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Beyond preconceptions: Analyzing the role of political party branding and psychological factors in voter decision-making within developing multi-party contexts

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Abstract. The case study revolves around discussions by a group of students of a popular university in a cafeteria. State elections in Uttar Pradesh had just finished and students were wondering as to how the election results were against their pre-conceived notions. They were discussing about the reasons as to why they voted for their preferred political party as first-time voters. Overall, this case study purports to assess the impact of political parties' branding on voters' decision-making. The case study seeks to raise three concerns: how does political parties' branding influence voters' decision-making? what are the key factors which influence a voter in decision-making process?, and why is psychology so different in a multi-party system in developing economies' contexts? A consumer-oriented approach is developed for assessing the impact of political parties' branding on voters' decision-making. It is concluded that voters' decision-making is influenced by the political parties' branding initiatives.
Keywords. Political parties' branding; Political marketing; Voters perception.
JEL. P16, D72, D73.

1. Introduction

Broken Elections in Uttar Pradesh, a State in India, had just been over. My friends in the university were aghast to learn how the new government won the mandate despite increasing popularity of their favorite political party. Some of my colleagues were apprehending that since their favorite political party had conducted successful campaigns on the print and electronic media, their party would win. Some perceived that since their favorite political party had excellent leadership, that political party would win. Others were highly satisfied with the development works conducted in the past by their favored political party. Therefore, they reasoned that their political party would emerge victorious. For some, their favored political party espoused a secular ideology bereft of arousing any communal tendencies; therefore, they predicted that their political party would win. Finally, there were some of my friends who were aware that their favored political party had an excellent image and reputation and it was likely that their preferred political party would win the elections.

As I was about to join my regular classes at the university on Monday, I noticed a different air that day. There was nobody in the lecture hall and I took my way through the corridors to reach the cafeteria to hit a cup of coffee. All of my classmates were sitting in the cafeteria and there was a lot of discussion and debate in the cafeteria with decibels reaching very high. I thought that they were involved in discussing about the impending examinations. My

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friends were discussing about the election results which were declared a day earlier. My friends were debating as to why they chose to vote their favored their preferred political party but were surprised to see the results. In all, there were around 112 students seated in the cafeteria with different views as to why they had voted for their preferred political party (See Table 1).

Table 1.

	Voting for name	Does name reflect ideology	Do leaders reflect ideology	Name change	Satisfaction with party's works	Leader defects to another party (Leader=Yes (1); Party=No (2))	Party popular for wrong reasons	Change of leaders	New political party
Yes	22	61	70	9	49	22(1) & 25(2)	51	65	46
No	90	51	42	103	63	30(1) &35(2)	61	47	66

Some of my friends argued that they voted because they were attracted to the political party's name. They said that they were first-time voters and did not know what to do other than picking up political parties with fanciful names. For some, English names like Congress were more appealing than the Hindi ones like Samajwadi. For others, being Hindi-speaking, they preferred to vote for the political parties with the names having similar language affiliations. Some others were criticizing the first-time voters for having made a crucial decision in voting on such frivolous grounds, however. Some reasoned that the name of their preferred political party reflected the ideology of the political party quite explicitly. They said that those names with a local language were more reflective of their ideological stand than the ones which had adopted English as their party name. Others did not believe this-they maintained that the name of the political party has nothing to do with the ideology of that party. In fact, very few of the students were of the opinion that the name of their preferred political party should change. However, a majority of the students preferred the retention of their political party's name.

The students were sitting around rectangular-tables and although the chairs were limited, some preferred to stand while others preferred to sit on the tables themselves. They were discussing that they were highly satisfied with the work done by their preferred political party in the areas of development of their locales, safety of women, provision of employment to the local people and launching programmes for the benefit of agricultural communities and other deprived sections of the society. Some friends referred to the newly launched programmes on the provision of scholarship assistance to female students of all classes. Others referred to the loan waivers for the farmers who had lost their crops during the floods in the nearby regions. Some referred to the establishment of new call centres for the providing timely guidance to the students who were studying in their Class X and Class XII. Some friends referred to the launch of the programmes for the underprivileged sections of the society for allowing them to pursue free coaching to appear in the prestigious civil service examinations.

Thereafter, the discussion veered around the question whether they voted for the leader or the party. Some said that they were in favor of their political party but did not like the leader as such. Some said that since their family and friends had been subscribing to the political party for a long time and their influence had made them vote for a particular political party. A close friend of mine, Anand, opined that being a first-time voter, his father told him to vote

for a particular political party which was favored by the family since the time of India's independence. Another colleague said that since his seniors had been espousing the ideology a political party, he too followed suit. Then, there were some colleagues whose family members were members of a particular political party and they suggested them to vote for the same political party. And, some felt that they were being forced to vote for a particular political party despite the fact that they did not like the political party or its ideology at all.

After a round of tea and burgers, I was wondering whether the discussion would come to an end given that it was a working day and classes were being scheduled as usual. Students were not willing to attend lectures that day and even the Professors were aware of students' disinclination for studying that day. Therefore, the University Notice-Board displayed a ticker stating that lectures shall remain suspended for the day. Students were happy to learn of the latest notice and the discussion heated up all the more.

