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***The role of political branding in Cyprus
parliamentary elections of 2016***

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ABSTRACT


This thesis relates to how political branding, as a marketing paradigm, fits into the 2016 parliamentary elections in Cyprus. The current context of Cypriot politics presents a challenge for all political actors. Cypriot voters generally demonstrate a new mindset imbued with intense anti-establishment and populist sentiment in repudiation of government scandals, corruption, and poor governance bedeviling the Cypriot society. Cypriot socio-economic problems have been generally attributed to the reigning political regime made up by major political parties. These old controlling political forces, while expressing a positive thought that supporters would continue to vote for them since they are beneficiaries of long-running political favors, showed in their behavior more of caution and apprehension that political clientelism may have loosened its firm grip on the electorate. In an incensed manner, the Cypriot electorate openly declared massive abstention from voting in the 2016 parliamentary elections. This avowed and demonstrated withdrawal from political rights purveyed a serious threat, which political actors could not summarily dismiss because the intensity of anti-establishment feelings resonated everywhere and could change the balance of political power in Cyprus. As the situation typified a solid, rebellious, and militant population of voters in a deteriorating Cypriot socio-economic strand, the role and significance of political branding surged to the fore. The need to know the profiles of new target audiences, how to reach them, what to tell them, how to impact and influence them, and how to convert Cypriot politics into a more predictable political environment were in general, fundamental marketing and communication issues that political branding needed to address in positioning a Cypriot political candidate. By leveraging a qualitative research design and the theoretical frameworks of brand audit, market segmentation, and digital media communications, the study involved the

investigation and analysis of the political branding strategy of political actors in the 2016 Cypriot parliamentary elections. The study covered the areas of audience targeting; thoughts, attitudes, and approaches of political actors; role and relevance of communication and branding; and the effectiveness of political branding based on actual election results. The findings indicated that political branding, with respect to Cypriot politics, produced mixed results and did not wholly meet desired outcomes of political actors due to partial process and quality compliance in political branding execution.

Keywords: *Cyprus, Parliamentary elections, political communication, branding, political landscape in Cyprus, marketing, elections of 2016*

Dedication

*To my family,
my whole world*


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I would like to express my profound gratitude to the remarkable individuals who have been instrumental in the successful completion of my doctoral thesis.

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This thesis stands as a testament to the collective efforts and support of these exceptional individuals. I am truly fortunate to have had such a dedicated and inspiring network of people accompanying me on this academic odyssey.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Nicosia. This thesis has been composed solely by myself except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment. It has not been previously submitted, in whole or in part, to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signed

Date



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Abbreviation Index

Voter Group	Code	Reason for Choice of Voter to Address	Code
Registered Party Voter	RPV	Size of Voting Population	SVP
Young Cyprus Voter	YCV	Helping the People	HTP
Undecided Cyprus Voter	UCV	Non-committal to Political Brand	NPB
Working Middle Class	WMC	Previous Voter's Interest	PVI
Jobless Cyprus Voter	JCV	Demonstrated Political Maturity	DPM
Mid-Life Voter	MLV	Promise of Hope	POH

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the importance of communication and branding strategies for political parties and candidates in the 2016 parliamentary elections in Cyprus. The chapter describes the circumstances giving rise to the research problem, defines the research aim and objectives, states the key questions and assumptions, and highlights the significance of the thesis and the value of branding for both business and non-business applications.

1.2 Background and Definition of the Problem

The political backdrop in Cyprus underscores the election campaign value of political communication and branding in the context of the rapid growth of information and communication technology (ICT) and digital media (Norwegian Centre for Research Data – NSD, 2010), where around 70% of households and 94% of enterprises in Cyprus are Internet-connected on broadband links (European Commission, 2015). This high online interconnectivity denotes the enormous impact of digital communication, more particularly social media, on almost all facets of people's lives in Cyprus (Michael, 2016), which political parties and politicians are very much aware of. For this reason, in the 2016 parliamentary elections, political parties and candidates, as well as communication consultants, needed to effectively reach and establish emotional connection with the electorates. Reaching the hearts and minds of the electorates was an urgent priority for political actors because Cypriot voters manifested a new mindset that was heavy in anti-establishment sentiments. Achieving emotional connection with the voters could potentially soften the hardened adverse perception of the broad population of indignant and frustrated voters who ventilated

large-scale abstention from the 2016 electoral exercise. Due to poor government performance, Cypriot voters became militant purveyors of populist thoughts inundating Europe and emerging in Cyprus. Considering the urgent and critical nature of the new voter's mindset, connecting and approaching voters through digital media, especially social media, was not only the cheapest way to promote political identity, but also a convenient, direct, and interactive mode to engage voters on a high personal context. In affirmation of their reliance on digital media, most political candidates and leaders in Cyprus maintain one or more social media pages on platforms such as Facebook and X (previously known as Twitter), where numerous online posts, comments, announcements, photos, and videos are regularly uploaded for public consumption (Frangonikolopoulos & Papadopoulos, 2017).

According to research participants in this study, problems about corruption and scandals in government, the Cypriot issue, and economic dysfunctions bearing on unemployment and poverty, including political machinations, deficient justice system, and weak human development were perceived to have alienated many voters from productive alignment with the government. The burden of how to influence voter behaviour became a key concern for all political actors. The emerging new voter mindset served to raise the hurdles of political communication because highly fragmented communities or groups of people emerged due to the erosion of public trust. In addressing an apathetic electoral behavior and voter's withdrawal intention, it became necessary for political actors to develop a public communication platform that underpins a strong political branding strategy. Whether or not the political actors were able to effectively study the mind and behavior of the electorates, or communicate and establish emotional connections with target audiences, or influence the results of the

2016 parliamentary elections stand as a key issue that has yet to be established. Overall, the study fundamentally seeks to address how political branding fit into the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections amid a different voter mindset that remains impregnated with intense anti-government sentiment, influenced by historical clientelism and rising populist thoughts, imbued with desired withdrawal from political exercises, and emboldened by the power of new digital communication.

1.3. Research Aim

Based on the issues and actions defining the context of the 2016 parliamentary elections, the research aim is: the investigation, the impact, and the effects of political branding on the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections. Due to the increasing use of branding in the 21st century by politicians, it is now considered as an essential “communication tool” for pre-election campaigns to enhance the public image of the candidates. Furthermore, The aim was to explore how political branding influenced, guided, and shaped the profiles of Cypriot politicians and the election results, through a detailed qualitative research methodology of interviews.

1.4. Research Questions

In relation to the research aim and objectives, the study responds to the following key questions:

Research Question 1 For audience targeting and market segmentation, what are the general profile, perception, and motivation of the Cypriot electorate with respect to the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections?

Research Question 2 What were the thoughts, attitudes, and approaches of 2016 candidates and communicators to connect with voters in the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections?

Research Question 3 What was the role and relevance of communication and branding in the 2016 parliamentary elections in Cyprus?

Research Question 4 How effective and what were the results of the political branding strategies in the 2016 parliamentary elections?

1.5. Research Objectives

Based on the central research problem and key questions in the contextual study of the Cyprus 2016 parliamentary elections, the research objectives are:

1. To discuss to what extent electorates of Cyprus know, use, and engage new digital media in their current lifestyle and communication interactions
2. To describe the knowledge and understanding Cyprus political actors have about target audiences, including their views on how to connect with them.
3. To evaluate and establish the importance of communication in the development and adoption of branding strategy for political purposes.
4. To gauge the general effectiveness of political communication and branding strategies adopted in the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary election results.

1.6 Research Assumption

This research study was conducted with two fundamental assumptions being considered. These are:

1. Communication consultants and candidates both possess the expert knowledge and experience to render an indicative assessment of the voter's mind with respect to political issues and their participation in election exercises, which assessment could be generally relied upon in inquiring into the voter's belief, perception, and values.
2. In representation of a common political party, the views of the candidates with respect to the understanding and analysis of the voter's mind and the thoughts about communication and branding remain aligned with those of the communicators.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the existing literature in relation to the application of marketing, branding, and combined media strategy in politics, which agenda accentuates the building and promotion of the identity, image, and value of candidates as political brands to be marketed across different groups of electorates. While the political branding landscape is replete with illuminating studies highlighting the interesting context of the topic, nonetheless, this thesis can be reasonably differentiated from earlier studies.

The current study covers one of the most recent election events where political branding appears to have thrived in a highly fragmented society with a large population of apathetic and disenchanting electorates. The period leading up to the elections in

May 2016 in Cyprus was influenced by global political events and trends which had a significant impact on political communication and branding strategies. Discussions about the Eurozone crisis and austerity measures were prevalent affecting how voters perceived things and influencing the election dynamics. Political figures used media platforms to discuss challenges aiming to gather support for their policies (Kaminis, 2015).

Additionally the geopolitical situation in the Eastern Mediterranean region with tensions with neighboring Turkey and attempts to reunify Cyprus highlighted the importance of communication in shaping opinion. Parties strategically positioned themselves on matters of security and regional stability using media narratives to attract voters and gain an edge (Tsakiris, 2016).

On a scale events like the Brexit referendum and the US presidential election impacted the context of Cyprus 2016 elections. These occurrences emphasized how communication and branding influence discussions on sovereignty, nationalism and globalization. The intense communication strategies seen during these campaigns. Including social media use. Changed campaigning methods and public involvement (Clarke et al., 2017; Cornfield et al., 2017).

In times scholars have been delving into the changing landscape surrounding the Cyprus issue highlighting how political communication and regional conflicts intersect. The participation of players and the complexities of energy exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean have impacted communication tactics as different parties navigate through evolving alliances and power dynamics.

Moreover the lasting impacts of the Eurozone crisis continue to influence discussions and communication strategies in Cyprus. Measures taken to address the crisis have raised concerns about stability affecting voter sentiments and election results. Understanding these challenges is crucial for examining the messaging and branding approaches used during the 2016 elections.

Furthermore current research on the growth of movements and how migration is politically utilized provides insights into how identity politics intersect with communication strategies. These issues tie into conversations on nationalism and sovereignty molding voter opinions and electoral results.

Lastly advancements in media and technology have revolutionized communication by allowing direct engagement, between politicians and voters while also presenting challenges related to misinformation and biased algorithms.

Social media platforms have now become battlegrounds, in shaping opinion and rallying support showcasing how political communication has transformed in the digital era (Chadwick, 2017).

In conclusion, the 2016 parliamentary elections in Cyprus were significantly influenced by a web of occurrences and patterns underlining the importance of political communication strategies and branding in shaping public conversations and election results. Understanding these dynamics within the framework of developments offers valuable insights into the changing landscape of democracy and governance not only in Cyprus but also, on a larger scale.

In addition, the parliamentary election of 2016 is a critical juncture in terms of political communication in Cyprus. This is the reason why this study remains important today, in 2023. It brings to the fore how election chances of political actors, regardless of the context of prevailing issues, could be decisively influenced by the dimension, content, diversity, and reach of media strategies supporting a branding campaign.

