

POLITICAL MARKETING

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POLITICAL MARKETING

VOLUME III

Ethics, Practices, and Advances in Political Marketing

Edited by
Paul R. Baines



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The Political Brand: A Consumer Perspective

Gareth Smith and Alan French

Introduction

An important stream of research in political marketing has focused on modelling how voters learn about political parties and make voting decisions based on this information (Newman and Sheth, 1985; Burton and Netemeyer, 1992; Newman, 1999; O'Cass and Pecotich, 2003; Cwalina et al., 2004). While not developing a general model of voting behaviour, this paper considers the role of an important element of political behaviour, namely, how consumers learn about and make use of the political brand. To do this we adopt a consumer based, cognitive learning approach to the political brand. This approach allows for a wide spectrum of buyer behaviour and branding literature to be considered in the political marketing context and in so doing increases our understanding of the political brand's role in voting behaviour.

The paper first thinks about the appropriateness of considering political parties as brands. It then develops a theoretical explanation of parties as brands using a consumer/voter learning perspective. From this, the interaction between the leader, the party and policies are considered in terms of the overall political brand. This is followed by the identification and discussion of the main functions performed by political brands in terms of the benefits provided for voters. These benefits, it is postulated, motivate consumers to learn about, interact with and eventually help decide upon a political brand.

Having identified the current situation, the future of political brands is considered, and likely external pressures for change discussed. In addressing these important branding issues, examples are provided, largely from the UK political system, though it is assumed the basic principles apply to all 'first past the post' western democratic party systems.

Are Political Parties Brands?

Branding is increasingly used in non-traditional, social markets such as politics. For example, branding has been considered in such 'unlikely' organizations as the London Metropolitan Police (BBC, 2005), the Roman Catholic Church (Zinkin, 2004), and universities (Jevons, 2006). In fact, 'branding principles have been applied in virtually every setting where consumer choice of some kind is involved, e.g. with physical goods, services, retail stores, *people, organisations, places or ideas*' (Keller, 2002: 151) (emphasis added). It is axiomatic that political parties are *organizations* where politicians (*people*) seek to exchange *ideas* and promises for electoral support. Unsurprisingly therefore, there has been a steady stream of papers that have accepted political parties and or politicians as brands (Kavanagh, 1995; Kotler and Kotler, 1999; Harris and Lock, 2001; Smith, 2001; White and de Chernatony, 2002; Schneider, 2004; Needham, 2006; Reeves et al., 2006; Scammell, 2007).

However, the view that political parties are brands is not universally held. For example, it has been clearly identified that politics is different to other, commercial markets (Henneberg, 2006; O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2007).¹ Add to this the concern that, when branding has been applied in the political marketplace, it can produce unwanted effects such as narrowing the political agenda, increasing confrontation, demanding conformity of behaviour/message and even increasing political disengagement at the local level (Scammell, 1999; Lilleker and Negrine, 2003; Needham, 2005). For some at least, political parties are not soap powder brands and should not be treated as such.

These conflicting views in fact highlight an important point in the study of branding in politics; that there are two quite discrete ways of analysing brands (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). One focuses on brand management (i.e. the application of branding practices in a given marketplace to develop a brand's identity therein). It is this approach that has attracted the criticism above. Transferring practices from one market to another without respect for the differences between them is clearly problematic.

The other approach adopts a consumer perspective and focuses on how consumers learn about and are motivated by brands (i.e. how the image of the brand forms in consumer memory and subsequently influences consumer behaviour). We adopt the latter perspective and argue that political parties are brands because they act as brands to consumers. A brand is defined as

'A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors' (AMA, 1960). Political parties clearly satisfy this definition. The electorate have a high level of recall of their names (e.g. Republican, Democrat, New Labour, Conservative) and (to a lesser extent) their symbols (the elephant, donkey, red rose and tree respectively). Critically though, voters attach meaning to these party names and symbols over time and this allows them to differentiate and vote for one party over another at an election.²

Developing this theme, consumers have knowledge structures of political parties in much the same way they have for brands, for example Ford or VW (Schweiger and Adami, 1999). Indeed, consumer knowledge of the names of politicians, the 'brand values' of parties, specific policies, etc. has been seen to be largely accurate and consistent among electors (Schneider, 2004; French and Smith, 2008). This is not to say that the electorate is uniformly knowledgeable about political brands. A major feature of western politics is the increasing levels of disengagement with the electoral process. As such it follows that many consumers will have low levels of knowledge of political brands and few perceived benefits from voting. For them, political brands are weak. Conversely, political brands will be stronger for more involved, partisan voters (French and Smith, 2008). In this sense political brands reflect the variation in consumer response to brands generally (see John et al., 2006).