Somebody raised his voice and asked the fellow students whether they would have voted for their preferred political party if the leader had defected to another political party. A couple of hands rose to affirm that they would prefer to vote for the political party even if the leader had defected to another political party. They said that loyalty to the political party precedes everything. They were of the opinion that they would remain loyal to their preferred political party under all circumstances. Others said that why should they vote for the leader whose loyalty to his/her own political party is dubious. Then, a senior colleague retorted saying that it's the political party leadership which is more important than the political party. They said that what matters is that the leader of the political party should be efficient. After all, a political party is made up of leaders. If the leader of the political party has defected to another political party, there must be some valid reasons for the defection. Probably, the leader is dissatisfied with the works of the political party, and therefore preferred to change his/her political party affiliation rather than sticking in the sands. They were of the view that a leader should be decisive enough to remain or leave the political party if he is in disagreement with the ideology or attitude of the political party.

The discussion kept progressing when the colleagues ordered for another round of tea. Nobody was willing to go home even though the time was past evening. They were debating as to why they should vote for a political party despite the fact that the political party had communal overtones. There were some political parties which had openly declared that even though they professed secularism and harmony among the citizens of all faiths, they preferred to favor a particular section of the community more than the rest. Also, few political parties had been such that their leaders had been indicted and incarcerated on the pretext of murders and arson. The ruling political party had allocated ministerial portfolios to their family members and close relatives. Some political parties had leaders who had been accused under corruption charges. Some leaders were charged of raping the minors while others were charged with keeping arms in an illegal manner. Some leaders were accused of fraud and embezzlement in the context of implementation of State-funded schemes. Some political leaders kept their men for threatening the shopkeepers for extorting money in an illegal manner. Therefore, the students questioned as to why were such political parties being supported.

It was pointed out if the political parties should remove such corrupt and criminal leaders from the political party. Some students favored that leaders should change as they were corrupting the entire political system and cheating the electorate.

A very interesting dimension figured wherein some students preferred that a new political party should be launched. Some students preferred to have a youth wing of their political party. Others preferred that the political parties in India should be given a fixed time-frame in which they may operate. They preferred that every political party should be in existence for only ten years. After ten years, new political parties should be given an opportunity to foray into the political sphere. There were some who were opposed to the launch of additional political parties as they said that all political parties are of the same genre and the ideology remains the same. They affirmed that politicians are corrupt and shall remain corrupt. They were thoroughly disenchanted with the political party system in the country. Some students preferred that new political parties should emerge as a viable opposition to the existing ruling parties.

Students favored that changes are required in the party working. A lot of improvement is required in the political parties. One colleague opined that, "The ideology of my preferred political party is good but idealistic." For some, personal interest of the leaders dominates the interest of the masses. In response to the second question, it was concluded that voters preferred that improvement is required. Emphasis should be laid on cleanliness in the city; social work should be undertaken; violation of Indian Constitutional principles should be checked; all forms of discrimination should be avoided; women empowerment should be ensured; and, secularism should be accepted as an adopted norm.

Finally, the students disbanded over the issue that political parties have been projecting themselves as popular marketable items for the consumers like them. I was hitting my twelfth cup of coffee by then.

2. Case overview

The case study is undertaken to capture the factors which impact a voter's decision-making process when it comes to voting during elections. The case study revolves around a group of university students who expressed different views regarding their voting decisions. Their voting decisions were based on factors like party's image, leadership, ideology, image and reputation, development works undertaken in the past, and so on. Elections in Uttar Pradesh, a State in India, had been completed and the results were a surprise for all. A number of State and National political parties had contested polls during the Uttar Pradesh elections. Students were taken by surprise to learn about the election results and they were trying to identify what factors propel them to vote for their chosen political party. The case study throws interesting insights as to what are the intervening forces which impact a voter's decision to vote for a particular political party. The case study has a background in political marketing and political branding and is suitable to students from Political Science and Marketing Management.

2.1. Learning objectives

Students will be able to draw home the following lessons:

a. How is political parties' branding important for influencing voting decisions?

b. What are the implications of political marketing for voters in Indian context?

c. How are the voters getting influenced by the political marketing dimensions?

Table 2. *Organizing discussion (Assumes 90 minute session)*

Time slot (minutes)	*Indicative discussion pointers*
10 minutes	Discuss the concept of political marketing.
20 minutes	Discuss the significance political marketing in Western and Indian contexts.
10 minutes	Discuss the ways how voters get influenced by the marketing campaigns of the political leaders.
30 minutes	Discussion on the interpretation of the Table 1.
15 minutes	SPSS/STATA application to Table 1 and the Question 1 with detailed analysis and interpretation.
5 minutes	Conclusion with directives for the next session.

2.2. Theoretical Note

Political Parties in India (A discussion on the multi-party system in India at Union and State levels)

In India, multi-party system is prevalent where national and state level parties are accorded due recognition. Political parties are registered by the Election Commission of India. All registered political parties select a party symbol out of those offered by the Election Commission. As on September XVI, MMXIV, the total number of parties registered was 1761 with 6 parties operating at the National level; 49 at the State-level and 1706 unrecognized parties.

