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An Empirical Study in Voting Behavior and Political Brand

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Abstract: Political marketing is still a searchable arena especially in term of voter loyalty toward a political brand. This current study empirically attempts to examine the relationship between party trust and voter commitment with voter loyalty to overcome the limitations in the prior attempts. The data were collected from voters of "party brands" in three constituencies in Jordan. PLS-SEM techniques have been applied to a sample of 208 voters to test the hypothesized relationships.

Key words: Party loyalty, party trust, voter commitment, Jordan, limitations

INTRODUCTION

Brands are ubiquitous remarkably; they are part of the daily life of citizens (Dean *et al*., 2014). Historically, brands are the valuable asset for business' firms (Ahmed and Mort, 2016) and they are increasingly seen in nonprofit sector as a very vital aspect in building positioning strategy against competitors (Kylander and Stone, 2012). Of late, "political brand" is part of political speech (Nielsen, 2015). Farhan and Ahmad (2015) specifically argued that branding is a useful concept to understand "political party" as brand. Lees-Marshment *et al*. (2014) noted that the study of brands in politics is necessary because of its impact on the political and economic aspects of our society. Similar to commercial brands, Weber (2016) pointed that "political brands spending billions of dollars each cycle in hopes of "winning" the democratic process, allowing them ultimately to exert their policies upon the public, changing the political and policy landscape of their country, city, state, or nation"(p. 107). For instance, Buttrill (2016) affirmed that American political brands spent $7 billion at 2012 election to obtain voter loyalty.

Speed *et al*. (2015) observed that political branding is an area of multidisciplinary research. For an example, Ahmed *et al*. (2015) implemented political brand equity model. Scammell (2007) introduced consumer/voter model toward political brand. O'Cass and Voola (2011) illustrated the resource-based view to parties' capabilities. Guzman and Sierra (2014) discovered the political candidate's brand image. Smith (2009) focused on brand personality in politics. Moreover, political brand value was discovered by Nielsen and Larsen (2014). In a nutshell, Farhan and Ahmad (2015) concluded that the implementation of branding in politics is still relatively new and identifies many aspects for future studies. One of these aspects is "political brand" loyalty and their antecedents (Schofield and Reeves, 2015).

Brand loyalty is a vital strategy in commercial sphere (Huang *et al*., 2014) and it is importance in political context to deal with fluctuation and drop the voter loyalty internationally (Winchester *et al*., 2014). For instance, Nick (2015) pointed out to the death of brand loyalty in American politics. This was observed in Australia (Hughes and Dann, 2010), UK (French and Smith, 2010), Turkey (Gullupunar and Gulluoglu, 2013) and to be more accurate, in Jordan (Al-Azzam, 2012; Rwashdeh, 2013). French and Smith (2010) recognized that high loyalty prohibits the switching voters between parties. However, a few research conducted in this area (Hermanto *et al*., 2014). Schofield and Reeves (2015) noted that the research in "political party" loyalty is still remain rare. Parker (2012) noted the importance of antecedents of voter loyalty. Khan *et al*. (2015) emphasized that voter loyalty can be built by focusing on voters needs and political marketing strategies.

In the prior literature, several antecedents of voter loyalty toward political brand were investigated such as satisfaction (Hermanto *et al*., 2014a), Leadership (Hermanto *et al*. 2014b) and performance (Khan *et al*., 2015) whereas little intention was given to trust and commitment as vital constructs in buying/voting behavior which leads to decrease customer/voter turnover (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Banerjee and Chaudhuri (2016) claimed that creating higher exchange and loyalty between voter and political brand is needed. Ahmed *et al*. (2011) argued that trust is the main binding force in strengthening the relationship between the political brands and the voters.

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According to Ahmed *et al.* (2011), trust in politics needs to be probed closely. In the same line, commitment is a vital aspect in voter decision making and has been newly applied to political marketing (Winchester *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, it has not been clarified with the voter (Mahmud and Gray, 2011). Even if any, the prior studies in antecedents of brand loyalty had reported inconsistent findings (Gullupunar and Gulluoglu, 2013; Hermanto *et al.*, 2014a; Hosseini and Nahad, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to establish the relationship between brand trust and voter commitment, with loyalty regarding the context of Arab parties where the political marketing research is rare (Khatib, 2012).