By adopting a consumer-oriented perspective for explaining and analysing political parties as brands we are also following the vast majority of the extant academic branding literature over the last twenty years (see Keller and Lehmann, 2006, for an overview). More specifically, this literature is based on the premise that consumers have an innate motivation to learn about and decide about brands, both to know where and where not to spend their money (vote/not vote) and to cope with the increasingly complex and over-communicated world that they live in. The application of this literature to political brands informs much of the rest of this article.

Conceptualizing the Political Brand as Consumer Memory

This way of viewing the brand is derived from cognitive psychology learning theory and in particular the associative network model of consumer memory.³ It accepts that, from a consumer perspective, brands are those associations about a particular object that are held in a person's memory (Keller, 1993). It postulates that brand knowledge is made from individual pieces of information or nodes. These nodes are linked together in memory to form a more complex associative network (Collins and Loftus, 1975; Wyer and Srull, 1989); in this context a network of associations about a given political party.

These may be recalled from memory when a node is stimulated from rest by a process known as activation (de Groot, 1989).

So, for example, the Conservative Party may be viewed as an information node to which other nodes may be associated such as its current leader, David Cameron (and associations linked to him like his youthfulness, interest in environmental issues, etc.); that it is the party of the countryside, low tax and so on. Seeing a party's leader on the television (or hearing their name/reading it in a paper) acts as a stimulus, producing spreading activation from memory to other political associations such as those mentioned above. Any association when stimulated has the potential to activate other brand nodes that are stored in memory. The types of possible associations held by voters of the political brand may be many and varied. Beyond awareness of the political brand and its leader will be the perceived benefits/drawbacks of the brand, its image, feelings towards it, experiences of the brand in action and so on (Keller, 2003).

From a consumer learning perspective therefore, the political brand is defined as an associative network of interconnected political information and attitudes, held in memory and accessible when stimulated from the memory of a voter (Smith, 2005).

Party, Leader and Policies: The Key Elements of the Political Brand

Political brands have three clearly distinct elements: a trinity with the party as the brand; the politician as its tangible characteristics; and policy as core service offerings (O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2007). However, assuming that political brands operate in consumer memory terms like other brands, not all associations will be of equal importance. Indeed, brand associations vary in their relative strength, favourability and uniqueness (Keller, 1993). Inevitably, the more positive (negative) these associations are, the stronger (weaker) will be the political brand for a given voter.

So, for example, if a party has a different (unique) policy, strongly and favourably associated with that party, in an area that is deemed important by voters, then that policy will be a powerful element of the brand. However, the competitive imperative for catch-all parties to move to the middle ground has ushered in an era of valence politics in the UK (Stokes, 1992). Currently, manifestos are very similar, with a general consensus over key policies (Budge et al., 2001; Whitely et al., 2005). Thus, when valence politics holds sway, policy will be perceived as less unique, less of a differentiator and thus a weaker element of the brand. Even when unique policies have existed recently, they have not been seen as important or very favourably received – as the Conservatives found with their Euro-sceptic stance and over immigration in the 2001 and 2005 general elections respectively.

The party as brand has been seen to have inherent strength because it offers the voter cohesion, recognition and predictability (Singer, 2002). Allied to this, the party brand can produce customer signals that are simple, credible, salient and continuous over long periods of time (Tomz and Sniderman, 2005). For example Labour's long-standing core brand values are, among others, the reduction of inequality and the promotion of social justice; for the Conservatives it is the championing of the individual and lower personal taxation, etc. These core 'meanings' are useful for voters who, once they have learned them, do not then have to relearn them over time. Interestingly, although the main UK parties have repositioned themselves (Labour under Blair and the Conservatives under Cameron), their core brand values are still largely intact. As such, the political parties have evolved rather than radically changed their brands' meaning, in much the same way as do many commercial brands.⁴

However, it is also clear that the strength of the party brand is not inviolable. When a party becomes disunited and/or sends conflicting messages to voters, the perceived cohesion of the party brand breaks down, its credibility is lost – and voters are notoriously disinclined to support a disunited party. The Conservative party experienced this under John Major and, most recently, so has Labour under Gordon Brown.