For a political party to be recognized as a National party, it must satisfy one of the following conditions: it should win 2% of seats in the Lok Sabha from at least 3 different States; the party should poll 6% of votes in 4 States and 4 Lok Sabha seats at the General Elections to the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly; or, it should get recognition as a State party in 4 or more States. The recognized political parties in India (as on September XVI, MMXIV) are Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), Communist Party of India (CPI), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

At the State-level, a party may be recognized as a State-level party on satisfying any of the following conditions: it should win minimum 3% of the total number of seats or a minimum of 3 seats in the Legislative Assembly; it should win at least one seat in the Lok Sabha for every 25 seats or any fraction thereof allotted to that State; it should get at least 6% of the total valid votes polled during general elections to the Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assembly and should win at least one seat in the Lok Sabha and two seats in Legislative Assembly in that election; or, it should get 8% or more of the total valid votes polled in the State. Some of the recognized State parties are Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK), All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), etc.

Elections are a common feature in Parliamentary democracies. In India, general elections are held every five years. Voting takes place following the tenets of universal adult franchise. At the Centre, elections to Lok Sabha are held for 552 seats. The first General elections were held in 1951-52.

In the recent MMXIV elections for the 16th Lok Sabha, 814.5 million electorates were involved. In these elections, 543 seats were being contested upon and BJP won the duel. Hitherto, INC and its allies had been outvoting BJP-cum-allies. Coalition political system has seeped in the Indian political system.

In the State-level elections to the Legislative Assembly (Vidha Sabha, in case of Uttar Pradesh), there are 403 assembly constituencies. The major parties which predominate in the Assembly elections are Indian National Congress, Bharatiya Janta Party, Samajwadi Party, and, Bahujan Samaj Party. Uttar Pradesh witnessed its maiden spell of Assembly elections in 1951-52. The latest elections were held in 2012. Initially, Congress was wielding power but later it was replaced by BSP or SP.

What is apparent from the recent election results of 2014 is that voters' decision-making in the Assembly elections depends on the political parties' performance. Anti-incumbency factor plays the roost in elections at the Centre and State elections when the performance of the preceding party is unsatisfactory. In line with the research questions, it is pertinent that political parties undertake development works to woo voters as well as work on political branding strategies. Finally, sound and stable government formation necessarily requires a robust leadership to win voters' fidelity in the long-run.

2.3. Political marketing

Fundamentally, political marketing is matrimony between marketing and politics (Lees-Marshment, 2001). "While political marketing is generally accepted to refer to the campaign and electoral practices of political elites, informed by concepts and ideas from the business environment, we argue that the marketisation of politics is more than the use of marketing techniques in election campaigns. Rather it represents the wholesale inculcation of marketing values and beliefs into the formal political sphere-that is politics as practiced by elite level actors with its subsequent impact upon the public and the political context." (Savigny & Wring, 2009). "Political marketing seeks to establish, maintain and enhance long-term political relationships at a profit for society, so that the objectives of the individual political actors and organisations involved are met. This is done by mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises" (Henneberg 2003). Thus, the party or candidate uses opinion research and environmental analysis to produce and promote a competitive offering (Wring, 1999). O' Cass (2001) argues that the use of marketing "offers political parties the ability to address diverse voter concerns and needs through marketing analyses, planning, implementation and control of political and electoral campaigns". Further, political marketing is "concerned with reciprocated exchanges of value between political entities and their environments" (Winther-Nielson, 2011). Epistemologically, in terms of a "qualified market", a political market may be understood as a result of interactions and interrelations of actors; in terms of "social embeddedness", there is focus on systems; in terms of "structural connectedness", there is stress upon interdependent management and politics spheres. Political marketers seek ways to encourage voters to support their product (a candidate, a political party or group, and an ideology). O'Cass (2001) defined political marketing with an exchange model. According to him, when voters cast their votes, a transaction takes place. In return for their votes, the party/candidate offers better government and policies after election. In other words, political

marketing is concerned with how these transactions are formed, stimulated and valued.

Political marketing has evolved with the application of disciplines within marketing such as advertising and marketing research, direct marketing, segmentation (Smith and Hirst, 2001), relationship marketing, marketing orientation (O'Cass, 2001), positioning (Harrop, 1990) and public relations. Literature on political marketing begins with the ontological supposition that parties can be conceived of as business, voters as consumers, both engaged in an exchange in a marketplace. Such a simplistic premise has become more than an analytic or heuristic device and prescriptive literature lends a normative dimension. Extant research has underscored political marketing in terms of elite-level political behavior (eg. Farrell, 1992; Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1995) with a positive perspective (eg. Harrop, 1990; Scammell, 1995; O'Cass, 1996; Lees-Marshment, 2001) as well as with a critical eye (eg., O'Shaughnessy, 1990, 2001; Wring, 1995, 2005; Henneberg, 2004; Savigny, 2007, 2008). Further, for some, political marketing needs to be understood with a more managerial approach with practical dimensions (eg., Kotler, Levy, 1969; Mauser, 1983; Maarek, 1995; Smith, Saunders, 1990; O'Cass, 1996; Lock, Harris, 1996; Egan, 1999; Kotler, Kotler, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Newman, Davies (eds.), 2006; Worcester, Baines, 2006). Basically, an election is perceived as a moment of sale: the point of choice, where voters employ the knowledge they have about a candidate or political party and make their choice (Aaker, 1991; Gundlach and Murphy, 1993; Keller, 1993). Thus, voters' decision-making is a critical component of political marketing. Succinctly observed, "the central purpose of political marketing is to enable political parties and voters to make the most appropriate and satisfactory decisions" (O'Cass, 1996).

