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## 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 Landtsheer 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; Ormrod 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; Volckner 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;

Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; d'Astous *et al.* 2007; Kumar 2005; Washburn and Priluck 2000).

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 to 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**

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3 Sierra 2009; Jain *et al.* 2018; Nielsen 2015; Peng and Hackley 2009; Serazio 2017; Scammell  
4 2015; Smith 2009; Speed *et al.* 2015). One popular strategic approach that can be used to  
5 conceptualise and understand candidates-politicians as political brands is the concept of co-  
6 branding (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat and Langan 2014; Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet  
7 2017; Volckner and Sattler 2006).

### 10 *Political 'Co-Branding'*

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12 Co-branding is a complex and multifaceted construct yet there is no universal definition or  
13 agreed consensus on its conceptualisation (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Besharat 2010; James 2005;  
14 Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Voss and Gammoh 2004). For example, co-branding is often  
15 interchangeably referred to as 'joint marketing', 'brand extension-development', 'ingredient  
16 branding', 'dual branding', 'co-marketing' and 'strategic alliances' (Ahn and Sung 2012;  
17 Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni *et al.*  
18 2018). Nevertheless, co-branding can be defined as the combination of two existing brands  
19 amalgamated to create a unique single identity manifested in the form of a new brand (Abratt  
20 and Motlana 2002; Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; d'Astous  
21 *et al.* 2007; Kumar 2005; Nguyen *et al.* 2018). Further, co-branding represents a 'system of  
22 brands' built from two or more well-known brands ultimately generating a sole entity  
23 representing a positive win-win situation for all parties concerned (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat  
24 and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Nguyen *et al.* 2018; Washburn  
25 and Priluck 2000). The newly formed co-brand represents a cooperative agreement that utilises  
26 the partner brand's intangible and tangible features (Besharat 2010; Grebosz-Krawczyk and  
27 Pointet 2017). For example, both partner brand names, logos and other identifiable features  
28 should appear on all communication touch points of the co-brand to signify a committed  
29 partnership (Besharat and Langan 2014; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018). Therefore, each party or partner  
30 help create the alliance [co-brand] and can bring unique qualities such as consumer awareness,  
31 new target markets, expertise, resources or complimentary reputation to the strategic  
32 arrangement (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; d'Astous *et al.* 2007; Kumar 2005;  
33 Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Nguyen *et al.* 2018; Wason and Charlton 2015). Ultimately, this newly  
34 developed co-brand communicates its offering to the desired target audience and signifies the  
35 long-term collaborative relationship between the two partners (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Helmig *et al.*  
36 2008; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018). This suggests the strategic approach of co-  
37 branding could serve to conceptualise and underpin candidate-politician political brands.

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39 Further, co-branding can be utilised to develop brands for new national and international  
40 markets, create points of identification and differentiation, attract a wider support base and  
41 appeal to new audiences (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Helmig *et al.* 2008; Nguyen *et al.* 2018; Thomson  
42 2006). In addition, co-branding can be adopted to communicate a desired identity, personality  
43 or representation (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Besharat and Langan 2014; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Wason  
44 and Charlton 2015). Co-branding can also support organisations in terms of how they allocate  
45 resources, how they expand and structure their brands [brand architecture] and support  
46 organisations as they facilitate and manage their brand portfolios (Besharat and Langan 2014).  
47 The purpose of co-branding is strategic in nature as it aims to transfer strong appealing  
48 associations, perceptions and imagery from the two existing brands to the new composite brand  
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3 (Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Helmig *et al.* 2008; Washburn *et al.* 2000). This process  
4 of image transference, often referred to as the ‘spillover effect’, should complement both  
5 parties and provide positive outcomes and opportunities for all partners (Baumgarth 2018;  
6 Helmig *et al.* 2008; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Washburn *et al.* 2000). This highlights the  
7 importance of an authentic, legitimate, respectful and consistent fit between the two partners  
8 (Thomson 2006). Therefore, successful co-brands provide a sense of ‘complementarity’ as this  
9 allows all parties “*to inherit the desirable qualities of the parent brand*” and a strong value  
10 exchange for each member (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Leuthesser *et al.*  
11 2002:39). However, who has ultimate control and responsibility of the co-brand? Can  
12 competitors have an impact on the co-brand and will partnerships limit its success? In addition,  
13 little is known about negative image transference [spillover] or lack of ‘complementarity’ from  
14 one partner to another. Further, knowledge on whether the partner brands help or hinder co-  
15 brands appears under-researched (Baumgarth 2018; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002). Nevertheless,  
16 there are explicit calls for future research to consider the relationship between partners and  
17 whether negative image transference can dilute or have a negative impact on the co-brand  
18 (Besharat and Langan 2014; Besharat 2010; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018).

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25 Despite some progress on co-branding, the topic remains ‘relatively limited’ (Aqeel *et al.* 2017;  
26 Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014:112) and complex particularly in different  
27 contexts and settings (Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018; Wason and Charlton 2015).  
28 Existing research in this area tends to focus attention on fictitious brands with additional insight  
29 needed on existent co-brands (Ahn and Sung 2012; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002). In addition, these  
30 studies tend to focus on two broad areas. The first addresses the exploration of perceptions,  
31 associations and images ascribed to the co-brand from a consumer standpoint. The second  
32 focuses on the implications of pursuing a co-branding approach compared to other strategic  
33 orientations (Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002). However, research  
34 seems to have overlooked co-branding from the perspective of the partners [co-brand internal  
35 creators] particularly how they create, communicate and manage their co-brand in terms of the  
36 desired identity and whether the new co-brand is helped or hindered by the identity of the  
37 partner brands (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Volckner and  
38 Sattler 2006; Wason and Charlton 2015). This is supported by explicit calls for further research  
39 into co-branding and new settings and contexts (Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Helmig  
40 *et al.* 2008), which may address the confusion and lack of agreed consensus (Ahn and Sung  
41 2012; Besharat 2010; James 2005; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018; Thomson 2006;  
42 Voss and Gammoh 2004). Therefore, the existing literature highlights opportunities of the  
43 strategic approach of co-branding and its potential to help conceptualise candidate-politician  
44 political brands.

