

Influences and impacts of personal brand and political brand bi-directional endorsement

Introduction

Personal political brands have played a long and important role in political candidature. Legends, myths and apocryphal tales of leaders, kings, and rulers indicate the historical landscape from Brand Camelot™ under the Arthurian management team to Brand Camelot's reissue in the 1960s America under the Kennedy Family franchise has demonstrated the potency of the right combination of personal reputation and near-mythic status for political longevity. However, despite considerable contemporary and historical interest in the person as the political proxy measure, limited work has examined the bi-directional flow of meaning associated with the endorsement of a political party by a personal brand in how the personal brand becomes moderated and influenced by the legacy of the party political brand. This paper puts forward a conceptual model of the duality of personal-political brand exchange which is moderated by the market's belief in the perceived congruence of the two brands. Endorsement of a political position by a celebrity or personal brand leader results in an exchange of cultural meanings, and is heavily dependent on the market's perceived fit between the individual's personal brand, the political party's product portfolio of policy, promise and performance. The result of opportunistic political endorsement by parties can result in long term harm to personal brand reputations without any significant gain to the party.

Literature

Brands are identifiable attributes, physical marks, emotional markers and cognitive triggers used to create a differentiated promise of future experiences based on prior offers of value through memories of prior product experience, or assumptions of future experiences based on the reputation of the product, provider or service (Dann and Jensen, 2007). The brand is a complex combination of the manufactured elements of the marketing communications toolkit to create a set of differentiating promises that reside in the mind of the consumer (Ahmed and Zairi, 1999; Okazaki, 2006). The functional purpose of branding within marketing is to communicate a set of differentiating promises about the value offering in the mind of the consumer through a bundle of key attributes (Ahmed and Zairi, 1999; Agres and Dubitsky, 1997, de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997). Marketing principles of branding can and have been successfully applied to political marketing (O'Cass 1996, Lees-Marshment 2001), and Needham (2006, 2005) demonstrates that successful parties develop brand attributes in their leaders to maintain relationships with supporters beyond the initial vote-transaction. Political branding has also explored the domain of personal branding, celebrity endorsement and brand community engagements to develop a more complex model of engagement between candidates and the voter marketplace (Hughes and Dann, 2009).

The application of the principles of branding to the conscious and deliberate development of personal reputation is well established formally and informally within marketing and management literature. The value of personal reputation as a manageable commodity that could be enhanced through deliberate actions, and the concepts of personal reputation, self marketing by individuals, and the commercially focused self creation of celebrity status were interspersed with more formal efforts to conceptualise and capture the personal brand domain. Authors such as Kotler (2000) defined personal brand as a seller's promise to deliver consistently a specific set of features, benefits and services related to their own skills and ability. Keller (2006) stated that people could be viewed as brand, competing with each other

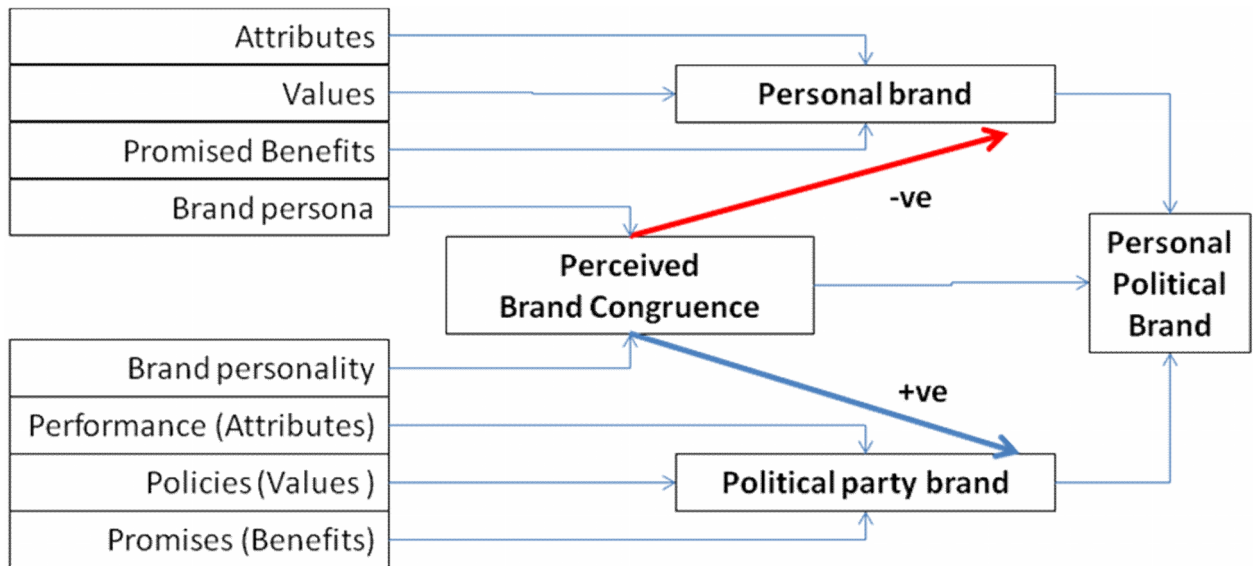
in markets for public acceptance and approval., with an acknowledgement of the the breadth of possibilities created by the personal branding. As Keller's (2006) concept was not dependent on initial celebrity or profile, graduates, athletes, artists, service professionals and community leaders were equally likely benefit from self branding activity

