

Causal Relationship Model of Political Parties' Branding of Thai National University Scholars

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Abstract

This research aimed to develop and validate the causal relationship model of political parties' branding of Thai national university scholars, which was quantitative research. The questionnaires were collected from 718 samples. All that participated in the study were undergraduate scholars of the top 10 scholars count in the national universities. The samples were obtained using a multi-stage sampling technique for developing and validating Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to analyze the effect of factors on the political parties' branding, such as (1) Visual Identity, (2) Person, (3) Highlighted Policy, and (4) Political Parties' Branding. The results found that (1) Visual Identity has a positive correlation with Political Parties' Branding, with a correlation coefficient of 0.83, Person has a positive correlation with Highlighted Policy, with a correlation coefficient of 0.86, Person has a positive correlation with Political Parties' Branding, with a correlation coefficient of 0.5, Highlighted Policy has a positive correlation with Political Parties' Branding, with a correlation coefficient of 0.89 at a significant p-value < 0.01. and (2) The Model is consistent with the empirical data, as evidenced by statistical significance based on the specified criteria of Chi-square=53.482, df=41, CMIN/df=1.304, GFI=.990, AGFI=.973, RMSEA=.021, and CFI=.999.

Keywords: Political Parties' Branding, Thai National University, Political Marketing

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Introduction

Brand communication has become a widely disseminated body of knowledge in business and marketing, primarily within the context of commercial organizations. However, in recent times, the application of brand communication strategies has extended to various other contexts. Educational institutions use brand communication to attract students and enhance their academic reputations. Healthcare organizations employ brand communication to establish trust among service recipients. There are also non-profit organizations that utilize brand communication not for profit-seeking purposes but to build societal confidence. Despite the varying contexts, these examples share a common characteristic: the need for delicate brand communication. Brand communication in these organizations, which requires high sensitivity, complexity, and caution, differs from typical business organizations. These common characteristics also apply to political parties' brand communication within non-profit organizations (Golensky and Hager, 2020; Fraussen and Halpin, 2018; Bigi, 2016; Clemens, 2006)

Political parties are organizations that blend all social dimensions, culture, and political influence, making them complex entities in terms of brand communication. In the contemporary world, political parties play a significant role in the democratic process and promote the people's freedoms. Their objectives go beyond winning the elections; they compete for long-term political popularity. This realization highlights the importance of brand communication strategies in the political dimension. The aim is to capture the hearts of the public by creating a distinctive identity for the political party itself and differentiating its perception from competitors (Han, 2020; Moorman, 2020; Schneiker, 2019; Lucarelli, 2018) According to the statistics from the Ministry of Interior, Thailand, the total number of eligible voters in Thailand is 52,322,824. Among them, there are 4,012,803 first-time voters, as reported by a research study by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2023). The research compared the number of first-time voters between the 26th and 27th general elections. The findings revealed that during the 27th general election (2023), there was an 11% increase in the enthusiasm of first-time voters compared to the 26th general election (2019). These research findings suggest that first-time voters, mainly undergraduate university students, have significantly increased political interest.

Therefore, based on these reasons, the researchers are interested in studying the causal relationship model of political party brand communication among undergraduate scholars in Thai national universities. The research focuses on undergraduate scholars, specifically the top 10 universities with the highest number of scholars.

Research Objective

1. To develop the causal relationship model of the political parties' branding of Thai national university scholars.
2. To verify the congruence of the causal relationship model of Thai national university scholars with empirical data.

Literature Review

Concepts and Theories about Political Parties' Branding

Political parties are facing intense competition to capture the attention and support of voters in today's highly polarized political landscape. Political parties' branding refers to using branding techniques to establish and promote the identity of political parties, candidates, and issues in the public's minds. It creates and manages the image, reputation, and perception of political actors and their policies to appeal to voters and gain their support. (Keller and Kotler, 2022; Daniele et al, (2020). By the principle of branding, there are four observable variables from the political parties' branding synthesis, which consist of 1) Awareness (AW), 2) Loyalty (LY), 3) Image (IM), and 4) Reputation (RP)

Visual Identity Aspect

The first aspect is creating a distinctive brand identity that reflects the party's core values and vision. Visual identity can also shape perceptions of political actors and their policies, as it can convey values and other attributes that resonate with voters. Effective branding also involves a coherent and consistent approach to messaging across all communication channels, including traditional media, social media, and grassroots organizing efforts. Political brands must be recognizable and stand out in a crowded and competitive landscape. To achieve this, many political brands rely on the services of professional designers and branding experts. These experts work to create a visual identity that aligns with the party's values and messages while also appealing to the target audience. In some cases, political brands may also research and test to determine which design elements are most effective in achieving their goals. (Klostermann et al., 2022; Pich and Newman, 2020; Lalancette and Raynauld, 2019; Heinberg et al., 2018). By literature review, there are four observable variables from the visual identities aspect synthesis, which consist of 1) Logo (LG), 2) Color (CL), 3) Font (FT), and 4) Slogan (SG).



