

A qualitative study revisiting the theoretical lens of brand image and developing the consumer brand image schema

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Qualitative
Market Research:
An International
Journal

147

Received 21 September 2023
Revised 14 March 2024
24 July 2024
Accepted 9 September 2024

Abstract

Purpose – Brand image remains a “nebulous” construct with very few frameworks dedicated to understanding the process of uncovering brand image. This is supported by explicit calls for greater clarity on how to examine brand image, particularly in different settings. Political branding is one setting that has received some attention, however, research has focused on “party” political brands and neglected “non-party” brands (independent candidates). Therefore, this study aims to examine how young citizens interpret independent non-party brands through the theoretical lens of brand image in the context of Guernsey and develop a systematic brand image framework that provides greater clarity to this topic area.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative interpretivist approach using focus group discussions was adopted to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of young voters 18–24 years of age. Focus group discussions ceased upon reaching theoretical saturation and a six-staged thematic analytical strategy was adopted to analyse the findings.

Findings – This study revealed deep insight into the political brand image of non-party brands from the perspective of young voters in an under-explored context. More specifically, this study uncovered that Guernsey’s political brands were seen as “accessible”; however, there was little differentiation, identification and connection between young voters and politicians. Further, this study uncovered a series of opportunities for strategists such as the desire for a younger generational view and younger representation in the Guernsey Parliament and greater clarity, distinction and authenticity related to political brand image.

Originality/value – This study addresses explicit calls for further research on brand image with a distinct focus on non-party political brands. Further, this study concludes by presenting the “consumer brand image schema”; a systematic framework which can be used to uncover brand image within and beyond the setting of politics. Further, the framework operationalises the complex concept of brand image and provides a three-stage process to examine and develop brand image. This will enable strategists to develop targeted strategies and adopt appropriate tactics to manage brand image to ensure brands are differentiated and interpreted as authentic, reliable, engaging, accessible and identifiable.

Keywords Brand image, Political branding, Political brands, External perspective, Qualitative research

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Brands are complex, multifaceted entities irrespective of their setting, industry and discipline. Brands are an amalgamation of strategy, tactics, structure, communication messages, values



and culture developed to convey what organisations represent and designed to appeal to their target market (Le Roux and Du Plessis, 2019). Indeed, successful brands are clear, consistent and engaging in terms of the tangible and intangible features which underpin a brand's existence (Grimm and Wagner, 2021). Understanding the perceptions, attitudes and opinions consumers associate with brands remains an important area of marketing and consumer research (Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017). Indeed, all brands are strategically positioned to demonstrate differentiation from competitors, present unique qualities and designed to encourage identification (Lee and Atkinson, 2019; Hofmann *et al.*, 2021; Panda *et al.*, 2019). Researchers have examined the perceptions and opinions of brands through diverse theoretical lenses ranging from brand identity, equity, personality, reputation and brand image. Examining *brand image* remains "crucial" for branding practitioners, researchers and academics as the concept is a key theoretical lens to understand how consumers interpret, feel and behave with brands (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017: 227; Savitri *et al.*, 2022). Further, brand image is "one of the core essences in branding" (Setiawan *et al.*, 2021: 3) and is fundamental for developing and managing brands (Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017: 251). Nevertheless, the construct is "nebulous" (Chan *et al.*, 2018) and varied in terms of conceptualisation (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Hartono, 2022; Keller, 1993; Malik *et al.*, 2012). Further, there continue to be explicit calls for further research and more understanding of brand image particularly in different settings and contexts.

One area that has received some attention is the application of the concept of brand image to the political environment. Indeed, existing research on *political brand image* has tended to focus on the positioning of *political parties* rather than the attitudes, benefits, associations and attributes of *candidates or politicians* (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Pich and Dean, 2015; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2015; Jain *et al.*, 2017; Pich *et al.*, 2020). Further, existing studies have examined the brands of politicians affiliated with political parties and the leaders of political parties and neglected the brands of independent and unaffiliated elected representatives (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Guzmán *et al.*, 2015; Opara, 2022; Pich *et al.*, 2020; Van Steenburg and Guzman, 2019). In addition, there are explicit calls for future research to examine the brand image of non-party political brands (candidates), which remains a neglected area of study (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Pich and Dean, 2015; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2015; Jain *et al.*, 2017; Pich *et al.*, 2020). Finally, existing research investigating political brands has also tended to focus on established electoral settings dominated by party politics (Jain and Ganesh, 2019).

To frame this study, the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey served as an appropriate context. Guernsey has a long history of being independent and unaffiliated (Pich *et al.*, 2020). Further, Guernsey has its own directly elected legislative assembly known as the "States of Deliberation", which has its own administrative, fiscal and legal systems and its own courts of law (www.gov.gg). Therefore, Guernsey's 38-seated parliament continues to be dominated by non-party political brands (Reardon and Pich, 2021). Responding to the identified gaps, this seeks to understand the brand image of non-party political brands in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey from a young citizen perspective and develop a brand image framework which will provide greater clarity to the concept of brand image and support strategists as they develop and manage brands. Further, this study seeks to develop a brand image framework which will provide greater clarity to the concept of brand image and support strategists as they develop and manage their brands. In the *first* section, we critically discuss the theoretical background for this study followed by our research objectives. The *second* part presents our research methodology, while the *third* section presents our empirical findings structured via three themes emergent from our six-staged thematic analysis and discusses our findings in relation to the existing research and presents

our developed framework. The *final* part outlines the implications of our research for marketers and academics and concludes with the identification of areas for future research.

Literature review

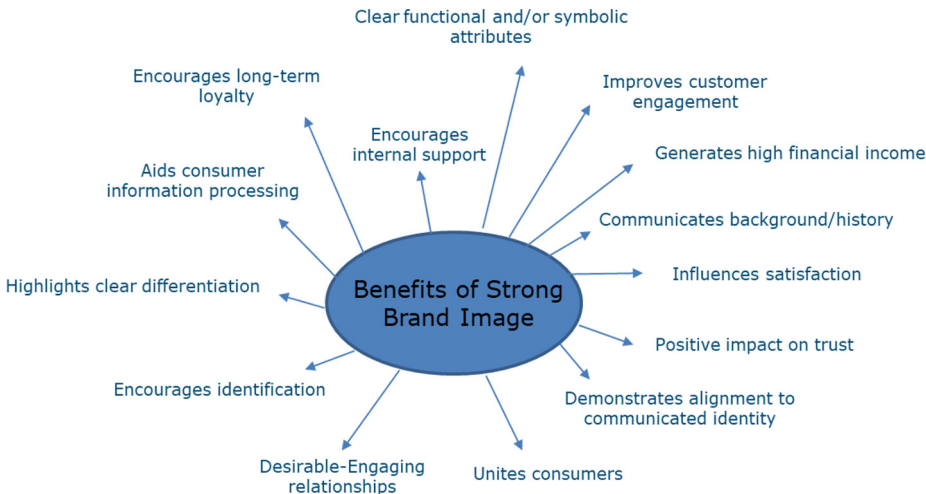
Brand image

Brand image has been described as “a set of consumer beliefs about a particular brand” (Savitri *et al.*, 2022: 186) and a “fairly concrete initial articulation of user and usage imagery” (Keller, 2001: 24). Further, brand image has also been characterised as a “spontaneous” (Lahap *et al.*, 2016: 150) summary of “beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, ideas, relevant behaviours or impressions that a person holds regarding an object, person or organisation” (Panda *et al.*, 2019: 237; Pich *et al.*, 2015; Bosch *et al.*, 2006; Einstein, 2008; Chen, 2010; Keller, 1993). Similarly, brand image is shaped by brand identity signals (Propheto *et al.*, 2020), personal experiences, conceived expectations and “structured around a set of associations that are usually organised in a meaningful way” (Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017: 228).

Benefits-implications of brand image

Understanding and reflecting on the current positioning and imagery associated with a brand is an important strategic stage of the brand management process (Azam and Qureshi, 2021; Pich *et al.*, 2020). Further, it has been suggested that establishing a “strong brand image is inevitable to ensure the overall organisational success” (Lahap *et al.*, 2016: 149). Research suggests that a successful brand has a clear, differentiated and engaging brand image, which can lead to several benefits (Cevallos *et al.*, 2020; Panda *et al.*, 2019; Zia *et al.*, 2021) outlined in Figure 1.