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52 For the purpose of this study, we define political co-brands as a ‘system of brands’ manifested  
53 from the combination of two existing brands including the ‘corporate party brand’ and  
54 ‘candidate-politician brand’ amalgamated to create a new brand with a unique single identity  
55 developed (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan  
56 2014; d’Astous *et al.* 2007; Kumar 2005). However, do political co-brands represent a positive  
57 win-win situation for all parties involved (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014;  
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3 Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018; Washburn and Priluck 2000)?  
4 Nevertheless, in order to explore candidate-politician political brands henceforth known as  
5 'political co-brands', from an internal brand creator perspective we need to consider an  
6 appropriate theoretical lens to help understand the reality and aspirations of the co-brand. Brand  
7 identity can be seen as an ideal construct to investigate the reality of a brand from an internal  
8 perspective (Nandan 2005; Silveira *et al.* 2013; Ross and Harradine 2011; Saaksjarvi and  
9 Samiee 2011; Srivastava 2011; Wheeler and Millman 2017), therefore the concept of brand  
10 identity seems an applicable lens to examine political co-brands.  
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#### 14 *Political 'Brand Identity'*

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16 Brand identity can be seen as the intended representation, formulated by the brands creator,  
17 and communicated to multiple stakeholders (Cheng *et al.* 2008; Dahlen *et al.* 2010; de  
18 Chernatony 2006; Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Saaksjarvi and Samiee 2011; Srivastava  
19 2011). Brand identity originates from brand managers who develop "*aspired associations*"  
20 (Bosch *et al.* 2006:13) into a focused visualisation of what the brand symbolises and therefore  
21 signifies its envisaged reality (Nandan 2005; Silveira *et al.* 2013; Ross and Harradine 2011;  
22 Saaksjarvi and Samiee 2011; Srivastava 2011; Wheeler and Millman 2017). In addition brand  
23 identity is all about an organisation's vision and values (Alsem and Kostelijck 2008; Ponnam  
24 2007), and "*has to be coherent, integrated, adaptable, durable and therefore dynamic and*  
25 *ready to change*" (Dahlen *et al.* 2010:204). Therefore, brand identity should be consistent yet  
26 flexible and routinely monitored to respond to environmental changes  
27 (Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Silveira *et al.* 2013).  
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33 Nevertheless, brand identity is a contemporary and multifaceted concept (Black and Veloutsou  
34 2017; Dahlen *et al.* 2010; Kapferer 2008; Silveira *et al.* 2013; Viot 2011). For instance brand  
35 identity can be applied not only to corporate political brands but also candidate-politician  
36 political brands "*which can possess their own culture and unique identity*" (Pich and Dean  
37 2015:339). Indeed, given that candidates and politicians can hold distinct identities, they must  
38 not be incoherent or contradictory with the corporate brand identity (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum  
39 2013; Kornum and Muhlbacher 2013). Alignment needs to be as coherent as possible in order  
40 to avoid confusion in the mind of stakeholders (Dahlen *et al.* 2010; de Chernatony 2006; Gyrd-  
41 Jones and Kornum 2013; Wheeler and Millman 2017). This suggests the construct of brand  
42 identity can be used to investigate how *political co-brands* are created, communicated and  
43 managed (Besharat and Langan 2014; Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Pich *et al.* 2017;  
44 Silveira *et al.* 2013; Wason and Charlton 2015; Wheeler and Millman 2017).  
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50 Nevertheless, the application of brand identity to 'politics' remains an under-researched area  
51 of study with existing studies favouring more consumer-voter focused perspectives such as  
52 political brand image, equity and reputation (Black and Veloutsou 2017; Cwalina and  
53 Falkowski 2014; De Landtsheer and De Vries 2015; Milewicz and Milewicz 2014; Phipps *et*  
54 *al.* 2010; Smith and Spotswood 2013; Speed *et al.* 2015). Despite limited exploratory research  
55 on 'political brand identity', Pich and Dean (2015) was one exception as they investigated the  
56 'corporate' political brand of the UK Conservative Party under the leadership of David  
57 Cameron. This was achieved by transferring Kapferer's (2008) six dimensions of brand identity  
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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.

Dimension	Political Co-Brand Identity Framework
<b>Personality</b>	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.
<b>Culture</b>	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.
<b>Self-Image</b>	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.
<b>Reflection</b>	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.
<b>Relationship</b>	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.
<b>Physique</b>	Refers to the physical properties and communication tools used by the political co-brand.

**Table 1: Key Elements of the Revised Brand Identity Network developed from Pich and Dean (2015)**

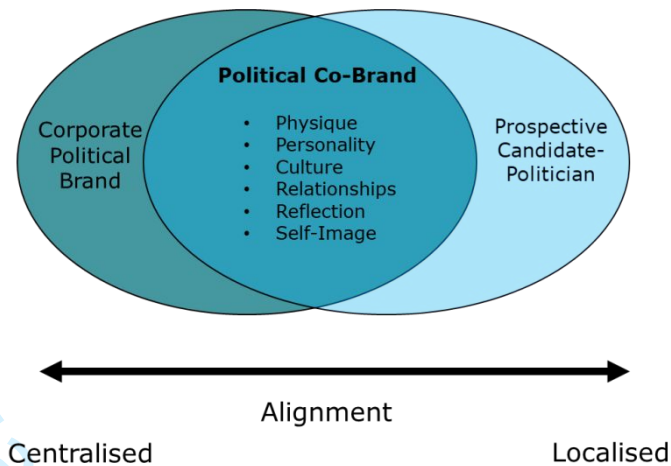


Figure 1: Political Co-Brand Identity Framework developed by authors adapted from Pich and Dean (2015); Abratt and Motlana (2002); Besharat and Langan (2014); d'Astous *et al.* (2007); Kumar (2005)

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

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3 hypotheses/propositions with the aim of research a conclusive end (Gephardt 2004; Maxwell  
4 2005).

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7 A multi case study approach is a suitable method for grounding the study as it considers  
8 “*exploration of multiple perspectives which are rooted in a particular context...*” (Lewis and  
9 Nichols 2014:66). Indeed, case studies are ideal for exploratory research (Gerring 2007) and  
10 aim to capture the phenomenon “*through the eyes of participants*” (Cohen *et al.* 2007:257). A  
11 multi case study approach “*seeks to understand the particular rather than generate law-like*  
12 *explanations*” (Welch *et al.* 2011:741) and aims to uncover rich contextual understanding of  
13 human experiences rather than generate generalisations (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Welch *et al.*  
14 2011; Yin 2009). In addition, the purpose of a qualitative exploratory approach is to “*document*  
15 *the world from the point of view of the people studied*” (Bryman *et al.* 1999:75) and uncover  
16 thick description (Geertz 1993) and emphasise meaning and intimate knowledge and depth  
17 rather than breadth (Saunders *et al.* 2012). The desirability of adopting qualitative research can  
18 provide the researcher with rich knowledge, hidden meaning and unique data which is achieved  
19 by delving deep into the respondent’s attitudes, feelings, perceptions and beliefs (Malhotra and  
20 Birks 2003; Rubin and Rubin 2005; Warren and Karner 2005). In addition, multiple case  
21 studies can focus on individuals, organisations or several locations (Creswell 2009; Rolls 2005;  
22 Yin 2009). Therefore, the overall aim of a multiple case study approach is to uncover common  
23 themes and deep insight from perspectives of critical and key participants [cases], which in  
24 turn will extend emergent theory and frameworks (Lewis and Nichols 2014; Pettigrew 1988;  
25 Yin 2009).