Figure 1 The Political Parties' Visual Identities (Chartthaipattana Party, 2023; Democrat Party, 2023; Move Forward Party, 2023; Pheu Thai Party, 2023; PPRP Thailand, 2023; Thai Sang Thai Party, 2023)

Person Aspect

Prime Minister Candidates, Members, and Influencers (or some articles called Celebrities) can play an essential role in political party branding. They are often viewed as party representatives, and their actions and behaviors can influence public perceptions of the party's values, principles, and goals. Parties may employ candidate selection and training programs to ensure their members and candidates align with the party's branding and messaging. Additionally, parties may use social media and other communication channels to highlight their candidates' qualifications, experiences, and values in line with the party's branding strategy. (Grimmer and Grube, 2019; Johnson, 2019; Rutter et al., 2018) By literature review, there are three observable variables from the person synthesis, which consist of (1) Prime Minister Candidate (PMC), (2) Influencer (IF), and (3) Members (MB).

Highlighted Policy Aspect

The policy's branding also requires parties to understand their target audience deeply. Parties must be able to identify the key issues most important to voters and develop policy positions that resonate with those issues. Highlighted policies can help voters to remind the political parties in the long term. (Moorman, 2020; Schneiker, 2019; Lucarelli, 2018) By literature review, there are three observable variables from Highlighted Policy Aspect synthesis, which consist of (1) Difference (DF), (2) Widely Impact (WI), and (3) Usefulness (UF).

Hypothesis

H1: Visual Identity is positively related to Political Parties' Branding

H2: Person is positively related to Highlighted Policy

H3: Person is positively related to Political Parties' Branding

H4: Highlighted Policy is positively related to Political Parties' Branding

Research Framework

According to literature review, 1) Visual Identities aspect consists of Logo (LG), Color (CL), Font (FT), and Slogan (SG), 2) Person aspect consists of Prime Minister Candidate (PMC), Influencer (IF), and Members (MB), 3) Highlighted Policy Aspect synthesis, which consists of Difference (DF), Widely Impact (WI), and Usefulness (UF), and have been studied 4) Political Parties' Branding of Awareness (AW), Loyalty (LY), mage (IM), and Reputation (RP). Then, the researcher created the conceptual framework with four hypothesizes shown in Figure 2.

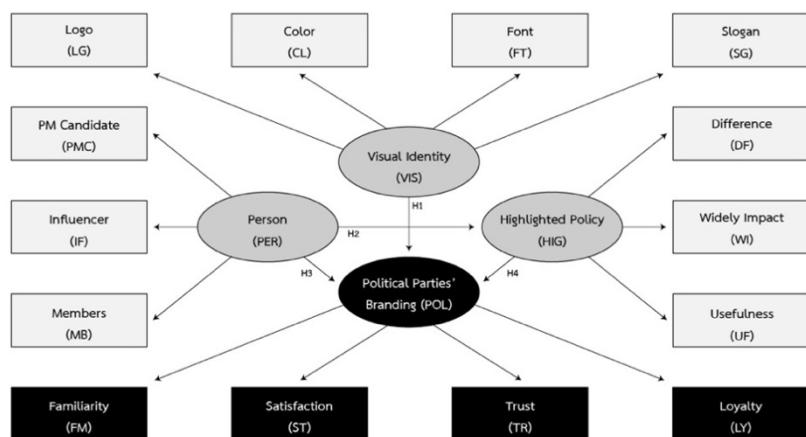


Figure 2 Research Framework

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research aimed to develop and validate the causal relationship model of political parties' branding of Thai national university scholars, which was quantitative research.

