Chapter 7
Branding and Sustainable Competitive Advantage in Indian Politics: Brand Rahul Gandhi

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ABSTRACT

Political marketing has grown leaps and bounds in India over the last two elections. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze as to how politicians have built their personal brands and how successful they have been at it. More specifically, we study Rahul Gandhi as a brand in order to find a match between brand identity, brand personality, and consumer perception in terms of benefits sought and influence of activities undertaken by him. The chapter concludes personality brands in politics work well when the brand personality matches with the party’s ideology, and stays strong through right activities and image building choices. There should be a sustainable synergy between the leader and the party to avoid brand equity dilution.

INTRODUCTION

The recent elections saw many eminent politicians pitching themselves directly or indirectly as the next Prime Minister of India. While Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party clearly declared there PM candidates, BSP’s leader Mayawati also emerged as the so called proverbial dark horse for the prime minister’s chair. We also saw name of two big leaders, Narendra Modi and Lalu Prasad

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-171-9.ch007
Yadav, being used by the media as the probable candidates for PM if not in this election may be in the near future.

Riding on the wave of victory, Congress supporters gave the credit of the phenomenal victory to the young face of Congress led by Rahul Gandhi. Seen as the prime minister of the future, carrying the legacy of the great Indian political family, he was believed to take a cabinet position in the present government. But as a surprise to all and disappointment to the supporters he refused citing the reason of being too young and inexperienced to take any responsible position in the government. Projected as the face Congress during election campaign “Brand Rahul” is a clear winner. The ‘good old’ countrymen have accepted his leadership. Nevertheless, why he is reluctant to take the responsibilities? Does “Brand Rahul” needs further refinement and clear positioning among the fellow citizens?

Further, in today’s context, political marketing is gaining relevance as media spends for political parties increase during campaigns; strong brands emerge from the ranks of political leaders with each party building a larger than life image of its leaders. Thus, we begin by understanding marketing in the context of politics. In this we look at a very interesting conceptual model proposed by Lees-Marshment (2001) of the way political parties have evolved over time from a product orientation through a sales orientation, and finally to a market orientation. Further, we also study critique of political marketing through a framework put forth by Henneberg (2002). In Addition, a personality brand can be defined in simple terms as a brand based around a single human being. It is a trust relationship between an individual and consumers that bypasses the normal purchase decision-making process. Personality Branding means strategically planning and developing the trust relationship between individual and consumer (Stockman, 2009). In order to understand the concept of developing a brand for a personality in the context of political marketing, we have adopted a framework from the field of human Resources and organizational Behaviour and applied it to marketing. As, personality branding essentially involves stimulating meaningful perceptions about the value and qualities that the personality stand for, we hypothesize that developing personality brands within an organization, humanizes the corporate brand and makes it more relatable.

This chapter tries to draw a parallel between Rahul Gandhi, the future of Indian political scenario, and other probable candidates of prime ministerial post. We have identified following leaders which we believe have strong brand image, to be the PM of the great Indian democracy.

1. **Rahul Gandhi**: He is the heart of our study to understand the status of his brand.

2. **Dr. Manmohan Singh**: The current prime minister of India. Was the decision to make him the PM again was taken by looking into his image? Or having an economist was the need of the hour?

3. **L.K. Advani**: The leader of opposition and the 2nd biggest face of Bhartiya Janta Party after Vajpayee, he was the clear favorite among BJP supporters.

4. **Narendra Modi**: Although he denied being in the race of PM, but had some support from inside the party especially after the victory in Gujarat elections. He is seen as the leader of the next saffron brigade.

5. **Lalu Prasad Yadav**: The party spoiler for the Congress, riding on the image of being a very full-of-beans politician and MBA school friendly politician, he moved away from Congress to form the 4th front. Realistic or not his supporters started promoting him as the next PM of the country.

6. **Mayawati**: “Parda” loving “Behenji” clearly portrayed herself as a very strong contender for the most lucrative post of the IPS (Indian Political System).
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