The personal brand consists of four elements of attributes, promised benefits, values and personality (Plummer, 2000; Kapferer 1992; Keller 1993) with brand personality being of interest for this study. Personal brand attributes and promised benefits have been measured previously via the use of proxy variables of celebrity attributes (trustworthiness, attractiveness, credibility) in studies of brand communities (Eagar, 2009). Of interest to the present research is the role of values and personality in personal and party political brands. Values are overt and implicit statements which can be assessed for stability over time and interactions to demonstrate a consistence moral compass, set of beliefs or consistent positions in political, moral, religious or ideological areas. Measurement of the values element of the personal brand can be either perceived (I believe my candidate would think X about Issue Y) or by recall (My candidate has indicated support/opposition to Issue Y).

Brand personality represents the anthropomorphisation of the brand as a quasi-human entity in the perception of the consumer (Keller, 1998; Aaker, 1997; Freling and Forbes, 2005). Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as a set of five human characteristics associated with the brand which include sincersity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Okazaki (2006) expanded the brand personality concept into categories of functional (factual information) and expressive (emotional) elements. Although originally intended as a process of anthropomorphisation, it was reverse engineered for use on human based brands through Dann and Jensen (2007) exploration of the conscious use of brand personalities within the roots music industry. On the basis of their findings, this paper extends their prior work by examining the value of the brand personality as the "constructed representation of the self" in personal brand – that is, the key personality traits intentionally exaggerated or emphasized in the communication of a "brand persona". The brand persona in the political marketing sense represents the perceived elements of the celebrity brand personality, which will be used by the market to assess the alignment with the personality of the party and the brand personality of celebrity.

Brand personality also ties into the consumption of products to conjure meanings (Seetharaman, Nadzir and Gunalan, 2001; Levy, 1959). Brand personality ties into the congruency of brand association, product preference, brand loyalty and the consumption of products which are congruent with the consumer's self image, and (Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Kumar, Luthra and Datta, 2006; Seetharaman, Nadzir and Gunalan, 2001). In short, when consumers assign or identify a series of personality traits to a brand they consume, the brand is believed congruent with the type of person with whom the consumer would want to associate – congruency in the political branding sense is often colloquially expressed as "the candidate you would want to have a beer with" as an expression of the desire to associate socially with the brand. Congruence between perceptions of the brand personality of the paper, brand personality of the individual, and the desire to associate with the individual in conjunction with the party will be an influence in the effectiveness of the personal brand endorsement of a party. Figure 2 outlines a second version of the model based on expanding the Personal Brand and Party Political Brand elements.

Figure 2: Expanded Model of Influence



Hughes and Dann (2009) outlined a three level approach to the features of a political party – the promises of future intent, stated policies and prior performance of the brand when in office and in opposition. The prior performance of the party is comparable to the attribute aspect of the brand given it is a historical demonstrate of what a party has done, rather than the predictive component of what a party may do if elected to office. Policies are indicative statements which illustrate the values of the party, and whilst they contribute to the performance/attribute, they can exist without implementation. Finally, promises are the future benefits of the party, and represent what the party can offer in terms of cognitive, emotive or affective relationships with the voters.

Brand Weight

In addition to the existing measures of brand, congruence and attributes, the paper proposes a measure of “brand weight” as a means to compare the relative influence of the individual celebrity and the party brand. Party brand weight is considered through weight of performance in terms of electoral success, voter support base, longevity and continuity of brand reputations. Individual brand weight is based on reputation, fame and prior conduct of the individual within the political arena. By analogy, David Beckham’s current individual brand weight is significantly higher than Los Angeles Galaxy football teams, and the assumption of Beckham’s attachment transferring his reputation to the side is reasonably widely accepted. In contrast, the relatively unknown David Beckham of 1992 signing with Manchester United transferred the credibility of the side to the palyer’s reputation. Similarly transferences of meaning between the lighter weight reputation of a minor political party and a high profile celebrity remain possible, although the more common transfer is from the brand weight of the political party to the political candidate who attains more fame and reputation from association with the party than is transferred in reciprocation.