A brand that possesses a strong, coherent, trustworthy image has the potential to build long-term meaningful relationships with consumers (Bilgin and Kethüda, 2022; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017; Propheto *et al.*, 2020), which can lead to loyalty and long-term satisfaction



Source: Created by the authors and inspired by Pich and Armannsdottir (2022)

Figure 1. Benefits of successful brand image

(Cretu and Brodie, 2007; Savitri *et al.*, 2022). Further, a strong brand is often the result of alignment between external brand image and internal brand identity (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018). Brand identity represents a related yet distinct concept which is developed, managed and communicated by the brand's creators and manifested by consumers (Pich *et al.*, 2020). Congruence between communicated identity and understood image needs to be as aligned as possible to ensure brands are deemed authentic and resonate with multiple stakeholders (Pich *et al.*, 2020; Savitri *et al.*, 2022). In addition, "a strong image is the result of the company's long history and the ability of the products produced by the company to be widely consumed and pose a threat to competition" (Propheto *et al.*, 2020: 742) and can "improve corporate esteem, financial performance [...] revenue and degree of profitability" (Lahap *et al.*, 2016: 150).

Despite the list of benefits and positive implications of creating and maintaining a strong brand image, brands with an undesirable, confusing, unbelievable or weak image produce the opposite effect to the benefits set out above (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018). It must be remembered it can be problematic for the company to manage brand image as they cannot have full control of how consumers thought process (Nielson and Surrey, 1998; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2015). It must be remembered it can be problematic for a company to manage its brand image. For instance, consumers can have pre-existing associations undesired by the brand's creators. In addition, consumers may misinterpret the projected brand identity signals created and communicated by the brand's creator (Nielson and Surrey, 1998; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2015). Similarly, brand image can be influenced by competitors and entities other than the brand's creator who often attempt to express undesired or contrasting associations and imagery with the aim of destabilising the narrative and establishing confusion about the desired brand image (Pich *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, exploring brand image can potentially reveal undesirable perceptions, attitudes, characteristics and attributes associated with brands (Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017). A brand with a weak or unfavourable brand image can confuse consumers and have a negative influence on loyalty, purchase intention, satisfaction and engagement (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Gaustad *et al.*, 2019; Grimm and Wagner, 2021; Hartono, 2022). Therefore, brand image can be considered a "dynamic and complex" area of study (Panda *et al.*, 2019: 237) and understanding how consumers positively and negatively perceive brands is "essential for successful brand management" (Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017: 227). Nevertheless, further exploration is needed to advance understanding of perceived brand image and the experiences consumers have with brands (Azam and Qureshi, 2021). However, this raises the question of how to operationalise the exploration of brand image.

Dimensions of brand image

The existing literature appears to broadly conceptualise brand image into two schools of thought. Firstly, brand image can be divided into two components: *functional image* and *symbolic image* (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; He and Lai, 2014). More specifically, *functional image* refers to the tangible features, perceptions of usefulness, benefits, communications, capabilities and practical benefits of a brand (He and Lai, 2014; Lee and Atkinson, 2019). In contrast, *symbolic image* refers to a brand's intangible features such as its perceived values, positioning, uniqueness and emotional connection with consumers (He and Lai, 2014; Lee and Atkinson, 2019). Secondly, brand image can be conceptualised through three dimensions such as attributes, benefits and attitudes (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Keller, 1993; Malik *et al.*, 2012; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017; Propheto *et al.*, 2020). Attributes are defined as "descriptive features that characterise a product or service, what a consumer thinks the product or service is or has and what is involved with its purchase or consumptions" (Keller, 1993: 4). These are product

attributes, price, packaging user and usage imagery. Benefits are the personal value consumers devote to the product or service attributes. This is what consumers think the product or service can offer them (Keller, 1993; Malik *et al.*, 2012; Propheto *et al.*, 2020). Finally, brand attitudes are defined as consumers' overall evaluation of a brand (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Keller, 1993; Propheto *et al.*, 2020). Further, brand attitudes are considered significant because they often form the basis of consumer behaviour, for example, their brand choices and link to the benefits and implications outlined earlier in the paper (Propheto *et al.*, 2020). However, after briefly discussing the two schools of thought, it appears there is an overlap with the dimensions and components of brand image. For instance, the conceptualisation of the attributes dimension and benefits dimension appear similar to the functional component of brand image (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Malik *et al.*, 2012). Likewise, the conceptualisation of the attitudes dimension appears to include similar aspects of the symbolic component of brand image (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Malik *et al.*, 2012). There appears to be similarity and implicit agreement within the literature as to how to define and examine brand image (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Malik *et al.*, 2012; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017).

Irrespective of the school of thought, brand image can be described as a multidimensional construct (Malik *et al.*, 2012; Martinez and De Chernatony, 2004) and brands can be examined through single or multiple dimensions or constructs (Malik *et al.*, 2012; Martinez and De Chernatony, 2004; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017). The literature implicitly suggests that adopting multiple dimensions rather than single dimensions will reveal deeper insight and greater understanding of the perceptions, associations and imagery ascribed to brands (He and Lai, 2014). In-depth understanding of brand image has the potential to guide internal stakeholders as part of the brand management process (He and Lai, 2014) and lead to a variety of benefits as discussed earlier in the paper. Indeed, Plumeyer *et al.* (2017: 251) maintain that understanding, measuring, creating and managing the image of brands have "become important aspects of strategic brand management and they are increasingly emphasised in the academic literature". Perhaps amalgamating the two schools of thought as part of an empirical study will go some way in addressing the critiques and challenges associated with the concept of brand image and provide greater clarity on how to explore/examine brand image (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Malik *et al.*, 2012; Pich *et al.*, 2020; Le Roux and Du Plessis, 2019), particularly as debate continues around how to understand, explore and measure brand image (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Martinez and De Chernatony, 2004; Pich *et al.*, 2020). This in turn will address the explicit calls for further research on brand image (Azam and Qureshi, 2021; Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Gaustad *et al.*, 2019) and in different contexts and settings (Aghekyan-Simonian *et al.*, 2012; Hofmann *et al.*, 2021; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017; Setiawan *et al.*, 2021). One area that has received some attention is research on political brand image.

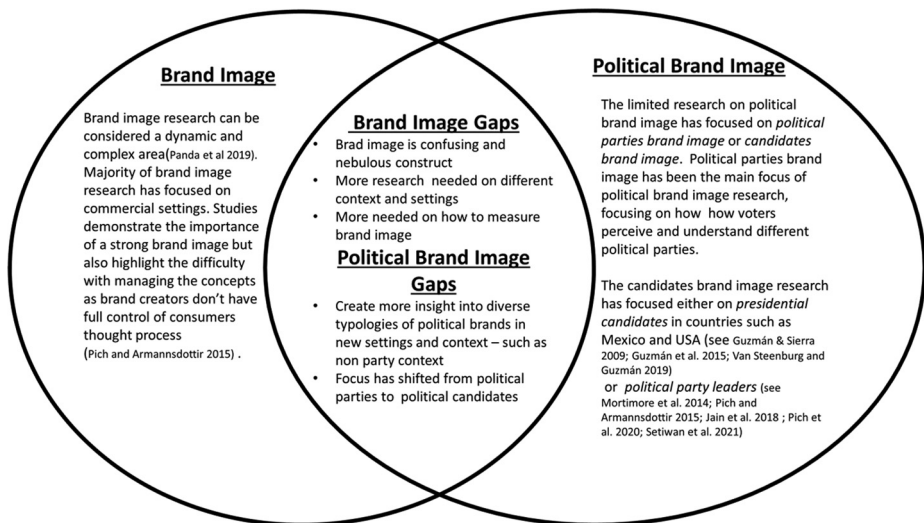
Political brand image

Whilst research in the field of political branding has received some interest in the past few decades, there are limited studies focusing on brand image from external stakeholders' points of view and this is supported by explicit calls for further understanding and studies devoted to this topic area (Pich *et al.*, 2020; Van Steenburg and Guzman, 2019). A short catalogue which outlines the limited research on political brand image can be seen in [Appendix](#).

Similar to existing research in the commercial setting set out earlier in this paper, political brand image has been defined as the "manifestation of the communicated identity combined with perceptions, associations, and attitudes in the mind of the citizen or voter" (Pich and Armannsdottir, 2022: 16). Political brand image is seen as the voters' understanding of the political brands, both tangible and intangible elements, as well as perceptions about how the brand will perform and any direct or indirect experiences voters will have of these brands (Nielsen, 2017; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2022). It should also be authentic, unique and

differentiating. Further, “for a political candidate or party to achieve phenomenal support in the vote market, the candidate or party must have brand image” (Opara, 2022: 18). Therefore, it is important for politicians to understand how voters develop their attitudes and access the associations to better establish a positive relationship with them. Further, a political brand’s image should be routinely monitored to make sense of how the brand is positioned in the mind of the consumer and capture the current impression, which will support the process of brand management (Plumeyer et al., 2017: 227). Similarly, examination of brand image is “critical”, as it provides insight and understanding of consumer relationships, interactions and interpretations of brands (Chan et al., 2018; Lee and Atkinson, 2019).