### 32 33 *Data Collection*

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35 In-depth elite interviews were selected as an appropriate method to explore political co-brand  
36 identities. Elite in-depth interviews are ideal methods for exploratory, empirical research,  
37 flexible in nature and “*potentially a Pandora’s box generating endlessly various and abundant*  
38 *data*” (McCracken 1988:12). Elite interviews have also been used extensively in political  
39 research (Beamer 2002; Radice 1994; Radice 1993) to understand the influence of experts or  
40 political leaders on the strategic development of policy or the political brand (Lees-Marshment  
41 2011). Indeed, in-depth elite interviews are often seen as a ‘special conversation’ or  
42 conversation with a purpose (Rubin and Rubin 2005), structured via open-ended questions and  
43 used to encourage a spontaneous yet guided discussion with the support of prompts and probes  
44 (Gillham 2005; Foddy 2001). Therefore, this form of interviewing was deemed an appropriate  
45 tool to uncover the internal political co-brand identity from the perspective of internal  
46 Conservative stakeholders. All topics in the discussion guide were covered but there was also  
47 flexibility to explore responses that emerged from the discussions.

48  
49 In order to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings, the process of methodological  
50 triangulation was adopted (Farmer *et al.* 2006; Saunders *et al.* 2012). This approach can involve  
51 the use of multiple research methods such as numerous interviews, documents, archival internal  
52 records, and communication tools (Jack *et al.* 2006; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Further,  
53 methodological triangulation strengthens the reliability of research findings as it “*helps tap into*  
54 *different elements of the issue and provides more of a complete picture*” by assessing the  
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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.

Case	Firstly Elected	Re-elected	UK Constituency	Selected Constituency	Joined Party
Participant 1	2005	2010, 2015	North	2002	1988
Participant 2	2010	2015	Midlands	2008	2000
Participant 3	2015	-	South	2013	2004

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

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3 snap-shot into several political brand identities (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Welch *et al.* 2011; Yin  
4 2009). The in-depth elite interviews were conducted July 2015 to September 2015.  
5 Participants-cases were briefed on the objectives of the study and all ethical procedures were  
6 outlined and approved before the commencement of the study. Each political co-brand was  
7 granted anonymity to avoid recognition.  
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### 10 *Analysis*

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13 This study adopted a two-stage process of thematic analysis; *coarse-grained* followed by *fine-*  
14 *grained* (Bird *et al.* 2009; Butler-Kisber 2010; Hofstede *et al.* 2007; Warren and Karner 2005).  
15 The coarse-grained stage included familiarisation of all findings and assessing emerging  
16 themes. For example, each in-depth elite interview was recorded, transcribed and thematically  
17 analysed by the researchers (Butler-Kisber 2010; Kvale 1996; Rubin and Rubin 2005; Warren  
18 and Karner 2005). More specifically, interviews were transcribed verbatim; re-read by the  
19 researchers, notes and memos compared. The data was coded manually and themes and  
20 subthemes were identified. The fine-grained stage was more focused and involved reviewing  
21 formulated categories, analysing for hidden meaning and revisiting themes identified from the  
22 coarse-grained stage (Bird *et al.* 2009; Butler-Kisber 2010; Hofstede *et al.* 2007; Warren and  
23 Karner 2005). This included comparing and contrasting the themes and sub-themes identified  
24 across cases, which in turn expanded themes or redefined themes (Yin 2009). In addition, the  
25 researchers reviewed the notes taken during the interviews designed to preserve ideas often  
26 forgotten in the data collection process (Glaser 2014; Goulding 2002). Finally, the researchers  
27 continued to practice the process of methodological triangulation and revisited the multiple  
28 research artefacts-methods such as reviewing the archival internal records, memos and  
29 communication tools used by each case (Farmer *et al.* 2006; Saunders *et al.* 2012). The  
30 researchers discussed the emerging themes and clarified any discrepancies following Butler-  
31 Kisber's (2010) approach to thematic analysis. This study sought depth and insight rather than  
32 conclusive generalisations. These personal accounts provided rich insight into the identities of  
33 the political co-brands, which is consistent with the philosophical assumptions of this study  
34 (Gephardt 2004; Saunders *et al.* 2007, van Manen, 2014). Further, an 'external validation  
35 strategy' (Warren and Karner 2005) was adopted to strengthen the transparency, reliability and  
36 validity of the analytical process. This included sending the political co-brands copies of the  
37 interview transcripts to assess whether they represented a consistent reflection of the interview.  
38 All cases corroborated the transcripts, which in turn strengthened the trustworthiness,  
39 transparency and reliability of the research (Farmer *et al.* 2006; Saunders *et al.* 2012; Warren  
40 and Karner 2005).  
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51 Finally, the dimensions-variables from the revised *brand identity network* [table 1] were used  
52 as broad headings [or probes] to guide the discussion for the elite interviews as the dimensions-  
53 variables underpinned the conceptualisations of internal political co-brand identity. However,  
54 the dimensions-variables did not limit the exploration and generation of themes developed from  
55 the cases' perceptions, opinions and feelings in relation to the political co-brand (Creswell  
56 2007; Gephart 2004; Trochim and Donnelly 2007). The following section presents the findings  
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3 uncovered as part of the investigation into the construction and management of political co-  
4 brand identity and alignment between political co-brand and political corporate party brand.  
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## 7 **Findings**

