

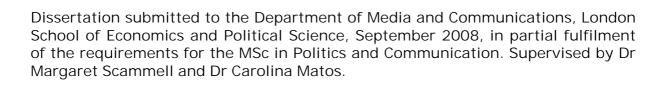
S lectronic Sc issertation Series

ompiled by rof Robin ansell and r art ammaerts

Branding in Election Campaigns: Just a Buzzword or a New Quality of Political Communication?

Manuel Adolphsen, Sc in olitics and ommunication

ther dissertations of the series are available online here
http www lse ac uk collections media lse mediaWorking apers



ublished by edia S ondon School of conomics and olitical Science S oughton Street ondon W The S is a School of the University of ondon t is a harity and is incorporated in ngland as a company limited by guarantee under the ompanies ct Reg number

Branding in Election Campaigns:

Just a Buzzword or a New Quality of Political Communication?

Manuel Adolphsen

ABSTRACT

2. THEORETHICAL CHAPTER

The *explanandum* of this study the phenomenon of political branding can be situated in various theoretical contexts. This could be for example the theory of a personalization of politics or arguments surrounding its emotionalization and blending with popular culture

This raises the question of how political branding has to be evaluated normatively or Scammell "branding is not easily categorized as a force for either good or ill" With its more engaging and interactive communication style it might have the potential for building a connection to voters who have turned their backs to politics Traditional political communication has left people confused and indifferent but political actors' adherence to the rules followed by commercial brands for the facilitation of 'brand connection' might empower and essentially repoliticize voters in the other hand branding might drive the substance out of politics and replaces it with glitz and style. While branding in theory, should always be based on a 'hard' product on substantive values and policies it can easily turn into a traditional marketing show that makes voters even more fed up with politics eedham draws up equally differentiated picture randing can increase political communication's comprehensibility and credibility and make it "more cognizant of and responsive to public opinion" owever it can also lack ideological grounding and stifle intra party life by subordinating all debate to the guidelines of the party brand

arberio and owe offer exclusively negative evaluations or the and arsin former "an over reliance on branded communications can all too easily shift into pure manipulation of the public and cause undue injury to the nation's fundamental democratic discourse" The emotional wrapping of political products which in other scholars' opinion might also bear potential for connecting to voters is seen as a suppressor of dissent as part of "demagogic rhetoric" arsin who treats branding as a way of stigmatizing political or opponents "political branding is not about reason giving in terms of rational critical debate" t is symptomatic for a media politics environment dominated by horse race reporting and tabloidization n his eyes "political communication and teledemocracy in the US is today best understood as branding in terms of marketing theory and it is a trend that is spreading across urope and globally" This rise of political marketing including the special technique of branding can partially be attributed to a secularization of politics which will be the topic of the next sections

t becomes apparent that secularization has turned the rigid politics of social cleavages and strong party loyalties into a more fluid and diverse system natead of ideologies mobilizing capacity now rests with single issues. Some scholars even speak of an era of "lifestyle politics" ennett in which political participation is a product of people's desire to "pursue freedom of expression and self realization" nglehart and Welzel of "considerable self reflexivity and identity management" ennet and yengar [forthcoming] and essentially a means of realizing "personal projects of managing and expressing complex identities in a fragmentin.

Sc issertation anuel dolphsen

Sc issertation anuel dolphsen

ads s elaborated above brand images are ultimately rooted in consumers' – or voters' – minds but can be nourished and contaminated through branded communication was interested to whether that branded quality was detectable in campaign communication

t has to be pointed out that my analysis was conceived in such a manner as to provide descriptions of both candidates' brand images as evoked in the advertisements. These descriptions alone however do not yet tell us much about the presence of purposeful branding is described above 'brand' is essentially a neutral concept describing a product's intangible values in this sense most — if not all — products possess a brand as they trigger certain emotions or connotations in this does not mean that these products are always advertised through branded communication brand images in consumers' minds can also be created through other things in griends' recommendations or the actual use of the product is elaborated earlier one can speak of branded communication only if a product is described as possessing distinct intangible qualities that make it clearly different from other products in the context of my analysis only obvious contrasts in the presentation of politically rather similar candidates could be regarded as evidence for branding

greatest limitation "y looking at aggregated meaning making across texts the method tends to skate over complex and varied processes of meaning making within texts" ibid The emphasis on larger patterns shifts the focus away from smaller details