Population and Sample

This study uses a population of 373,047 undergraduate scholars of the top 10 scholars count in the national universities who enroll in the academic year 2022, obtained from the database of MHESI (2023). The suitable number of sample groups for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis should be approximately 10-20 times the number of observable parameters or

variables that can be detected. (Hair et al., 2010). This research has 14 observable variables, and the minimum sample size is 280 scholars. The preliminary data collection is done through proportionate stratified random sampling, with the proportional allocation of sample groups according to the number of scholars in each Thai national university. Then, data is collected in the field according to the predetermined proportion through simple random sampling using the Yamane (1973) formula to determine the sample size by a confidence level of 95%, such as 69 of Kasetsart University, 45 of Thammasat University, 44 of Mahasarakham University, 40 of Chulalongkorn University, 40 of Chiang Mai University, 35 of Prince of Songkla University, 34 of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, 32 of Mahidol University, 31 of Srinakharinwirot University, and 29 of Burapha University as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Proportion sampling of Thai National University Scholars.

Thai National University	Population	Proportion Sampling
Kasetsart University	64,541	69
Thammasat University	41,534	45
Mahasarakham University	40,600	44
Chulalongkorn University	37,626	40
Chiang Mai University	37,280	40
Prince of Songkla University	32,934	35
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University	31,907	34
Mahidol University	30,305	32
Srinakharinwirot University	29,206	31
Burapha University	27,114	29
Total	373,047	100

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into 4 parts: General Information, Visual Identity, Person, Highlighted Policy, and Political Parties' Branding.

This research has been certified as ethical by the Human Research Ethics Committee of The Regional Network, Sripatum University (Khon Kaen campus). It has been certified as Research with Exemption of DPE. No. SPUIRB-2023-006. Therefore, during the data collection process, the researchers followed the research ethics guidelines, which included obtaining informed consent before data collection, ensuring anonymity, maintaining the confidentiality of data, and emphasizing the importance of privacy.

The questionnaire was evaluated for content validity by examining the Index of item-objective congruence (IOC) through the assessment of 3 qualified experts who take a position of political party and branding communication organization more than 5 years. The result found that all questions met the criteria with an average score between 0.81 - 0.95 which showed that the question was relevant to the topic. (Kesang, 2016)

The questionnaire was tested on a non-sample group of 30 scholars to determine the reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability score was between .801-.944, 0.944 of Visual Identity, 0.916 of Highlighted Policy, 0.897 of Political Parties' Branding, and 0.801 of Person, which is considered acceptable as Table 2

Table 2 The result of the assessing questionnaire's reliability.

Variables	Cronbach's alpha
Visual Identity	.944
Highlighted policy	.916
Political parties' branding	.897
Person	.801

Data Collection

Data was collected by conducted as online questionnaires via Google Forms, which were distributed through Facebook Groups and Twitter that relate to the sample interest. The researcher designed the first screening question, "Are you an undergraduate scholar of 10 national universities as follow?" and "Are you the first voter of The 27th Thailand Election? (if the respondents choose an answer out of condition, the survey is terminated.) The survey was conducted in June 2023. 739 responses were received, of which 21 incomplete questionnaires were deleted, resulting in 718 complete questionnaires. Thus, the response rate for this study is considered acceptable.

Data Analysis

The statistics that are used in the research are descriptive statistics, which are frequency, percentage, average, and standard deviation. For analyzing the relationship between observed variables and unobserved variables, this research uses Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) the analyze the relationship between observed variables and latent variables.

Findings

The sample group that responded to the questionnaire consisted of 718 individuals. They were divided as follows: Chulalongkorn University with 138 people, or 18.8%; Mahidol University with 122 people, or 17%; Thammasat University with 89 people, or 12.4%; Kasetsart University with 81 people, or 11.3%; Srinakharinwirot University with 76 people, or 10.6%; Chiang Mai University with 51 people, or 7.1%; Mahasarakham University with 48 people, or 6.7%; Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University with 41 people, or 5.7%; Prince of Songkla University with 38 people, or 5.3%; and Burapha University with 37 people, or 5.2% as Table 3

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of the frequency and percentage of universities