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9 This section demonstrates how the political co-brand identities were constructed, managed and  
10 highlights alignment with the corporate political brand. This exploration was achieved by  
11 deconstructing each political co-brand with the aid of the 'political co-brand identity  
12 framework'. The findings section is discussed with reference to the six dimensions of brand  
13 identity; physique, personality, culture, relationships, reflection and self-image. In addition, ten  
14 interconnected themes were uncovered as part of the creation and development of political co-  
15 brand identity namely; limited funding, core premise, broad-church values, personal beliefs,  
16 blended identity, personalisation, nature of constituency, profiling, strong corporate-local  
17 relationship and corporate tensions. Each dimension and theme will be explained and  
18 evidenced below. In addition, the applied findings [figure 2] highlight significant transfer  
19 potential and applicability of the brand identity network and demonstrate that the framework  
20 can be adopted to explore the internal-relational orientation of political co-brands with little  
21 difficulty. The findings section concludes with a short discussion and concludes with  
22 limitations, implications and areas for future research.  
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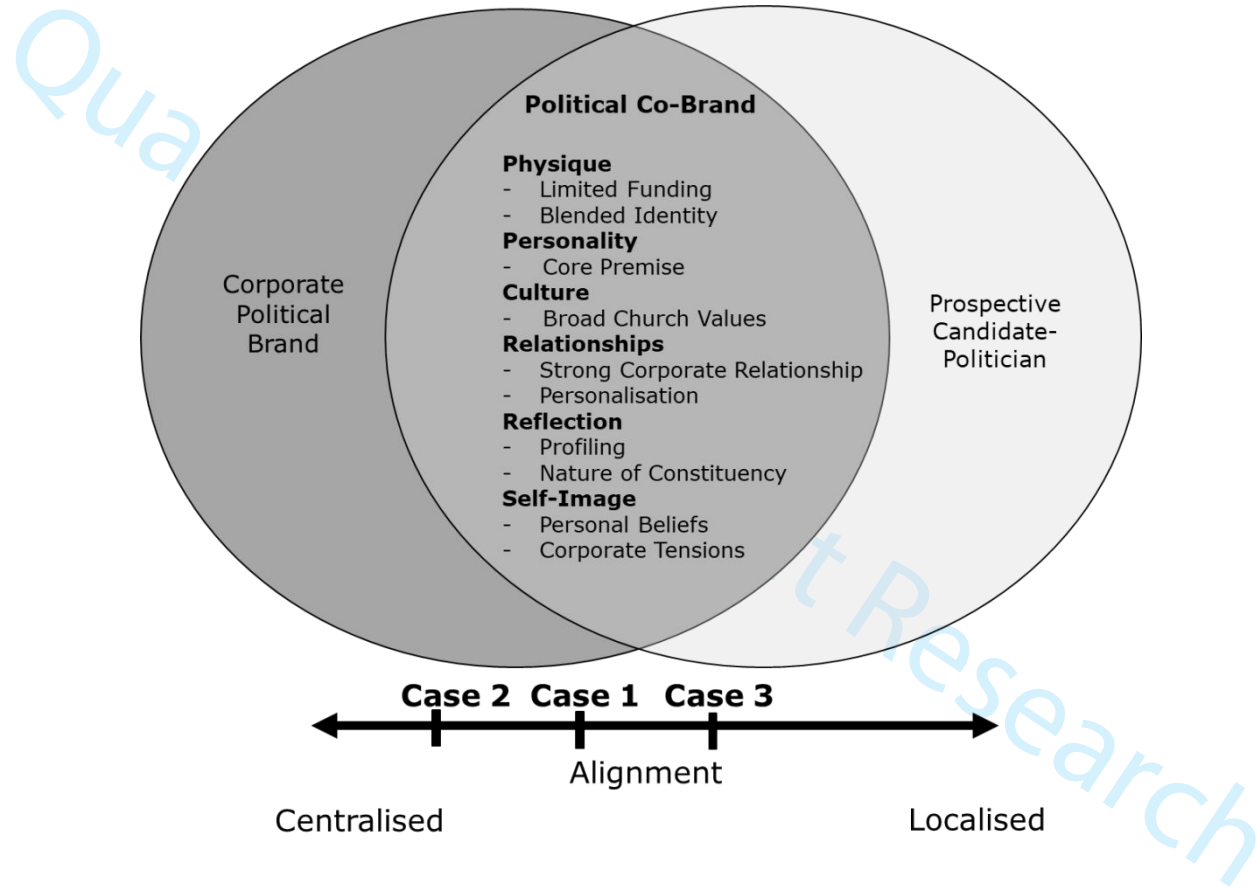


Figure 2: Applied Political Co-Brand Identity Framework including Identity Dimensions and Uncovered Themes

## 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

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3 about it...if you have a big mouth like myself it's always a good thing...so I stood for election  
4 on the county council and then people told me to run for [general] election...my job is to be a  
5 public representative and to fight for what is right locally' (C2). On the other hand, case three  
6 embarked on a career in politics following the threatened closure of a local school, which  
7 galvanised the candidate's political interest and support. For example, 'I became interested in  
8 politics back in 2004 and it was because of a special needs school that was closing down...the  
9 local [Conservative] candidate there was helping run a campaign to save it and the campaign  
10 group got me involved', (C3). Further, this initial personal issue formed the basis for the  
11 candidate's core theme of 'social mobility and equality for all' when selected as a local  
12 parliamentary candidate six years later. **Therefore, all cases put forward simple propositions to**  
13 **underpin their desired political co-brand identities which manifested from personal**  
14 **experiences, beliefs and attitudes.**

## 20 Culture

21  
22 The culture dimension referred to the heritage and core values of each political co-brand. The  
23 broad church values manifested from personal beliefs, perspectives, and attitudes aligned to  
24 political party ideology. Successful political brands should project consistency between  
25 political party values and party leader values.

### 29 *Broad Church Values*

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

42  
43 Similarly, case 2 believed his values evolved from 'the liberal side of the party. I think the  
44 government shouldn't poke it's face in other people's lives...also law and order, I think it is  
45 very important to communities...I think you can only do what you want to inspire through  
46 government if the economy is generating the tax for you to do so, which also makes me a  
47 Conservative' (C2). Whereas case 3, newly elected in 2015, maintained the 'broad church'  
48 values focused on 'standing up for choice, responsibility...we shouldn't allow people to get  
49 stuck in a rut and help them up out of it and empowering them to take more responsibility of  
50 their own lives through the Big Society' (C3). **Therefore, each co-brand communicated clear**  
51 **cultural values and these values linked to the overall ideology and heritage of the corporate**  
52 **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