Nevertheless, the limited research focusing on political brand image has mostly focused on image of political parties and its leaders’ brands (French and Smith, 2010, Pich and Dean, 2015; Setiawan et al., 2021; Das Gupta and Sarkar, 2021) who play a crucial role in influencing voting intention (Van Steenburg and Guzman, 2019). Few studies have investigated brand image of presidential candidates and how voters self-referencing or self-brand image influences their perception of the brand image of candidates (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009; Guzmán et al., 2015; Van Steenburg and Guzman, 2019). All these studies have demonstrated the importance of understanding the process voters go through when evaluating presidential candidates (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009) and capturing the perceptions and associations with parties and/or candidates, as this can impact voter behaviour (Pich and Dean, 2015; Jain et al., 2017, Jain et al., 2018; Pich et al., 2018). Further, several studies have applied or created brand image frameworks that can be used in political contexts. However, existing studies tend to focus on established political party systems and focus on political party brands rather than direct attention to non-party brands (independent candidates). In addition, researchers highlight that future research should focus on unexplored settings and different types of political brands (Guzmán and Sierra, 2009;



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Figure 2. Gaps in political brand image research

Pich and Dean, 2015; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2015; Jain *et al.*, 2017; Pich *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, gaps in the existing body of knowledge continue to exist as outlined in Figure 2.

Existing research in this area often investigates brand image with additional concepts such as brand personality, brand equity and brand positioning rather than solely focusing on the theoretical lens of brand image (Pich *et al.*, 2020). However, brand image remains a distinct concept (Lee and Atkinson, 2019; Panda *et al.*, 2019) and perhaps sole focus on this distinct theoretical lens will address many of the challenges associated with this often “interchangeably used” and “nebulous” concept (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Hartono, 2022; Keller, 1993; Malik *et al.*, 2012). Returning to the political context, Opara (2022: 25) argues that “positing that brand image has shifted from the party to the candidate’ amplifies that further research is needed on candidates, as this focus appears to be under-researched especially from an exploratory perspective”. Existing literature highlights the importance of a deeper understanding of voters’ perceptions and associations (Pich and Armannsdottir, 2022; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2018) and the need to create and/or adapt brand image frameworks (Pich and Armannsdottir, 2018; Pich *et al.*, 2020) to better explore political brand image.

Context – the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey

One jurisdiction that has a long history of independent politicians is the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey. Guernsey is a self-governing sovereign island-state situated in the English Channel, 30 miles from mainland France and 70 miles from the south coast of the UK. The Channel Island of Guernsey is not a member of the European Union nor part of the UK (Reardon and Pich, 2021). Guernsey has a population of just over 63,000 and has an established directly elected Parliament [known as the States of Deliberation], made up of 38 Parliamentarians (known as Deputies) (www.gov.gg). Once elected, Deputies would vote as individuals and govern by consensus (www.channelislands.eu). Up until 2020, Guernsey had no political parties and politicians were independent and campaigned as individuals without the support and resources of the “party machine” (Reardon and Pich, 2021). However, ahead of the 2020 General Election three new political parties were formed – the Alliance Party Guernsey, the Guernsey Party and the Guernsey Party of Independents (www.gov.gg). Nevertheless, the new political parties failed to make a breakthrough at the 2020 General Election and independent politicians continue to dominate the political landscape in Guernsey (www.election2020.gg). Therefore, Guernsey and its independent politicians served as an appropriate context to frame this study. Subsequently, this study seeks to:

- Understand the brand image of non-party political brands from a young citizen perspective in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey.
- Develop a brand image framework which will provide greater clarity to the concept of brand image and support strategists as they develop and manage brands.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodological approach, as it aims to investigate the brand image of non-party political brands from the perspective of young citizens and understand how young citizens engage with political brands in a non-party context. A qualitative interpretive methodology is an appropriate approach as it enables researchers’ to inductively recover and gather rich information to deepen our understanding of the subject area (Gephart, 2004; Hollebeek, 2011; Singh, 2015; Trochim and Donnelly, 2007). Indeed, a qualitative interpretive approach “is committed to understanding social phenomena from the actor’s own perspective” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984: 2) and endeavours to explore the

meaning attributed to situations, experiences, behaviours, perceptions and associations (Gambetti *et al.*, 2015; Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Focus groups

Focus group discussions often referred to as group-based interviews (Hofstede *et al.*, 2007) served as a suitable method for this study. Firstly, focus groups are “unpredictable [...] organic in nature” (Bloor *et al.*, 2001: 19), ideal for exploratory research as they can uncover feelings, reveal experiences, uncover associations and identify attitudes (Bloor *et al.*, 2001; De Carlo *et al.*, 2009). Secondly, focus groups are suitable methods in the initial stages of research or when little is known about the topic, context or subject under study (Zikmund, 2003). Interviews are more appropriate for later stages of research and when investigators desire to revisit themes or issues identified from focus group discussions for additional depth and richness (Bell *et al.*, 2019). Thirdly, unlike interviews, focus groups can also encourage natural-like discussions and debates within a group of participants, which in turn can reveal deeper insight and encourage participants to reflect on their attitudes and perceptions during the group-based discussions (Trochim and Donnelly, 2007). Fourthly, focus groups were considered more appropriate than interviews as focus groups offered “the opportunity to study the ways in which individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it” (Bell *et al.*, 2019: 455). Finally, political practitioners regularly use focus group discussions rather than interviews in political branding research to capture insight into attitudes and perceptions of political parties, party leaders and policies (Ashcroft, 2010; Gould, 1998; Jain *et al.*, 2017; Ross, 2015; Pich *et al.*, 2020).

This study adopted a purposive sampling technique, as it enabled researchers to select “the sample based on his or her judgement about some appropriate characteristic required of the sampling members” (Zikmund, 2003: 382). In this case, young voters of 18–24 years of age were an appropriate sample for two reasons. Firstly, the Guernsey Government actively pursued young voters aged 18–24 years with the intention of strengthening engagement (www.gov.gg/youngpeoplesurvey), and secondly, young voters of 18–24 years of age are often characterised as the most disillusioned group in electoral systems (Dermoddy *et al.*, 2010). Age, therefore, was the only prerequisite for participation. Four focus group discussions led by one mediator and one facilitator and made up of 28 participants were conducted from October 2017 to February 2018. Data collection ceased after reaching “knowledge saturation” also known as “theoretical saturation” (Cayla and Eckhardt, 2007; Flick, 1998). Theoretical saturation is at the discretion of the researcher and the criterion of when to stop collecting data (Flick, 1998; Krueger, 1998) usually when no additional insights are uncovered. Further, to reach theoretical saturation, researchers need to be satisfied they understand the complex phenomenon under study and be in a position to address the research aim and objectives (Flick, 1998; Krueger, 1998; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Finally, theoretical saturation is consistent with an interpretivist approach and allows researchers to gain an understanding of the “lived experiences” of the phenomenon from the perspective of a specific group of individuals (Daymon and Holloway, 2011; Gorman and Clayton, 2005; Van Maanen *et al.*, 2007). The digital recordings from the focus group discussions were transcribed *verbatim* and each transcript ranged from 7,500 to 10,000 words.

Improving rigour and trustworthiness – analysis

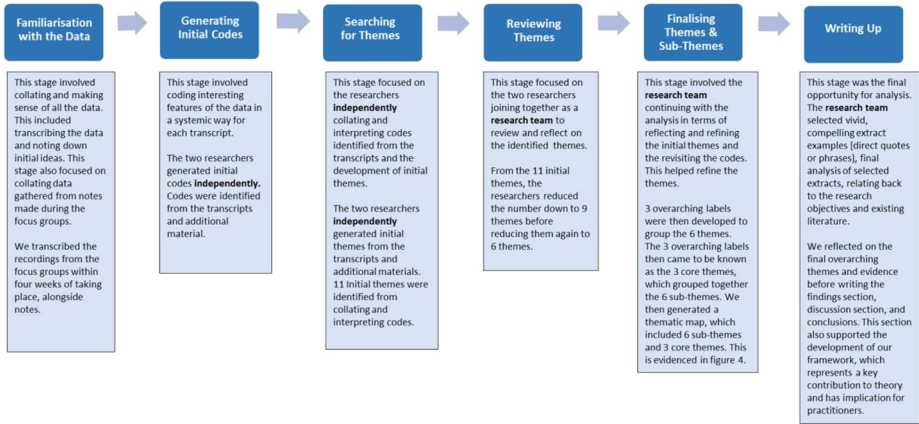
To strengthen the trustworthiness and rigour of our study, three strategies were adopted including *piloting*, *triangulation* and adopting a *multistage analytical strategy*. Firstly, a pilot study was carried out with our first focus group to assess the usability of our data collection schedule (Halliday *et al.*, 2021). Pilot studies are crucial as they serve as an opportunity for

researchers to reflect and improve the data collection schedule by addressing any questions that may be unclear, irrelevant or identifying any questions missing from the schedule (Muijeen *et al.*, 2020). Further, pilot studies allow researchers the chance to assess whether the initial findings/themes address the research objectives and if not, amendments can be made to the schedule (Bell *et al.*, 2019). Based on our pilot study, very few changes were required apart from simplifying the ice-breaker question and amending some of the terminology in the schedule to ensure it contextualised specifically to Guernsey.