Literature review

Brand loyalty (party loyalty): Brand loyalty is a vital concept in marketing for academics and practitioners (Ong *et al.*, 2016; Seyed *et al.*, 2016). Obviously, brand loyalty is defined as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1997). Earlier scholars presented brand loyalty in two aspects, namely "behavioral loyalty" and "attitudinal loyalty" (Aaker, 1991; Day, 1969; Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Keller, 1993; Oliver, 1999; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). In political marketing, Aygoren and Yilmaz (2015) followed the previous two aspects. As for the aspect of "attitudinal loyalty", it is defined as "the propensity to be loyal to a focal political brand, followed by a strong likelihood considering that political brand as a primary choice" (Mishra and Mishra, 2014). On the other side, behavioral loyalty is "repeat election" (Needham, 2006). In line with those scholars, "political party" loyalty is a combination of two aspects of loyalty. Therefore, the operational definition of party loyalty is: repeat purchase (vote for) the same party over time and make recommendations to others in order to vote for this party.

Needham (2006) noted the necessity of brand loyalty in politics. Winchester *et al.* (2014) posited the critical role of voter loyalty toward "political brand". Ahmed *et al.* (2015) revealed that party loyalty is a powerful method in shaping the attitudes of voters that eventually lead them to choose a preferred party among others. Mahmud and Gray (2011) argued that well understanding and familiarity with party can increase loyalty and help in building relationship. Dalton (1996) mentioned that in order to attract voter attention, political parties have focused in building brand (party) loyalty. Davies and Mian (2010) illustrated the influence of voter loyalty on parties and leader's reputation. Therefore, political brands leaders should stress the importance of loyalty to reach their political aims and to sustain their position in the political marketplace as well. In brief, loyalty of voters is the main factor that contributes to the success of political organizations.

Of late, much research has been examined in brand loyalty and their antecedents in different settings (Huang *et al.*, 2014; Huang and Ca, 2015; Moolla and Bisschoff, 2012) whereas a few in political setting as mentioned before. Aygoren and Yilmaz (2015) and Parker (2012) emphasized the issue mentioned above. In brief, Khan *et al.* (2015) added that loyal voters lead to lower the more efforts required for marketing and enhance the party performance. Specifically, it is needed in Arab context (Farrag and Shamma, 2014).

Brand trust [party trust): Brand trust is one of significant element in marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust is a key to build a relationship with others (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2009). Keller (2003) specifically argued that trust can destroy or improve a relationship between two partners. Consequently, understanding the nature of "political brand" trust and its contribution to obtain loyalty considers a particular interest to parties in order to develop the relationships with voters (Rachmat, 2014).

Trust occurs "when one part has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity" (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Johnson and Grayson (2005) reported that trust is comprised of two aspects, namely cognitive and affective. The first aspect refers to the willingness of the partner to rely on the service provider's competence and reliability whereas another aspect refers to an emotional view of partners to stay in the relationship. In this research, the cognitive aspect of trust is more related. Hence, party trust is "The confidence of voters in the political service providers" and "willingness of the partner (voter) to rely on political service provider's competence and reliability" (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Lassar *et al.* (1995) confirmed that previous definition.

The link between brand trust and brand loyalty can create relational exchanges that are highly valued (Tsiotsou, 2013); especially with the dilemma of distrust that faces political brands internationally (Ahmed *et al.*, 2011; Gullupunar and Gulluoglu, 2013; Hooghe *et al.*, 2011; Lantieri and Chiagouris, 2009). Henn and Foard (2012) noted that in UK "young people today have little trust or confidence in the political parties and professional politicians". Sherman *et al.* (2008) reported that trust is a vital issue in the political brand to win voter support. Ahmed *et al.* (2011) concluded that trust has very strong

influence on the electoral behavior. The same researchers asserted that "high level of trust shows that voters are fully confident and have faith in the political candidates, the low level of trust reflects that voters have no or very weak confidence in the political figures and they tend to develop a very negative perception about them". Trust seems to be producing a successful relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

In reality, brand trust has received more attention in research of relationship marketing (Chinomona and Dubihlela, 2014; Lee and Hsieh, 2011; Ramaseshan *et al*., 2013; Sabet *et al*., 2014) and neglected in political marketing (Rachmat, 2014; Mahmud and Gray, 2011). Nguyen *et al*. (2013) and Hermanto *et al*. (2014a) discovered trust as a vital component in developing loyalty toward the brand whereas Hosseini and Nahad (2012) reported contrary findings. However, due to mixed results, this study hypothesized that:

- H_1: There is a significant relationship between party trust and party loyalty

Voter commitment: Morgan and Hunt (1994) concluded that commitment is one of the major players in marketing field. In the literature of organizational behavior, the concept of customer/employee brand commitment has been covered widely (Amani, 2015; Richard and Zhang, 2012; Tu *et al*., 2013) whereas the concept of voter commitment to a "political brand" is a new construct (Gullupunar and Gulluoglu, 2013; Winchester *et al*., 2014). Winchester *et al*. (2016) confirmed that commitment is "an important element in voter decision-making". Hollanders and Vis. (2013) focused on voters' commitment problem as a new mechanism; whereas Winchester *et al*. (2014) argued that it should revisit the concept of voter commitment. In brief, voter commitment is required for a successful relationship in political marketing (Gullupunar and Gulluoglu, 2013).

