

‘A huge political experiment’ – exploring the Political Brand Positioning of political parties in Jersey from an internal-external perspective

Conference Track – Branding and Marketing Communication

Abstract

There are explicit calls for more understanding on how different typologies of political brands create, manage and communicate their brand positions designed to differentiate from competitors and engage the electorate. Responding to identified gaps, this study investigates the brand positioning of four party-political brands from an insider [politicians] and outsider [voter] perspective in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Jersey. Adopting a qualitative interpretivist approach, this study carried out semi-structured interviews with politicians-candidates from all four political parties in Jersey and focus group discussions with young voters 18-24 years. A six-step approach to thematic analysis was adopted as part of the analytical strategy. Initial findings suggest there appears to be inconsistency between desired and actual positioning of party-political brands in Jersey. More specifically, internal stakeholders created clear positioning for party-political brands grounded on values and visual identity cues rather than grounded on distinct policies. However, the brand positioning of the four party political brands were largely unclear and unrelatable from the standpoint of external stakeholders. Yet external stakeholders revealed a series of opportunities to improve the coherency between desired and actual political brand positioning. Researchers, practitioners and politicians will be able to use this study as a guide as to how to investigate and manage brand positioning in dynamic contexts and settings.

Keywords: *political branding, brand identity, brand positioning, marketing communications, Crown Dependencies, Jersey*

Introduction and Objectives

It is widely accepted that political parties, candidates-politicians, party leaders, election campaigns, political groups, policy initiatives and legislators can be conceptualised as *political brands* (Marland *et al.* 2017; Simons 2016). Political brands act as short-cut mechanisms to communicate desired positioning to a multitude of stakeholders such as supporters, activists, the media, employees and most importantly voters. In addition, political brands are designed to act as points of differentiation from political rivals in terms of policy initiatives, ideology, and values (Marland *et al.* 2017; Pich and Newman 2019). Furthermore, political brands are constructed to encourage voter identification and support. Indeed, political brands signify a series of promises and envisaged aspirations, which they will enact if successful at the polls (Rutter *et al.* 2015). One area that has seen limited attention is *political brand positioning*.

In order to contextualise this study, the research focused on the Channel Island of Jersey, a British Crown Dependency. Jersey has four political parties – Jersey Alliance [formed 2021], Reform Jersey [formed 2014], Jersey Liberal Conservatives [formed 2021] and the Progress Party of Jersey [formed 2021]. Jersey Alliance currently has 10 Members of Parliament. Reform Jersey has 5 Members of Parliament, and the Progress Party of Jersey has 2 Members of Parliament. The Jersey Liberal Conservatives currently have no elected members. The remaining members of the 49-seat Parliament are not part of any political party and sit as independent politicians. Jersey has a population of just under 100,000 across 9 constituencies. The island's General Election was contested on the 22nd June 2022. Therefore, Jersey's four political parties served as ideal brands to frame this investigation. Therefore, this study aimed to

- Explore the brand positioning of party-political brands in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Jersey from an internal of party candidate-politician perspective.
- Understand the brand positioning of party-political brands in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Jersey from an external young voter perspective.
- Map out and compare the desired and actual brand positioning of the four political party brands

Literature Review

Political brand positioning can be seen as a strategic approach where political brands envisage a desired position which include both brand names, logos and other identifiable features on all communication touch points (Baines *et al.* 2014; Ronzoni *et al.* 2018; Pich *et al.* 2020). Indeed, political brands are difficult to manage (Armannsdottir *et al.* 2019). For example, political brands are tailored to resonate with voters and developed from the wants and needs of constituents. Further, there are many typologies of political brands ranging from political parties, candidates-politicians, party leaders, election campaigns, political groups, policy initiatives (Pich 2022). However, existing research has tended to focus on established political party brands rather than new-emerging political brands or political brands in dynamic political systems (Marland 2017; Newman and Newman 2022; Pich 2022). In addition, there are limited studies on political brands that focus on an internal *and* external perspective and further research is called for to strengthen understanding of political brands in different settings and contexts (Marland 2017; Pich *et al.* 2020; Rutter *et al.* 2015; Simons 2016). Finally,

there is a paucity of research dedicated to political brand positioning, especially how political brand positioning is developed, managed and ultimately conceptualised (Baines *et al.* 2014; Pich *et al.* 2020; Smith and French 2009). Therefore, this study investigates the brand positioning of four party-political brands from an insider and outsider perspective in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Jersey.