It may be pertinent to note that typically, 'citizen' and 'consumer' are polar entities. Whereas the former is outward-looking, embracing public interest; the latter is self-interested, inward-looking and private. However, Cohen (2001) decries this assertion stating that no such simple distinction has held true historically and that both the entities were 'ever-shifting categories that sometimes overlapped, other times were in tension, but always reflected the permeability of the political and economic…".

Five prominent models of political marketing have been advanced by Butler and Collins (1994), Newman (1994), Maarek (1995), Wring (1997) and Baines et al (2002). Butler and Collins (1994) have elucidated the structural and process characteristics of political marketing. Whereas the structural characteristics incorporate the product nature, organization and market; the process characteristics include the techniques and approaches that control the marketing activity. Newman (1994) gave a political campaign model including marketing (marketing or voter segmentation, candidate positioning, strategy formulation and implementation based on the 4Ps of marketing mix (Kotler, 1997)) and political (campaign platform) facets. Maarek (1995) advanced a model whereby the campaigning forms the edifice of political marketing. Wring (1997) presents a model whereby there is exchange relationship between seller (candidate) and buyer (voter). This model comprises of the party or candidate organization, the environment (conditioning its development), the strategic mix it uses and the market it should operate in. Finally, Baines, Harris and Lewis (2002) have presented a model which relates to the coordination of local campaigning activity by the national party to

project a systematic and unified message by political parties. In the first stage, the political strategists gather data on individual voting districts regarding voter registration; collect census data and conduct constituency market research into voters' attitudes, opinions, hopes and desires to determine which individual voting districts are most liable to changing their fidelity from one candidate or party to another. In the next stage, the nature of competition in the constituencies is ascertained. In the final stage, a feedback-cum-evaluation analysis pertaining to the campaigning is conducted. In this model of political marketing planning, political market segmentation and positioning are influenced by competition, census data, constituency research and identification of the relevant voting groups. Overall, all the models are fundamentally aiming at the application of strategic marketing concepts to political parties.

A separate strand which has emerged is that of political marketing management. Henneberg, Scammell, O'Shaughnessy (2009) have outlined three-dimensional perspective, i.e. a selling-oriented, an instrumentally-oriented, and a relational political marketing management. The selling-oriented dimension is based on a traditional, ideology-oriented approach to politics (Kavanagh, 1996; Henneberg, 2002). Publicity measures are employed to showcase the mettle of the political leadership and ideology. The instrumentally-oriented dimension political marketing campaigns are coordinated through a multitude of political marketing instruments (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Wring, 2005). Finally, the relational dimension with its emphasis on societal marketing is advocated where the stress is laid on harboring long-term interactions that benefit all relevant actors as well as society (Laczniak and Murphy, 2006).

A related concept is that of PMO (Political Marketing Orientation). Political Marketing Orientation takes into cognizance the marketing-mix concept; this involves the (a) products-candidate, policy ideology and good governance (LeBaron, 2008 and Nazar, et al., 2010); (b) Distribution-Henneberg (2003) concluded that distribution in PMO refers to the way and manner the products are made available to the target market (voter) and these are campaign delivery and offering delivery; (c) Price (cost)-In political marketing, costs deals with the management of attitudes and behaviours of all the political players, internally and externally. Niffenger (1989) recognizes psychological costs, opportunity cost in decision making and voting influence costs. It is imperative, that these costs must be minimized, most especially, on the part of the voters; (d) Communication – this essentially deals with information dissemination. Quite understandably, all these components may find application in the Indian political system.

Political parties branding

Conceptualizing political parties in terms of brands pitches the voters as "consumers" and political parties as "products". Such an analogy holds well in line with the fundamentals that consumer "choice" is a by-product of "available" brand variants (Keller, 2002). Further, political parties are "organizations" where the politicians attempt to exchange ideas and promises for electoral support. Politics has been subsumed under "other, commercial markets" in previous research (Lock and Harris, 1996; Butler and Collins, 1999; O'Shaugnessy, 2001; Henneberg, 2006).

Research has identified political parties and or politicians as brands (Kavanagh, 1995; Kotler and Kotler, 1999; Harris and Lock, 2001; Smith, 2001;

White and deChernatony, 2002; Schneider, 2004; Needham, 2005, 2006; Reeves et al., 2006; Scammell, 2007). Impetus for research based on political brand was driven by the changing nature of post-war Western Democracies. However, what's pertinent to our purpose is that in Western context, which are developed economies, two-party system was predominant. In the Indian context, or, specifically, in the developing economies, where multi-party systems have evolved, the range of choices in terms of political parties being expansive, a far more nuanced understanding of political branding is achieved.