By comparison, the leader will often have the strongest, clearest and most impactful associative meaning, as his/her image/personality is more easily identifiable and communicated (through verbal and visual imagery) (Schneider, 2004). Of course, the leader's meaning is often uncontrollable in politics. Gordon Brown's public persona is dour while David Cameron's is youthful and fresh. These images of political leaders (both favourable and unfavourable) have been measured using Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale and voters have been found to have remarkably clear, strong and consistent views of their leaders' personalities (Smith, 2003; Schneider, 2004).

Prima facie, it would appear that a leader is, therefore, important in the transfer of his/her associations to the party brand. For example, the appointment of David Cameron as leader coincided with the Conservative Party's improved popularity. Source Credibility theory (Sternthal et al., 1978) provides a theoretical explanation of the means by which a politician may transfer his/her image to a party. Originally used to explain the celebrity endorsement effect, this theory suggests that the transfer of a message (and image) is influenced by the trustworthiness and expertise of the source. More recently, attractiveness has also been seen to affect credibility both for brands generally (Ohanian, 1990) and politicians in particular (Schweiger and Adami, 1999). For a fuller discussion of the literature and application to a political context see Henneberg and Chen (2007).

Further measurement, premised on the associative network model of the brand, has identified the mental maps held in memory by voters (French and Smith, 2008). These maps revealed, among other things, a complex interrelationship between the party, its leader and key policies. They also revealed

differences in the relative strength, favourability and uniqueness of party, leader and policy associations, within and between Conservative and Labour brands.

Overall then, we can summarize that the three key sources of associations of the overall political brand are highly interrelated in the minds of voters. Moreover, their relative importance in terms of the overall brand will vary depending on the competitive nature of the political market (i.e. the presence of differentiated or valence policies); the credibility, attractiveness and personality of its leaders; and the party's perceived salience and credibility in fulfilling its promises. The cumulative effect of these key associations will directly impact on voters' overall assessment of the political brand and how they will vote at an election.

The Function of Political Brands

Benefits, when perceived by consumers, provide a stimulus to learn about and act in relation to a particular brand. Theoretically, it has been suggested that brands can provide sociological, rational, psychological and cultural benefits for consumers generally (Keller, 2002) and voters in particular (Scammell, 2007). We integrate this broad taxonomic structure with appropriate theoretical contributions from the extant marketing and consumer behaviour literature to investigate how consumers may interact with, and gain benefit from, political brands. As alluded to, these benefits will vary significantly in their importance, with different benefits being valued by different voters. For some, few if any benefits will be perceived as important, resulting in a low involvement in the political process overall.

Political Brand and Social Benefits

Relationship partner The dyadic relationship between the consumer and a brand has been seen to be critical for the building of trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Indeed, the development of a positive relationship between the voter and the party has been forwarded as the *raison d'être* of political marketing (Henneberg, 2002). In the commercial sector, it has been identified that consumers form relationships with brands through consumption and that this provides strong and valued benefits for consumers (Fournier, 1998). Although such relationships have not been considered in politics, partisan (loyal) voters, for example exhibit similar characteristics to those identified as in a 'committed partnership' with a brand. The relationship is a 'long term, voluntarily imposed, socially supported union, high in love, intimacy and trust and a commitment to stay together despite adverse circumstances' (Fournier, 1998: 362). In 2005 the British Electoral Studies research (Sanders et al., 2005) identified some three million voters in the UK who through their

partisan allegiance were strong candidates for such a relationship with one of the party brands.

The 11 million voters with a 'fairly strong' identification to a given party are more likely to have a less intense, 'best friendship' relationship with a political brand (Fournier, 1998). 'Best friendships' are characterized by a perceived congruity in partner images (political brand and voter) with personal interests in common. However, unlike the 'committed partnership' which prevails through good and bad times, 'best friendships' are threatened by a major transgression from the partner (i.e. when the political party either fails to deliver or behaves in a way unexpected by the voter/partner).

