

# CAMPAIGNING IN THE ASCENDANCY OF POLITICAL BRANDING: THE GAINING MOMENTUM

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## Abstract:

*Modern polity is influenced by a plethora of factors. These aspects related to politics go in the making of a successful political party, leader and eventually a nation. At the same time, having a renowned politician as its frontrunner does simplify the things for a political party. In other words, the presence of a political brand is crucial for the success of a political party in today's times when even the field of politics is not untouched by fierce rivalry and competition. When one talks about the various factors which go in the making of an effective political brand, it becomes clear that there are multitudes of them. One such factor is campaigning. Having an effective campaign can do wonders for a political party or leader. As we know well that the visibility of any product increases the chances of its saleability. Same is the case with a political brand. Having a good product is one thing, making it visible and appealing to the customers is another one. This applies to modern politics also. This research paper would explore the concept of political branding to an extent and would try to establish a relationship between campaigning and political branding and how having an effective campaign could turn a political brand into a winning one. At the same time, merely having an effective campaign couldn't justify a weak political brand. This is what the authors have tried to present in this research paper.*

## **Introduction**

Campaigning in a political election is as old as the concept of election itself. Having an effective campaign has been one of the pre-requisites for a political party to establish its credential as a serious contender in that election. It is a phenomenon which helps the electorate to identify with the contending parties and make their choices. After the leader and manifesto of any party, it is the way in which it campaigns that makes or mars its prospects in a given election.

Traditionally, campaigning has been a phenomenon which has been done in the form of reaching out to the electorate thereby highlighting the deeds of the past (in the case of the incumbent government) and what they intend to do once they are voted back to power or by showcasing the loopholes in the current scheme of things (in the case of the opposition party/ies) wherein they go about lambasting the present rule of governance and what they would do differently to negate the 'misgovernance' being carried out by the incumbent government. Every party involved in an election goes about convincing the electorate of it being the right choice for that election.

Door-to-door campaigning has always been an effective means of connecting with the masses because listening to the views, issues, aspirations and critique of the common man is something which any party needs to pay heed

whether it is the ruling one or the one sitting in the opposition because in a democracy like our country, the fate of political parties rests in the hands of the common man every five years (or has been the trend in the past years less than the full duration of tenure, with a few exceptions of course, the most notable of it being the last general election); and it is through campaigning that the political parties try to reach to them and make the electorate a part of their larger scheme of things.

Many a renowned politicians have made their mark by their door-to-door campaigns. Gandhi ji took on-foot marches the norm during the pre-independence era, such is the effective of this form of campaign. Even in the post-independence era, many seasoned politicians like Jai Prakash used this form of campaigning to mobilize masses to resonate with their causes.

When we talk about campaigning in elections, the effect of same has been on the rise with each passing election. The increasing clutter with regard to the number of parties in the fray for an election has only enhanced the need for effective campaigning. The desired effect which political parties and leaders expect from campaigning is much and for this they go all out to ensure that their visibility and recalability is higher than their rivals. However, some of them succeed in the same while many don't.

Given the multi-party nature of democracy that India is, one can never underestimate the role played by effective

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campaigning in the success of a political party or the lack of it for those who end up on the losing side.

### **Political Branding: The New Paradigm in Indian Politics**

With the rise of awareness and connectivity among the masses of our nation, the political parties have felt the need to differentiate themselves from others. The ever-increasing clutter with regard to the political parties (at last count there were more than 1750 political outfits which exist at the national, regional and local levels) has only made it difficult for the electorate with regard to making their preferred choice of leader. It is here that the modern concept of branding has come to their aid.

It seems a novel concept to have the aspect of branding related to the field of politics but the reality is politics is just like any other field out there and the fundamentals of marketing are as much applicable on it as on any other field. Hence, political branding does make a sense to decongest the clutter and make sense of the choices which are at disposal in today's political scenario.

If one goes by the definition of what comprises a brand, there are many versions of it. Some of the popular ones are as mentioned below:

Brands have been around us since "the dawn of history" existing as trademarks (Danesi, 2006, p 10).

Brands are described as any visual symbols that identify a product or service (Danesi, 2006).

A brand is any combination of names, slogans, logos, symbols, shapes, colors, letters, signatures, product design, packaging, advertising, and marketing that together give particular products or services a physical, recognizable form that is visually distinctive (Williams, 2000; Clifton et al., 2009).

It is the last definition particularly given by Williams, Clifton et al, which resonates with the making of a political brand as it clearly says that 'any combination' which is visually distinctive (think of the myriad political parties' symbols and slogans in recent times) which are recognizable and one can tell the difference among them.

