality, culture, relationships, reflection and self-image. In addition, ten interconnected themes were uncovered as part of the creation and development of political co-brand identity namely; limited funding, core premise, broad-church values, personal beliefs, blended identity, personalisation, nature of constituency, profiling, strong corporate-local relationship and corporate tensions. Each dimension and theme will be explained and evidenced below. In addition, the applied findings [figures 2] highlight significant transfer potential and applicability of the brand identity network and demonstrate that the framework can be adopted to explore the internal-relational orientation of political co-brands with little difficulty. The findings section concludes with a short discussion and concludes with limitations, implications and areas for future research’. We believe provides greater clarity, focus and
My co-authors and I also refined each section of the findings chapter to clarify out findings and to ensure we introduced each dimension and theme uncovered as part of our study. For example, this can be seen in the opening section of the ‘physique’ dimension. This definition and explanation has been extended and the core themes of ‘limited funding’ and ‘blended identity’ have also been refined. This in turn links our core findings back to our applied framework and also our conceptual framework. We followed this process for all section in the findings chapter. We believe this has improved the clarity of the findings chapter and addresses the concerns of the reviewer.

• How did you check the reliability of your data?

We strengthened the reliability of our data by several steps such as methodological triangulation and adopted an external verification strategy. This has been added and is outlined in the methodology sections.

• Please explain why only these cases, not others?

We have explained why these cases were the only three to take part in the study. For example, The three cases represent constituencies across the United Kingdom from the North, Midlands and South of the country. The three cases were the first to acknowledge the researchers request to take part in the study and granted access. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, no additional cases granted access to take part in the study. Nevertheless, the three cases were elected under the leadership of Conservative Party leader David Cameron [2005-2015]. For example, each political co-brand was elected or re-elected in May 2015. Indeed, there is no ideal number of cases for a multi case study approach, which traditionally ranges from three to ten cases (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2009). Fewer than three cases can limit the development of theory and fail to provide a convincing understanding of the problem at hand (Eisenhardt 1989; Pettigrew 1988). Therefore, the elite in-depth interviews with the three cases provided an opportunity to uncover deep insight and rich understanding into the creation, development and management of political
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<th>Additional Questions</th>
<th>Thank you for these positive and constructive comments</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Originality:</strong> Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: The paper is interesting and unique in topic and context</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Relationship to Literature:</strong> Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?: Suggest to add more references from 2017/2018</td>
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<td><strong>3. Methodology:</strong> Is the paper’s argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: All stages need to be explained in more details. A couple of sentences about the limitations of the small sample and other limitations of the study should be added</td>
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<td><strong>4. Results:</strong> Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: As the authors summarised the results section has been expanded and clarified. The constructs [dimensions] have been expanded and clarified. The introduction of the findings section now outlines the aim of the study and gap in the body of knowledge. The key figure in the findings section has also been clarified to</td>
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findings, I suggest to add more constructs to the findings, referring to existing gap in theory. 
About political co-branding, author(s) could be more explicit with the idea of political co-brands as a key contribution in the conclusion.

5. Implications for research, practice and/or society: 
Does the paper identify clearly any implications for research, practice and/or society? Does the paper bridge the gap between theory and practice? How can the research be used in practice (economic and commercial impact), in teaching, to influence public policy, in research (contributing to the body of knowledge)? What is the impact upon society (influencing public attitudes, affecting quality of life)? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: Suggest to improve the managerial and policy maker’s contribution Further research could be into bullet points [rather than embedded in the paragraphs] to be more explicit for researchers to carry on the research, this would provide additional clarity and focus. Further research should also focus not just on the ‘internal stakeholders’ but also the ‘external’ voter and assess the consistency between identity-image which would reveal more insight and depth into the political brand.

6. Quality of Communication: 
Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal’s readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Suggest proof read 

link back to the conceptual framework and core constructs [dimensions]. This in turn is discussed in the discussion and conclusion sections.

We agree that we needed to be more explicit with the idea of political co-brands as a key contribution in the conclusion.

We have improved the managerial and policy maker’s contributions.