Personal Brand Consequence

Brand alignment between the political party and the individual may result in a change in the brand attribute coherency of both brands. Brand attribute coherency has been described as being (Kayande *et. al.* 2005) as “...where the consumer receives information about two attributes whose levels are expected to be correlated but where the level of one attribute is far from what the consumer would expect, given the level of the other”. In the context of celebrity engagement in the brand endorsement of a political party, this public alignment of

the personal brand with the political may result in the need for the followers of the personal brand to realign their judgments of the personal brand attributes. Political alignment between personal brand and party brand will result in the market reassessing the brand attributes of the participants based on congruence, market alignment and brand weight of the individual brands.

H1: Market perception of the level of congruence between the personal brand of individual and the political brand of the party will have a positive or negative influence on overall personal brand

H1A: Congruence between personal and political brand will positively impact personal brand

H1B: Congruence will have a minor positive effect on the party brand

H1C: Minor incongruence between personal and political brands will negatively impact personal brand

H1D: Minor incongruence between personal and political brands will have no impact on the political brand

H1E: Major incongruence between personal and political brand will have large negative impact on the personal brand

H1F: Major incongruence between personal and political brand will minor negative impact on the political party brand

Political and Personal Brand Alignment

Brand community literature emphasizes the important of brand alignment as in-group / out group dynamics of communities of alignment and opposition (Eagar, 2010). Political marketing actively engages ingroup brand affiliation as part of the party brand alignment process. Consequently, political alignment for a former unaligned celebrity figure results in the acquisition of a political brand community of alignment and opposition in addition to their existing brand communities (opposition and alignment) for their personal brands. The resultant acquisition of new brand communities will impact on the standing of the celebrity's personal brand within the market. Due to the nature of celebrity, certain presumptions of value alignment are pre-existing in the relationship between the celebrity and their audience – the notion of the celebrity as “one of us” in terms of political affiliation will be an affirmation of the assumption, whereas the declaration of opposition by non-alignment with the presumed value results in a greater level of cognitive dissonance, and perceived brand incongruence

H2A: Market affiliation towards the political party brand will have a minor positive effect on the reputation of the celebrity following the endorsement

H2B: Market opposition towards the political party brand will have a large negative effect on the reputation of the celebrity following the endorsement

The impact of political brand affiliation is also bi-directional insofar as the affiliations of the celebrity with the party will also bring the celebrity's communities of alignment and opposition. Opposition to the celebrity is expected to disproportionately influence reaction to

the party brand based on the sense of the party emphasizing the out-group alignment of the person who dislikes the celebrity compared to their previously perceived sense of in-group alignment with the party.

H3A: Market affiliation towards the celebrity will have a minor positive effect on the reputation of the party following the endorsement

H3B: Market opposition towards the celebrity will have a major positive effect on the reputation of the party following the endorsement

Brand Weight: Transference of Meaning

Brand weight is determined by the relative fame, reputation, history and consistency of a brand over time. Individual brand weight can be calculated a collective sum of the individual's traits, characteristics, public persona, fame and known public history. Party brand weight is a collective sum of policy commitments, prior parliamentary and non-parliamentary performance, and political ideology as expressed through electoral promises.

H4: Relative brand weight will determine the flow of brand meaning from personal or political brands where the market perceives incongruence between the brands

H4A: Congruence will not result in a transfer of meaning

H4B: Incongruence will result in a transfer of meaning from heavier brand to the lighter brand until brand equilibrium is reached.

Conclusion

The model proposed in the paper is based on theory, informal evidence gathering on the impact of political practice, media coverage and anecdotal evidence gathered from a decade of observation of political marketing practice. The theoretical frameworks and hypothesis proposed in this paper are designed to form the basis of a discussion as to the appropriate methods of measuring the impact of political engagement on celebrity. Currently, the assumption of positive benefit for political parties from the engagement of the celebrity brand has been established in the literature without due consideration of the potential impacts on their personal brands. Measurement and testing of the bidirectional effect, and the modeling of the relative influences of the party and personal brands on each other are needed to ensure that the impact of political brand alignment is clearly understood before more celebrities candidates are recruited in political campaigns.

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