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Abstract Submitting Form

Conference	<u>7th Annual International Colloquium on Branding, 29-31 July & 1 August 2019, Athens, Greece</u>
Title of Paper	<i>It's all about Entertainment: The Rise of Celebrity Political Brand Equity in Italy from a Young Voter Perspective</i>

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Title	X Dr <input type="checkbox"/> Mr <input type="checkbox"/> Ms <input type="checkbox"/> Other Specify:
First Name	Christopher
Family Name	Pich
Position	Senior Lecturer in Marketing
University/ Organization	Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University
Country	United Kingdom
E-mail	<u>Christopher.pich@ntu.ac.uk</u>
Title	X Dr <input type="checkbox"/> Mr <input type="checkbox"/> Ms <input type="checkbox"/> Other Specify:
First Name	Guja
Family Name	Armannsdottir
Position	Senior Lecturer in Marketing
University/ Organization	Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University
Country	United Kingdom
E-mail	<u>Guja.armannsdottir@ntu.ac.uk</u>
Title	X Dr <input type="checkbox"/> Mr <input type="checkbox"/> Ms <input type="checkbox"/> Other Specify:
First Name	Maria
Family Name	Palazzo
Position	Senior Lecturer in Marketing
University/ Organization	Università degli Studi di Salerno, Fisciano
Country	Italy
E-mail	<u>mpalazzo@unisa.it</u>
Title	X Dr <input type="checkbox"/> Mr <input type="checkbox"/> Ms <input type="checkbox"/> Other Specify:
First Name	Agostino
Family Name	Vollero
Position	Senior Lecturer in Marketing
University/ Organization	Università degli Studi di Salerno, Fisciano
Country	Italy
E-mail	<u>avollero@unisa.it</u>
Title	X Dr <input type="checkbox"/> Mr <input type="checkbox"/> Ms <input type="checkbox"/> Other Specify:
First Name	Luigi
Family Name	Di Maio
Position	Senior Lecturer in Marketing
University/ Organization	Università degli Studi di Salerno, Fisciano
Country	Italy
E-mail	<u>ldimaio@unisa.it</u>

Abstract

Please try to limit your abstract to less than 500 words (about 30 lines)

Celebrity branding has been described as a strategy designed to utilize an individual's existing reputation and high

levels of awareness to promote products, services and initiatives. Indeed, celebrity personalities often make a transition from one profession to politics and this is well documented. For example celebrity personalities such as Arnold Schwarzenegger [Austrian-US actor], Anna Soubry [UK journalist] and Donald Trump [US businessman-television presenter] have seamlessly made the transition into politics using their familiarity, experience and personal characteristics. Nevertheless, there are many typologies of political brands such as political parties, politicians, governments, and campaign groups. Further, there are explicit calls for further research on different typologies of political brands predominantly from a citizen-voter standpoint. In order to examine celebrity political brands the concept of brand equity will serve as a theoretical lens.

Brand equity can be conceptualized as the value ascribed to brands. The value is reflected in imagery, experiences, and expectations consumers associate with brands. If consumers identify consistent perceptions and associations projected by the brand and reveal favorable expectations, experiences which are clearly differentiated from competitors this translates into positive-strong brand equity. One framework that has received some attention is the *customer based brand equity* framework (Keller 1993). This framework is structured via five dimensions such as *identity-saliency, imagery-performance, rational-emotive responses* and *relationships-resonance*. Despite widespread acclaim and limitations of brand equity, there appears to be a paucity of research devoted to *customer based brand equity* of political brands. Therefore, *customer based brand equity* will serve as a framework to explore the imagery, experiences, and expectations consumers ascribe to celebrity political brands. In order to contextualise this study, this project will focus on two leading Italian political brands: Matteo Salvini (Lega Nord Party Leader - Deputy Prime Minister of Italy) and Di Maio Luigi (Five Star Movement Party Leader - Deputy Prime Minister of Italy). Furthermore, both politicians position themselves as 'celebrities-entertainers'. Therefore, this study will:

- *Explore political brand equity of Italian political brands*
- *Investigate how Italian political brands are positioned by entertainment and celebrity status*
- *Assess the transfer potential of the customer based brand equity as a mechanism to understand the rise of celebrity political brands*

This study adopts a qualitative approach using focus groups combined with qualitative projective techniques. Focus groups will be conducted before June 2019. Young Italian voters aged 18-24 years will form the sample as both political parties - Lega Nord Party and the Five Star Movement target young voters 18-24 years. The findings will be analysed/transcribed by the researcher adhering to the rigorous process of thematic inquiry. The findings will advance research in political branding by exploring the rise of celebrity political brands with the support of customer based brand equity and assess its applicability as an operational tool. This study will also have implications for practice as political actors such as politicians, candidates, parties and groups will be able to utilize this research as a guide of how to investigate and manage celebrity political brand equity and make refinements/improvements if required.

Keywords (at least three)	Brand equity, Political brands, Young citizens, Exploratory research
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