The second strategy adopted was triangulation. Triangulation involves implementing processes to strengthen understanding of the phenomenon under study and provides rigour, trustworthiness and transparency to the research process (Bell *et al.*, 2019; Denzin, 2017). More specifically, an investigatory triangulation strategy was adopted as part of this study (Denzin, 2017). Investigatory triangulation refers to the use of more than one investigator or researcher as part of the study. Investigator triangulation can reduce biases at several stages of the research design including designing and planning the data collection tools (interview schedules), identifying additional sources of content and material to support the primary method, data collection and data analysis. In the case of this study, two established researchers formed “the research team” and were involved in all stages of the research process from conceptualising to reporting. One researcher adopted the role of “facilitator” (led the focus group), and the second researcher adopted the role of “mediator” (actively listened to proceedings, made notes, ensured the facilitator adhered to the schedule and followed up on additional insights uncovered in the sessions). Investigatory triangulation also extended to all stages of analysis and enabled the researchers to interpret and verify the findings which provided rigour and trustworthiness to the study (Bell *et al.*, 2019; Denzin, 2017).

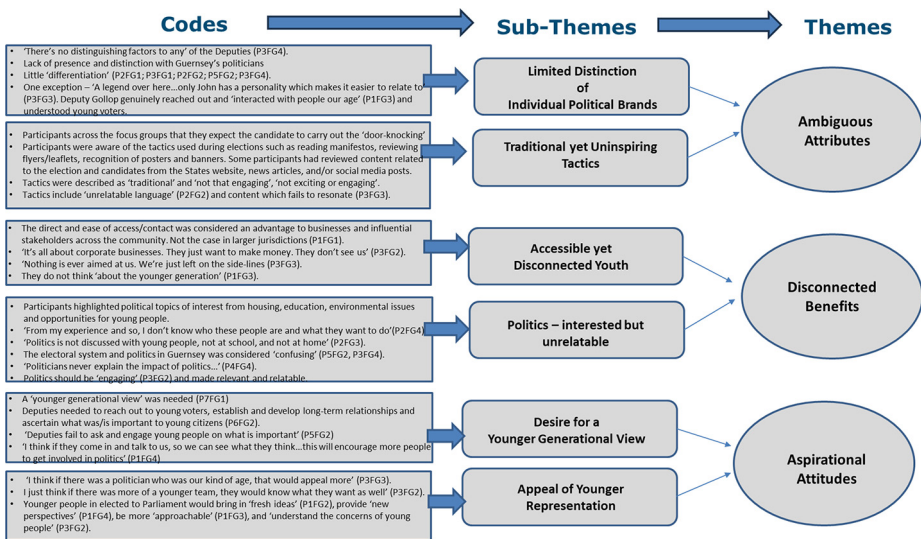
The third strategy adopted to strengthen rigour and trustworthiness of the study focused on adopting a multi-stage analytical framework. This study adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-staged thematic analytical process which is consistent with the interpretive tradition (Paskins *et al.*, 2010; Roper and Shah, 2007). In its simplest form, thematic analysis is a systematic process of reviewing the transcripts and encoding the raw data into categories and themes, which reveal insight into the phenomenon under study (Bird *et al.*, 2009; Roper and Shah, 2007). Further, this study adhered to six stages as part of its analytical process, which is consistent with the interpretive tradition (Braun and Clarke, 2006). An illustration of the six staged thematic processes the research team followed is outlined in Figure 3.

The first stage involved transcribing the recordings from the focus group discussions and reviewing the transcripts without assigning themes to become familiar with the raw data. The second stage focused on the researchers working independently to read, then re-read each transcript and identify emergent codes based on the direct quotes and phrases identified from the transcripts (Bird *et al.*, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The third stage involved each researcher to independently reflect on the codes identified from stage two and this led to the development of initial draft themes. This process was repeated for each transcript. The fourth stage focused on the research team coming together to compare the initial draft themes from all the transcripts. The initial draft themes and themes were expanded, re-categorised or made redundant (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Butler-Kisber, 2010; Warren and Karner, 2005). This led to the fifth stage where the research team reflected and refined the initial themes and revisited the codes. This helped refine the themes. Three overarching labels were then developed to group the six themes. The three overarching labels then came to be known as the three core themes, which grouped together the six sub-themes. The research team then generated a thematic map, which



Source: Figure created by the authors and inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006)

Figure 3. Applied 6 stages thematic process



Source: Created by the authors

Figure 4. Thematic map generated from the focus group discussions

included examples of the codes, six sub-themes and three core themes which is illustrated in Figure 4 (Gioia et al., 2013). The sixth stage formed the final stage of analysis and included the production of the “findings” section of the article where the key findings were structured through the core three themes and six sub-themes. Therefore, the six

stages provided rigour and trustworthiness to the analytical process, which supported an inductive approach to building knowledge step-by-step (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Trochim and Donnelly, 2007).

Findings and discussion

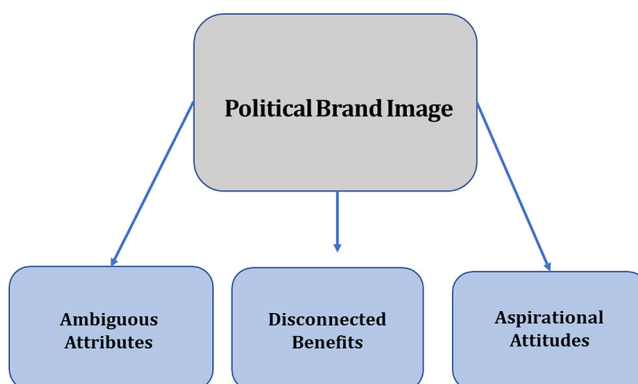
The aim of this study was to understand the brand image of non-party political brands from a young citizen perspective in the context of the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey. Further, this study aimed to develop a brand image framework which will provide greater clarity to the concept of brand image and support strategists as they develop and manage brands. The focus group discussions revealed three core themes associated with Guernsey’s political brands including *ambiguous attributes*, *disconnected benefits* and *aspirational attitudes*. The core themes are illustrated in Figure 5.

Ambiguous attributes

Limited distinction of Guernsey’s political brands. The first sub-theme of ambiguous attributes identified from the focus group discussions suggested there was limited distinction and differentiation with the political brands in Guernsey. More specifically, young voters believed Guernsey’s politicians (sitting Deputies and candidates) failed to articulate strong and impactful identities, which in turn made Guernsey’s political brands undistinguishable. For example, one voter argued:

I’m unsure what deputies stand for. I haven’t got a clue. We have a general election in a few months, deputies should tell people especially young people what they stand for and what they will do if elected (P3FG3).

Similarly, it was revealed that Guernsey’s politicians are “too confusing and unclear what they stand for” (P5FG1) “they are quite similar” (P2FG4). Further, voters believed that “there’s no distinguishing factors to any of the Deputies” (P3FG4) and politicians in Guernsey were “nameless and faceless” (P5FG4). Further, there was broad agreement across focus groups that there is little “differentiation” (P2FG1; P3FG1; P2FG2; P5FG2; P3FG4)



Source: Created by the authors

Figure 5. Core themes of independent political brand image identified from focus groups

and “there’s a lack of choice” (P3FG1), owing to the limited presence and distinction with Guernsey’s politicians. One voter suggested:

politicians here all say the same thing “vote for me, I’m local, I’m hardworking, I’m trustworthy” but they all say that. There’s no difference. They don’t give you clear reasons to vote for them. We need detail and specifics, but we don’t get that’ (P3FG2).

However, participants across all focus groups identified one exception to this characterisation of Guernsey’s political brands – *Deputy John Gollop*. Participants agreed that Deputy John Gollop had a clear, distinguishable political brand and was identifiable compared with his counterparts. For example, Deputy Gollop possessed a “different” (P1FG3), “good reputation and stands out” (P5FG2), identifiable, distinguishable (P5FG4) and was considered “the most popular” (P5FG2), “the best” politician on the island (P6FG2) and “a bit of an icon” (P2FG4). Further, it was argued that Deputy Gollop:

Is unique for a couple of reasons. He is clear about what he believes in for example he is a big supporter of equal opportunities and supporter of environmental issues. He seems to genuinely want to make a difference and cares. He uses Twitter, he’s on the radio and he’s not afraid to speak to people. In fact, my mum bumped into him the other day and moaned about an issue with buses, and he took the time to listen and didn’t fob her off (P2FG1).