The accent on branding amplifies the significance of the thesis in society, within and beyond the confines of the business world. Branding is one of the most powerful of contemporary marketing strategies and is used by modern business firms to enhance their corporate and product image; differentiate their products from competition; develop, reinforce, and strengthen favorable consumer perceptions; and ultimately, enhance organizational competitive advantage. Branding has become increasingly important in the last two decades and the value of established and successful brands has reached astronomical proportions (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002). Furthermore, the ratio of market value to book value of the S&P 500 companies has increased from 1, in the early 1980s, to 7 today, primarily due to the increase in the value of intangible assets like brands and goodwill (Hulten & Hao, 2008). Branding has now been drafted into the area of political elections and branding principles and approaches are being strongly used by various political aspirants to achieve electoral success (Needham, 2005). Since the thesis propounds on the power of branding in politics, it assumes high relevance in any political exercise, and in the strategic intent of any political actor, whether locally or in a global context.

The study leverages semi-structured interviews of 19 key informants -- 14 parliamentary candidates (interviews) and 5 communication consultants (interviews).

The participation of several key informants heightens the comprehensiveness and reliability of information in the research. From a political communication standpoint, the thesis examines the value of marketing and combined traditional and digital media in sustaining a branding strategy transcending business and non-business applications.

Furthermore, the tripartite paradigm of brand audit-market segmentation-digital media constitutes another original contribution with respect to the appreciation and analysis of the Cyprus parliamentary election exercises. The model suggests a novel mode of analysis richer in strategic and integrated marketing sense than the less sophisticated approach that was generally adopted by political actors in the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections.

Numerous stakeholders can benefit from this thesis. Political actors and organizations, including communication consultants, public relations agents, editors, and writers can use the thesis as a key reference. Academic researchers can similarly look at the thesis as a source of information. Moreover, brand managers, marketing specialists, and integrated marketing communications (IMC) practitioners can be guided by the thesis as it originates from the branding and communication perspectives used in the business community. Due to plans in politics, it will likewise benefit from the thesis as it initiates us to the hard discipline of political communication and branding, from value creation, party affiliation, audience targeting, content and messaging development, media strategy, and feedback management.

1.8 Chapter Summary

The chapter provided an initial description of how the thesis relates to the importance of communication and branding for political parties, candidates, and communicators in the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections. The chapter described the circumstances surrounding the value and necessity of political branding, which then afforded a clear definition of the research problem, as well as the research aim, objectives, and key questions. The chapter concluded with a compelling discussion of the significance of the research study, including a strong impetus on the value of branding and the usefulness of the discipline across business and non-business applications in society.



CHAPTER 2: MARKETING AND ITS RELEVANCE TO POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical framework for the research study, locate gaps in existing literature and help in the formulation of research questions. The determination of the role of political branding in the 2016 parliamentary elections in Cyprus represents a complex subject with an interesting mix of political, marketing, branding, and personality-building dimensions.

“Political branding is a burgeoning area of practice and study. Academics have explored the nature of the Barack Obama brand, which has been deemed to be a commodified entity that is marketed in place of policy (Zavattaro 2010); of Mexican presidential candidates, who voters preferred when a political brand image projected capability, energy, empathy and handsomeness (Guzmán and Sierra 2009)”; Scammell as cited in Marland (p.4, 2013) refers to Tony Blair’s Labour Party, which was rebranded in response to elector disappointment with a deteriorating premium brand.

The chapter has broad subject content that presents and discusses: (1) the importance of communication as an essential human need, with political messaging and branding dimensions; (2) an overview of marketing and brand building in the business context; (3) the link between brand building and political activity, including its impact on electoral exercises.

It is important to recognize from the outset the inherent ironies and contradictions in the use of branding for political purposes. **Marketing** is a broad business activity undertaken to enhance sales of business products or services for maximum revenues, profits, wealth, and competitive advantage (Porter, 1980; Borad, 2018). It is a complex function that includes in its ambit the study of the market, especially consumers, competing products and competitor strategies, the formulation of carefully thought-out multidimensional marketing strategies, and their effective implementation in the marketplace. The development of corporate brands, products, and services, which entails instilling positive marketplace and consumer perceptions, is an important element of marketing. This brand-building process helps organizations attract and retain customers and charge premium prices, despite prevailing competitive pressure. **Branding** helps in differentiating organizations and their products from others in a positive and beneficial way to improve institutional market performance, sales, profitability and wealth creation (Porter, 1980; Kotler & Keller, 2012). **Politics**, on the other hand, is associated with governance and service rather than business, trade, and industry. Politicians enter the political arena, at the regional, state or national level to participate in corporate governance and engage in service to citizens. They have onerous responsibilities, which include among other things, the enhancement of the economic and social conditions of their constituents. Whilst the basic publicized objective of politics concerns public service in adherence with specific political ideologies, an overwhelming majority of modern-day politicians use various strategies that are associated with marketing to influence voter opinion and win elections.

“This strategy is not only related to winning an election; it also has to do with the ability to maintain the support of the voters, to extend the trust that these political leaders receive throughout the time they spend in a specific position.

This need is expressed through the concept of permanent campaign, which is required not just for election but for governing and policy success as well". (Escarcena, p.6, 2014)

Marketing has thus become an extremely important element of political life, especially political campaigning and electoral success -- whether it is on a national, regional, or local level. The study of various elections in the United States, especially the ones involving Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Barrack Obama and Donald Trump, leads to the conclusion that these contests have moved beyond the realm of service, devotion, duty and governance to that of sophisticated marketing management, as prevalent in the most developed countries (Brady, 2008). The language used by contemporary political journalists and bloggers appears to be replete with marketing and brand management terminology and it has become difficult to differentiate the analysis of the presidential campaigns from media reports about the competing campaigns of Samsung and Apple (Brady, 2008). Barrack Obama's campaign was described by many experts with the assistance of diverse commercial frameworks (Erwin, 2008). Media reports described his identity in terms of "seamlessness" and "corporate", even as media reports stated that he was promoted across media as a sophisticated and expensive consumer brand (Erwin, 2008). His promotion was often described with parallels about the development of social media platforms (Erwin, 2008). On the other hand, Donald Trump's presidential campaign for the elections of 2016 was characterized by a social media "war". Trump's campaign through social media represented an obscene branding of a hypercapitalist businessman and celebrity into a political candidate whose campaign is run on bombast, dominating on a daily basis the mediascape, and gaining the attention of voters/consumers (with the willing

complicity of the cable news networks and with the help of his Twitter feed) (Kellner, p.18, 2016). This is an obvious example of the way in which marketing and social media can affect elections results.

This review of literature first takes up the discussion of marketing and brand building in the business context and thereafter attempts to establish a strong relationship between brand building and political, especially electoral activity. The review is sequentially structured, beginning with an overview of marketing and brand building and thereafter progressing to the use of branding in politics and in electoral activity.

2.2 Central Importance of Communication

Propounding on the basic notion that communication is a process among human beings, Shockley-Zalabak (2001, pp. 19-25) articulated the view that the process of human communication typifies attempts to construct shared realities through social interaction. Shockley-Zalabak considers communication as an interaction where two parties send and receive messages to and from each other using verbal and non-verbal channels and requiring competence-based behaviors of communication actors. Communication therefore, is a messaging platform that enhances its significance in marketing, branding, and image-building – properties that make it a cornerstone in present day political branding and political marketing (Post, 2012, Pich & Dean, 2015).

In its rhetorical context (University of Texas at Arlington, 2016), communication develops sources of differentiation by creating trust and establishing credibility (i.e. ethos), building emotional connections with the audience by appealing to their values and interests (i.e. pathos), and reinforcing context by appealing to the intelligence of

the audience (i.e. logos) with well-constructed compelling arguments (Purdue.edu, 2016;). In its relational context, communication epitomizes attempts to build and extend relationships by intensifying emotional connections with different target audiences under a more personal and collectivistic context of relationship building (Clark-Polner & Clark, 2014). The incredible speed of technological advances and wireless innovations has dramatically changed the way people communicate, apart from enabling a big part of the world to be digitally interconnected under a robust and ubiquitous information and communications technology regime (Rouse, 2016).

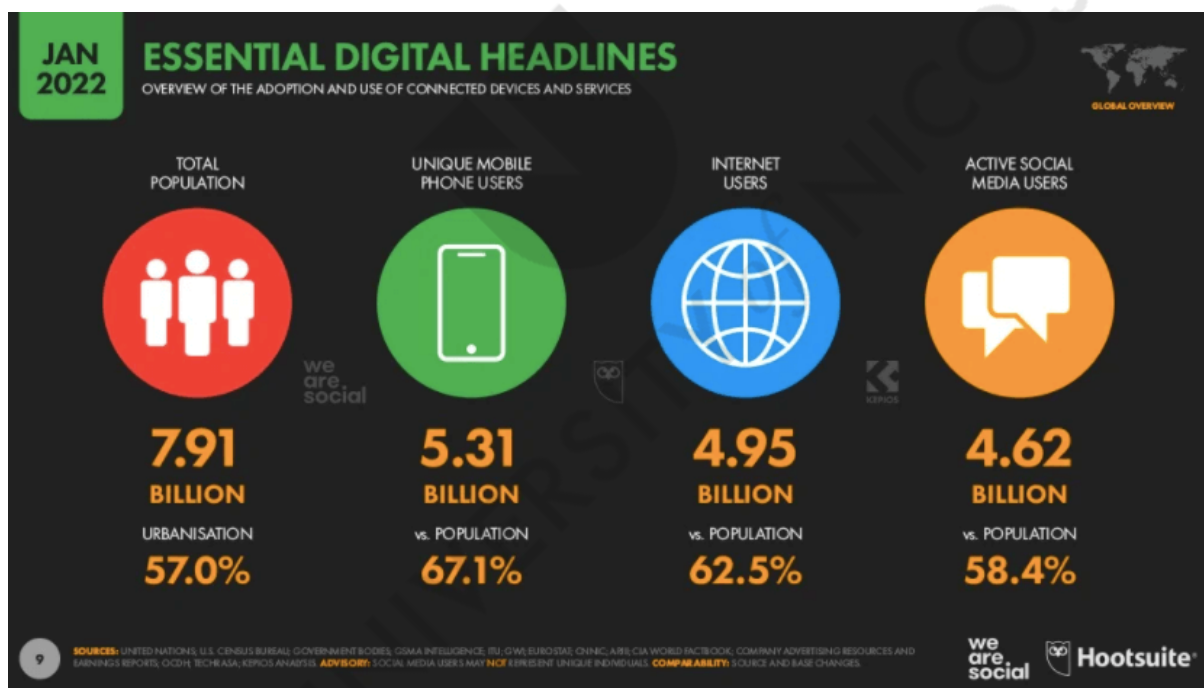


Figure 2.1: Essential Digital Headlines Source: Datareportal ([DataReportal – Global Digital Insights](#))

As shown in [Figure 2.1](#), the global digital snapshot illuminates the emerging extensive transition to the digital environment, at penetration rates of 62.5% (Internet), 67,1% (mobile), and 58,4% (social media). In numerous studies, social media continues to

demonstrate a growth pattern indicating that more communicators, whether private or public, take advantage of the reach and economy of the medium.

Figure 2.2 presents social media penetration in various parts of the world as of January 2022, mostly based on the gender and age of the users.