We concur with the reviewer. We have bullet pointed the calls for future research. In addition we have added the suggestions that future research should not only focus on the ‘internal stakeholders’ but also the ‘external’ voter and assess the consistency between identity-image. This in turn would reveal more insight and depth into the political brand.

The manuscript has been proof read before resubmission

Throughout
Reviewer: 2

Recommendation: Minor Revision

Comments:
Wonderful Work

Additional Questions:
<b>1. Originality: </b> Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: Paper is very interesting and crafted very nicely for the publication.

Thank you for your positive and constructive comments.

<b>2. Relationship to Literature: </b> Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?: Literature review is written well and there are different sources from various areas. However, author might provide the overall view at the beginning of the section so that the reader knows about the subsequent sections. Additionally, authors may also integrate the sub-sections of literature review more cohesively and connect the content very closely with the research objectives (as we have to keep reminding the authors about our core research objectives).

I liked the figure and the table but author might have to mention the source. If author has developed, it has to be stated explicitly in the paper.

Thank you for the constructive feedback. We concur with the reviewer in terms of providing an overview of the structure of the paper at the end of the literature review. This provides direction and focus. In addition, we have completely reshaped and extended the introduction. For example, we have introduced and defined each construct such as political branding, co-branding, conceptualizes political co-branding and political co-brand identity. This explains and justifies political branding, the adoption of co-branding and the development of political co-brand identity. This reaffirms the identified gap, which has been made clearer and more focused. We have also included a short section at the end of the introduction to direct the reader to the following sections of the paper, which in turn acts as signposting and improves the flow of the argument. All sub-sections in the literature review have been connected by clear signposting, which improves the flow of the argument and remains closely aligned with the research objectives.

The sources have been added to the table. As the authors developed the figure based on previous work references have been added to clarify this.

<b>3. Methodology: </b> Is the paper’s argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the

Thank you. We ensured the research objectives were aligned to the literature and consistent with the methodology.
research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: Methodology is designed well and is appropriate for the stated research objectives.

4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: Results are developed in accordance with the research objectives but author might add a table that summarizes all the key findings.

Thank you for stating that the results are developed in accordance with the research objectives. My co-authors and I reflected on your suggestion that we could include a table to summarise all the key findings. However, after refining the applied figure in the findings section [figure 2] from three original figures for each case to one core figure including the main dimensions and themes uncovered as part of the study then this addresses your point. The findings section following the revised applied figure 2 defines, explains and evidences each uncovered theme, which are then revisited in the discussion section. In addition, as each theme is subsequently defined, explained and evidenced following the revised applied figure-conceptual framework, a table would only duplicate the main themes. We hope this addresses your comments.

5. Implications for research, practice and/or society: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for research, practice and/or society? Does the paper bridge the gap between theory and practice? How can the research be used in practice (economic and commercial impact), in teaching, to influence public policy, in research (contributing to the body of knowledge)? What is the impact upon society (influencing public attitudes, affecting quality of life)? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: Implications are connected with the research, practice and society. Paper also bridges the gap between the theory and the practice. However, authors can add more significant implications in terms of the public policies, public attitudes and quality of life.

The implications section has been updated for greater clarity and focus with a strong link to theory and practice. For example, This study has implications for practice too. Organisations and policy makers will be able to adopt the definition of political co-brands as a construct to conceptualise candidate-politician brands. This will allow organisations and policy makers to create a personalised political co-brand with a distinct identity, develop an ideal position of alignment and manage its relationship with the corporate political brand based on the profile of the constituency and continued market research. In addition, organisations, policy makers and different typologies of political brands will be able to use the political co-brand identity framework as a diagnostic mechanism to investigate their co-brands current identity, assess alignment and make strategic changes or reposition the envisaged identity if desired. Similarly, organisations and policy makers can use this framework, key dimensions and factors as a blueprint to design and build new political brands, construct policies and create identifiable and unique identities at a corporate and/or local level tailored to address the wants and needs of constituents.
6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Very well written paper

Thank you for your kind, supportive comments.