Similar points were echoed across the focus group discussion. For instance, Deputy Gollop was described as “a legend over here [...] only John has a personality which makes it easier to relate to” (P3FG3). Participants revealed several factors for this accolade. Firstly, the Gollop political brand was seen to focus on the wants and needs of voters [“locals”] rather than focusing on tourists as “he knows more about the culture and what everyone from Guernsey would like” (P5FG2). Secondly, the Gollop political brand possessed a sense of presence and recognition as “John goes to every single community event that is on over here, literally you’ll see him there [...] he talks to people [...] none of the others do that. He’s always involved with people, when none of the others are” (P1FG4). Thirdly, the Gollop political brand was perceived to have engaging, outgoing, fun, approachable and relatable personality. Part of the engaging and relatability personality stems from not solely focusing on political issues when engaging with constituents yet when political issues were raised, they were made relevant and communicated to appeal to the audience. This engaging and amusing character was seen as a key reason people “want to talk to him” (P5FG2) and reach out to the politician (P1FG3). Deputy Gollop possessed a character that was described as:

really funny and gets your attention [...] there was an advert for a housing company and viewing a house in Guernsey. It was Darth Vader. At the very end, Darth Vader took his mask off and it was John Gollop (P3FG2).

Further, participants believed Deputy Gollop genuinely reached out and “interacted with people our age” (P1FG3) and understood young voters, which gave a sense of approachability to his political brand. However, participants did not have this sense of affinity, identification, originality and presence for any other political brand from the Bailiwick of Guernsey. Therefore, this study revealed that political brands in Guernsey possessed ambiguous attributes and limited differentiation. However, there was one exception. The one exception managed to create and communicate an authentic, relatable and engaging personal political brand, which enabled young voters to identify with the politician (Grimm and Wagner, 2021; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017). A clearly differentiated political brand with a strong coherent image has the potential to build long-term meaningful trustworthy relationships with citizens, which can lead to loyalty and satisfaction (Cretu and Brodie, 2007; Savitri *et al.*, 2022). However, most political brands in Guernsey failed to

clarify their positioning, project unique attributes and demonstrate coherent differentiation with competitors, which had an impact on identification (Lee and Atkinson, 2019; Hofmann et al., 2021; Panda et al., 2019; Pich et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2021).

Traditional yet uninspiring communication tactics. The second sub-theme of ambiguous attributes related to the traditional, yet uninspiring communication tactics used by political brands during the general election period. For example, young voters were aware of the range of tools used by candidates in election campaigns and engaged with the political tactics ranging from manifestoes, posters to the use of websites and social media platforms. An overview of the tactics used by candidates in elections can be seen in Table 1.

Despite awareness and some engagement, young voters were critical of the tactics and content such as the limited clarity and focus of the tactics, use of “unrelatable language” (P2FG2) and positioning of the messages appeared to be barriers between young citizens and politics. For instance,

I’ve found the manifestoes not a good sense what they’re about [candidates] because like “they want a good education and health system”, well who doesn’t (P2FG1).

Similarly, “I have a little flick through to see what they’re about”, but the content is positioned for a different audience and not for young citizens (P6FG2) and “there needs to be more communication with this generation [...] they need be clear and tell us what they will do” (P3FG3). Further, “teenagers spend most of their time on their phones on social media, so it would be a very good way of getting information to young people” (P4FG2). Although, candidates should also reflect on the communication tools used as not all young people use “Twitter” and an array of social media platforms may be needed to appeal and engage different voters (P1FG3). Further, “they just assume that we’re all on social media” (P3FG3).

Nevertheless, one key tactic that is considered the most influential and important way of connecting with citizens is known as “door-knocking”. Door-knocking involves each

Table 1. Overview of communication tactics used by candidates in elections

Tactics used by deputies	Explanation
Manifestos	Short written document which introduces the deputy to its voters and details their intentions, motives, interests and views. Focused policies are generally not included but broad values and aspirations. This is due to the nature and culture of politics in Guernsey and the independent system. Manifestoes are hand-delivered by deputies and/or published on social media sites or state websites
Hustings	Meetings held where deputies can introduce themselves and what they stand for. Voters can attend and ask them questions. However, each deputy has a limited amount of time to answer questions
Door-to-door knocking	A key campaign tactic. Deputies go from door to door (canvassing) introducing themselves and presenting their motives, views and intentions. Only deputies take part in door-to-door knocking
Posters/ billboards	Posters/billboards placed in public places or private properties
Social media platforms	Social media sites such as X (formally known as Twitter), Facebook, Instagram are used by some deputies but not all deputies
Flyers/ leaflets	Flyers/leaflets left at restaurants and shops and put through the letter box
States website	All manifestoes are published ahead of election date on the states website. Each deputy (once elected), has a page on the states website with their information and contact details

Source: Created by the authors

politician visiting most homes/citizens across the constituency to say “hello”, “give you a little pep talk and speech” (P1FG3), drop-off a short leaflet outlining biographical information, broad values and why they should be elected and serves as an opportunity for citizens to ask questions (P1FG4). This resembles canvassing. However, unlike other political systems, only the candidate carries out the door-knocking tactic and not carried out by supporters or campaign staff. For example,

Guernsey is quite unique as it's always the deputies themselves who do all the door knocking and from my experience when I was in the UK when it came to elections for MPs or city councillors you'd get their supporters and people working for the party and they'd say 'have you thought about voting for our labour candidate' and I don't think that would necessarily work here (P2FG1).

There was broad agreement from participants across the focus groups that they expect the candidate to carry out the “door-knocking” and no one else. Further, participants of all focus groups were aware of the practice of “door-knocking”, however young citizen engagement with this tactic varied. For example, some young voters “invited candidates into the house to hear what they had to say” (P6FG2), engaged with candidates on the door-step to listen to what they had to offer (P4FG2) and some decided to “hide” when candidates carried out door-knocking and waited for the candidates to post their leaflets and “sorry we missed you cards” (P1FG4).

To be honest, I get why politicians go from door-to-door [door-knocking]. My mum, dad and gran love it. It gives them a chance to put the politicians on the spot and ask them questions. But for me, it's cringeworthy and feels unnatural, awkward, a bit fake. Like they only want to speak to me to get my vote and will say anything to get my vote (P1FG3).

Further, young voters recognised that “door-knocking” was a key electioneering tactic yet believed it was geared towards older voters, not young voters. There was agreement across most focus groups that “door-knocking” had little impact on young citizens (FG1; FG2; FG3) and candidates should focus on more appropriate tactics and events designed to appeal to young voters (FG3; FG4). Participants argued that older citizens expect this tactic and failing to “door-knock” sends out the message that candidates do not care about constituents and the candidate takes constituents for granted (FG1; FG2).

Subsequently, this study revealed that young voters desired relatable and engaging communication tactics to clarify the electoral process in Guernsey and allow aspiring Deputies to provide greater distinction as to “what they stand for” (P5FG2). Nevertheless, young voters were *aware* of the different types of communication tactics and brand identity signals used by candidates designed to communicate their offering and existence (Grimm and Wagner, 2021; Propheto *et al.*, 2020). However, most signals and descriptive features designed to structure political brand identity, failed to communicate functional and symbolic attributes, resonate, or engage young voters (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; He and Lai, 2014). This had an impact on clarifying the unique qualities of political brands in Guernsey and forming emotional connections between political brands and voters (He and Lai, 2014; Lee and Atkinson, 2019). Further, the findings suggest that most of Guernsey's politicians possessed weak and confusing brands and had failed to convey clear narratives and imagery communicated through their brand identity signals (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Gaustad *et al.*, 2019; Pich *et al.*, 2020). Although, as evidenced in the previous section, it can be argued that one political brand could be considered “successful” as the politician possessed a consistent authentic image supported by engaging and relatable tactics (Grimm and Wagner, 2021). To maintain strong brand image, political brands should communicate a coherent identity underpinned by clear, relatable and engaging tactics, which in turn would address confusion and strengthen identification (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Pich *et al.*, 2020; Savitri *et al.*, 2022).

Nevertheless, despite the weak nature of most of Guernsey's political brands, it would be unfair to argue that the brand images were undesirable or unbelievable (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Gaustad *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, most of Guernsey's political brands can be interpreted as possessing weak brand imagery because of limited awareness and a lack of differentiation. This reaffirms the dynamic and complexity of brand image research (Panda *et al.*, 2019).

Disconnected benefits

Accessible yet disconnected youth. It was also revealed that young voters recognised that their politicians were accessible and were fortunate their system of government facilitated an informal degree of access with very few barriers existing between voters and candidates. For instance, there was an acknowledgement that citizens could easily access the contact information of sitting Deputies [once elected], ranging from telephone, email, social media accounts and home addresses through the government "States" website. For example:

[...] if you look at the States website you can see all the Deputies' personal details and you can phone deputies up on their home phone. You can also find their email address so they're accessible if you need to contact them (P2FG1).