DATA SELECTION I: THE CASE OF THE DEMOCRATS' PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES 2007/08

The emocratic arty's presidential primaries were selected as a test case for my residential primaries are party internal contests in which party members in some states also the wider public choose the candidate they would like to see running for the White emocratic primaries saw seven candidates applying for the party ouse The nomination olitics com The candidates receiving most attention were former irst illary Rodham linton and Senator arack bama with linton commonly seen ady Senator as possessing the highest chances of winning - until bama's surprising victory at the owa caucuses in anuary n the following six months linton and bama engaged in a close race and took turns between winning and losing in the different states on the end emerged as the candidate having secured more delegates linton suspended her campaign on une announcing her endorsement of bama

What makes the emocratic primary race highly suitable as a test case for an investigation into political branding is the special character of bama's campaign s already described above his campaign communication has been described as a carefully orchestrated branding operation ccording to pundits his "youthful look and multicultural persona" ew York Times owell ¶ resonated well with younger audiences and fittingly represented his 'change' ndorsements by many figures from popular culture some of whom released web videos in his support helped him to obtain "rock star status" The ndependent ¶ ence there seems to be a stark contrast between bama's political "movement" S ews Ververs \P and linton's "traditional campaign operation" Washington Post illizza while both candidates are said to be very similar politically urry This makes a good case for a comparative analysis

DATA SELECTION II: POPULATION AND SAMPLING

y analysis' population includes all TV advertisements broadcast by the campaigns of illary linton and arack bama between une bama's first spot after announcing his candidacy and une linton's final spot before conceding defeat of included are

web videos that were only published on the candidates' websites as well as spots released by s and other groups or individuals not affiliated to the campaigns of a spot was aired in several locally adjusted versions only one version was included in the population Spanish language ads were excluded

list of the titles and broadcasting dates of all ads was retrieved from the website of the olitical ommunication ab at Standford University The majority of spots could be found on YouTube and downloaded from there using special software Where YouTube did not provide the spots other online sources had to be consulted act heck org including the candidates' websites arack bama com illary linton com Through this procedure advertisements for linton for bama were obtained in total To reduce the number to a manageable size spots for each candidate were randomly selected with the help of randomizing software. The final spots that were statistically representative for all TV advertisements sample thus comprised broadcast by both campaigns during the primary season

DEVELOPMENT OF CODING FRAME

n order to measure both candidates' brand images as evoked in the advertisements developed a coding frame that was structured along the above mentioned model of brand components onsequently a number of variables explored the *boundary conditions* of the linton and bama brands i e which particular 'political product' the candidates advocated in the spots With the majority of variables the presence of *brand differentiators* was investigated i e how the candidates were 'emotionally wrapped' and whether 'low information signals' see section were revealed The general idea was to systematically collect detailed information about both candidates' brand images as conveyed in the ads so that conclusions concerning the use of branding cou

Sc issertation anuel dolphsen

Sc issertation anuel dolphs

linton bama followed by taxes linton bama a

Several other variables in my content analysis also aimed at measuring the various facets of the candidates' presentation and possible differences in this regard. The idea was to measure the

particularities of male and female fashion they at least give empirical backing to what some observers have called "the bama look" Wall Street ournal i e a more casual appearance compared to other politicians that is to stress his 'change' message

Figure 8: nclusion of campaign logo and slogan by candidate multiple codes per ad



Figure 9: motions evoked in ads by candidate multiple codes per ad

motion	linton	bama
--------	--------	------

f both remarks were found non applicable this study's final conclusion would be that branding in election campaigns indeed seems to be more like a buzzword used by journalists and pundits to describe certain features in campaigning or campaign organization t cannot be measured as a distinct quality of political communication in an intersubjectively verifiable way