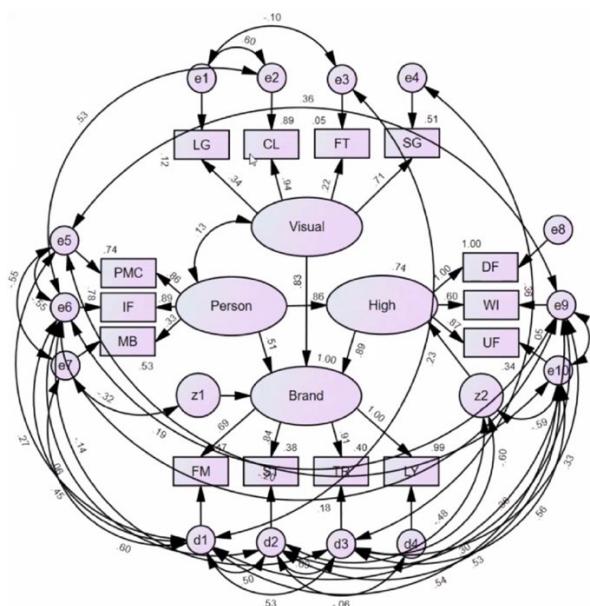
Thai National University	Frequency (in total 718)	Percentage
Chulalongkorn University	138	18.80
Mahidol University	122	17.00
Thammasat University	89	12.40
Kasetsart University	81	11.30
Srinakharinwirot University	76	10.60
Chiang Mai University	51	7.10
Mahasarakham University	48	6.70
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University	41	5.70
Prince of Songkla University	38	5.30
Burapha University	37	5.20
Total	373,047	100

Regarding gender, there were 339 male respondents, or 47.2%; 316 female respondents, or 44%; and 63 respondents, who chose not to specify their gender, or 8.8%. In terms of the academic year, there were 214 first-year scholars, or 29.8%; 214 second-year scholars, or 29.8%; 155 third-year scholars, or 21.6%; 106 fourth-year scholars, or 14.8%; and 29 scholars in higher years, or 4%.

The result of the Goodness of Fit test for the Causal Relationship Model of Political Parties' Branding of Thai National University Scholars is shown in Figure 3, indicating an acceptable level of fit for the SEM model that meets the criteria, such as Chi-square=53.482, df=41, CMIN/df=1.304, GFI=.990, AGFI=.973, RMSEA=.021, CFI=.999, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 The criteria for assessing the goodness of fit index of the model.

Index	Criteria	Results
Chi-square: χ^2	$p > 0.05$.092
CMIN/df: χ^2/df	$1 < \chi^2/df < 2$	1.304
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	> 0.90	.990
Adjusted Goodness Fit Index (AGFI)	> 0.90	.973
Approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.06	.021
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.90	.999



Chi-square=53.482 , df=41 , CMIN/df=1.304 , GFI=.990 , AGFI=.973 , RMSEA=.021 , CFI=.999

Figure 3 Causal Relationship Model of Political Parties' Branding of
 Thai National University Scholars (edited)

After testing the goodness of fit of SEM, the next step is to test the research hypotheses using correlation coefficients, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 presented the statistical results of the correlation analysis. In the H1 test, it was found that Visual Identity has a positive correlation with Political Parties' Branding, with a correlation coefficient of 0.83 at a significant p-value < 0.01. In the H2 test, it was found that Person has a positive correlation with Highlighted Policy, with a correlation coefficient of 0.86 at a significant p-value < 0.01. In the H3 test, it was found that Person has a positive correlation with Political Parties' Branding, with a correlation coefficient of 0.51 at a significant p-value < 0.01. Lastly, in the H4 test, it was found that Highlighted Policy has a positive correlation with Political Parties' Branding, with a correlation coefficient of 0.89 at a significant p-value < 0.01.

Regarding the observed variables of the Visual Identity factor, statistically significant values range from 0.05 to 0.89. Color has the highest impact on Visual Identity, followed by Slogan, Logo, and Font, in that order. Person factor, statistically significant values range from 0.53 to 0.78. Influencer has the highest impact on Person, followed by Prime Minister Candidate and Members. As for the observed variables of the Highlighted Policy factor, statistically significant values range from 0.60 to 1.00. Difference has the highest impact on Highlighted Policy, followed by Usefulness and Widely Impact. Finally, the observed variables of the Political Parties' Branding factor have statistically significant values ranging from 0.69 to 1.00. Loyalty has the highest impact on Political Parties' Branding, followed by Trust, Satisfaction, and Familiarity, in that order. The statistical summary of the hypothesis testing for H1 to H4 is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Correlations