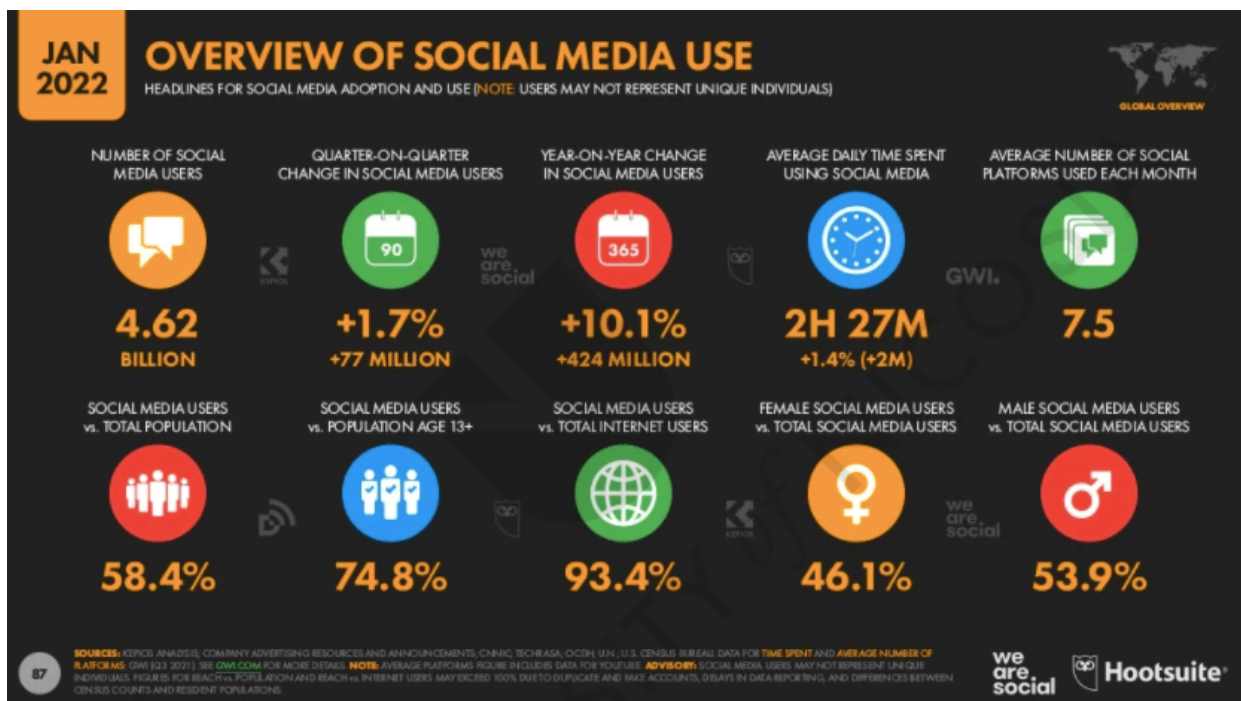


Figure 2.2: Social Media Use (2022)

Source: Datareportal ([DataReportal – Global Digital Insights](https://www.datareportal.com))

Figure 2.3 shows the increasing speed at which digital advertisements have in social media. The wide use of social media “forces” brands and companies to spend millions on advertisements through several platforms with a preference for Facebook and Instagram.

US Social Network Video Ad Spending, 2019-2023

billions, % change, and % of total social network ad revenues

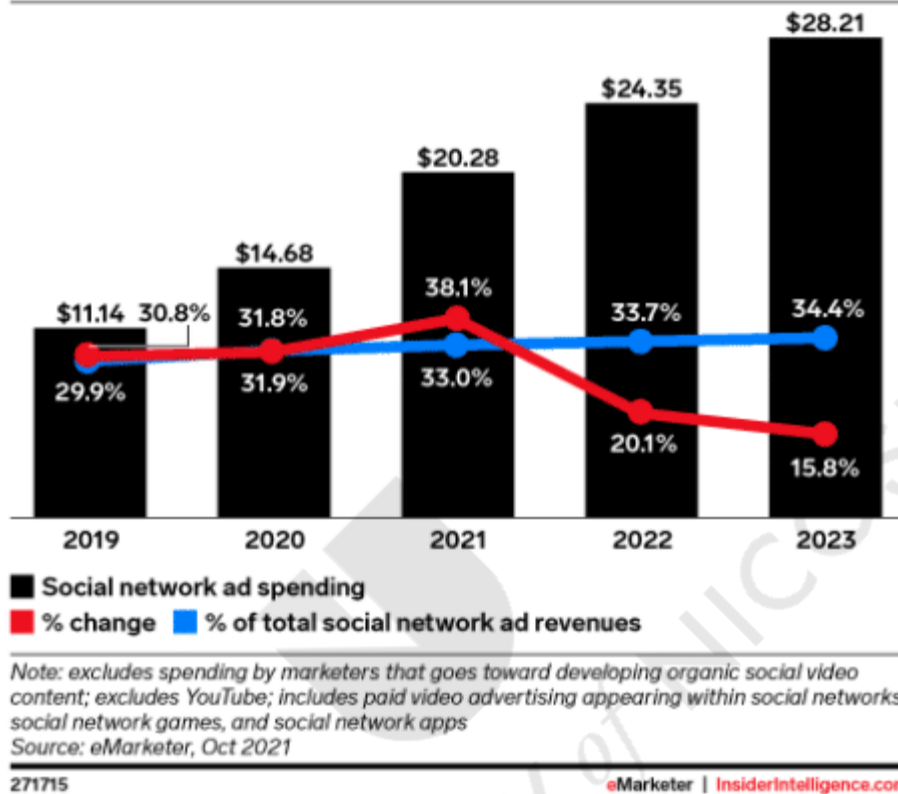


Figure 2.3: US Social Network video Ad spending 2019-2023

Source: eMarketer ([eMarketer: Advertising, Media & Marketing - Insider Intelligence](#))

As emerging technologies develop new paradigms on how people think, work, live, and interact in the mix of strengths and weaknesses in alternative communication channels, the call for effective and prudent communication decisions highlights the importance and use of strategic communications strategy in personal, group, and organisational communications (Everse, 2012). In today's ICT framework, power, speed, reach, utility, and economy characterize communication as a key enabler of human activity and development (Kuyoro, Awodele & Okolie, 2012).

With the continued rise of technology-based communication enablers and tools (Savelau, 2009), people enjoy instantaneous global access to diverse information portals, with convenient facilities for online research, e-commerce, cross-media, digital marketing, social media, and integrated marketing communications under optimal considerations (Assael, 2011; Mulhern, 2009). The need to effectively reach and establish emotional connections with target audiences, using scarce personal and resources, whether for business or non-business campaign agendas, accentuate the importance of IMC. This relates to a strategic marketing process aimed at unifying and directing all messaging and communication strategies, including media channels, to the customer (Eliason, 2014). It has been demonstrated in many applications, including politics and personal branding (Luck & Chapman, 2003; Ghiuta, 2009), that IMC produces superior branding results as it affords optimal use of cross-media, brings down communication cost, and creates brand consistency (Linton, 2016). As Copley (2004, p.4) states:

Integrated marketing communications can be described as a process that involves various forms of communications that variously persuade, inform, remind, and entertain customers and prospects, affecting and influencing the behaviour of target audiences. The IMC process also includes anything and everything that an organization, company, or its people and brands do with targets and the publics, either deliberately or not. Making good use of all forms of relevant communication makes sense. All in all, the IMC process, like the more general marketing process, starts and ends with the customer or prospect.

IMC has significant implications in marketing, brand building, political communication, and political branding, which topics are discussed in the following sections.

2.3 Overview of Marketing and Brand Building

Peter Drucker, the globally acknowledged management expert constantly focused upon the importance of marketing in business, stating that marketing and innovation were the two primary functions of business activity:

“Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two – and only two – basic functions: marketing and innovation. Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs. Marketing is the distinguishing, unique function of the business.” (Drucker, 1954, p. 37)

Marketing essentially comprises the process of communicating the value of the product or service to consumers in order to sell them for the enhancement of organizational revenues (Gilligan, 2005; Homburg et al., 2009). Kotler & Keller (2012) defines marketing as the satisfaction of needs and wants through an exchange process. Escarena (2014), on the other hand, stated that marketing was not about providing products or services; it entailed the provisioning of changing benefits to the needs and demands of the customer. The Chartered Institute of Marketing defined marketing as a management process responsible for the identification, anticipation, and satisfaction of customer requirements (CIM, 2013). The common theme in these three definitions, as can be seen, was the satisfaction of customer needs and the provision of customer benefits (Homburg et al., 2009; (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Marketing is very obviously a complex and multidimensional activity constituting

numerous activities and needing purposeful integration, the more important of which are bulleted below (Yogesh K. Dwivedi et al., 2021).

- Development of marketing strategies and plans
- Capturing marketing insights
- Connecting with customers
- Building strong brands
- Shaping of market offering
- Delivering of value
- Communication of value
- Creation of long-term growth

It is of relevance to know that marketing is believed to have evolved through five specific stages, namely the simple trade era, the production era, the sales era, the marketing department era, and the marketing company era (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Homburg et al., 2009). The simple trade era originated in historical times when available products were produced by hand and were available in limited quantities (Kotler & Keller, 2012). With exploration and trade in resources being the focus of economic activity, the overwhelming bulk of business took place in commodities (Homburg et al., 2009; Patterson, 2008).

The simple trade era, which is considered to have existed from historical times to the middle of the 19th century, was replaced, due to the industrial revolution, by the production era (Homburg et al., 2009; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Mass production resulted in the enhancement of the availability of product choices in the marketplace and business philosophy revolved around “if you build it, they will come”, an assumption that stemmed from the limited availability of alternative product options (Homburg et al., 2009; Kotler & Keller, 2006). The marketing era, business historians, feel lasted

for six decades from the 1860s to the 1920s, and was replaced by the sales era (Homburg et al., 2009; Patterson, 2008).

The sales era, which lasted from the 1920s to the 1940s succeeded the production era and emerged from the saturation of pent-up consumer demand (Roger, 1998; Patterson, 2008). With business firms constantly enhancing the production of various types of goods, enhancement in competitive activity resulted in increasing efforts by companies to sell their products to consumers (Roger, 1998; Patterson, 2008). This era saw the emergence of commoditization, with products becoming commodities and price becoming the distinguishing feature of competitive advantage (Roger, 1998; Homburg et al., 2009).

The sales era was succeeded by the marketing department era when the economic boom that developed after the closure of the Second World War resulted in the realization by organizational managements that the existing sale orientation was not resonating with buyers (Roger, 1998; Homburg et al., 2009). Increasing levels of affluence made consumers more powerful in the marketplace (Homburg et al., 2009; Lenskold, 2003). Business organizations responded to this development by consolidating all marketing-associated activities, like advertising and sales promotion into marketing departments (Adcock, 2000; Kotler & Keller, 2006). This was the period, when marketing came to be recognized as the reason for the existence of businesses, lasting from the 1940s to the 1960s (Adcock, 2000).