The nature of the brand itself and its personality is seen to affect how such transgressions are interpreted by consumers and affect the relationship (Aaker et al., 2004). Thus, exciting brands are more readily 'forgiven' their transgressions. This may help to explain New Labour's continued popularity after the excitement engendered by its landslide victory in 1997, in the face of early scandals.⁵ Also, Boris Johnson, an exciting and unorthodox politician, was elected as London Mayor despite (or because of) his numerous transgressions and political gaffes.

Conversely, consumers are less forgiving of transgressions from 'sincere' brands (Aaker et al., 2004). As all political brands try to appear trustworthy and honest, transgressions pose a clear threat to political brand relationships. Labour's involvement in the Iraq War was seen as a transgression of the perceived relationship between it and many of its members. The party's sincerity was questioned when evidence of weapons of mass destruction was not forthcoming and allegations of fabricating the evidence of their existence surfaced. A surge of party membership resignations followed (more likely from 'best friends' than 'committed partners').

The political brand and community involvement Party activists with a strong brand relationship are also most likely to be part of a political brand community. A brand community is where consumers directly interact with the brand and, critically, other users of the brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander and Schouten, 2002). Such brand social relationships are maintained through personal interaction. In politics this is recognizable at 'brand conventions' such as constituency meetings and party conferences. Also, an increasing number of people are able to be part of a political brand community through online interaction. Thus, in the run-up to the 2008 US Presidential elections, the Obama camp successfully used an online strategy to create small social networks to recruit, energize and fund-raise among local activists and their friends. The campaign also highlighted the use of MySpace, Facebook and YouTube for developing an interactive, viral marketing-driven relationship with the Obama brand (Stelter, 2008). Social networks, with their potential for fund-raising and local canvassing, as well as providing brand community benefits to a large number of partisan voters, are likely to become an increasingly important source of future political brand relationships.

The political brand and cultural identity It has been identified that brands and their consumption can also provide cultural meaning to consumers (McCracken, 1986; Holt, 2002). Culture may be thought of as the entirety of a society's norms and values (Antonides and van Raaij, 1998). Brands have been shown to influence and reflect such societal norms and values (Kapferer, 1998). Internally, political brands can stand for positive cultural mores such as modernity (Labour in 1997; the Tories since 2005) or negative things such as 'old fashioned' and 'of the past' (Labour in the 1980s, the Tories from 1997–2005).

External signals such as the country of origin effect have been used by many commercial brands to signal benefits to consumers (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). German products are technically well made and reliable; Italian products are stylish and chic. The nation as a brand has been seen to stand for values, beliefs, norms, institutions and also a sense of common interests (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000). So, for example, Labour has sought to frame its policies on immigration, freedom of speech and religion within the British cultural values of 'tolerance and fair play'.

Democracy itself is, of course, a central value of a society which impacts on those political brands within it. In western democratic systems the perception of the institutions and offices of government (e.g. Parliament, House of Representatives, prime minister, president, etc.) – as opposed to specific parties and politicians – are well respected and valued by voters. Thus, consumers can use political brands to affirm their civic duty and attachment to these cultural institutions, over and above any benefits derived from the political brand itself.

To the extent that the political brand is associated with internal and external cultural values it offers the voter the ability to reinforce his/her own self-image (a psychological benefit, discussed later) and sense of belonging to a nation's core value-set (a cultural benefit) through the brand. Conversely, inasmuch as a person thinks negatively about politics (i.e. all politicians are corrupt; it has little impact on my life, etc.), he/she may well reinforce his/her own self-image by a considered decision not to vote.

Political Brands and Rational Benefits

Functional and economic benefits The basic idea of individual rationality, based on the economic theory of expected utility maximization, has been developed into a key model of voting behaviour (Downs, 1957). Put simply, this spatial model, based on Hotelling's (1929) theory of retail location, assumes that a voter chooses that party which comes closest to an 'ideal point' where his/her utility is maximized. The brand plays a key role in this process in that consumer utility will be informed by the functional and economic benefits offered by the political brand. Functional benefits from a brand are derived from features

of the service promised and they operate at the more basic level of consumer physiological and safety needs (Keller, 1993). Thus, political brands can offer functional benefits such as greater safety (through improved health care) and freedom from harm (via policies on policing, surveillance and wider national security). Financial security directly impacts on both physiological and safety needs. Any perceived economic benefit superiority of one brand over another is a likely powerful influence on voting behaviour. As the Bill Clinton aphorism would have it, 'It's the economy, stupid'.