Porter *et al*. (1974) noted that "commitment is the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization". This result is similar to the studies of Meyer and Allen (1984) and Moorman *et al*. (1993). In political brand (party) context, Gullupunar and Gulluoglu (2013) emphasized that "commitment to a party in terms of organizational commitment can be stated as that a voter's being identified with the party, his desire to maintain membership relations, having a positive attitude towards message and practices and having tendency to take an active role". Porter *et al*. (1974) presented one aspect of commitment "affective". Mowday *et al*. (1982) presented two aspects, namely "continuance and affective". Allen and Meyer (1990) added third aspect which is "normative commitment". More recently as stated by Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010), the affective aspect of commitment is an emotional attachment that influences the behavior and leads a person to put additional effort to achieve the organization's goals.

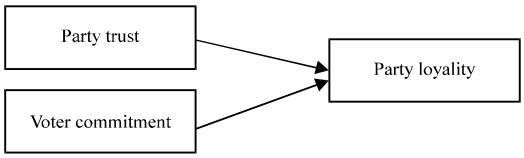

Fig. 1: The theoretivcal framework

In this research, voters "affective commitment" is more related. "Affective commitment" reflects a voter's psychological attachment to a political brand (Eisenberger *et al*., 2001; Lai, 2014). "Affective commitment" fits the voters setting and the emotional attachment with the party (Gullupunar and Gulluoglu, 2013). Commitment to the brand is the key to foster brand supporting behaviors during the delivery of the brand promise (Hasnizam *et al*., 2012). Lariviere *et al*. (2014) supported the roles of commitment in long term relationship. In the same thread, loyalty is the consequence of commitment (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008). To this end, parties need to specifically focus on a long-term association with a voter and generate loyalty as competitive advantages. Therefore, this study hypothesized that:

- H_2: There is a significant relationship between "voter commitment" and "party brand" loyalty

Theoretical framework: The theoretical framework is given as in Fig. 1.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is quantitative in nature to examine the proposed phenomenon deeply. It focuses on registered voters in three constituencies, namely "Mafraq, Zarqa and Aqaba" with respect to Jordan context. The total population of these constituencies was (366,602) voters in Jordanian election at 2013. This study has used the sample size table that presented by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), for a given population a sample size of 379 would be required to represent the population of this research, however, 208 respondents were considered to be appropriate for the analysis. Multistage sampling had been employed to select one constituency from each region in Jordan. Then, malls intercept survey using systematic random sampling has been used in

the main shopping malls in each constituency. The self-administered questionnaire has been distributed to respondents who are >18 years old between the end of (November, 2015) and the middle of (January, 2016). The "political brands" selected for this study are "Islamist, leftist, Arab nationalist and Jordanian nationalist". The sampling procedure is consistent with earlier revisions that employed "voters" as respondents (Halim and Ishak, 2014; Mishra and Mishra, 2014; O'Cass and Pecotich, 2005). Moreover, questionnaire is comprised of 17 items; they are modified with the political brand context, including "5 items" of party loyalty (Cater and Cater, 2010; Zeithaml *et al*., 1996), The "5 items" of voter commitment (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2009; Lai, 2014) and "7 items" of party trust (Ramaseshan *et al*., 2013; Kimpakorn and Tocquer 2010). 5-point Likert scale was used where "5" indicates strongly agree and "1" indicates strongly disagree. Pre-test and pilot test were used as well.

Data analysis

Preliminary data analysis: This study has employed SPSS Version 22 in descriptive analysis as well as cleaning the data. Among 208 respondents, the majority of respondents were male voters (58.7%), the age group of 26-45 obtained (56.3%) whereas in terms of academic qualification, (55.8%) was obtained by bachelor's degree. The findings revealed that (46.6%) of the respondents identify themselves with Islamist brand followed by (39.4%) of Jordanian nationalist brand. Regarding repeat voting, (73.6%) of the respondents emphasized that they voted one time or more. In brief, the results go along with prior revisions (Gullupunar and Gulluoglu, 2013; Guzman and Sierra, 2009; O'cass 2002; Parker, 2012; Winchester *et al*., 2014). Furthermore, even though this research has applied (PLS-SEM) technique to assess quality of model, all preliminary tests were run to scan "missing data; non-response bias; multicollinearity; normality as well as outliers and common method variance". The findings overstepped the recommended threshold value from prior revisions.