The marketing department era has been followed by the marketing company era and is felt to still be in play (Adcock, 2000; Homburg et al., 2009). The marketing concept, which has become widely accepted, posits that customers are the focus of business

endeavors and businesses essentially exist to satisfy customer requirements (Adcock, 2000; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Marketing is thus the goal of all business activity, with all organizational employees becoming, directly or indirectly part of the marketing effort (Adcock, 2000; Lenskold, 2003). The consumer has become king and companies exist to satisfy him.

2.3.1 Branding

Branding, as elaborated earlier, is an integral element of marketing and is felt by many marketing and management experts to be the culmination of marketing efforts (Abratt & Bick, 2003). Jevons (2005) stated that the word brand itself was historically derived from the Teutonic word for the mark left by a hot iron and its use has been traced to the same time as marketing; which was introduced in the Oxford Dictionary in the middle of the 16th century. Branding has been described as “the psychological representation of a product or an organisation” (Scammell, 2007, p.18), which implies that the term is more symbolic than tangible in terms of value to the end user.

The American Marketing Association defined a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol or design intended for identification of goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of their competitors” (American Marketing Association, p.1, 2014). Described more simply and at a basic level, a brand essentially facilitates swifter decision-making by customers by differentiating between products that are broadly similar (Scammell, 2007; Crainer, 1995). It is important to appreciate that the perception and definition of branding have progressively evolved with time, with the development of concepts like value addition, implying that branding is used in campaigns for the development of image (Scammell, 2007; Crainer, 1995).

It is also relevant to note that the meaning of branding depends upon the functioning of specific brands in the extremely complex contemporary marketing efforts of organizations, products, and services (Jevons, 2005; Scammell, 2007). Its definition can also vary with the context in which it is used, like for example an organization, a product, a service, a person, and even a politician (Jevons, 2005; Scammell, 2007). Such an expanded definition has helped in imbuing branding with significant flexibility and led to its evolution from the realm of consumer advertising to that of strategy formulation and development of a full-fledged market identity (Jevons, 2005; Scammell, 2007).

The complexity of branding and its various connotations have resulted in the awareness that it is more than an expedient term for fashionable imagery or marketing strategy (Lambin, 2007; Scammell, 2007). The development of a good and strong brand for an organization, a product, a service, or even a political candidate is becoming increasingly important as modern-day western consumers have not just become more demanding but can also relate with ease to the treatment of a politician or a political candidate as a marketable product (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; Blackston, 2000).

“Scammell (2007) gives four reasons for the rise of the contemporary brand. The first is that recognition of a respected brand name translates into financial value; second, growing distrust and skepticism about the efficacy of mass advertising; third, the perception of increasing consumer power and new concerns for corporate social responsibility; and fourth, consumer research,

which insists on the importance of emotional engagement in shopping behavior”
(Sonies, p.12, 2011).

All dimensions of brands, including their description, communication, economic valuation, and research have over time become complex and sophisticated in response to consumer demands (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; Blackston, 2000). Extant literature in marketing, as indicated earlier provides a broad range of descriptions for the brand (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; Blackston, 2000). Contemporary experts now want to describe brands in terms of psychological representations, layers of emotional connection, and intangible benefits (Goodchild & Callow, 2001; Abratt & Bick, 2003). For example, it is a marketing and research-based reality that color has powerful and unique psychological appeal for brand differentiation and customer engagement (Ciotti, 2018); the ideal phenomenon of emotional attachment, as studies indicate, acts as a mediator in creating strong and iconic brands which can be emotional brands (e.g. Visa, Meridien, Marriott, Taj Hotels), and can wield enormous power beyond the factors of price, features, and benefits to the pinnacle of customer commitment (Jawahar & Maheswari, 2009); and in terms of being reflective of intangible benefits, brands can fulfill various important imprints in the minds of target audience such as acting as a source of trust or a predictor of quality (Miller & Muir, 2005). The applications of these psychological representations of brands to political actors convey alignment with political branding and communication exercises generally observed during election campaign events. The term brand thus goes well beyond the discrete benefits that are associated with products and includes diverse softer dimensions, like emotions and social experiences that are associated with them (Goodchild & Callow, 2001; Abratt & Bick, 2003). Woods (2004) brought out the differentiating features

between products and brands by describing its internal structure in terms of two elements, namely the functional and economic values obtained in purchasing specific products. The product essentially comprises the clear, hard and tangible advantages that are obtained by consumers, whilst brand differentiators comprise soft and emotional product wrappers, which can be of various types and have diverse connotations (Woods, 2004; Jevons, 2005). Brand differentiators that are psychological in nature appeal to the value preferences and the self-reflexive capabilities of consumers, whilst those that are social in nature concern the socialization or social standing of people using the brand (Woods, 2004; Jevons, 2005). Cultural brand differentiation on the other hand relates to traditions and customs (Woods, 2004; Jevons, 2005). It is evident that whilst these categories may overlap, they reveal that brand image or product perception can concern diverse dimensions of human existence. It can thus be said that a brand goes well beyond a product and essentially constitutes a perception that is entrenched in the minds of consumers (Scammell, 2007; Grimaldi, 2003).

Brand managers very often aim to shape product perceptions and bring about reciprocal relationships by associating products with desired lifestyles or through a careful orchestration of the sensual dimensions of the consumption environment (Scammell, 2007; Grimaldi, 2003). Such attempts notwithstanding, it is accepted that brands finally constitute the projections of products in the minds of consumers (Scammell, 2007; Grimaldi, 2003). Marketers thus aim to cultivate such product projections for the achievement of their marketing objectives (Scammell, 2007; Grimaldi, 2003).

Branding can include all types of organizational activities for the formulation, creation, development, and nurturing of specific brand images in the minds of customers (Leone et al., 2006; Yasin et al., 2007). Such activities entail the careful utilization of diverse organizational resources on determined tangible and intangible product, service, and organisational or personal attributes to differentiate and distinguish a specific brand in a striking, meaningful, forceful, and persuasive manner for the targeted audience (Leone et al., 2006; Yasin et al., 2007). All factors that can shape and influence the product perceptions of consumers, including marketing communication strategies, the attitudes and behaviors of employees, and the actual experience of using products or services are thus aligned for the brand through a process termed as brand integration. Such integration aims to ensure that all aspects of the brand relate to its unique identity (Anholt, 2005; Collings, 2003).

It is important, at this point, to highlight three important brand characteristics: (1) value-laden / emotional narratives, (2) multi-channel orientation, and (3) trust building (Nobre et al., 2010). With respect to the first characteristic, it is not difficult to appreciate that the majority of contemporary products in specific sectors are very similar in terms of features, pricing, packaging, availability, and distribution (Leone et al., 2006; Yasin et al., 2007). The difference between a burger from McDonalds and Burger King or between a branded Pepsi and Coca-Cola beverage, if it was restricted to price or taste would certainly be low (Nobre et al., 2010). Branding results in the construction of specific images around these products; providing them with individual identities, implying specific connotations, and making them distinguishable.

Marketers realize that when debatable claims like better product functioning or more economic pricing become ineffective, the marketplace needs to be provided with more intricate incentives, motivating factors, and underlying appeal that is built into brand images (Anholt, 2005; Collings, 2003). Such fundamental appeal is often customized for consumer ambitions and lifestyle preferences, facilitating the sharing of participation in democratic and aspirational narratives (Anholt, 2005; Collings, 2003). Some marketing experts have criticised these viewpoints of brands, acting as social unifiers, as rather simplistic; it does however illustrate the first feature of branding, namely the communication of value-rich and emotional narratives that are customised for specific groups to differentiate between similar products (Nobre et al., 2010; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

With respect to multichannel orientation, marketing experts have averred that rational, consistent, and effective brand images can be created only when similar brand attributes are transmitted to consumers through diverse communication channels (Chernatony, 2006; Mathieson, 2005). A producer of luxury fashion products will for example have to ensure that the messages transmitted through mass media advertising, public relations, direct mailing, and social media platforms aim to suggest identical connotations, feelings, and emotions, even though these different channels reach consumers in diverse contexts and involve different senses (Chernatony, 2006; Mathieson, 2005). An absence of coherence in branding communication will result in confusion in the minds of consumers and in dilution and weakening of brand identity and strengths (Chernatony, 2006; Mathieson, 2005).

Today, the media environment is becoming increasingly fragmented, due to the onset of disruptive digital technologies that splinter media in various niches, channels, and segments, and cause fragmentation in audience attention, as well as media outlets, agencies, and marketing departments (Sousa, 2013). Under this situation, the use of appropriate discipline in multichannel communication is essential for the communication of distinct brand attributes (Nobre et al., 2010; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Especially in media, it is necessary to view the packaging from a managerial approach, as the process of building a brand (Jupowicz-Ginalska, 2018). One of the most important aspects of branding concerns the achievement and retention of consumer trust (Nobre et al., 2010; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Marketing executives develop coherent brand images that incorporate both values and inspirational appeals to attract customers and often make diverse promises that increase customer expectations (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Nobre et al., 2010). Marketing experts have stated that organizations must take all possible measures to ensure that the branded products or services deliver in terms of product promises to generate consumer trust (Mathieson, 2005; Chernatony, 2006).

Such satisfaction of consumer expectations is, however, an immensely challenging task, especially for service organizations where achievement of customer satisfaction is often dependent upon the interaction of consumers with organizational employees (Collings, 2003; Anholt, 2005). Marketing experts like Smith (2003) and Hilton (2003) have stated that organizational transparency, honesty, consistency, and quality help in the development of high levels of trust between brands and customers. The failure of brands to satisfy customer expectations and delivery on claims can however result

in the contamination of brand image in the minds of consumers (Smith, 2003; Hilton, 2003).

The advancements in branding notwithstanding, it is relevant to appreciate that modern utilization of branding commenced only about three decades ago in the 19680s, when marketing developed swiftly to satisfy consumer needs (Blackett, 2003; Feldwick 2003). Such branding also became evident in the political arena as diverse elements of branding, including focused market research, advertising and spin started being used by political candidates in the 1980s and the 1990s (Blackett, 2003; Feldwick 2003).

There is little doubt that the growth and popularity of branding have been affected in large measure by the growth of the modern consumer and consumerism (Blackett, 2003; Feldwick 2003). Branding is thus aligned in significant measure with consumer activism in the contemporary era (Smith, 2003; Hilton, 2003). The need of consumers to identify with specific product images led to the development of a number of consumer brands, like Coca-Cola, in the 20th century, which continue to be relevant and strong even today (Nobre *et al.*, 2010). Marketing experts like Brymer (2003) and Roll, 2011) have aimed to explain the growth of the contemporary brand in diverse ways. It has been stated that recognition of respected brand needs results in the development of financial value (Brymer, 2003; Roll, 2011). The increasing distrust and cynicism about the effectiveness of mass advertising has led to a greater focus on brand differentiation (Brymer, 2003; Roll, 2011). The growth of brands has been driven by greater consumer power and the recent development of consumer concern for business sustainability and greater corporate social responsibility (Brymer, 2003; Roll,

2011). Consumer research in recent times has also dwelt upon the significance of emotional engagement in consumer purchasing behavior, leading marketing organizations to place greater stress on brand development (Brymer, 2003; Roll, 2011).