In terms of functional/economic benefits, the government brand differs somewhat from opposition brands. The government has 'retrospective content' in that it can lay claim to actual performance (Butt, 2006). Opposition parties only have 'prospection', that is, the promise of performance (Sanders et al., 2005). As a result, on the economy in particular, challenger brands (as opposed to incumbents) tend to promise safety benefits to voters by following the economic policies (and spending commitments) of the government. This was done to good effect by New Labour in 1997 and more recently by Kevin Rudd in Australia's 2007 federal election.

Political Brands and Psychological Benefits

Political brand as heuristic Although economic and functional benefits are important potential benefits from political brands, the depiction of a typical voter as a rational being who carefully weighs up policies before choosing the one that maximizes his/her utility is not realistic. Many voters, faced with the high costs of learning about the complexities of the political brand, save time and energy by using heuristics to help them decide their voting intention (Sniderman et al., 1991; Popkin, 1994). For them, the associations they currently have of the party brand are sufficient, obviating the need to actively engage in new learning about a party, its policies and values (Forehand et al., 2004).

The underpinning theory is that humans are 'cognitive misers' (Simon, 1957) who use shortcuts to make reasonable choices with minimal effort in many consumption situations.⁶ In politics, the brand operates as a heuristic device at several levels (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001).⁷ The party itself (Labour or Conservative) and its perceived ideology (left or right) provide a beneficial heuristic for voters to assess a candidate. So voters do not need to learn specific party policies but generalize that Labour, and by association, their candidates, will support public services and the working class while the Conservatives will favour lower taxes and less state intervention, etc. Finally, the leader's image, as a major and often dominant part of the overall brand, has been identified as a heuristic for voter assessment of critical issues such as overall party competence, responsiveness and attractiveness (Clarke et al., 2004).

Moreover, the political brand has been seen to produce constraint (i.e. consistency) in voting decisions (Tomz and Sniderman, 2004). Despite the shortcuts used, such voting decisions have been seen to be consistent and leading to 'correct' decisions at elections (i.e. voters end up voting for a party/politician that, after more informed reflection, was in fact the correct one). As such, the brand heuristic performs a critical function for democratic systems.

Self-concept reinforcement through the political brand The self-concept is an organized structure of perceptions of one's self, which individuals store within their active memory. It is now generally agreed that consumers engage in buying behaviour that is consistent and congruent with their self-image. The more congruent the fit between an individual's actual or ideal self and those pertaining to the brand, the greater the preference for that brand (Malhotra, 1988). That is, consumers use brands to reaffirm their perceptions of their perceived self. The self-expression model of brand personality suggests that for certain consumers, 'brands become vehicles to express a part of their self-identity' (Aaker, 1996: 153). This may be their actual identity or ideal 'aspirational' identity and it can be summarized as those leader personality traits that voters admire and aspire to. Thus, a leader who has identifiable personality traits 'like me' or 'as I'd like to be' would be attractive to voters and the match with self-concept offers a short-cut to preference.

In addition, politicians 'unmatched' with a voter's self-concept can still be attractive to electors, as explained by the Relationship Basis personality model. As Aaker notes, 'Some people may never aspire to have the personality of a competent leader but would like to have a relationship with one, especially if they need a banker or a lawyer' (1996: 159) or indeed a prime minister or president. Certain brand personality traits, such as competence, honesty, sincerity, being down to earth (Aaker, 1997), even if not held personally, are still likely to be valued by voters and help them decide between possible party leaders.

Epistemic value and variety seeking with political brands Politicians and their parties also offer an epistemic value to some voters who have an innate desire for change caused by a sense of curiosity or just boredom with their existing brand's leaders/policies (Newman, 1999). Just as consumers can obtain pleasure by switching from something they know to something new, there is prima facie evidence that voters get bored with the same old faces, and leaders/governments pall after having their weaknesses and limitations exposed. There is a shelf-life with most brands, and consumers can get pleasure from brand switching – i.e. using their power to stop buying one brand (the government) and experimenting with a new, interesting brand on sale (an opposition party).