Measurement model: Second generation Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) version 2.0 M3 has been used to test the goodness of the measurements. In order to assess the reflective measurement items for this study, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) approach has been employed to evaluate both of convergent and discriminate validity (Hair *et al*., 2014). Hair *et al*., (2014) reported that to obtain convergent validity, factor loading and Composite Reliability (CR) should be >0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) >0.50. Additionally to measure the discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion has been used. Table 1 and 2 displayed convergent and discriminate validity, respectively.

Table 1: Convergent validity

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	Alpha	CR
Party loyalty	PL1	0.790	0.669	0.876	0.910
	PL2	0.812			
	PL3	0.748			
	PL4	0.856			
	PL5	0.878			
	PT1	0.734	0.574	0.876	0.904
	PT2	0.709			
	PT3	0.725			
Party trust	PT4	0.765			
	PT5	0.827			
	PT6	0.818			
	PT7	0.714			
	VC1	0.734	0.648	0.863	0.902
	VC2	0.843			
Voter	VC3	0.811			
commitment	VC4	0.830			
	VC5	0.804			

Table 2: Discriminant validity

Variable	PL	PT	VC
Party loyalty	0.818		
Party trust	0.713	0.757	
Voter commitment	0.786	0.698	0.805

Table 3: Path cofficient of hypotheses

H	Relationship	Std. β	SE	t-value	Dicision	p-value
H_1	PT->PL	0.322	0.077	4.177	Supported***	0.000
H_2	VC->PL	0.561	0.069	8.081	Supported***	0.000

As displayed in Table 1 and 2, both types of validity were achieved, since they overstepped earlier criteria.

Structural model: The results of structural model analysis discovered that (R^2) for PL is (0.670) as stated by Cohen (1988) this is a substantial measure; in addition, cross-validated redundancy (Q^2) of the model for PL (0.438>0) is larger than zero as mentioned by Hair *et al*. (2014). Table 3 shows the results of hypotheses testing.

As presented in Table 3, the results revealed that both of the hypotheses H_1 and H_2 are supported with ($\beta = 0.322$, $t = 4.177$; $\beta = 0.561$, $t = 8.081$, respectively). In a nutshell, all of hypotheses were supported.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis number one is accepted; trust of party has a significant impact on loyalty of parties and it also has been confirmed in Jordanians political parties' context. Furthermore, this result is in line with the prior research of Hermanto *et al*. (2014a) which found that party trust strongly impacts on party loyalty. It means that an increase in confidence in parties significantly affects the increase in voter loyalty; the higher value of trust in parties leads to the higher value voter loyalty. One possible justification can be stated that when the voters

feel that party is always reliable, trusty and have a good reputation, these factors increase the voter trust as well as enhancing the political brand image in voters' minds. Ultimately, party can be more easily branded.

Hypothesis two is built on the relationship between voter commitment and voter loyalty. The result concluded that voter commitment is strongly associated with party loyalty in Jordanian political parties' context. This result is consistent with the former studies (Ercis *et al*., 2012; Lai, 2014). The possible explanation of these results is that emotional tie is strong in Jordan which eventually impacts on the voting behavior of the voters. In other words, commitment of voters toward political parties in Jordan happened mostly on the basis of affective motivation; it is not based on a principle or ethical value. Thus, political brands must look at emotional tie as a key element for determining the voting behavior of Jordanian voters.

To summarize, long-term elements are subject matters in voter's preference. Since affective commitment and trust play such an essential role in voter relationships, marketers of political brands are advised to emphasize initiatives and activities that promote positive feelings of affiliation. Long-term relationships with voters can provide all kinds of advantages with respect to political brands and lead to more loyal voters.

This research comes up to investigate the relationship between party trust, voter commitment and party loyalty. From the theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to exchange theory in political brand context which rarely used in political marketing to understand voters' behavior especially in Arab context. Moreover, the research provides benefits to the policy makers in political parties to enhance the positions of parties compared with other competitors in political market and preparing recommended long-term strategies.

CONCLUSION

The results revealed that party trust and voter commitment have a significant and positive relationship with voter loyalty. This study discusses the results and offers an implication compared with prior versions. Recommendations for future research will be presented accordingly.

LIMITATIONS

The current study has some limitations that need to be considered when reviewing the results in term of sample size, the generalization of the results to other constituencies. The bigger sample size is needed. It is highly recommended that future studies should examine the antecedents of relationship marketing within or outside the context of study as well.

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