The concept of branding has in recent years developed into a theory that has transcended products and is being applied to events, cities, nations, and politicians through the development of public identities with the use of consumer branding strategies (Park & Srinivasan, 1994). The 2014 World Cup in Brazil illustrates the ways in which branding can be used to develop a strong emotional connection between a sporting event and millions of people and shape their viewing and purchasing behavior (Smith, 2014). More than one billion people are expected to view the finals of the World Cup and huge amounts of money are being spent by consumers in various ways associated with the event (Smith, 2014).

The increasing utilization of consumer branding strategies implies that branding has grown to become much more than advertising and includes a significantly wider dimension of public relations (Duffy & Hooper, 2003; Blackett, 2003). It has become important for public figures to build images that resonate positively with audiences by using platforms that are most consistent than advertising (Duffy & Hooper, 2003; Blackett, 2003). Brands and branding are thus being utilized everywhere, not just as methods for selling products (Duffy & Hooper, 2003; Blackett, 2003). Branding has in fact become a method for public personalities to build identities and communicate with their audiences (Duffy & Hooper, 2003; Blackett, 2003).

2.3.2 Context of Political Branding

It is important to appreciate that the use of branding methods has been prevalent in politics since historical times but has grown over time because of the development of technological advances and of course social media platforms. While social media is not new to politics, it is believed that social media is transitioning to take a much larger role as a political tool in the intermediate future (Gil Appel et al, p.86, 2020). The following quips a succinct description of the historical context of political branding:

Political propaganda and image management have always been present in democracies. George Washington was not defiantly standing in the boat that was crossing Delaware; Abraham Lincoln's portrait was doctored to elongate his neck; and a polio-stricken Franklin D. Roosevelt avoided being photographed in a wheelchair. So, it should come as no surprise that today's political leaders seek to control how they are publicly viewed, whether this is Barack Obama choosing to smoke cigarettes in private, Vladimir Putin fishing while bare-chested or Stephen Harper cuddling kittens. (Marland, 2013, p. 2)

Political branding involves the careful, strategic, and formulated utilization of consumer branding strategies and methods for the development of political image and advantage (Smith, 2003; Hilton, 2003). It concerns the various communication and branding strategies used by politicians to differentiate their appeal, increase their popularity, and enhance their chances of election (Anholt, 2005; Collings, 2003). It has thus gone beyond the realm of traditional advertising and now incorporates multidimensional marketing and the development of image identity (Leone et al., 2006; Yasin et al., 2007). Smith & French (2009) believe that political brands are important since they are thought to play a role in voting decisions. People often rely on heuristic shortcuts to make a voting decision, since gathering all the information to make a choice takes too

much time and effort (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1991; Popkin, 1994).” (Moorman, 2013, p. 7).

Such use of branding in politics is increasing in complexity on account of the fragmentation of the electorate, the growth of diverse social concerns, the disillusionment with contemporary politicians, and the need for politicians to develop positive perceptions in their audiences, especially the electorate (Leone et al., 2006; Yasin et al., 2007).

In times there have been changes in how political branding is approached, influenced by the shifting social and political landscape as well as advancements in technology. Scholars are now more interested in exploring the aspects of branding in today's world.

One key development is the increasing importance of platforms in shaping discussions and how brands are viewed. The rise of media and online communication channels has given figures new ways to create and share their brand stories directly with the public (Smith, 2023). This shift to platforms has not expanded the reach of political messages but has also heightened the competition for attention and trust in a crowded media landscape (Jones et al., 2022).

Additionally the era of truth politics has added layers of complexity to how political brands are built and maintained. As false information spreads online politicians must strike a balance, between being genuine and using messaging to earn trust and connect with audiences (Lee & Kim, 2024). This trend highlights how storytelling,

emotional appeal and perceived credibility all play roles in shaping how the public views brands (Johnson, 2022).

2.4 Progressive Use of Branding in Politics

Whilst the use of branding in political and electoral exercises can be traced back to the US elections of 1796 between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, its evidence over the last two decades in various countries is clear for all to see (Evripidou, 2012; Chernatony, 2006). Several politicians and parties in diverse countries, ranging from the United States and the United Kingdom to India have relied upon the concepts of brand management to strengthen their external presentation and develop political perceptions amongst voters (Evripidou, 2012; Chernatony, 2006). As Singh (2014) shared, modern political branding is a psychological construct that aims to influence a decisive shift in voter's action, including dismantling barriers in the political arena, having an inclusive policy of outsider admission in the political exercise, and constructing emotional connection with the people in reinforcing a justification for candidate inclusion and generating voter preference of a political party – political branding helps consolidate democracy.

Branding in fact is now considered to be the modern manifestation of political marketing (Adolphsen, 2009; Scammell, 2007, Chester et. al, 2017). Branding, as elaborated earlier, helps in the simplification of consumer choice and in the facilitation of name and image differentiation between products that are quite similar (Adolphsen, 2009; Scammell, 2007). Brands comprise loose groups of rich associations, connections, and impressions that are recorded in the human consciousness in different sensory forms (Adolphsen, 2009; Scammell, 2007). Brand imaging in politics seems to have added an additional layer of emotional relationships that functions on

top of the practical use value of products (Adolphsen, 2009; Scammell, 2007). The proof of the requirement for the development of emotional connections was illustrated in the rebranding exercise of Tony Blair when he wished to develop a more positive and emotional relationship with the UK public to enhance his approval ratings (Needham, 2005). The UK Labour Party, which has traditionally been associated with the working class, was rebranded into New Labour, (which propagated the third way), in the mid-1990s with the help of globally known professional branding firms (Barberio & Lowe 2006; Sonies, 2011).

Branding has become characteristic of the 21st century and is now being used extensively by politicians for the development and enhancement of public image. All politicians are now encouraged to think of themselves as brands and use diverse public relations and other communication strategies to strengthen their public appeal (Sonies, 2011; Barberio & Lowe 2006). Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of the UK, apprehended growing dissatisfaction with New Labour Party in the early years of the 21st century due to its incumbency for several years (Barberio & Lowe 2006; Sonies, 2011). Blair's political managers thus used a consulting agency with a specialisation in branding to develop a public relations campaign for the enhancement of Blair's public image, which made use of a branding campaign undertaken by President Clinton of the United States in the early 1990s (Barberio & Lowe 2006; Sonies, 2011).

This rebranding led to the development of the term Matured Tony, which aimed to blend youthful hope with maturity and appeal to hesitant and indecisive public opinion (Sweney 2006; Branding for the People, 2012). Blair accordingly went ahead and took on difficult members of the media and other citizens to display his strong relationship

with his constituency. His readiness to develop a new brand image assisted him in identifying with the UK public in a positive manner (Sweney 2006; Branding for the People, 2012). Gordon Brown, Blair's successor in office also made use of branding, requisitioning the services of well-known branding experts (Chandler & Owen, 2002; Needham, 2005).

The Conservative party has also created an official position for brand communication and has made significant use of political branding (Chandler & Owen, 2002; Needham, 2005). David Cameron, for example, has made liberal use of brand management strategies and methods to rebrand himself from Liberal Conservative to "Conservative" Conservative (Chandler & Owen, 2002; Needham, 2005). It is relevant to appreciate that political branding is not being used only in the United Kingdom, but also in countries as diverse and distant as the United States, Germany, and India (Sweney 2006; Branding for the People, 2012).

The recent elections in India witnessed extensive use of political branding by Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which made use of various social media platforms, 3D projection, and mass media to win a crushing victory over the incumbent government (Gupte, 2014).

Branding, it is evident, has grown into a deliberate and important strategy for utilization in the political arena (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; Schneider, 2004). Such branding helps leaders of political parties and politicians standing for elections in the alignment of their diverse communications with pre-determined sets of emotions, exhortations, feelings, and messages and helps in the standardization and disciplining of the

management of diverse external presentations (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; Schneider, 2004).

Such an approach towards politics and electoral practices takes on a particularly valuable hue because of the extensive chaos associated with large elections that are peopled by numerous actors, often from the same political party, who want to speak at cross purposes with each other (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; Schneider, 2004). Political branding, from this specific viewpoint, develops into a method for internal guiding and shaping of political communication within parties, influencing various communication methods in governments and in the campaigns of various candidates (Barberio & Lowe, 2006; Sonies, 2011). It is also important to understand that political communication is replete with diverse emotional and aesthetic qualities, which are intangible in nature, go beyond product benefits, and are thus particularly amenable to the use of branding methods and techniques (Barberio & Lowe, 2006; Sonies, 2011).

Recent developments in political branding have continued to shape the landscape of electoral politics worldwide. As noted by Evripidou (2022) and Chernatony (2023), the use of branding in political campaigns has become increasingly prevalent in the past two decades, with politicians and parties employing sophisticated branding strategies to shape public perception and influence voter behavior. The concept of political branding, as elucidated by Singh (2024), goes beyond mere image management—it is a psychological construct aimed at forging deep emotional connections with voters and shaping their political preferences.

In the contemporary political arena, branding has emerged as a fundamental aspect of political marketing (Adolphsen, 2023; Scammell, 2022; Chester et al., 2024). Building on the principles of consumer choice and differentiation, political brands leverage rich associations and emotional connections to resonate with voters on a personal level (Adolphsen, 2023; Scammell, 2022). The success of branding efforts is exemplified by the rebranding of political parties and leaders, such as the transformation of the UK Labour Party into New Labour under Tony Blair's leadership (Barberio & Lowe, 2023; Sonies, 2024).

Moreover, the digital age has revolutionized political branding, with social media platforms playing a pivotal role in shaping political narratives and mobilizing voters (Evrpidou, 2022; Chernatony, 2023). Leaders like Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party have capitalized on the power of social media and innovative campaign tactics to secure electoral victories (Gupte, 2024). This underscores the importance of digital branding strategies in contemporary political campaigns.

In addition to external image management, political branding serves as an internal guiding mechanism for parties and candidates, standardizing communication efforts and aligning messaging with core values and emotions (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2022; Schneider, 2023). As political communication becomes increasingly complex, branding methods offer a structured approach to navigating the diverse array of voices and messages within parties and campaigns (Barberio & Lowe, 2023; Sonies, 2024).

In conclusion, the progressive use of branding in politics continues to evolve and shape electoral practices worldwide. From its roots in traditional image management to its contemporary manifestations in digital branding and emotional connection-building, branding has become an indispensable tool for politicians seeking to navigate

the complexities of modern politics. By understanding and harnessing the power of branding, political actors can effectively communicate their messages, forge lasting connections with voters, and ultimately shape the course of democracy in the 21st century.

2.5 Transitions and Realities in Political Communication

Communication in the political arena has changed significantly in contemporary times (Bennett, 1998; Swanson, 2004). The progressive elimination of social differences has resulted in alterations in the common context for the receipt and interpretation of messages that used to exist in previous times and helped citizens in understanding the political environment and determining their political inclinations (Bennett, 1998; Swanson, 2004). Political communication in previous periods, when society was characterized by strong and rigid differentiations, was structured in adherence to a limited number of political themes (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Political parties used these themes, developing political and national ideals in line with these themes for enhancing their individual credibility and increasing the ranks of their followers (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Such ideals were converted into the foundations of political communication and facilitated audiences in absorbing political communication in their consciousness in line with their existing information and knowledge (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Political parties thus communicated with their audiences with consistent, uniform, coherent, and occasionally naive viewpoints on political happenings (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Experts like Giddens (1999) have argued that such traditional forms of political communication have over the years become rather obsolete and have lost their

relevance. Contemporary politicians very clearly cannot use their established and traditional ideals and approaches to motivate audiences and augment supporters in these dynamic times, especially when political conviction is lacking both in politicians and in their audiences (Giddens, 1999; Swanson, 2004). Such changes in the political environment and the thought processes of audiences have led politicians to make use of branding and marketing techniques for persuading voters (Giddens, 1999; Swanson, 2004).