Kotler (1991) defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". Brand has been defined in terms of the supplementary assurance held out to the customer in addition to the intrinsic value of the assets bought by the customer (Lynch, 1997). Such supplementary assurance may be the proprietary visual, emotional, natural and cultural image or attributes associated with a person, company, product or service. For Scammell (2007), the term 'brand' refers to the symbolic value, "the psychological representation" of a given product. According to Lambin (2007), the term 'brand' signifies a "layer of emotional connection" implied by a set of intangible benefits associated with a product. Extending this definition to political parties' branding, it may be understood as the summation of leadership, ideology, philosophy, symbols, policies, agenda, promises apart from self-publicity and propaganda measures (White and de Chernatony 2002). Party brands make the party more simple, credible and salient to voters (Tomz and Sniderman, 2005).

Forehand, Gastil and Smith (2004) concluded that branding a political party aids in enhancing the likelihood that voters are eager to learn more about the party, its policies and its values. Similarly, party's image (Farrell and Wortmann, 1987; Bannon, 2003) as well as the party leader's image also has a motivational effect to learn more about the party (Clarke et al., 2004). The fundamental role of brands is to facilitate differentiation among similar products (Kotler, 1991). 'Brand differentiators' may be psychological (appealing to the self-reflexive capacities and value preferences of the customers), social (relating to the customers' socialization or standing in society) or cultural (impact of brands on customers' customs and traditions). As such, branding or brand management is the creation and development of distinct values for a product or service to make it appealing and distinct vis-à-vis others with an objective of giving it an easily recognized clear identity. The most fundamental constituent of a brand is its name. As the basic needs of individuals began to be met more fully by the products available in the market which had little differentiation in terms of the functional benefits offered by the products in the same category to the customers, the use of brands became widespread (Aaker, 1996). Extending this to political parties' context, the nomenclature of BJP, AAP or INC impact the voters' attitudes and mind-set. Similarly, differentiating brand names with pictorial representation has been found to enhance product brand recognition and awareness (MacInnis, Shapiro, and Gayathri, 1999). Thus, logos of the political parties articulate their parties' ideology and philosophy.

Political parties play a role in voting decisions (Smith & French, 2009). Brands are conceived as heuristics in decision-making by helping to structure consumer choice and experience (Arvidsson, 2006; Schmidt and Ludlow, 2002;

Smith and French, 2009). In the context of this research on political parties' branding, parties' branding will influence voters' decision-making. Further, many citizens have a low level of involvement in party politics. For them, gathering political information is costly in terms of the effort needed to assimilate it versus the motivation to do so (Downs, 1957). Encountered with these learning costs, voters prefer to save time and energy by using heuristic shortcuts to help them decide their voting intention (Sniderman et al., 1991; Popkin, 1994). Thus, citizens rely on the party brand associations which serve as a useful heuristic, precluding the need to actively engage in learning about a party, its policies and values (Forehand et al., 2004). It has been argued that there is a tension for political brands in that there is a need for them to be voter driven, while at the same time being responsible for the long term (Reeves, de Chernatony, & Carrigan, 2006). Especially, a leader's image, as part of the overall brand, has been deemed as a robust heuristic device for voter assessment of overall party competence, responsiveness and attractiveness (Clarke et al., 2004). Further, brand associations are the attributes that customers recollect when they hear or see the brand name. Positive connotations are linked with a brand name for evoking affirmative associations. Attributes associated with a brand name may be tangible or intangible (psychological or historical). In the Indian context, generations prefer to vote for a particular political party because they've grown up listening to the accolades of the party. Similarly, voting decision may be impacted upon by the leader's impeccable character (psychological/intangible) or party's development works (tangible). Voters' maps were analyzed to underscore the key branded characteristics in terms of general structure and linked associations for political parties (French and Smith, 2010).

Brand image exists in the minds of customers, as a result of how customers perceive and construe the brand and the marketing activities surrounding it. Thus, brand image is defined as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller, 1993). Thus, brand image refers to how consumers derive meaning for brands and look at the brand from an "outside-in" perspective. Brand image encapsulates the physical attributes of a product; the functional characteristics or benefits of the product (both tangible and intangible); and, the brand personality (Plummer, 2000). Brand personality entails the brand traits. Brand attitudes are functionally linked with behavioral intentions, which predict actual behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Brand image was found to be associated with five factors (competence, empathy, openness, agreeableness and handsomeness) in the presidential candidates for Mexico's 2006 elections (Guzman and Sierra, 2009). For an effective brand-image communication, identical brand attributes should be transmitted through all communication channels. Thus, multi-channel communication should ensure that a party's ideology is congruently and correspondingly put across the print, electronic and social media. Additionally, the value-laden or emotional appeal should be effectively harnessed by the political parties in the minds of the people. For example, political parties should ensure that the voters are able to connect themselves emotionally with the leadership and ideology. Finally, trust-building is an important facet of political parties' branding. Political leadership vies for gaining voters' trust by employing various means. In multi-party systems, political parties face tough competition and try harder to be distinct brands than in a two-party system, since competition impacts the way brands are

perceived (Aaker, 1991). Smith and French (2009) define political brand as "an associative network of interconnected political information and attitudes, held in memory and accessible when stimulated from the memory of the voter".