Method

As this study aimed to explore the brand positioning of new party-political brands from a multi-stakeholder perspective, a qualitative interpretivist approach was considered an appropriate research strategy. Qualitative research is ideal for exploratory studies as the approach attempts to delve beneath the surface and capture rich insights into perceptions, attitudes, feelings and behaviour (Bell *et al.* 2019; Warren and Karner 2010). In terms of sampling, this study adopts a purposive sampling framework. Purposive sampling is an appropriate sampling strategy as the study aims investigate the brand positioning of party-political brands from an internal-external standpoint. Stage one of the study focuses on *internal stakeholders* - categorised as party candidates-politicians. Stage two of the study focuses on *external stakeholders* - categorised as young voters aged 18-24 years. As part of stage one, this study adopts semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews have been described as ‘non-standardised’ conversation with a purpose and are facilitated by the researcher and supported by an interview guide structured around broad themes developed from the existing academic literature (Saunders *et al.* 2016). Twelve semi-structured interviews were carried out in November 2021-January 2022 with candidates-politicians from the four political party brands. Interviews were undertaken on video call (MS Teams) or telephone. In terms of stage two, this study adopts focus group discussions as the principal method for exploring the political brands from an external young voter perspective. Focus group discussions Further, focus group discussions are designed to encourage “*broad discussion among multiple participants to capture both deeper insight and differing ideas on a particular subject*” (Halliday *et al.* 2021:2145). Both methods allow for greater flexibility and a natural-like conversation with a purpose compared to other methods (Bell *et al.* 2019). Five focus group discussions with young voters 18-24 years [30 participants in total] were carried out face-to-face in May 2022. Participants from stages one and two were given a pseudonym to ensure their identification and participation remains anonymous. Thematic analysis will serve as this study’s analytical strategy. More specially, an inductive thematic approach will be adopted to uncover the themes based on the raw findings and not influenced by existing frameworks or templates (Saunders *et al.* 2016). This six-step approach to thematic analysis developed by Braun *et al.* (2016), not only serves as a pragmatic analytical strategy but also provides rigor and trustworthiness to the interpretation process.

Initial Findings

Based on our initial analysis of the findings, six broad themes were uncovered as part of the investigation into the brand positioning of party-political brands within the British Crown Dependency of Jersey. The first three themes relate to the political brand positioning from an insider perspective. *Firstly*, political brand positioning appears to be influenced by the outcome of the 2013 island-wide referendum, which delivered a mandate for changing the political system and strengthened the case for the introduction of ‘party’ political brands opposed rather than a system of independent

politicians/political brands. *Secondly*, political brand positioning is shaped by the political environment and introduced to facilitate change as it was '*difficult to get things done*' (P2) under the former political system. *Third*, political brand positioning seems to go beyond ideology and includes dimensions such as the formation, management, structure, relationships and aspired identity [physical and intangible elements] of the party-political brands.

The final three themes relate to the political brand positioning from an external standpoint. *Firstly*, young voters welcomed the introduction of party-political brands to the dynamic political environment of Jersey. Young voters believed the introduction of political parties would bring '*much needed clarity*' (P3FG3), '*clearer differentiation*' (P2FG1) and '*simplify choice in elections as we will finally know what politicians stand for*' (P5FG2). However, there was limited awareness of the four party-political brands across all focus group discussions and limited understanding of the positioning, identity or policies of the party-political brands. Young voters argued that they felt '*frustrated*' (P4FG1) about the limited understanding of the positioning of the four political-party brands and believed parties had failed to '*reach out*' (P3FG5), '*make a connection with young voters*' (P1FG1) even though young voters were '*engaged and interested*' (P3FG3) in the upcoming General Election [focus groups carried out during the official General Election campaign 2022]. *Third*, young voters called for the political-party brands to campaign with appealing and appropriate tactics designed to '*engage young voters*' (P2FG2) rather than '*outdated*' (P5FG2) and '*alienating*' (P2FG1) electioneering methods. Therefore, our initial findings suggest that political brand positioning complex, multifaceted and ever-changing and there appears to be inconsistency between desired and actual positioning. However, our core themes may evolve once we concluded analysis for stages one and two. Nevertheless, this study will address explicit calls for more insight in this area (Baines *et al.* 2014; Marland *et al.* 2017; Needham and Smith 2015; Pich *et al.* 2020) and reveal first-hand accounts of political brands in terms of values, ideological beliefs, associations-perceptions, experiences, expectations and alignment from an internal and external perspective (Baines *et al.* 2014; Marland *et al.* 2017; Pich and Newman 2019; Rutter *et al.* 2015).

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The findings will have implications for academics and practitioners beyond the world of politics. For example, this study will provide brand managers and internal stakeholders at large with a framework of how to position new or existing brands and strategically manage a brand's desired and actual positioning. This in turn will allow internal stakeholders to respond and address any inconsistencies, amend desired positioning and manage communicated identity. This is crucial as it will help Jersey's political parties and also independent candidates with a mechanism of how to audit positioning and desired/current identity which is crucial on the run up to the Island's General Election scheduled for 22nd June 2022. Nevertheless, the introduction of political parties to Jersey has been described as a '*huge experiment...no one knows how it is going to pan out*' (P3). Only after the 2022 General Election, will we know if the new party-political brands have made an impact and have communicated clear positioning.

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