The absence of strong political convictions and the enhanced capabilities of audiences to access and evaluate the merits and demerits of specific political parties have resulted in the use of marketing and branding methods for purposes of persuasion of audiences and development of supporters (Giddens, 1999; Swanson, 2004).

“Similar to the challenge that companies have in branding their products and services in the commercial marketplace, governments, political parties, and campaign organizations all rely on similar theories and strategic tools to carve out successful niches for their leaders. Political parties are like corporate brands that offer an umbrella of predictability of performance just as a corporate endorsement does for a new product that enters the market. Candidates become the political brands of a political party. Branding is all about appealing to peoples’ dreams. Politics is all about selling hope to a people.” (Newman, p. 1, 2006).

Some political commentators have however decried such widespread use of marketing and branding approaches in contemporary political communication, stating that their use has resulted in the progressive dilution of relationships and ties between

political parties and their supporters (Bennett, 1998; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999;). Political activity that aims to bring candidates to power now perceives elections as isolated events, where the support of voters has to be obtained from scratch and is not long-lasting in nature (Bennett, 1998; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999).

With most political parties being centrist in nature and catch-all in their approach, voters are attracted and wooed primarily through the constant and loud highlighting and exaggeration of the individual qualities of candidates, coupled with the denigration and slandering of candidates from opposing parties (Bennett, 1998; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Bennett (1998) stated that such an approach essentially disregards the increasing significance of lifestyle preferences in contemporary society. Political parties do not focus on detailing the attraction of their policies for specific lifestyles and focus on the marketing of their political products based on stereotypical claims (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999).

Experts like Capella and Jamieson (1997) have stated that the progressive elimination of long-term ideals and themes in contemporary politics has clearly altered traditional methods of political communication. Contemporary communication is furthermore taking place through a wide range of channels, which is very clearly an outcome of the growth of the media and its abundant and ever-present nature (Popkin, 1991; Capella & Jamieson, 1997). Mass audiences are thus breaking up and going into oblivion, even as mainstream outlets are becoming irrelevant. Specific social segments are at the same time searching for specific and specialized media, which is enhancing political diversity and aggravating social and cultural diversity (Popkin, 1991; Capella & Jamieson, 1997).

Academics like Capella and Jamieson (1997) have stated that much of the media have changed their focus and are now concentrating on the negative and strategic dimensions of politics, especially the publicity efforts of candidates and their small and perpetual skirmishes with each other. Such media focus on essentially negative aspects of political parties and their candidates has resulted in the development of extensive criticism and the alienation of citizens from political parties, candidates, and the political process (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). It is evident from the preceding discourse that various changes in the political environment and media functioning have resulted in significant alterations in existing methods of political communication, more so in communication involving electoral processes (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999).

Contemporary political parties are unable to assume that voters will continue to support them based on traditional loyalties and long-held ideologies (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The modern electorate is characterised by reducing social divisions, greater secularisation, and is often motivated and mobilised through specific concerns or issues, some of which may be post-modernistic in nature (Bennett, 1998; Swanson, 2004). Such alterations in political preferences and lifestyles have been accompanied by tremendous fragmentation of the media environment (Bennett, 1998; Swanson, 2004). The growth of various communication channels, especially social media platforms, has resulted in the breakdown of established routes of discussion and discourse and their replacement with specialized media that are used by specific social groups and segments (Bennett, 1998; Swanson, 2004).

Political campaigning is furthermore accompanied by increasing cynicism, scepticism, and apathy in the political audience, which is becoming increasingly alienated from political messages (Bennett, 1998; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). The comparison of these challenges with the three characteristics of branding described in Section 2.3.1 imply that the use of branding and other marketing methods is spreading in political communication because of these challenges and the ability of branding to resolve them.

Branding can lead to the development of an emotional or symbolic element to political messages that can make up for the progressive reduction of ideological essence (Bennett, 1998; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). The use of multiple channels by branding can also be seen to be a direct response to the fragmentation that has occurred in contemporary media (Popkin, 1991; Capella & Jamieson, 1997). Branding methods appreciate the significance of coherence and consistency in the transmission of messages through various alternate channels and pay attention to tiny details (Popkin, 1991; Capella & Jamieson, 1997).

2.6 Political communication during the pandemic era

The COVID-19 pandemic which emerged as an extraordinary situation in 2020, shook the daily life of the whole planet. Within a very short period of time, people across the world had to live under circumstances they never experienced before and were “forced” to adapt immediately to a new way of life similar to times of war such as: lockdowns, travel restrictions, border closures, etc. Governments had to promptly respond to the new challenge in order to guard the health of their citizens. Each country managed the pandemic in different ways and communicated with its residents

who often seemed to be deprived of basic human rights and personal freedoms on the “altar” of health protection. For several months, crisis communication had become a crucial issue in our societies which were witnessing the acceleration of the process of digital transformation in all political, social, and economic scopes, including media (Mico and Coll-Rubio, 2020).

Also, during the pandemic and lockdowns, there has been an increase in internet use, social media, movie platforms, and e-learning. A special report by Datareportal in July 2020, examines changes in social media usage during the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown period. Notably, a monumental increase in online and digital activities occurred (Figure 2.4).

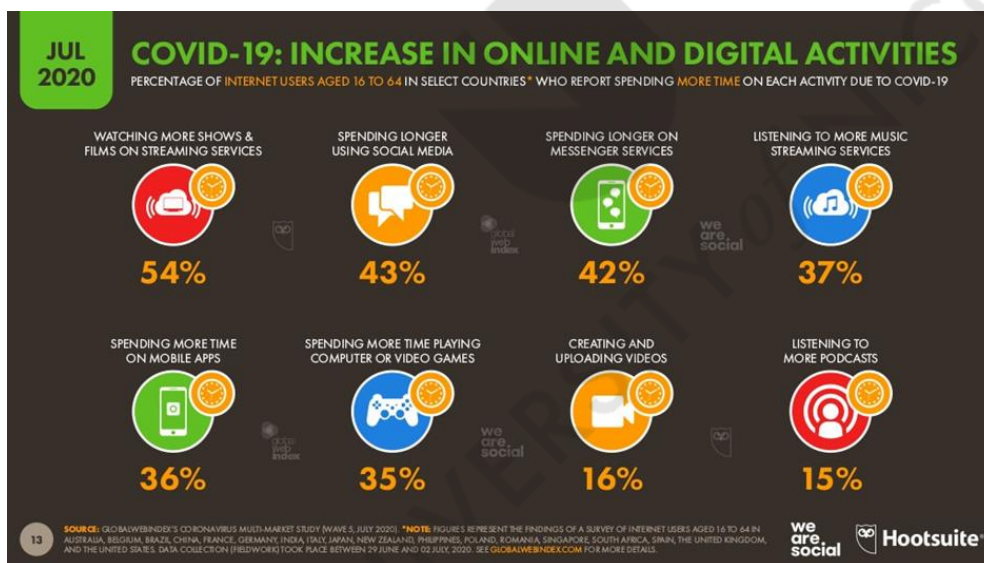


Figure 2.4 COVID-19: Increase in online and digital activities (Dateportal, 2020)

The pandemic, which resulted from the development of the SARS-COV2 virus, was simultaneously a local and a global crisis (Blasio and Coll-Rubio, 2020). Both national and international communication strategies were rapidly evolving every day in order to share the pandemic updates in the most comprehensive and fast way possible. This

was especially important during the unprecedented times of the pandemic, since misinformation leads to uncertainty and anxiety, but news consumption from trusted sources makes individuals keep away from delusions, rumors, and alternative facts (Bratu, 2020). Furthermore, the rapid escalation of the pandemic has been accompanied by tension, misleading and disinformation news. A flexible communication strategy had to be adapted with a proactive approach to handle all social, cultural, and economic challenges related to the pandemic (Ratzan et al., 2020). The development of new media and communication technologies and their availability from a wide range of platforms created great advantages for health communication by using effective media strategies (Schiavo, 2020), especially on behalf of the governments.

Government communication is generally defined as all the communication activities of government bodies that aim at conveying and sharing news and information to present and explain government policies, plans, decisions, and actions. Government communication acts on achieving many objectives such as explaining the government's goals, decisions, actions, and activities to the public; keeping people up to date with their rights and obligations; giving the community instructions on how to act in the case of an emergency and increasing awareness of social, economic and environmental issues (Kang et al., 2018; Soukenik, 2018). Politicians and government officials tested their crisis management capabilities to adopt divergent emergency management effective strategies in both the short and the long run. Governments struggled with the rapidly widespread COVID-19 and faced many overwhelming challenges during the pandemic (Moon, 2020).

On the other hand, in the USA and the UK, the governments used a completely different approach to confront the crisis in the first period of the pandemic. In the USA, Donald Trump seemed to have different priorities rather than fighting the pandemic. He had the fear that a severe lockdown would have serious economic damages, which would not help his re-election. In the UK, Johnson Boris had to fight the economic crisis after Brexit. Furthermore, he decided not to take bold decisions, like the other European countries did. Despite that, he changed his mind after he was infected with COVID-19 and eventually followed the same guidelines as the rest of the European countries.

Such measures were unavoidable during the pandemic as safety was the top priority. In the post-COVID era, the expectations for political communication returned to liberal democratic norms of vocal and uncomfortable accountability for healthy engagement between political leaders and voters .

2.7 Political Communication and Branding Amidst the Ukraine Conflict

The conflict, in Ukraine characterized by tensions between nations and military clashes has caused emergencies and triggered widespread political dialogues and promotional campaigns on a global scale. In this age of information sharing the Ukrainian conflict has become a central focus for various entities seeking to craft narratives demonstrate influence and sway public opinion.

Communication Strategies in Politics

Political figures and administrations around the world have employed communication tactics to address the situation in Ukraine. Whether through statements or social media

updates these individuals aim to express their positions garner backing and shape how the world perceives the conflict. For example, leaders from nations frequently criticize Russia's actions in Ukraine as breaches of international standards and sovereignty (Smith, 2022). Conversely Russia has used connections and regional security concerns as justifications for its involvement (Jones, 2023).

Furthermore political communications amidst the crisis extend beyond channels. Non governmental entities such, as advocacy organizations, media platforms and online communities have played roles in spreading information and influencing conversations. For instance online activism and citizen journalism have presented viewpoints that challenge mainstream media portrayals (Garcia, 2023).

Branding Strategies and Soft Power Projection

The use of branding has played a role in shaping how the parties involved in the conflict in Ukraine are perceived. Both nations and non state actors have employed their brands to sway opinion and gain support for their stances. For example Ukraine has strategically used campaigns to highlight its identity, resilience and desire for integration.