When it comes to imitating a popular brand, it is the same story everywhere. Each of the contenders in any market tries to replicate the success story of the winning brand in one form or the other. Even if look at the popular art forms like cinema or literature, there are prequels, sequels and remakes of umpteen titles and then there are franchisees, 'inspired' works, spin-offs, you name it. This doesn't even include the blatant misuse by others of blindly copying but mostly failing the strategies as adopted by the winning brands. How could the political scenario be any different!

In the recent years particularly we have seen the rise of some very strong political brands at the national as well as state levels. Here we need to understand that by claiming how strong a political brand is, we intend to highlight the ability of the leader to take her/his party across the winning line riding on her/his charisma alone.

We need to remember the miraculous victory by the BJP-led NDA in the last general election of the country which would go down in the history of India as the one in which a non-Congress majority government was formed at the central level by a single party thanks to the stupendous success which brand Modi enjoyed over its rival brands. At the same time, there have

been such strong regional political brands like J Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee, Nitish Kumar, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mayawati, Sharad Yadav, N Chandra Babu Naidu, Prakash Karat, Naveen Patnaik, Farroq Abdullah, M Karunanidhi that they enjoy a loyal following in their respective home states. Then there are such leaders like Arvind Kejriwal who are famous for their unique mode of connecting with the common people (the name of the party itself is Aam Aadmi Party!).

Much of the charisma and popularity which these iconic leaders enjoy either at the national or state level has much to do with the way they campaign during the various elections in which they present their candidature among the masses. Thus we can say that campaigning does play a crucial role in the making of a political brand and the success of it. At the same time, we need to understand the effectiveness of a political campaign is directly associated with the charisma of the leader and just having a high voltage political jamboree doesn't necessarily translates into success but what it essentially does is to present the leader in the limelight among the common people.

### **Reinforcement Effect of Campaigning on Political Branding**

Basically, Indian brands are lagging behind their global counterparts in engaging with consumers against criteria such as functional and social identity, emotive and symbolic perceptions, among others (Source: TNS Global). Also, brands in India are not consistent with their communication. But there have been instances in the past few years when some political brands have managed to do that. Brand Modi during the last general election is a case in point. Then there is brand Kejriwal which did tremendously well in the Delhi assembly poll or for that matter brand Nitish in the recent Bihar assembly polls.

What separates modern election campaigning from the past ones is the hi-tech version of the same. Gone are the days when election campaigning was done in the forms of rally alone. We can say that rallies are still the most common and popular medium of connecting with the masses as far as election campaigning goes, but there are other avenues also which have made their presence felt thanks to the ever-increasing 'connected' Indians who have taken to internet, mobile internet specifically, in the same way as fish to water.

Online campaigning has played a crucial role in the making as well as unmaking of a political brand. What one needs to understand and appreciate about the online platform is that it is a great leveler. No one party or leader can claim ownership of it unlike a physical venue which is allotted, albeit briefly, to a particular leader to voice her/his opinion on various issues. The online public is much smarter than the offline one and is free to express themselves on the points made out by the political parties and leaders making this platform two-way and engaging. The real testing of the efficacy of a political brand is to be gauged online rather than offline as the continuous scrutiny and comments test them for their ability to hold their sway on other or fade away in oblivion.

Then there is the new poster-child of campaigning, digital crowdsourcing which invites the online community to share their views on various issues and based on the feedback received, the leaders form their policies and action plans. The believability and connectivity associated with this unique and

novel concept helps a political brand to connect better with the masses and more importantly gives a concrete idea about the expectations of the people and how to deliver on the same. We need to remember that great brands are made up of better stuff than their rivals and concepts like this certainly go a long way in ensuring the same.

The reach of the digital media, newspapers, magazines, radio have their own say in the overall scheme of campaigning done by a political party and in the making of a political brand. What the elections of recent years have taught us is the plain fact that campaigning does play a crucial role in putting a political brand in limelight and that there are multiple novel ways by which a political party can connect with the masses. The better the campaign strategy, the more is the recall factor. At the same time, one definitely needs to factor in the modern aspects of campaigning which have characterized the political brands of today.

#### Conclusion

The above discussion does give us a fair bit of idea how campaigning has evolved with the passage of time and how it could help in the making of a successful political party and the relatively modern concept of political brand. What a political party needs to understand is the prudence which it needs to exhibit whilst using campaigning in the modern context as the voter of today is much informed, connected and expects more from the leaders whom s/he votes for. At the same time, the parties need to embrace the modern avenues of campaigning (which most of them have already done) and use them in such a way that they could connect with the contemporary voters in a much better way thus upping the believability aspect of it. The two-way nature of the modern-day campaign avenues brings many opportunities and challenges with them and to harness the same political parties need better political brands which could reinforce the beliefs of their followers along with the demands of today's political paradigm.

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