Party equity

Brand equity has been conceptualized as the sum-total of brand awareness, loyalty, perceived quality, and associations (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, 2001; Ross, 2006). In the context of political parties, brand awareness and associations are inferred as components of voter-based party equity. Brand awareness implies that brand recall stimulates linked brand associations which may be positive (and add to equity), neutral or negative (and thus not add to a brand's equity). For instance, association of RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangha) with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) may be positively or negatively perceived by voters. Brand loyalty relates to party identifications. Thus, voters' loyalty over a period of time is perceived as a sign of high brand equity. The relationship between political leaders and voters is fortified by trust. Political trust shifts owing to the unresponsiveness of government institutions and political leaders. Voters judge the apparent differences between what the politicians actually deliver vis-à-vis their promises precisely before and after the election campaigns. Sherman and Schiffman (2002) view stability of the political trust if the government is successful in implementing the better form of government. With trust, comes fidelity for the party. For instance, voters tend to adhere to a party for years together. Perceived quality relates to credibility (trustworthiness, honesty and believability), security (freedom from danger, risk or doubt), communication (listening and keeping consumers involved) and reliability/competence (ability to perform the promised service). Extending this facet to political parties' equity, a party's credibility, security, communication and reliability are the parameters of judging political parties from voters' perspective. Finally, brand associations are premised on brand association strength, favorability and uniqueness (Keller, 1993). Strength implies how many associations the party brings to mind; favorability, the positivity/negativity of these associations and uniqueness, where associations are not shared with the opposition and thus a potential source of differentiation. Vis-à-vis the political parties, AAP has been able to influence the minds of the voters based on its core ideology of anti-corruption and the party has stood by its guns at all times. Such a positive association lent credibility to the party and led to its remarkable victory in the recent polls.

Brand knowledge is derived from distinct pieces of information (called nodes). Theoretically, such information is associated in memory to form a more complex associative network (Collins and Loftus, 1975; Wyer and Srull, 1989). Contextually, a political party may be viewed as an information node to which other nodes may be associated such as its current leader (his predilections and image). Summing up, from a consumer learning perspective, the political brand is defined as an associative network of interconnected political information, held in memory and accessible when stimulated from the memory of a voter.

2.4. Linkage of the case study with the concepts

Overall, this case study sought to understand the moderating and mediating variables impacting the decision of voters to vote for a preferred political party.