Likewise Russia has employed tactics to present itself as a protector of Russian speaking populations and a stabilizing presence in the region. These branding efforts go beyond media outlets extending to platforms and cultural initiatives aimed at bolstering soft power and influencing global narratives.

Analytical Perspective

The conflict in Ukraine underscores the interconnected nature of communication, branding strategies and international relations in today's world. It emphasizes how narratives and symbols can shape perceptions of events and impact policy decisions. Additionally the rise of media platforms has opened up communication channels to a range of voices allowing diverse perspectives to contribute to discussions on the conflict.

From a perspective examining communication and branding practices during the Ukraine conflict provides insights into the power dynamics at play, in modern international affairs.

The significance of storytelling, image control and the use of influence to shape how the world views and influences results is highlighted in this discussion. Moreover it stresses the importance of analyzing media portrayals and discussions to uncover hidden intentions and agendas, within geopolitical contexts.

To wrap up the conflict in Ukraine offers an example that showcases the nature of political messaging and branding in today's global affairs. By scrutinizing the tactics employed by parties and assessing their impact on sentiment and policy decisions researchers can gain valuable insights into the dynamics of authority, persuasion and perception, in contemporary society.

CHAPTER 3: THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN CYPRUS

Based on the diverse political narratives that were systematically created and expressed by key political leaders and actors in Cyprus, and in consideration of the changing environmental realities, it is not unlikely that inaccuracies, dichotomies, omissions, deletions, and misrepresentations could have changed the way the political communications history of Cyprus was written. Hence, this study, for greater clarity and understanding, seeks to deconstruct by offering a historiography of political communications in Cyprus.

3.1 Backdrop: Political History of Cyprus

The historiography of Cyprus, more particularly that of political communications, cannot assume any clear and understandable context without the rendition of a good backdrop on the political history of the country. As Smilden (p.1, 2007) articulated: "History plays an important part in the so-called Cyprus problem". Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have their separate ethnocentric and partisan versions of the island's history, and their narratives and perceptions are often contradictory," with their two separate historiographies continuing to fuel animosities. Smilden (2007) added that it is reasonable to maintain that the different interpretations of Cyprus' history serve as barriers to peace. People from both sides communicate with opposing purposes in two different languages and with none of the two parties having an understanding and appreciation of the history of the other.

It can be appreciated that dichotomous narratives on Cyprus history are also a function of its complex geopolitical configuration, which consists of four major jurisdictions

(Postel-Vinay, 2005; Katsourides, 2017; Kerekes, 2019). The first political dominion is the Republic of Cyprus, which is recognized by the international community as the representative of the whole island. The government of the Republic has effective control over the southern part, representing 60% of the territory and is one of the members of the European Union since 2004. The second political part is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which occupies around one-third of the island on the northern portion and remains recognized only by Turkey (Salin, 2004). The third political area is the United Nations-controlled Green Line, which is around 4% of the island and constitutes a buffer zone that separates the two republics. The last political instrumentality represents the Sovereign Base Areas (SBS) of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, two areas in the southern coastal part of the island which represent around 3% of the island and remain under the sovereign control of the United Kingdom for military ends. From these four forces, it can be appreciated that differences in political circumstances breed divergent political goals and political strategies needing distinct political communication narratives. These variations in political communication narratives alter and rewrite historical accounts to the point of beclouding reality, such as what contributed to the diversity, ambiguity, and complexity of narratives defining the historiography of Cyprus (Brouwer, 2009; Stone, 2009; Christophorou, Şahin, & Pavlou, 2010; Çiftçi, 2018).

From 1570, Cyprus was under the rule of the Ottomans for more than three centuries until 1878 when the United Kingdom took over and then declared Cyprus as its colony in 1925 (Gazioglu, 1990; Hill, 2010). As calls for decolonization heightened in the 1950s and as both Turkish and Greek communities raised different expectations from decolonization, conflicts intensified. These conflicts created tumultuous situations that

caused the intervention of the United Kingdom, Greece, and Turkey, leading to the holding of the Treaty of Guarantee, which is a part of the agreements for the creation of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960 after a London conference in February 1959 (UN Peacemaker, 1960; Bölükbaşı, 1998). The Treaty of Guarantee apparently conveyed colonial imprints, with the United Kingdom, Greece, and Turkey being guarantors of the Constitutional order and with the power to intervene together in case of treaty violation. Where collective intervention of the guarantors proves to be not possible, Article IV of the treaty states: "In so far as common or concerted action may not prove possible, each of the three guaranteeing Powers reserves the right to take action with the sole aim of re-establishing the state of affairs created by the present Treaty" (UN Peacemaker, p.1, 1960).

Violence broke out between Greek and Turkish communities in December 1963, when the thirteen (13) amendments proposed by President Makarios of the Republic of Cyprus were rejected by Turkey and the Turkish community in Cyprus. These amendments were deemed to curtailment of the civic and democratic rights of the Turkish community. Despite the intervention of the United Nations Security Council, violence ended in 1967 and from 1968 to 1974 negotiations between the two communities took place, following a failed coup against Makarios, Turkey invaded Cyprus twice and took possession and control of 37% of the northern part of the island (Wayback Machine, 2007; Morelli, 2011). After about a decade of failed peace talks, in 1983, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus (TFSC) was declared in February 1975 and in November 1983 declared its independence and had the name: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). As political tensions continued, the participation of the European Union (EU), as a party to the Cyprus problem, happened as expected since the EU was instrumental in the 1997 negotiation and 2004 accession of Cyprus to the

EU, while Turkey remains in negotiation for EU membership (Brewin, 2000; European Commission, 2019). Hence, as borne out by history, there are seven strategic actors in the political communications historiographical landscape of Cyprus -- the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots as primary actors, and Turkey, Greece, United Kingdom, United Nations, and European Union as auxiliary actors. As part of the Cyprus political communicative processes, at liberty to make their own independent political expressions, it is not difficult to discern that the seven strategic actors had influenced how changes in the history of Cyprus had to be crafted, represented, and disseminated to suit distinct political interests.

3.2 The History of Cypriot Political Parties

While the historiography of political communications in Cyprus proves to be generally intractable and difficult to deconstruct for accurate and conclusive interpretation, such historiographic narrative cannot be wholly presented without discussing the history and impact of Cypriot political parties, which can be configured to be four (4) major and four (4) minor parliamentary parties (Cyprus Profile, 2020). The following sections present this historical account, including an assessment of how political parties could have influenced the context of Cypriot political communications historiography.

Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL)

The Progressive Party of the Working People, or AKEL, the successor to the Communist Party of Cyprus, was established on April 14, 1941, during the party's founding meeting. AKEL, which is the party of the Cypriot working class, was founded on the Marxist-Leninist communist principles and had played an active role in the Cypriot struggle for liberation from British rule (Anastasiou, 2008; Smith, 2008;

Petmesidoum, 2010; 2011; Nordsieck, 2016; AKEL.ORG, 2016). AKEL supports the pursuit of an independent, demilitarized, and non-aligned political stance for Cyprus, including the adoption of a federal approach to the internal problem of the country. AKEL puts a premium on the policy of rapprochement in relation to the Turkish Cypriots. While initially supportive of the Annan Plan, AKEL ultimately rejected the plan as the UN Security Council failed to ensure post-reunification security (Wright, 2004). AKEL tried to demonstrate strong support for welfare benefits, nationalization, and first-class trade unions, and seemed to be able to successfully introduce economic welfare measures during the years of economic crisis which started in 2008 in USA (Political resolution of the 21st Congress of AKEL, 2010). In the presidential elections of 2008, Demetris Christofias was elected and he was the first president from the left-wing political party who succeeded to be elected for the highest political position in Cyprus. AKEL is now led by Stefanos Stefanou since 2021.

Solidarity Movement (ALLILEGYI)

The Solidarity Movement is a Greek Cypriot nationalist party that was established by Eleni Theocharous in January 2016 (Nordsieck, 2016), after leaving the conservative Democratic Rally in November 2015 as she renounced the bizonal, bi-communal resolution of the Cyprus problem (Anastasiou, 2015; Kades, 2016). Theocharous merged the right-wing EVROKO with the Solidarity Movement in March 2016 (Kades, 2016), while propounding the party's foundational values of "saving the Republic of Cyprus and restoring the rights of the Cypriot people" (Psyllides, 2016, p.1). As Psyllides (2016, p.1) further stated:

"Theocharous, who left DISY in November citing a divergence of views on the handling of the Cyprus issue, said it was necessary for the country to stop the

dangerous decline it was going through. It needs to renew its political resources with honest, uncorrupted, and accomplished people who were determined to fight corruption, impunity, favoritism, and incompetence that undermine the functioning of the Cypriot state.”

Democratic Party (DIKO)

The Democratic Party (DIKO) represents a Greek-Cypriot parliamentary political party in Cyprus founded in 1976 by Spyros Kyprianou (Loizos, 2008; Mirbagheri, 2009). DIKO has been differently described as a centrist (NSD, 2010; ESS, 2018), center-left (Athanasiadis, 2014), or center-right (Tocci, 2007; Loizides, 2012; Ker-Lindsay, 2017). As research accounts indicated, among all political parties in Cyprus, DIKO remains the most loyal and committed follower of the policies of Archbishop Makarios, who is the founding father of the Cyprus Republic (Solsten, 1991). DIKO was led from 2000 to 2006 by Tassos Papadopoulos (who also served as Cyprus President from 2003 to 2008). DIKO is now led by Nicolas Papadopoulos, son of Tassos, after internal voting in December 2013 (Kathimerini, 2013).

As DIKO declared its intention to veer away from a center-right political stance and instead embrace social democracy (Dew, 2005), the party has developed and maintained an abiding hardline policy on the Cyprus issue and even strongly opposed the Annan Plan in 2004. DIKO voices and demonstrates strong support for European integration and for a non-aligned foreign policy, while going for the idea of Cyprus joining the NATO Partnership for Peace (Terry, 2014a). DIKO, together with the Movement of Social Democrats (EDEK), represents a mid-force in Cypriot politics as the two parties differentiate their organizational context from the right-wing Democratic

Rally and the left-wing AKEL. DIKO and EDEK navigate a nuanced path that seeks to strike a balance between economic liberalism and social welfare (Christophorou, 2009).

The mid-force represented by DIKO and EDEK acknowledges the complexity of contemporary political challenges, aiming to find pragmatic solutions that resonate with a broad spectrum of the Cypriot population. Their organizational context reflects a commitment to inclusivity, drawing support from individuals who may find themselves ideologically positioned between the more polarized platforms of the Democratic Rally and AKEL (Smith, 2012).

This political positioning is not merely a strategic choice but is deeply rooted in the historical and cultural context of Cyprus. The mid-force philosophy embodied by DIKO and EDEK recognizes the need for cooperative and pragmatic governance, especially in a region marked by geopolitical complexities and historical tensions.

In summary, DIKO and the Movement of Social Democrats (EDEK) represent a mid-force in Cypriot politics by strategically differentiating themselves from the right-wing Democratic Rally and the left-wing AKEL. This positioning reflects a commitment to a balanced political approach, addressing both economic and social dimensions, and acknowledging the nuanced preferences of the Cypriot electorate (Johnson, 2015).