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

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

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

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15 **As identified in the previous dimension, all the political co-brands created their identities based**  
16 **on limited internal and external funding and based on creative thinking for maximum impact.**  
17 **Nevertheless, the nature of the constituency governed the degree of support provided by the**  
18 **corporate political brands. This 'internal' support was rationed and strategically directed by the**  
19 **corporate political brand given the large number of contestable seats across the country and**  
20 **related to the nature of the constituency. For example, if the corporate political brand equated**  
21 **the constituency as 'winnable-marginal-target' then additional support in terms of funding,**  
22 **communication tools and management would be provided. However, if the corporate political**  
23 **brand designated the constituency as 'safe' [more than 10,000 majority] or 'unwinnable' [for**  
24 **example Labour stronghold] then the constituency would receive very little support. This often**  
25 **revealed some tension as political co-brands in 'safe' or 'unwinnable' constituencies not only**  
26 **had greater decentralisation in developing and managing their political co-brand they also**  
27 **received very little internal support (C1; C3). However, the nature of each constituency can**  
28 **change from election to election and once strong 'safe' seats can become 'marginal', and**  
29 **'unwinnable' seats can become 'marginal' target seats depending on national or local policies,**  
30 **and the actions of the sitting government or local candidate.**  
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38 **Indeed,** this was the case of the Southern political co-brand. Once the candidate had been  
39 selected by CCHQ [2013] to contest the seat for the 2015 UK General Election, the first duty  
40 was to create a local presence and develop a clear identity. This was challenging as the local  
41 long-standing incumbent [Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament] 'had a 70% approval  
42 rating...he was very popular' (C3). Further, the political co-brand initially believed there was  
43 little chance of local success at the 2015 UK General Election and looked towards the 2020  
44 UK General Election. This long-term approach would provide the opportunity to gain  
45 experience of fighting an election campaign, build a coherent political co-brand and raise  
46 awareness in the mind of the electorate. However, the political co-brand found the prospect of  
47 gaining local recognition challenging and '...for six to seven months no one really knew who I  
48 was and we hadn't done enough to show people we were working hard' (C3). However, in  
49 February 2014 the local Liberal Democrat MP announced that he would not contest the 2015  
50 UK General Election. This change in the local environment offered the political co-brand the  
51 opportunity to adapt their initial strategy and refresh their tactics in terms of creating and  
52 developing their identity. Overnight the constituency morphed into a Conservative 'target seat'  
53 and 'central office sent over a lot of resources in the end and more money. Their support was  
54 invaluable in reality...I can't underestimate the amount of literature that should go through  
55 peoples doors to start to make a dent to make an impression' (C3). This resulted in a change of  
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3 strategy at a local and corporate level. At a corporate level, more resources in terms of  
4 professional literature, additional staff, visiting Government Ministers and funding were  
5 available to shape the local identity, raise awareness, strengthen the impact and intensify  
6 recognition.  
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### 8 **Self-Image**

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

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

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53 It was also revealed that there appeared to be some tension between the political co-brands and  
54 aspects of the corporate political brand such as 'consistency of corporate message' and  
55 'strategic distance'. The consistency of the corporate political brand message was debated by  
56 the political co-brands. For example, the Midlands and Southern political co-brands were  
57 overly positive with regards to the corporate political brand and communicating a consistent  
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3 message to constituents and standing out from political competitors ‘I actually think we have  
4 learnt to stick to our messages and say what is important to us’ (C2) and ‘I thought the  
5 Conservative message was a lot stronger’ than the Labour Party (C3). Nevertheless, the  
6 Midlands political co-brand highlighted that the corporate political brand should not become  
7 complacent as they needed to ensure ‘people understand what we are trying to achieve...I mean  
8 we hope the message is getting across, and we can only do so much and then it’s out of our  
9 hands. We have a good message and getting it out to the public and reminding them of what  
10 we have done and how far we have come’ (C2). In contrast, the Northern political co-brand  
11 believed the corporate political brand message had become ‘fragmented’ which in turn  
12 ‘confuses’ the electorate ‘well I think sometimes we are not as proud or make decisions that  
13 are not really what the Conservatives should do, so people get confused and they then vote  
14 UKIP and think that’s the Conservatives that I recognise...we should be proud of being  
15 conservative and proud of what we believe in and over the last few years we have lost  
16 confidence in being Conservatives and what we believe in’ (C1). Therefore, the private  
17 statements linked to the consistency of the corporate message and highlighted the delicate  
18 nature of managing the corporate political brand, which could lead to perceptions of disunity  
19 within the organisation.  
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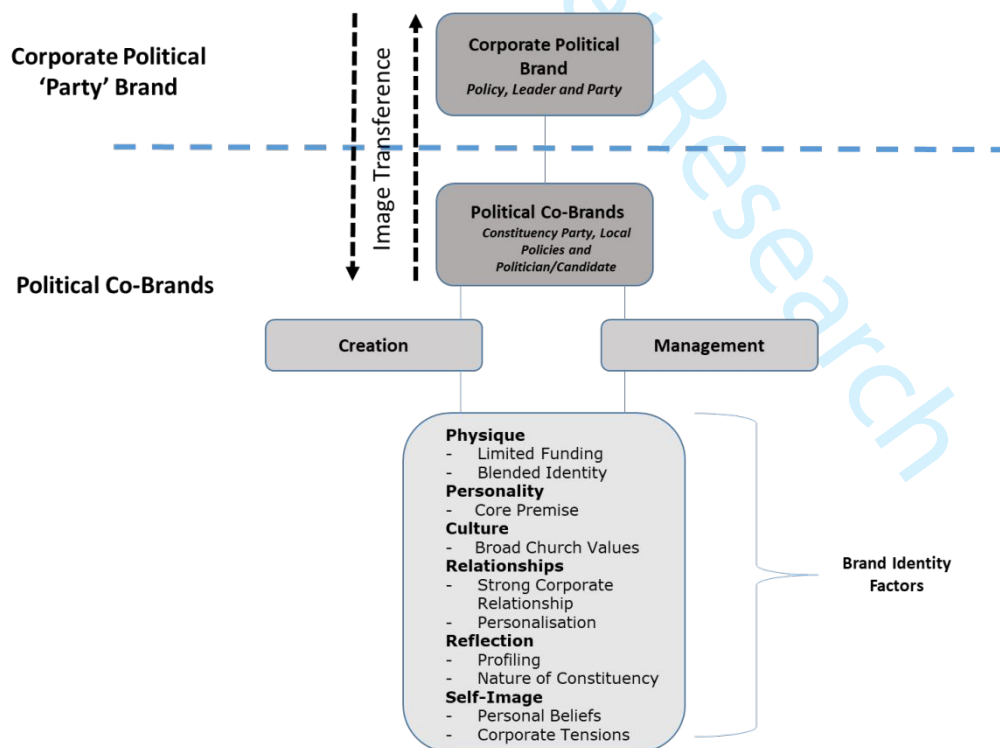
27 The political co-brands also highlighted some challenges with the corporate political brand.  
28 More specifically, depending on the popularity [or not] of the corporate brand, corporate  
29 policies or corporate leader [David Cameron] within the constituency, this would govern the  
30 development of the identity of the political co-brand. For example, the Northern political co-  
31 brand argued ‘David Cameron is a drag on the vote’ across the constituency and ‘he doesn’t  
32 gain votes he’s a drag on the votes...David Cameron made the biggest mistake when the public  
33 were crying out for a Conservative message and instead he abandoned it’ (C1). **Therefore the  
34 Northern political co-brand identity placed greater emphasis on the local issues-values, and  
35 local candidacy rather than the corporate leadership or corporate policies [corporate identity].**  
36 Nevertheless, as outlined earlier the Midlands political co-brand developed a blended identity  
37 maximising the positivity of both corporate and local aspects and did not concur with the  
38 Northern political co-brand. In contrast, the Southern political co-brand developed their  
39 identity with some distance with the corporate political brand. For example, ‘We also know  
40 from our polling that the Conservative Party’s still pretty unpopular in [constituency] whereas  
41 my brand is a lot more popular so we decided to go down the “candidate name” rather than the  
42 “candidate name Conservative” root’ (C3). **Subsequently, the political co-brands were strategic  
43 when designing and building identity and the degree of alignment depended on the localised  
44 popularity of the corporate party leader, party and policies and overall judgement of the  
45 political co-brands.**  
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## 53 Discussion