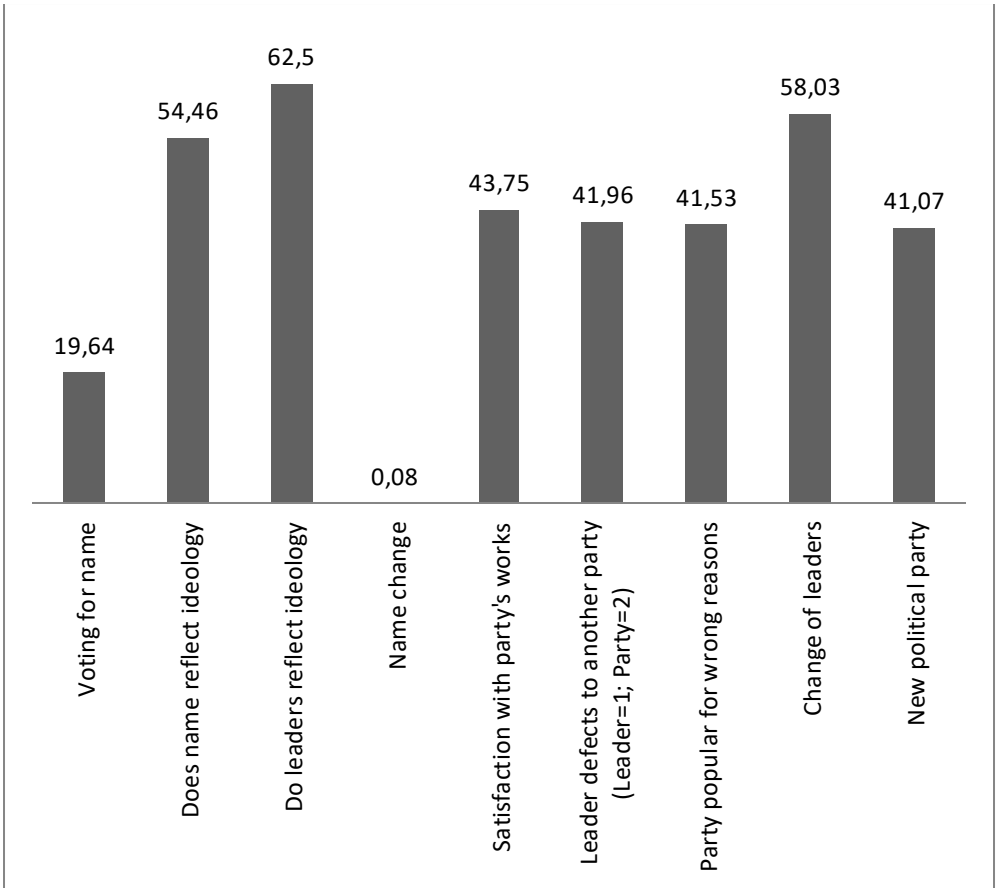

Figure 1. *Moderating and Mediating variables included in the study (%)*

A number of concluding statements may be drawn from the aforesaid. A party's name does not impact voting decision for the preferred party. Implicitly, a political party does not attract voters merely by its nomenclature. Party's ideology should be reflected in the party's name. This is surprising as noted previously that a voter is not attracted by the party's name in decision-making. Leaders should toe the party-line and follow and uphold the ideology for better association with the voters. Party leadership should be rightly matched with the party ideology. Further, it was found that a change of party's name would not detract voters; they would remain unaffected as far as their loyalty to the party is concerned. Very surprisingly, voters are dissatisfied with the development works of their preferred party and still prefer to remain loyal to their party. Implicitly, the loyalty may be attributed to the peer influence or family influence. Alternatively, voters are unable to find a viable alternative to their preferred political party, and, hence, prefer sticking to their party for want of an alternative. It is also witnessed that the voters exercise their voting decision based on the popularity of the preferred political party. Voters prefer a political party which has untainted repute. A majority of respondents prefer changes in party leadership. A majority of respondents are dissatisfied with party leadership and prefer a change of guard. A leader's defection to a rival party does not impact voters' voting decision-making vis-à-vis their preferred political party. This implies that association and loyalty to their preferred political party is more important than the party leadership. Emergence of a rival political party would not impact voters' predilection for their preferred political party. Loyalty to their preferred political party is quite strong.

3. Suggestive questions

How do female versus male students perceive the preference for their preferred political parties? (Please distribute the following charts beforehand to the students.)

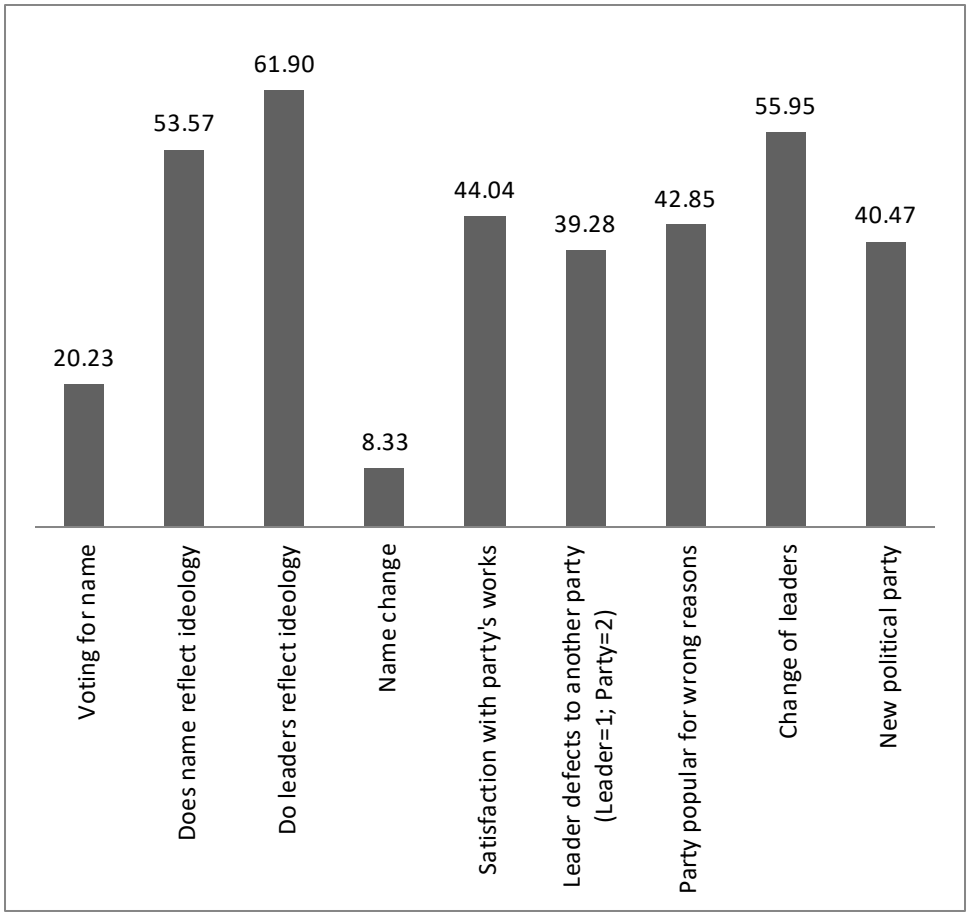

Figure 2. *Moderating and Mediating variables in cases of Males (%)*

Approximately 20.23% males prefer to vote for a political party based on its name. 53.57% males believe that their preferred party's name reflects the party ideology. 61.90% males are of the opinion that their leaders represent their party ideology. Merely 8.33% respondents prefer to vote for their party if the party's name changes. 44.04% males are satisfied with the party's development works. If the party's leader migrates to a rival party, 39.28% respondents would vote for the rival party where the leader has migrated. 42.85% male respondents agree that their preferred party is unpopular for harboring extremist and radical ideas or criminalization of politics. 55.95% respondents prefer a change of party leadership. Lastly, 40.47% respondents believe that a new political party should emerge as an alternative to their currently preferred party.