Variety seeking affects much buyer behaviour (Roehm and Roehm, 2005), particularly amongst non-loyal consumers/voters. Variety has been seen to

provide stimulation and novelty to bored consumers (Menon and Kahn, 1995). Brand switching has also been found to have consumer value in that it allows individuals to affirm their self-identity as unique/interesting (Ratner and Kahn, 2002). It is also known that some consumers have an intrinsic preference for varied experiences (Ratner et al., 1999). Just as many people want a change when they buy a new car, some consumers can derive benefit from variety seeking in politics too.

Future Challenges for the Political Brand

There are developments already observable in the political and wider consumer markets that will impact on all political brands and have far reaching implications for the political system itself. We have identified the range of benefits that the political brand provides for consumers. Of these, valence politics has had the effect of reducing the possibility of marked differences between parties on functional and economic terms, to the extent that they fulfil 'boundary conditions', setting acceptable levels of performance (Scammell, 2007).

This leaves the 'softer' cultural, social and psychological functions of the brand as the main sources of brand differentiation and motivation for voters. These functions operate at an emotional level and reflect practitioner and academic evidence that voters are increasingly using emotional intelligence to guide voting decisions (Burkitt, 2002; Richards, 2004; Westen, 2007). Tony Blair's 'reconnection strategy' during the 2005 general election is a clear example of the increased 'emotional intelligence' from political brands in response to changing conditions. A traditional strategy would have been to protect the prime minister during the election campaign from the media and angry voters. Instead, Blair was placed before hostile, live audiences to allow him to show contrition for mistakes made and responsiveness to the justified anger in the electorate (Scammell, 2007). This 'masochism strategy' allowed many voters to respond emotionally to Blair, who was asking for forgiveness for past mistakes.

However, more sophisticated branding strategies such as showing increased emotional intelligence will not be enough to placate the electorate in the future. Post modernism and its potential impact on the voter as consumer highlights significant challenges for political brands in the future (see Holt, 2002 for a dialectic analysis of this phenomenon). In particular, the consumer counter-culture implicit in post-modern thinking directly calls for a rethink about what are the political brand's functions (Dermody and Scullion, 2001). People, through greater affluence and choice, are empowered as consumers in their day-to-day lives. However, as citizens they are faced with increasing threats from which they feel powerless; be they terrorism, climate change and

population movements, or more local problems of decaying communities and anti-social behaviour. Higher levels of political disengagement have been attributed to, among other things, this empowered consumer–insecure citizen dichotomy, leaving politicians increasingly talking to ‘an empty stadium’ (Gould, 2003).

From the citizen–consumer dichotomy arises a radical requirement from political parties. The latter will have to satisfy empowered consumer citizens who want the political brand not only to do things for them, but also to act as a vehicle for achieving desirable outcomes for themselves. The post-modern consumer of the future will want greater choice between political brand offerings but also ‘self-actualisation, a world of connection, community and authenticity’ (Gould, 2003: 73). There is however, a paradox between consumers’ desire for different ways to fulfil their needs (i.e. greater choice) and the current political system that limits policy differences and brand choice (within effectively a two-party system).

Even accepting that greater pluralism is possible within the system, achieving greater connection (with a distant political elite), a greater sense of community (in an increasingly atomized society) and authenticity (in a combative political system concerned with point scoring) calls for a root and branch re-think as to what the political brand is for. For example, for consumers to see a political brand as authentic requires it to be seen as ‘disinterested’. That is, driven, not by a self-serving motive to achieve power and govern, but core brand values that are of relevance and use to consumers in living their lives and fulfilling their ambitions.

As for self-actualization, many will see it and politics as an oxymoron. However, if political brands can change to embrace these post-modern needs, they may also be able to set the mood music for the civic culture that encourages more consumer-citizens to actualize through, for example, charitable and voluntary community work.

It is not, however, evident that political brands will be allowed by consumers to make these changes. An increasingly powerful post-modern phenomenon is the anti global brands movement. It goes beyond consumer cynicism about the motives of brands to fundamental concerns consumers have over their detrimental effect on the environment, human rights and cultural and physical public space (Klein, 2000). Current political brands will, in the future, be in trouble if, as with brands such as Nike, Shell and McDonalds, they are seen as part of the problem, not the solution (Holt, 2002). The US, under Bush, did not ratify Kyoto. Retailers continue to sell products from sweatshops. Children are becoming obese while the brands that contribute to it target them unhindered.

Political brands clearly face a challenging future with the only certainty being that old strategies such as the occasional rebranding and change of leader will be insufficient to address the core concerns that consumers have of them.