### 54 *Creation and Development of Political Co-Brand Identity*

55 This study demonstrates how political co-brand identity is constructed and managed over time  
56 and explores the coherency between the political co-brand and political corporate brand. In  
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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).





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3 Figure 4: Revised Political Co-Brand Identity Framework: The Creation and Development of  
4 Political Co-Brands  
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7 In addition, this study reveals (figure 3) that political co-brands are multifaceted, *related yet*  
8 *distinct* and often competing entities that are developed over time and by multiple internal and  
9 external stakeholders (Billard 2018; Jain *et al.* 2018; Milewicz and Milewicz 2014; Nielsen  
10 2016; Pich and Dean 2015; Scammell 2015; Speed *et al.* 2015). For example, political co-  
11 brands face several challenges when *creating* and *developing* identities particularly with the  
12 support of small-localised teams with often-limited support from the corporate political brand.  
13 Further, political co-brands face challenges such as limited local funding, maintaining a  
14 consistent local identity with the pressures of a changing corporate identity, and unpopularity  
15 of the corporate brand or corporate-local tensions also seem to have an impact on how brands  
16 manage their identity (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and  
17 Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018; Washburn and Priluck 2000). Nevertheless, the findings  
18 reveal that in order for political co-brands to secure success in the polls, a long-term approach  
19 is needed to build an identity and maintain a local ‘presence’ inside and outside the election  
20 campaign period. A consistent localised identity, grounded personalised values, yet developed-  
21 updated with local market research reflect the changing wants and needs of the electorate  
22 (Nandan 2005; Silveira *et al.* 2013; Ross and Harradine 2011; Saaksjarvi and Samiee 2011;  
23 Srivastava 2011; Wheeler and Millman 2017). This provides political co-brands with the  
24 opportunity to profile key constituents and develop personalised communication tools designed  
25 to deliver an appropriate targeted message (Pich *et al.* 2017). This is crucial as it keeps political  
26 co-brands relevant, perceived as approachable and truly ‘local’. Finally, the findings  
27 demonstrate that political co-brands can be conceptualised using the ‘trinity of elements’  
28 [leader, party and policy] up until now reserved for corporate political brands (Ahmed *et al.*  
29 2015; Nielsen 2016; O’Cass and Voola 2011; Smith 2008).  
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38 *Political Co-Brand Alignment*  
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40 This research also makes a wider contribution to the body of knowledge as it addresses the  
41 ‘relatively limited’ (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014:112)  
42 application of commercial co-branding to different contexts and settings (Helmig *et al.* 2008;  
43 Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018; Wason and Charlton 2015). Existing scholars  
44 within co-branding recognised limited understanding as to how co-brands create, communicate  
45 and manage their desired identity and questioned whether new co-brands are helped or hindered  
46 by the identity of the partner brand (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan  
47 2014; Volckner and Sattler 2006; Wason and Charlton 2015). In addition, this study responds  
48 to calls for more insight and understanding of non-fictional ‘living’ brands which represent a  
49 move away from a traditional focus of fictitious brands (Ahn and Sung 2012; Leuthesser *et al.*  
50 2002). For example, the findings suggest that political co-brand identities are aligned to the  
51 overall corporate political brand identity (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and  
52 Langan 2014; Volckner and Sattler 2006; Wason and Charlton 2015). However, the degree of  
53 alignment or ‘image transference’ will be determined by the nature of the constituency [safe  
54 seat, winnable-target seat or unwinnable] and envisaged identity of the political co-brand.  
55 Indeed case two [Midland Constituency] represented closer alignment with the corporate  
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3 political brand compared to the other two cases. Case two developed a blended central-local  
4 identity and believed the developed political co-brand demonstrated a sense of  
5 'complementarity' and inherited the positive and desirable qualities from the corporate brand  
6 infused with a localised perspective (Besharat and Langan 2014; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002).  
7 Likewise, case one [Northern Constituency] followed a similar approach when designing and  
8 building the political co-brand and highlighted the virtues of 'image transference' as it helped  
9 establish and develop the local identity (Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet 2017; Leuthesser *et al.*  
10 2002; Washburn *et al.* 2000).

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15 Nevertheless, case one highlights the political co-brand had become slightly more decentralised  
16 from the corporate political brand over time, which was a result of developing and  
17 strengthening a local identity from election to election. It could be argued that when political  
18 co-brands are initially created and developed, alignment or 'image transference' is greater and  
19 as political co-brands gain local prominence and form a stronger presence then a degree of  
20 misalignment is possible (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler  
21 and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018; Washburn and Priluck 2000). For example, case one  
22 acknowledged that part of the corporate political brand [party leader] was unpopular within the  
23 constituency and would have a negative impact on local voting intention, therefore case one  
24 would place greater emphasis on the 'party' and 'policy' than reference to the 'party leader'  
25 (C1). Therefore, this suggests 'negative image transference' can cause the political co-brand to  
26 misalign with the corporate brand in order to safeguard the local identity (Aqeel *et al.* 2017;  
27 Baumgarth 2018; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002). Similarly, despite being a 'new' political co-brand,  
28 case three [Southern Constituency] exhibited some misalignment or 'lack of complementarity'  
29 from the corporate political brand as part of its initial creation (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth  
30 2018; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002). For example, based on local market research the Conservative  
31 Party was '*pretty unpopular*' across the constituency, therefore the political co-brand placed  
32 greater emphasis on the local attributes rather than a balanced approach when creating and  
33 developing local identity (C3). This therefore suggests that the management of 'negative image  
34 transference' or 'lack of complementarity' needs to be considered when creating and  
35 developing political co-brands to ensure that the corporate brand does not hinder the political  
36 co-brand. Further, this study suggests that misalignment between the two entities [centralised  
37 and localised] can be strategic and not necessarily a negative trait. Further, a degree of  
38 misalignment can actually be a *positive* opportunity for political brands as political co-brand  
39 identity can be designed to broaden its support base and appeal to voters beyond traditional  
40 'party' lines. Therefore, contrary to the existing literature, *limiting* the 'spillover effect' or  
41 'image transference' could actually complement both parties as it still provides positive  
42 outcomes (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat 2010; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002;  
43 Washburn *et al.* 2000).