5. CONCLUSION

This study was devoted to the phenomenon of political branding in particular to the question whether political branding lends a unique identifiable character to campaign communication in my theoretical chapter, the popularity of political branding was framed as a consequence of the secularization of politics. Where campaign messages used to target long established milieus and feature emotional connotations tied to social cleavages, today's parties and candidates might be trying to re introduce well resonating emotional themes in their communication activities and thereby restore closer ties between particular groups in society and political projects, urther reasons drawing political actors towards branding as deduced from marketing thinking's theoretical treatment of the concept might be its suitability for multi channel environments and emphasis on generating trust based relationships

The question of whether branding can actually be detected as a measurable quality of campaign communication was then investigated on the basis of the US emocratic arty's presidential primaries in which the campaign of Senator arack bama was commonly described as relying heavily on political branding. Through a quantitative content analysis of TV campaign advertisements in bama's campaign communication was compared to that of his main contender. Senator illary linton in particular, the composition of both candidates' brand images was investigated — with the hypothesis being that the bama campaign would communicate a comprehensively different brand from linton's and could therefore be seen as engaging in political branding.

The results of my analysis however revealed only a limited number of statistically significant differences in the presentation of both candidates. The greatest disparities could be found in the extent to which they relied on personality related rather than issue focused information as well as in the combinations of personality traits conveyed and emotions triggered—ther than that both political brands are very similar — a surprising fact—taking into account that the two campaigns have been described as employing different campaigning approaches and—bama as engaging in heavy political branding. This suggests the conclusion that branding cannot easily be detected in political communication — or at least not in a quantifiable intersubjectively verifiable manner.

This opens up a methodological perspective for the future research on political branding f the branding concept is to be treated not only as an analytical framework but also as a distinct

REFERENCES:

- resident us *Presidential campaign TV ads and video* ccessed une at http www president us tv
- arack bama com ccessed une at http www barackobama com
- arberio owe randing residential politics and crafted political communications *Paper* presented at the annual meeting of the merican Political Science ssociation Philadelphia ugust ccessed une at http www allacademic com meta p __index html
- ennet W ance The uncivic culture ommunication identity and the rise of lifestyle politics PS Political Science and Politics
- ennett W ance yengar Shanto forthcoming new era of limited effects The changing foundations of political communication *ournal of ommunication* ccessed une at http pcl stanford edu research bennett minimaleffects pdf
- lackett Tom What is a brand n R lifton Simmons ds rands and randing ondon The conomist
- lumler ay avanagh ennis The third age of political communication nfluences and features *Political ommunication*
- rady Will uly bama's media campaign randing our consciousness coessed une from http blogs guardian coluk art obamas_media_campaign_branding html
- reslau aren ebruary *illary looks beyond Super Tuesday* ccessed une at http blog newsweek com blogs stumper archive hillary looks beyond super tuesday aspx
- rymer huck What makes brands great n R lifton Simmons ds rands and randing ondon The conomist
- apella oseph amieson athleen all Spiral of cynicism The press and the public good xford xford University ress
- illizza hris ecember *or bama it takes a movement* ccessed une at http blog washingtonpost com thefix the_line_is_a_movement_buildin html olitics com

- oldenberg Suzanne anuary ills ngels how angry women of ew ampshire saved linton ccessed une at http www guardian co uk world jan hillaryclinton uselections
- ordon rown's PR trio uly ccessed une at http www telegraph coluk news newstopics politics labour ordon rown's R trio html
- rimaldi Vincent ovember *The fundamentals of branding* ccessed une at http brandchannel com features_effect asp pf_id
- allin aniel ancini aolo mericanization globalization secularization Understanding the convergence of media systems and political communication n sser and fetsch ds omparing political communication Theories cases and challenges ambridge University ress
- arsin ayson The rumor that "ohn erry is rench" ie haughty foppish elitist socialist cowardly and gay Paper presented at the annual meeting of the nternational ommunication ssociation San rancisco ay Retrieved une from

Sc	issertation	anuel	dolphsen
----	-------------	-------	----------

Romano ndrew b ebruary 'rno er b' r i 9 99cm T

Electronic MSc Dissertation Series

edia Ise lectronic Sc issertations will

resent high quality Sc issertations which received a mark of istinction and above Selected dissertations will be published electronically as pdf files subject to review and approval by the ditors