The point of "accessibility" was consistent across all focus group discussions for instance, "you can look them up in the phonebook" (P2FG4) and "can access [the] States website to find out information on Deputies" (P1FG3). Further:

Deputies publish their contact information on the States website like phone number, address. You can easily get in touch with them if there's a problem (P2FG2).

However, it was also acknowledged that this level of accessibility was "a double-edged sword" (P1FG1), as it often had an impact on politicians seen to be on continuously on duty with no distinction between personal and private time. For instance:

Because Guernsey's a small place, you will see Deputies in the supermarket or at a restaurant or in town. You could easily ask them a question or report a problem. But they probably wouldn't like that (P1FG3).

Nevertheless, the direct and ease of access/contact was considered an advantage to businesses and influential stakeholders across the community not afforded to organisations and citizens in larger jurisdictions (P1FG1). Despite widespread recognition across focus group discussions that politicians were accessible, many believed politicians were disconnected from voters, especially young people. It was believed:

[...] unless you are in finance, business or an old person, politicians don't really care about young people. There is no connection or relationship between young people and politicians (P3FG3).

Similarly, it was perceived that candidates in Guernsey do not consider the wants and needs of young people. For instance, it was argued that "it's all about corporate businesses. They just want to make money. They don't see us" (P3FG2). There was also a consistent perception that politicians across the island tended to focus their attention and tactics on the older generation rather than attempting to engage and connect with young voters. Indeed, participants argued that politicians and communication tactics were "geared to [the] older generation" (P3FG4) and they do not think "about the younger generation" (P1FG3).

Subsequently, our research highlighted young voters acknowledged that they were fortunate to have an "accessible" relationship with Guernsey's political brands compared with the perceived inaccessible nature of politicians in other jurisdictions. This highlights that the political brands in the Bailiwick offered some differentiation compared with political brands

beyond the context of Guernsey (Cevallos *et al.*, 2020; Panda *et al.*, 2019; Zia *et al.*, 2021). However, the personal experiences discussed in the focus group discussions highlighted that young voters felt disconnected from Guernsey's political brands and perceived that there were no meaningful, long-term relationships between young voters and politicians in Guernsey. Therefore, political brands should continually strive to establish and maintain positive authentic relationships with citizens and/or address misperceptions associated with limited emotional connections, which has the potential to strengthen loyalty, trust, engagement and overall satisfaction (Aghekyan-Simonian *et al.*, 2012; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017; Sasmita and Suki, 2015).

Politics – interested but unrelatable. It was revealed that most participants across all focus groups were interested in political issues. For example, when participants were prompted to list issues of interest, participants highlighted topics such as the environment, university education, job opportunities/employment, housing, transport in Guernsey, transport off-island and desire more amenities for young people (P2FG1, P3FG2, P1FG3, P4FG4). However, participants felt excluded from the political “process” including engaging in elections and politics. For instance, many admitted they knew very little about politics, the electoral system or political process in Guernsey. It was suggested:

[...] politics is not discussed with young people, not at school and not at home. I know more about politics in the UK and USA but can't tell you how it works here. We're not taught it here. My cousin lives in Southampton, and he has sessions at college on politics and how politics works in the UK. We need something like that here to explain the system and explain how things work (P2FG3).

Similar points were expressed in other focus groups for instance, “we don't get really told much about it at school” (P4FG2), “if you're just going about your school day-to-day, you are not going to hear about it, at least from my experience and so, I don't know who these people are and what they want to do” (P2FG4). Further:

I know we have Deputies, that's what we call our politicians, but apart from that I can't tell you much else. I know Deputies are independent and we don't have political parties here. Political parties would be good here as you would know what they stand for and it might make politics a bit more interesting here (P2FG2).

Participants across all focus groups argued that they want to know more about the electoral system and political process in Guernsey. Further, participants suggested schools should dedicate time to provide unbiased sessions about the political system and electoral process as this would end confusion and bring about much-needed clarity (P3FG2; P4FG2; P3FG5). It was also revealed that some participants engaged and reviewed the leaflets and posters during elections, but the content was positioned for the older generation (P2FG2, P1FG3, P3FG4). However, part of the problem stemmed from how candidates position political issues and fail to make political issues relevant to young voters, (P1FG1; P2FG4). For example:

Politicians never explain the impact of politics. They only seem to want to talk about voting and voting for them. They never explain why I should vote for them. They usually say ‘vote for me, I've been a politician for x number of years’ rather than ask me about political issues that I'm interested in (P4FG4).

Making politics “relevant” was a common issue identified across all the focus group discussions. For instance, one participant expressed:

I can't see the relevance of politics. Nothing seems to change. Politicians never make politics relevant especially to young people or explain why it is relevant to us. Does it matter, is it important. I don't know (P2FG3).

In addition, it was suggested that politics “has to be engaging for younger people. People will just get bored straight away [...] I think it needs to be more fun” (P3FG2), Deputies need to “relate to us [...] understand our problems” and clarify “potential solutions” (P3FG3). Subsequently, as identified in the focus group discussions, young voters were interested and concerned about political issues, yet they were unaware and somewhat confused with the implications of electoral system and political process in Guernsey. This is consistent with existing work on young voters and political brands in different jurisdictions (Pich and Armannsdottir, 2018; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2015). Successful political brands clearly communicate the impact of policies and relevance of politics to citizens (Anselmsson *et al.*, 2014; Pich *et al.*, 2020; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017; Sasmita and Suki, 2015). Further, political brands should reassure voters by signifying performance and managing expectations ahead of polling day and being explicit about how they are distinct from competitors in addressing the wants needs and concerns of voters (Aghekyan-Simonian *et al.*, 2012; Hartono, 2022; Lee and Atkinson, 2019; Rozikin and Sholekhah, 2020). However, this cannot be said to be the case with political brands in Guernsey. Therefore, political brands in Guernsey should not only appeal to young citizens but also explicitly emphasise the relevance and impact of potential policies and initiatives.

Aspirational attitudes

Desire for a younger generational view. Young voters across all focus groups argued that a “younger generational view” was needed and candidates needed to reach out to young voters, establish and develop long-term relationships and understand what was/is important to young citizens (P6FG2). For instance:

It would be good if politicians actually took the time to listen to us and hear what’s important to us and hear what we want to see in Guernsey. That never happens. Getting a good job, education, getting on the property ladder are important issues for us. We need fun things to do, things for young people to get excited about. There is nothing here for young people (P7FG1).

There was a common perception that young people in Guernsey have a “voice but we’re not listened to, we’re overlooked and forgotten about” (P3FG3). Further, it was argued that very few candidates reach out to young voters for instance “deputies fail to ask and engage young people on what is important” (P5FG2).

Similarly:

I think if they [candidates] come in and talk to us, so we can see what they think and they can see what we think as well, and this will encourage more young people to get involved in politics (P1FG4).

Likewise:

[...] the older generation has grown up together so they all tend to have similar opinions. That can be a problem because everyone starts thinking the same way. They stop thinking about the younger generation (P1FG3).

Finally:

Nothing is ever aimed at us. We’re just left on the sidelines. Everyone says: ‘It’s up to you, it’s your future’. What’s my future? What do I have to decide on? What happens if I do that or that? Nothing ever really gets explained (P3FG3).

Subsequently, we uncovered young voters had aspirational attitudes. More specifically, young voters perceived that political brands in Guernsey failed to reach out to young people and identify their wants and needs. Brand attitudes represent the overall evaluation of a

brand, and attitudes are significant, as they often form the basis of behaviour (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Keller, 1993; Propheto *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, political brands in Guernsey should seek to engage with young people and use this opportunity to respond to the wants and needs of young people. This would allow the establishment and development of relationships between the two groups and allow candidates to tailor strategies and tactics to appeal to, resonate and engage young voters in future elections (Azam and Qureshi, 2021; Pich *et al.*, 2020; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017). This in turn would provide candidates an understanding of how to clearly position and communicate their political offering and enable them to differentiate their political brand image (Azam and Qureshi, 2021; Pich *et al.*, 2020; Propheto *et al.*, 2020).

Appeal of younger representation. Similarly, young voters argued that this younger generational view is linked to representation too. For instance, young voters highlighted not only would they like to see greater engagement and appealing candidates but also younger candidates elected to Parliament to physically symbolise representation and potential role models. For example:

I think if there was a politician who was our kind of age, that would appeal more. I want to see someone who looks like me, sounds like me and understands me (P3FG3).

Similar points were made in another focus group, the States need:

[...] young people. They're all at least 40 or 50 plus [...] if there were people who were 25 or maybe 30, then they'd have more ideas of that their childhood was like, so they'd understand and put more ideas towards people our age [...] I just think if there was more of a younger team, they would know what they want as well [...] I think the younger people need to start stepping up to help out (P3FG2).