Hypothesis	Correlation	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p
H1: Visual Identity is positively related to Political Parties' Branding	0.831	0.823	0.029	12.755	0.000
H2: Person is positively related to Highlighted Policy	0.858	0.867	0.012	9.162	0.000
H3: Person is positively related to Political Parties' Branding	0.513	0.501	0.010	8.586	0.000
H4: Highlighted Policy is positively related to Political Parties' Branding	0.892	0.897	0.013	23.868	0.000

significant at the 0.01 level

Discussion

1. According to the first hypothesis testing, it was found that Visual Identity, consisting of a Logo, Color, Font, and Slogan, clearly impacts Political Parties' Branding. In other words, a Visual identity is a powerful tool for building a memorable brand presence. By carefully crafting visual elements that align with a brand's values, personality, and target audience, businesses can establish brand recognition, differentiate from competitors, build trust, and evoke emotional connections with consumers. Investing in a well-designed and consistent visual identity is worthwhile and can significantly contribute to a brand's long-term success. Among these elements, Color has the most significant impact on Visual Identity, because Color is a more profound form of communication than just conveying messages. Besides creating memorable experiences for viewers, Color can also convey emotional and psychological aspects. In summary, from the perspective of first voters,

Visual Identity is the most important to Political Parties' Branding, especially in the digital communication era where information is continuously transmitted. Political Parties should pay great attention to Logo, Color, Font, and Slogan because the visual aspect is the basis for special brand recognition. This result align with the research conducted by Cao et al. (2022), DasGupta and Sarkar (2022), and Park et al. (2020)

2. The results of the second hypothesis testing revealed that the Person factor, comprising the Prime Minister Candidate, Influencer, and Member, has a positive relationship with Highlighted Policy. This can be explained by the significant influence that political party members, as individuals, exert on policy formation within their respective parties. These findings align with the research conducted by Strandberg and Carlson (2021), Park et al. (2020), and Moorman (2020), which elucidate how the representation of diverse constituencies, alignment with party ideologies, policy expertise, grassroots connections, participation in internal decision-making, and role in ensuring accountability collectively shape the policies put forward by political parties.

3. Based on the third hypothesis test results, which found that the Person factor includes the Prime Minister Candidate, Influencer, and Member, has a positive relationship with Political Parties' Branding, it can be analyzed that party members, particularly high-profile figures such as the prime minister, leaders, influencers (or celebrities), officials, and spokespersons, often represent the party through public statements. How they choose their words, tone, and messaging significantly impacts how the public perceives the party. An articulate and coherent message from party members can strengthen the party's branding, while controversial or divisive statements can have a negative impact. This aligns with the findings of Moorman (2020), Schneiker (2019), and Lucarelli (2018), which highlight that a strong political brand built by party members instills trust and confidence among voters. Consistent messaging and behavior create a sense of reliability, which is crucial for the long-term success of a party.

4. According to the last hypothesis test results, it was found that the Highlighted Policy, consisting of Difference, Widely Impact, and Usefulness, has a strong positive relationship with Political Parties' Branding. This aligns with the research findings of Moorman (2020), Park et al. (2020), and Grimmer & Grube (2019), which support the idea that policies play a crucial role in shaping the identity and perception of political parties. Policies are the foundation of a party's ideology, values, and vision for governance. Effective formulation and communication of policies are essential for political branding, enabling parties to establish credibility, attract specific voter segments, and differentiate themselves from competitors. Additionally, Johnson (2019) discovered that developing and implementing sound policies enhance a party's trustworthiness and credibility. Consistency in policy positions and effective implementation strengthen the party's brand as reliable and capable of fulfilling its promises.

Suggestions

1. Suggestion for Research Utilization

The research reveals that from the perspective of first voters, essential aspects related to political parties' branding are (1) Visual Identity, (2) Person, and (3) Highlighted Policy. Each of these aspects has sub-variables with different weights of correlation. This allows political parties to apply the research findings to identify and improve internal weaknesses that affect their brand. Furthermore, the research findings can be utilized for brand-building purposes, including newly established political parties in the future and the re-branding of those existing political parties. These findings can be applied to short-term goals, such as campaign planning and voter mobilization, and long-term objectives, such as brand communication, to generate popularity and build a positive reputation for the party brand.

2. Suggestion for Further Research

Future research should focus on studying first-time voters in private educational institutions or expand the research to different regions within Thailand. From the data of the general election in Thailand on May 14, 2023, it was found that the voter turnout was approximately 75.22% of eligible voters nationwide. This is considered the highest voter turnout in the country's history since the Office of The Election began organizing elections (BBC NEWS, 2020). Therefore, in future research, it is advisable to expand the scope of the study to the first voter of higher private education institutions, compare between the regions, other age groups beyond the student population, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, to gain a broader understanding of the population's voting behavior.

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