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54 Subsequently, each political co-brand represents an 'alliance' and possesses a unique, blended  
55 identity developed from a personalised core premise and positioned by a personal ideology  
56 manifested from the 'broad church' corporate values and heritage (Abratt and Motlana 2002;  
57 Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and Langan 2014; d'Astous *et al.* 2007; Kumar 2005; Nguyen *et al.*  
58 2018; Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017; Pich *et al.* 2017; Wheeler and Millman 2017).  
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3 Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that creating, developing and managing successful  
4 political co-brands requires a long-term collaborative approach [18-months-2 years] to  
5 establish a local presence and maintain a consistent localised message inside and outside the  
6 election campaign period (Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Silveira *et al.* 2013). Further, the findings  
7 suggest that the relationship between the corporate political brand and political co-brands can  
8 vary in terms of alignment and strength and will be influenced by the nature of the constituency,  
9 personal position and beliefs of the co-brand and perceived tensions between corporate-  
10 political co-brands (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat and Langan 2014; Grebosz-Krawczyk and  
11 Pointet 2017; Volckner and Sattler 2006). Indeed, the study suggests corporate political brands  
12 represent a 'system of co-brand identities' united by a desire to improve the lives of  
13 constituents, by implementing 'broad church values' into practice and securing power at the  
14 ballot box (Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Washburn  
15 and Priluck 2000). 'Political' co-brands are just as complex and multifaceted as conventional  
16 co-brands and share the desire to generate a sole entity, which represents a positive win-win  
17 situation for all parties (Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Besharat and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler  
18 and Armstrong 2010; Pich *et al.* 2017; Serazio 2017; Washburn and Priluck 2000). In addition,  
19 we can define political co-brands as a 'system of brands' manifested from the combination of  
20 two existing brands including the 'corporate party brand' and 'individual-candidate-local  
21 brand' amalgamated to create a new brand that embodies a unique single identity (Abratt and  
22 Motlana 2002; Besharat and Langan 2014; d'Astous *et al.* 2007; Kumar 2005; Pich *et al.* 2017).  
23 However, 'political' co-brands are diverse and can limit or expand the process 'image  
24 transference' depending on the desired political co-brand identity (Baumgarth 2018; Besharat  
25 and Langan 2014; Kapferer 2012; Kotler and Armstrong 2010; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018; Washburn  
26 and Priluck 2000).

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36 It must be acknowledged that all research studies have their own limitations and acknowledging  
37 this will strengthen the ability to draw conclusions (Farmer *et al.* 2006; Jack and Raturi 2006;  
38 Scandura and Williams 2000. As indicated earlier, due to time constraints (Lilliker 2003) and  
39 limited access to appropriate and relevant participants, three cases formed the basis of the  
40 sample. Nevertheless, as each case was considered an expert in the topic area, an elite interview  
41 approach, which tend to be a small group of the total population, provided a convincing  
42 understanding of the problem at hand (Beamer 2002; Eisenhardt 1989; Pettigrew 1988). In  
43 addition, as this study adopted a multiple case study approach, three cases represented an  
44 opportunity to uncover deep insight and rich understanding into the creation, development and  
45 management of political co-brands from three areas of the UK (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Eisenhardt  
46 1989; Welch *et al.* 2011; Yin 2009).

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

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11 Subsequently, political co-brands are *strategic in nature* as they aim to transfer strong  
12 appealing associations, perceptions and imagery amalgamated with tangible elements to create  
13 a new entity (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat and Langan 2014; Grebosz-Krawczyk and Pointet  
14 2017; Washburn *et al.* 2000). Therefore this study demonstrates that the updated political co-  
15 brand identity framework [figure 1 and table 1] can be used as a mechanism to understand the  
16 internal perspective of political co-brands and the six dimensions help structure the exploratory  
17 process (Pich and Dean 2015). This addresses the calls for future research within political  
18 branding to revisit and reframe existing concepts and frameworks to new settings-contexts.  
19 This in turn supports the advancement of the sub-discipline of political branding and set the  
20 agenda for future research (Ahmed *et al.* 2015; Billard 2018; Jain *et al.* 2018; Lock and Harris  
21 1996; Nielsen 2016; O’Cass and Voola 2011; Ormrod and Henneberg 2011; Panigyrakis and  
22 Altinay 2017; Scammell 2015; Serazio 2017; Speed *et al.* 2015).