Further, some young voters also argued for a greater presence of non-locals elected to Parliament to demonstrate an inclusive, outward-facing approach and the opportunity to bring in “fresh ideas” (P1FG2) and “new perspectives” (P1FG4) to Guernsey. It was perceived that younger and more diverse candidates would encourage young people to get engaged in politics, as they would be more “relatable” (P1FG3), “make more of an effort to reach out to young people” (P4FG4), “understand the concerns of young people” (P3FG2), “share similar outlooks in life” (P3FG3) and “reflects what modern society looks like” (P4FG1).

Subsequently, young voters desired greater representation of younger candidates elected to parliament, which could strengthen engagement with the electoral process in Guernsey. Young voters perceived that the lack of young people in parliament was a factor for disengagement and current political brands in Guernsey were not considered representative of all islanders. Further, research on brand image has the potential to reveal desirable associations, appealing characteristics and favourable attitudes associated with political brands, which can have an impact on perceived authenticity, loyalty, satisfaction and engagement (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Gaustad *et al.*, 2019; Grimm and Wagner, 2021; Hartono, 2022; Pich and Armannsdottir, 2022; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, brand image can be considered a “dynamic” area of study (Panda *et al.*, 2019: 237) and understanding how consumers positively and negatively perceive brands is “essential for successful brand management” (Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017: 227).

The consumer brand image schema. This study demonstrates the importance and implications of investigating brand image from a multidimensional approach and considering the attributes, benefits and attitudes associated with brands (Malik *et al.*, 2012; Martinez and De Chernatony, 2004). Indeed, capturing the current brand image reveals positive and negative perceptions and attitudes and allows organisations to maximise

strengths and opportunities and manage weaknesses and areas for improvement (Hartono, 2022; Pich *et al.*, 2020). Marketing researchers have stressed the importance of understanding how consumers form, organise and access these mental associations with brands (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Atkinson, 2019; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, debate continues around *how* to understand, explore and investigate brand image, with very few frameworks dedicated to understanding the process of uncovering brand image (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Martinez and De Chernatony, 2004; Pich *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, based on our findings, and support of the existing literature, we developed a systematic framework to uncover brand image entitled the “consumer brand image schema”.

The developed consumer brand image schema operationalises the complex concept of “brand image” and provides a three-stage approach to examine and manage brand image (Table 2). Further, the developed framework is structured around multiple rather than single dimensions of brand image as this will potentially reveal deeper insight and a greater understanding of the perceptions, associations and imagery ascribed to brands (He and Lai, 2014; Malik *et al.*, 2012; Martinez and De Chernatony, 2004; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017). In-depth understanding of brand image will guide internal stakeholders as part of the brand management process (He and Lai, 2014).

Stage one focuses on brand attributes and benefits (He and Lai, 2014; Keller, 1993; Lee and Atkinson, 2019). Identifying attributes and perceived benefits will provide strategists with deep insight into core characteristics related to a brand’s current image. Stage two focuses on brand attitudes (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Keller, 1993; Propheto *et al.*, 2020). Further, brand attitudes are considered significant because they often form the basis of consumer behaviour (Propheto *et al.*, 2020). Identifying attitudes will provide strategists with an understanding of the current brand image and form the basis for developing strategies and tactics to manage a brand’s desired identity (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Pich *et al.*, 2020; Savitri *et al.*, 2022). Following the identification and analysis of *current* attributes, benefits and attitudes, strategists can reflect on the *current* brand image and refer to the “reflection markers” to assess whether the brand is differentiated from competitors, authentic, relatable, engaging [using appropriate tactics/language], accessible and identifiable [connection-relationship], consistent with desires-aspirations. Stage three focuses on developing strategies to manage brand image. Uncovering brand attitudes will provide insight into retrospective and current brand image, which will guide strategists to take advantage of identified opportunities. Further, it will allow strategists to design approaches to maintain a strong brand image or address any inconsistencies or undesired characteristics associated with current brand image (He and Lai, 2014). For example, strategists need to ensure brands possess and communicate unambiguous attributes, connect with stakeholders through positive, clear and relatable benefits and be clearly positioned in terms of aspirational attitudes. This can be achieved in part by using the “reflection markers” as envisaged goals to ensure brands aspire to be clearly differentiated, authentic, relatable, engaging [using appropriate tactics/language], accessible and identifiable [connection-relationship], consistent with desires-aspirations. The arrow represents that the three-stage systematic approach is a process that should be carried out on a routine basis to monitor current brand image, ensure brand image is aligned to desired brand identity (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Pich *et al.*, 2020; Savitri *et al.*, 2022) and determine whether a brand demonstrates differentiation with competitors and continues to encourage identification (Lee and Atkinson, 2019; Hofmann *et al.*, 2021; Panda *et al.*, 2019). Subsequently, this study goes some way in addressing the confusion and lack of consensus with the concept of image (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Hartono, 2022; Keller, 1993; Malik *et al.*, 2012) achieved by applying and developing the consumer brand image and engagement schema.

Stage	The Consumer Brand Image Schema Brand Image Dimensions	
One	Attributes	Benefits
Identification	<i>Attributes</i> can be defined as descriptive features includes product, price, place, promotion, tangible and intangible elements both functional and symbolic. Descriptive features can be functional [tangible] and/or symbolic image related attributes. Functional and symbolic attributes can lead to differentiation from competitors.	<i>Benefits</i> can be defined as personal values, perceived or actual experiences or expectations consumers associate with the brand. and benefits the brand offers the consumer. Benefits can also relate to the functional [tangible] and/or symbolic [intangible] features associated with the brand.
Two	Attitudes	
Analysis and Reflection	<i>Attitudes</i> can be defined as the overall evaluation of the brand derived from the attributes and benefits. Attitudes can be positive and negative and relate to the functional [tangible] and/or symbolic [intangible] features associated with the brand. Following the identification and analysis of current attributes, benefits, and attitudes, strategists can appraise the current brand image and refer to the 'reflection markers' to assess whether brand. <i>Reflection Markers</i> include is the brand interpreted as authentic, relatable, engaging, accessible and identifiable [connection-relationship], consistent with desires-aspirations.	
Three	Behaviour-Opportunities-Impact	
Strategic Planning	Understanding the <i>current attitudes</i> [brand image] will provide insight into retrospective and current brand image, which will provide strategists with opportunities and approaches to maintain strong brand image or address any issues associated with current brand image. <i>Reflection Markers</i> become <i>Envisaged Goals</i> for brands to ensure they communicate unambiguous attributes, connect with stakeholders through positive, clear, and relatable benefits, and be clearly positioned in terms of aspirational attitudes. For example, brands should aim to be clearly differentiated, authentic, relatable, engaging [using appropriate tactics/language], accessible and identifiable [connection-relationship], consistent with desires-aspirations. The three-stage systematic approach is a process that should be carried out on a routine basis for strategists to monitor current brand image, ensure brand image is aligned to desired brand identity.	

Source: Created by the authors and inspired by Foroudi *et al.* (2018); He and Lai (2014); Keller (1993: 4); Lee and Atkinson (2019); Malik *et al.* (2012); Plumeyer *et al.* (2017); Propheto *et al.* (2020)

Table 2. The consumer brand image schema

Conclusion

According to [Opara \(2022: 18\)](#), “for a political candidate or party to achieve phenomenal support in the vote market, the candidate or party must have brand image”. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate how young citizens interpret independent political brands through the theoretical lens of brand image. Further, as “brand image has shifted from the party to the candidate”, further research on the brand image of individual candidates-politicians rather than party brands represented an under-researched and under-developed area of study ([Das Gupta and Sarkar, 2021](#); [French and Smith, 2010](#); [Opara, 2022: 25](#); [Pich et al., 2020](#); [Setiawan et al., 2021](#)). The British Crown Dependency of Guernsey which had traditionally been dominated by independent and unaffiliated elected representatives served to contextualise this study. Indeed, this study fills identified gaps for further research by examining how citizens perceive and understand political brands from a “voter centric perspective” ([Ahmed et al., 2015](#); [Nielsen, 2016](#)).