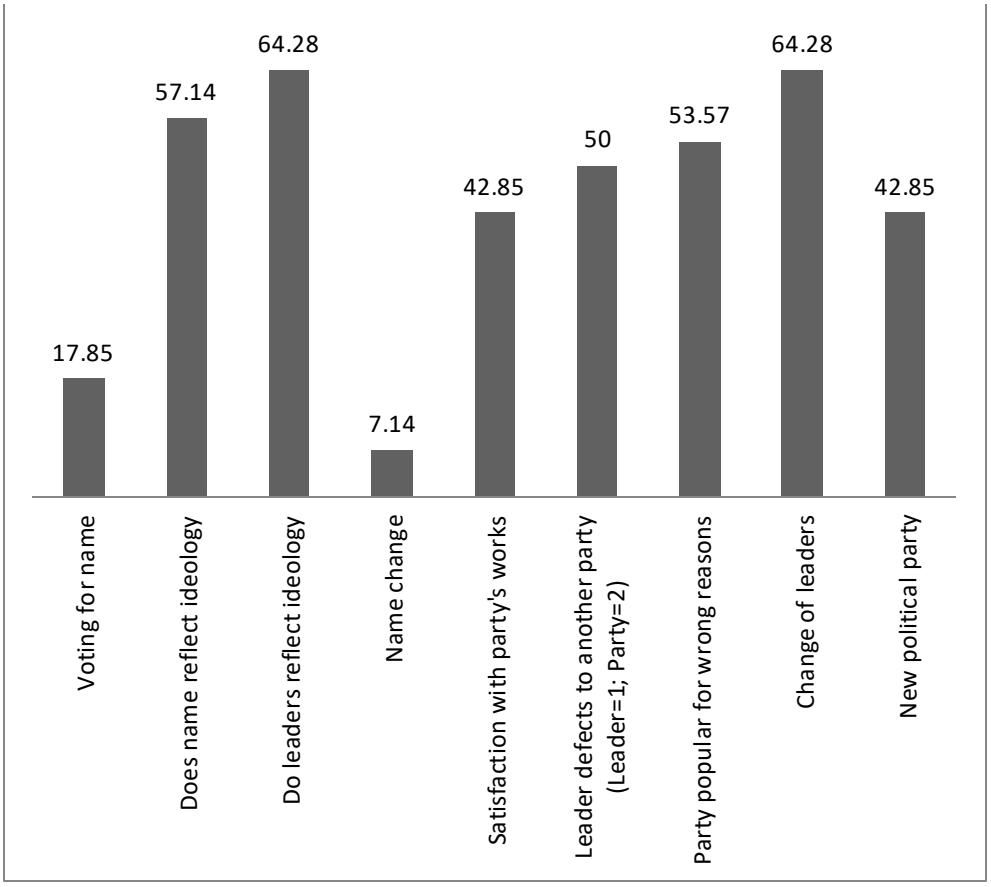

Figure 3. *Mediating and Moderating variables for Females (%)*

In case of females, 17.85% respondents make their voting decision based on the party's name. 57.14% respondents believe that their preferred party's name reflects the ideology of the party. 64.28% respondents opine that their party's leaders reflect party's ideology. A mere 7.14% respondents prefer the change of the political party as far as voting decision is concerned. 42.85% respondents are satisfied with the party's works. 50% respondents would prefer to the rival party if the leader defects to the rival party. 53.57% respondents are aware that their preferred party is unpopular among the masses for wrong reasons. 64.28% respondents prefer a change in their party leadership. 42.85% respondents prefer that a new political party should emerge as an alternative to their preferred political party.

Male respondents are more prone to be influenced by the party's name than females in making their voting decision. Females, more than males, perceive that their party's name does reflect party's idelogy. Similarly, females, in contrast to males, opine that their preferred party's leaders are reflective of the party ideology. Females and males are equally inclined to prefer no change of their party's name; they'd remain unaffected in their voting decision in the event of their party's name change. This is depictive of their loyalty to their party. Males, more than females, are satisfied with the party's works. Surprisingly, men would prefer to vote for the rival party where the leader defects to. Men are loyal to the leader instead of the party. For them, party leadership is more important as it's the leader who shapes the party's destiny. Females are more prone to party loyalty instead of leadership loyalty. Females are of the opinion that their preferred party is unpopular for pursuing radical

ideas or criminalization in their leadrship. Females are, ipso facto, favoring a change of the party leaders. Males are not much in favor of a change of political leadership. 40.47% males prefer a new political party to emerge as an alternative to their preferred political party; the corresponding figure for females is 42.85%. This indicates that females wish to have a new political party as a counter to their existing party. Probably, females are less satisfied with their party and leadership.

What are your overall views about the case study?

Brand perception of political parties was positively related to voter's decision-making. In a multi-party system, especially in developing economies, conceding that a majority of voters are uninformed and illiterate, political parties vie for maximum votes through several measures. Political branding is an important facet where the political parties attempt at forging association with the prospective voters. Political parties, which have been in existence for longer periods, are successful in impacting the generations together. Households take pride in associating themselves with a specific political party. Branding of political parties by projecting positive image about themselves assumes importance. Leadership of a party is very important and voters base their decision-making on the sound leadership. Party's ideology and philosophy should be appealing to voters and parties should aim at attracting all sections of the society cutting across caste and class divides. Development works must be undertaken with popular consent.

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