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

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51 This study has implications for theory and practice. In terms of implications for theory, this  
52 study builds on limited existing concepts such as co-branding and political brand identity as a  
53 means of critical application. Existing research on co-branding remains a ‘relatively limited’  
54 and complex area of study and generally focuses on fictitious brands. Similarly, research on  
55 political brand identity remains under-researched particularly with a focus on ‘candidate-  
56 politician’ brands. This study therefore demonstrates the importance of investigating political  
57 brand identity from an internal brand creator perspective. This in turn supports the development  
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3 and advancement of political branding as an area of study (Ahmed *et al.* 2015; Billard 2018;  
4 Lock and Harris 1996; Nielsen 2016; Nielsen 2015; O’Cass 2001; O’Cass and Voola 2011;  
5 Ormrod and Henneberg 2011; Panigyrakis and Altinay 2017; Scammell 2015; Speed *et al.*  
6 2015). In addition, this paper demonstrates the opportunities and merits of utilising the strategic  
7 approach for co-branding to help conceptualise ‘candidates-politicians’ as political brands  
8 which up until now, ‘candidate-politician brands’ have been difficult to define and understand  
9 unlike the extensive research on corporate political brands. *More specifically, this study puts  
10 forward a definition of a political co-brand conceptualised as ‘a system of brands manifested  
11 from the combination of two existing brands including the corporate party brand and  
12 individual-candidate-local brand amalgamated to create a new brand that embodies a unique  
13 single identity’* (Abratt and Motlana 2002; Aqeel *et al.* 2017; Baumgarth 2018; Besharat and  
14 Langan 2014; d’Astous *et al.* 2007; Kumar 2005). Therefore, this definition will go some way  
15 to address the confusion and lack of agreed consensus (Ahn and Sung 2012; Besharat 2010;  
16 James 2005; Leuthesser *et al.* 2002; Thomson 2006; Voss and Gammoh 2004). This study also  
17 contributes to theory as it builds on the work of Pich and Dean (2015) and develops the political  
18 co-brand identity framework [figure 1 and table 1] as a pragmatic tool to explore how political  
19 co-brand identity is created and managed and how this aligns with the corporate political brand  
20 and other political co-brands.  
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28 This study also has implications for practice. Organisations and policy makers will be able to  
29 adopt the definition of political co-brands as a construct to conceptualise candidate-politician  
30 brands. This will allow organisations and policy makers to create a personalised political co-  
31 brand with a distinct identity, develop an ideal position of alignment and manage its  
32 relationship with the corporate political brand based on the profile of the constituency and  
33 continued market research. In addition, organisations, policy makers and different typologies  
34 of political brands will be able to use the political co-brand identity framework as a diagnostic  
35 mechanism to investigate their co-brand’s current identity, assess alignment and make strategic  
36 changes or reposition the envisaged identity if desired. Similarly, organisations and policy  
37 makers can use this framework, key dimensions and factors as a blueprint to design and build  
38 new political brands, construct policies and create identifiable and unique identities at a  
39 corporate and/or local level tailored to address the wants and needs of constituents. Below we  
40 list a series of research objectives which future research should attempt to focus on in order to  
41 advance research:  
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- 47 • As this paper puts forward a working conceptualisation of political co-brands future  
48 studies could use this working conceptualisation and investigate other political co-  
49 brands within and beyond Europe and other jurisdictions to assess similarities and  
50 differences of often competing identities within corporate political brands.
- 51 • Future research should investigate the prospect that political co-brands do not represent  
52 a positive win-win situation for all parties and explore the impact of negative ‘image  
53 transference’ from corporate-to-co-brand or visa-versa.
- 54 • In addition, further research should focus not just on the ‘internal stakeholders’ but also  
55 the ‘external’ voter and assess the consistency between identity-image which would  
56 reveal more insight and depth into the political brand.  
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- 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.

Qualitative Market Research

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Qualitative Market Research

Reviewers Comments	Action taken	Page
<p><b>Reviewer: 1</b></p> <p><b>Recommendation: Minor Revision</b></p> <p>Comments:  <i>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.</i></p> <p><i>In short, these include justification of constructs, argumentation, methodological concerns and analysis problems. I strongly recommend the authors to address the following:</i></p>	<p>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 <b>RED</b> 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.</p> <p>Thank you once again.</p>	
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You need to explain and justify your choice for the sector in studying Political Co-Brand Identity.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• The authors need to redevelop the introduction significantly, include more theories/literature and justify and position the paper better.</li> <li>• Please add a definition table for each constructs</li> </ul>	<p><b>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.</b></p> <p><b>Each of the six constructs of the brand identity network are in a table and defined.</b></p>	<p>Page 2-3</p> <p>Page 8</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The methodology section, data collection and analysis require further explanation</li> </ul>	<p><b>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].</b></p>	<p>Page 9, 10, 11 and 12</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please state your findings more accurately.</li> </ul>	<p>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.</p> <p>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</p>	<p>Page 13</p> <p>Page 13</p>
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	<p>direction [signposting] for the findings section, which in turn addresses the reviewers comments.</p> <p>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.</p>	Page 15-22
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you check the reliability of your data?</li> </ul>	<p>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.</p>	Page 9-12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please explain why only these cases, not others?</li> </ul>	<p>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</p>	Page 11



	<b>co-brands from three areas of the UK and reveal a snap-shot into several political brand identities (Cohen <i>et al.</i> 2007; Welch <i>et al.</i> 2011; Yin 2009).</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would suggest to add more references in findings and discussion section.</li> </ul>	<b>Similar to other papers within the Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal we have not put references in the findings section and saved the references for the discussion section. We have added more up to date references throughout the paper and added more references-sources to the discussion section.</b>	Pages 22-26
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proof read is needed before submission</li> </ul>	<b>The manuscript has been proof read before resubmission</b>	Throughout
<p>Additional Questions:</p> <p><b>1. Originality:</b> Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: The paper is interesting and unique in topic and context</p> <p><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?: Suggest to add more references from 2017/2018</p> <p><b>3. Methodology:</b> 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</p> <p><b>4. Results:</b> Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: As the authors summarised the</p>	<p><b>Thank you for these positive and constructive comments</b></p> <p><b>More up to date along with classic references from 2017 and 2018 have been added to the literature review. This in turn strengthens the argument and strengthens the rationale for the study.</b></p> <p><b>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]. Limitations have been added on page 26.</b></p> <p><b>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</b></p>	<p>Pages 2-9</p> <p>Pages 9-12</p> <p>Page 26</p> <p>Pages 13-22</p>

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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 makers 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**

Page 24

Page 28

Page 28

Throughout

<p><b>Reviewer: 2</b></p> <p>Recommendation: Minor Revision</p> <p>Comments: Wonderful Work</p>	<p>Thank you for taking the time to review our work and make helpful and constructive comments. We have reflected on your comments and attempted to address all your comments. We believe the revisions made based on your comments has improved the quality of the core argument, presentation and structure of the paper and calls for future research. Thanks again for recommending minor revisions for our paper.</p>	
<p>Additional Questions: &lt;b&gt;1. Originality: &lt;/b&gt; Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: Paper is very interesting and crafted very nicely for the publication.</p>	<p>Thank you for your positive and constructive comments.</p>	
<p>&lt;b&gt;2. Relationship to Literature: &lt;/b&gt; 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).</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Page 2-3</p> <p>Page 2-9</p> <p>Page 8-9</p>
<p>&lt;b&gt;3. Methodology: &lt;/b&gt;Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the</p>	<p>Thank you. We ensured the research objectives were aligned to the literature and consistent with the methodology.</p>	

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<p>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.</p>		
<p><b>4. Results:</b> 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.</p>	<p><b>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.</b></p>	<p>Page 13</p>
<p><b>5. Implications for research, practice and/or society:</b> 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.</p>	<p><b>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.</b></p>	<p>Page 27-28</p>

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5 <b>6. Quality of Communication: </b> Does the paper clearly  
6 express its case, measured against the technical language of the  
7 field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has  
8 attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability,  
9 such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Very well  
10 written paper  
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**Thank you for your kind, supportive comments.**

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