This study contributes to theory and practice. First, this study contributes to theory by revealing convincing accounts into the relationships between young voters and political brands ([Needham and Smith, 2015](#)) and addresses calls for more insight into diverse typologies of political brands in new settings and contexts ([O’Cass and Voola, 2011](#); [Pich et al., 2020](#); [Rutter et al., 2015](#); [Scammell, 2015](#); [Simons, 2016](#)). For instance, this study highlighted that apart from one exception, there was limited differentiation and clarity regarding the brand image of political brands in Guernsey. Despite that Guernsey’s political brands were seen as “accessible” there was little identification and connection between young voters and politicians. Therefore, creating and developing a successful brand image goes beyond accessibility and thought needs to be given to establishing and maintaining long-term emotional and authentic relationships with voters, alongside clarifying expectations, what politicians “stand for” and signifying brand performance to constituents ([Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012](#); [Hartono, 2022](#); [Lee and Atkinson, 2019](#); [Rozikin and Sholekhah, 2020](#); [Sasmita and Suki, 2015](#)). In addition, the findings suggest that many of Guernsey’s politicians possessed weak and confusing brands and failed to convey clear narratives and imagery communicated through their brand identity signals ([Foroudi et al., 2018](#); [Gaustad et al., 2019](#); [Pich et al., 2020](#)). Further, this study demonstrates that brand image continues to be a “crucial” theoretical lens ([Plumeyer et al., 2017: 251](#); [Setiawan et al., 2021: 3](#)) for branding practitioners, researchers and academics within and beyond the political environment as the concept grants access into the perceptions, attitudes and opinions consumers associated with brands. Understanding the attributes, benefits and attitudes associated with brands equips strategists with knowledge of how to develop, manage and safeguard brands ([Plumeyer et al., 2017](#)). Nevertheless, this study uncovered a series of opportunities for strategists such as the desire for a younger generational view and representation in the Guernsey Parliament and explicit calls for greater clarity, distinction and authenticity related to a politician’s political brand image.

Based on the findings and the desire for further exploration of brand image research ([Azam and Qureshi, 2021](#)), this presents the “consumer brand image schema”; a systematic framework which can be used to uncover brand image within and beyond the setting of politics. This represents a contribution to theory and practice. For example, this research and framework ([Table 2](#)) operationalises the complex and dynamic concept of “brand image” ([Panda et al., 2019](#)) and provides a three-stage process to examine and manage brand image. Further, the developed framework will provide insight into the current physical and intangible attributes, perceived and experienced benefits and overall positive and negative attitudes related to brand image. This, in turn, will enable strategists to develop a targeted strategy and adopt appropriate tactics to maintain and manage brand image to ensure brands possess positive awareness/familiarity, clear authentic and relatable positioning and strong long-term meaningful relationships with consumers ([Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012](#);

Bilgin and Kethüda, 2022; Hofmann *et al.*, 2021; Sasmita and Suki, 2015; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017; Propheto *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, this study provides greater clarity into the “nebulous”, complex construct of brand image (Chan *et al.*, 2018) and presents a focused conceptualisation and operational framework for practitioners and researchers (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Hartono, 2022; Keller, 1993; Malik *et al.*, 2012).

Subsequently, capturing the current brand image reveals positive and negative perceptions and attitudes and allows organisations to maximise strengths and opportunities and manage weaknesses and areas for improvement (Hartono, 2022; Pich *et al.*, 2020). This study demonstrates the importance of understanding how consumers form, organise and access these mental associations with brands (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Atkinson, 2019). As debate will continue around *how* to understand, explore and investigate brand image (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Martinez and De Chernatony, 2004; Pich *et al.*, 2020), future research should critically apply and appraise the developed “consumer brand image schema” (Table 2) as a systematic framework to deconstruct brand image in different contexts and settings. Secondly, further research should carry out longitudinal and/or comparative research to investigate brand image within and beyond politics, as this will highlight how brands develop over time, identify the consistency of differentiation and whether brands maintain long-term meaningful relationships with consumers and continue to encourage identification. This in turn will ensure brand image remains a crucial construct for practitioners and researchers (Chan *et al.*, 2018; Plumeyer *et al.*, 2017: 227; Savitri *et al.*, 2022) and “one of the core essences in branding” (Setiawan *et al.*, 2021: 3).

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Table A1. Studies on political brand image

Author(s)	Key concept(s)	Method	Gaps	Context
Guzmán and Sierra (2009) A political candidates' brand image scale: Are political candidates brands?	Brand image and brand personality as a measure of brand image Brand image framework of presidential candidates (competence, empathy, openness, agreeableness and handsomeness) Brand equity Analysing mental maps that voters create when asked to think about a political party Leader brand image and positioning	Quantitative Principal component analysis and structural Equation modelling procedures	Limited research identifying candidates as brands	Presidential candidates for Mexico's 2006 election, 3 candidates
French and Smith (2010) Measuring political brand equity: a consumer-oriented approach	Brand equity Analysing mental maps that voters create when asked to think about a political party Leader brand image and positioning	Quantitative	Limited studies focusing on measuring brand mapping process and analysis of brand maps	Party politics, labour and conservative party
Mortimore et al. (2014) Asymmetry in leader image effects and the implications for leadership positioning in the 2010 British General Election	Leader brand image and positioning	Quantitative, using national survey data	Positioning studies have not looked at the association between specific image attributes and overall satisfaction for each leader. Positioning research has not measured public expectation	2010 British general election campaign – party leaders
Pich and Dean (2015) Political branding: sense of identity or identity crisis? An investigation of the transfer potential of the brand identity prism to the UK conservative party	Qualitative projective techniques in political brand image	Qualitative Focus groups	Little research illuminates the complexity of the internal–external divisions within the brand identity prism and few qualitative studies how have addressed this	UK Conservative party's brand image amongst young adults 18–24

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Author(s)	Key concept(s)	Method	Gaps	Context
Pich and Armannsdottir (2015) Political brand image: an investigation into the operationalisation of the external orientation of David's conservative brand	Brand image of the conservative brand – using Bosch et al.'s (2006) framework	Qualitative Focus groups	Studies have focused more on brand identity Limited frameworks available – neglect the development and assessment of brand image framework	Party, leader, policy Conservative party in 2010 – with 18–24-year-olds
Guzmán et al. (2015) Self-referencing and political candidates brands: a congruency perspective	Self-referencing and political candidate brands	Quantitative Using Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale	Little is known about the process voters go through when evaluating a political candidate based on congruity between the candidate and a voter's own characteristics Few studies focus on brands from a voter perspective – and there are limited frameworks showing the influences of political branding	Presidential candidates for Mexico's 2006 election, random sample representative of Mexican registered voters
Jain et al. (2017) Exploring the influences of political branding: a case from the youth in India	Brand image and political marketing	Qualitative		India – Bhartiya Janata Young voters 18–28
Jain et al. (2018) Developing a political brand image framework	Developing a brand image framework	Qualitative	Limited studies dedicated to post-election scenarios, especially in the Indian context	India – Bhartiya Janata and their leader Narendra Modi Young voters 18–35 and expert interviews
Pich et al. (2018) Investigating political brand reputation with qualitative projective techniques from the perspective of young adults	Political brand image and reputation	Qualitative – projective techniques	Calls for more pragmatic tools and methods to comprehend the external orientation of brands	Young voters – 18–24 years of age prior to the General election in 2015

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Author(s)	Key concept(s)	Method	Gaps	Context
Van Steenburg and Guzman (2019) The influence of political candidate brands during the 2012 and 2016 US presidential elections	Voters' self-brand image will influence their perception of candidates' brand image	Quantitative	Brand relationships has replaced traditional short-term marketing paradigm Previous research has demonstrated the candidate-brand relationship in presidential elections in terms of brand image, such a phenomenon has not been examined in the US presidential elections	US presidential elections in October 2012 and 2016
Pich et al. (2020) Problematising the presentation and reception of political brands: the strategic and operational nature of the political brand alignment model	The paper looks at brand identity and brand image and creates a brand alignment framework	Qualitative	Limited studies have addressed both brand identity and image Few models have been created which can build/monitor the positioning of a political brand	UK conservative party Politicians were interviewed prior to the General election in 2015 Focus groups with young voters (18–24-year-olds)
Banerjee (2021) On the relationship between online brand community and brand preference in political market	Relationship between online brand community and brand preference in political market - India	Quantitative	Limited studies on how online political brand community impact in shaping voter behaviour	18–35-year-old voters of political parties in India
Setiawan et al. (2021) Scale development: Exploring successful political outsiders' brand image to determine reformist dimensions	Successful political outsiders' brand image to determine reformist dimensions	Mixed method Interviews – document analysis – survey with voters	Studies on outsiders are centred on the rise of the far-right wing and Donald Trump's case Previous studies use a single approach	4 Indonesian party leaders

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Author(s)	Key concept(s)	Method	Gaps	Context
Das Gupta and Sarkar (2021) Linking political brand image and voter perception in India: a political market orientation approach	Political brand image and voter perception in India		More focus is needed to understand voter orientation which can be investigated from multiple dimensions Younger group is politically aware but disengaged	Political party – collected in 2017 (between consecutive general elections of 2014 and 2019 – from respondents 18–31
Opata (2022) Political party brand competence and voters' decision making in Nigeria	Political party competence and voters' decision-making in Nigeria	Quantitative	Limited research taken place in Nigeria	Political party

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