Democratic Rally (DISY)

The Democratic Rally (DISY) was founded on July 4, 1976, by the President of the House of Representatives from 1960 to 1976, Glafcos Clerides, as a liberal-

conservative, Christian-democratic political party in Cyprus (Slomp, 2011; Nordsieck, 2016; ESS, 2018). While the party has historical ties to the presidency of Cyprus, Clerides held the position from 1993 to 2003. Nicos Anastasiades, the current president, took office in 2013 and has also previously led the party. Based on conservative and Christian democratic platforms, DISY remains an active purveyor of free-market economy and family values. It supported the Annan Plan during the 2004 referendum, advocating political settlement for the reunification of Cyprus, and demonstrating strong opposition against Turkish domination of the northern part of Cyprus (Slomp, 2011; Loizides, 2012). Although with this political stance, DISY runs the risk of being alienated from people traditionally aligned with Greek nationalism. DISY, as a matter of party priority, also makes strong representations for lower direct taxes and higher indirect taxes, economic development, freedom from fiscal deficits, and expanded investments in infrastructure (Solsten, 1991). DISY is now led by Annita Demetriou as party president, after internal voting in March 2023.

Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK)

The Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK) is a Greek Cypriot nationalist and social-democratic political party in Cyprus founded in 1969 by Vassos Lyssarides as the United Democratic Union of Centre (EDEK), which originally championed a strongly anti-imperialist socialist orientation (Kahveci, 2013; Charalambous, 2015; Nordsieck, 2016). This initial anti-imperialist and nationalist stance of EDEK had its roots in the Cypriot struggle against the British colonial rule, as influenced by the political thoughts of Baathism, Muammar Gaddafi, and Nasserism (Varnava & Yakinthou, 2011; Kahveci, 2013). In 1969 there was no other party with socialist ideas. Lyssarides has always been an advocate for the defense of democracy. However, from the early

1980s, EDEK has changed and operated as a European-inspired social-democratic party, but without necessarily abandoning its nationalist stance (Christophorou, 2009). In 2000, the party changed its organizational name to Movement for Social Democracy (Kahveci, 2013), in what appears to be a term more reflective of its philosophy and more congruent to the idea of creating closer ties with European social democratic parties on values and appearance. In 2001 the name of the party reverted back to EDEK as Social Democrat movement EDEK. EDEK is now led by Marinos Sizopoulos, who assumed the party's leadership in March 2015 after House President Yiannakis Omirou resigned in January 2015 (Financial Mirror, 2015). According to Terry (2014, p.1), "EDEK has historically been a small but notable party in Cyprus with support fluctuating between 6% and 12% in historic legislative elections and that social democracy has always been a weak ideology in Cyprus, eclipsed on the left by the strength of the Communist AKEL."

National Popular Front (ELAM)

The National Popular Front (ELAM) is a far-right, ultra-nationalist political movement founded in 2008 on the ideology of popular and social nationalism. ELAM is led by Christos Christou, who was an active member of the Golden Dawn: Cypriot Kernel, the original name of the party (Katsourides, 2013), until it was denied to register under such name as a political party, leading to the name National Popular Front (Hadjistilianou, 2013). From a movement, ELAM had transitioned to a political party, as it obtained in May 2011 the approval to operate as such (Christofi, 2011). Based on the party's manifesto, ELAM declares a hardline anti-federalist stance on the Cyprus dispute, a zero-tolerance or total anti-immigration policy concerning illegal immigration, a strict Greek-centered public education system to address the slavery

of globalization and an energy policy that would maximize the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus (ELAM, 2011; Charalambous & Christoforou, 2019). As can be discerned from its messaging, ELAM communicates a strong message of ultranationalism, Euroscepticism, and enosism (i.e. Greek-centeredness). ELAM has also been repeatedly accused of promoting racism and being involved in violent acts that tended to purvey an image of extremism as ELAM participated in the disruption of Cypriot reunification events (Psyllides, 2014). In parliamentary elections of 2016, ELAM, succeeded in electing two parliamentary members with 3,71% of votes.

Ecological & Environment Movement (OIKOLOGOI)

The Ecological and Environmental Movement (founded in 1996), now known as the Movement of Ecologists – Citizen's Cooperation is a green political party (Nordsieck, 2016) that obtained two (2) seats in the parliament after the 2016 elections, which year the party also adopted its new name and logo. Despite its predominant environmental orientation, the party, nonetheless, continues to make notable representations about other issues affecting the Cypriot society, more particularly on the Cyprus problem. Until October 2023, the party was led by Charalampos Theopemptou while in November 2023, elections will be held for the party's presidency.

Citizens' Alliance (SYMMACHIA POLITON)

Citizens' Alliance is a political party in Cyprus that was established in 2013 by Giorgos Lillikas, who continued to be the leader of the organization that fundamentally espouses a unitary republic for Cyprus, stands for populism, capitalism, and Greek Cypriot nationalism, rejects the idea of a federation embracing the Greek Cypriot and

the Turkish Cypriot elements, and opposes the prevailing Cypriot austerity program, including the privatization of assets (Charalambous, 2014; Nordsieck, 2016). The Citizen's Alliance upholds the principles of social democracy, open society, diversity, pluralism, social justice, and equality, including the belief in a Cypriot solution that should overturn the specter of invasion and occupation toward a free homeland where rights are respected in a democratic system (Symmaxia Politon, 2019). In its online messaging, the party succinctly states: "The Alliance of Citizens is striving for a truly free, modern, rule of law Cyprus that will operate in a transparent and accountable manner, recognize an active role in the citizenry, serve the people, their needs and dreams" (Symmaxia Politon, 2019, p.1). In the May 2016 parliamentary elections, the Citizen's Alliance gained entry to the Parliament with three (3) seats for a 6.01% representation. In 2021 the political party was incorporated into EDEK.

3.3 Historiographical Implications of Political Parties

Political parties in Cyprus, with their diverse philosophies and agendas, have complicated the political landscape, leading to conflicts and challenges in presenting a unified historical narrative, especially during regime changes. Although democratic political processes remain in place in Cyprus and political parties may have surfaced critical issues, while creating life and vibrancy in the Cypriot political scene, nonetheless, political parties have introduced compelling challenges. Just from the representations of the four major political parties, the political crucible of Cyprus percolates with divergent elements. The liberal-conservative and Christian democratic ideals of DISY; the Marxist-Leninist communist principles of AKEL; the centrist and social democratic perspective of DIKO that is interspersed with a hardline policy on the Cyprus problem and support for European integration; and the European-inspired

social democratic and nationalist stance of EDEK, with anti-imperialist roots, represent polarities that may be exceptionally difficult to address. How these multifaceted differences in political organizations, including minor political parties, can be leveraged to the effective resolution of the Cyprus problem remains a daunting hurdle for the national transition. Incrementally, how these polarities can be reconciled to generate clear, indicative, and credible historiography constitutes a persistent issue impinging upon the strategic political, economic, and social transformation of Cyprus.

3.4 Political discourses in Cyprus

Historiography, as generally understood, relates to the study of the methods historians use in constructing history and refers to a body of historical work on a specific subject or issue. As Furay & Salevouris (1988, p. 223) define it, historiography means “the study of the way history has been and is written” and that it does not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations characterizing the events in the works of individual historians. Historiography, which is the theory and history of historical writing, is a written work after a critical examination of the sources, including the techniques and theoretical approaches made to produce a credible narrative on a reconstruction of human activities for greater understanding (Vann, 2019).

From old to new media, political leaders craft political communications to uphold their respective political narratives, agendas, and regimes by reaching and winning over their public on the bar of public opinion, acceptance, and support (Denton & Woodward, 1998; Bakir, 2013; Richardson, 2016; Owen, 2019). This conflation of conflicting narratives describes the political communications historiography of Cyprus, which appears to find alignment with the fragmented and volatile nature of the Cyprus

society and politics (Colak, 2008; Christophorou, Şahin, & Pavlou, 2010; Çiftçi, 2018).

At this juncture, one key question that reverberates relates to:

In what ways do historians and writers convey different political narratives and underpin different political agendas in a manner that shapes the historiography of political communications in Cyprus?

To address the preceding key question, as earlier discussed in the study, the communications channels that have been used in the Cyprus political communications arena include both traditional media (i.e. newspapers, TV, radio, and marketing collaterals) and digital media (i.e. social media, mobile, online, and email). On equally effective representations beyond election campaigns, publications of relevant books and academic articles penned by reputable authors, including expert journal contents, research studies, reviews, and opinions, are alternative communication channels usually invested in to reach target audiences and influencers. It is not also uncommon that many influencers are authors who craft writings and messages intended to communicate distinct political thoughts, perspectives, and arguments for or against a group, cause, or interest.

The following sections discuss how the major political actors in Cyprus express their respective political agendas, and how some authors contribute to reinforcing different narratives in a way that describes the historiography of political communications in terms of news-based parameters for assessing political narratives (Christophorou, Şahin, & Pavlou, 2010). These are:

- Source (Who communicates?)
- Content (What is the message?)
- Channel (What is the medium)
- Audience (Who is the receiver?)

- Purpose (Why is the message necessary?)
- Outcome (What was the impact?)

Greek Cypriot / Greece

The historical narratives of the Greek Cypriot (GC) emerged from strong nationalistic fervor, carried out by a broad variety of expressions emanating from the state, political parties, and individual social actors in a messaging context interspersed with a sense of history and identity (Papadakis, 1998). As early as 1955, the GC's historical narratives conveyed a strong anti-colonial accent that paradoxically propounded a union with Greece (i.e. enosis), a well-pronounced political stance initially pursued by the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters under the leadership of Archbishop Makarios on the political front and General Grivas for military undertakings (Papadakis, 2003). The incongruity of being nationalistic while receptive to a union with Greece tended to drive a wedge to achieve a unified narrative under the GC since it has become populated with Left-Wing and Right-Wing politicians and supporters that ventilated two divergent views and political statements on the history of Cyprus (Brouwer, 2009). From the political communications manifestations of the Right-Wing, the use of comparisons and politics of memory (i.e. remembering and recording or discarding of different historical events) was evident in attempts to present and espouse historical narratives that contextually contravened reality (Papadakis, 2003). In the course of events, studies indicated that in the dichotomous and tense narratives between the Left-Wing and the Right-Wing polity, the latter had to change political strategy because of decolonization, the rise of communists, new social temperament, and the challenge to the political hegemony of the Right by the Left became too strong

a force for the Right to contend with (Katsourides, 2014; 2017). In the use of politics of memory, the GC polity had, in effect, altered the history of Cyprus because of deletions of negative memories and conflicts in many accounts of negative memories, which machinations over history were even passed through Cyprus history textbooks (Çiftçi, 2018). In a revealing representation, Ciftci (2018, p.1) stated:

“I focus on the collective memory conceptualization that invades Cyprus Conflict, and I investigate Cyprus history textbooks from Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot education systems. In this regard, the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot memories are mostly based on the historiographies, negative memories of between 1958s and 1963s and the heroic partisan struggle strongly clash with negative counter-memories of 1974”.

As the GC narratives contained inaccurate historical accounts and misinterpreted major historical events, despite the use of credible channels such as TV, newspaper editorials, leading news articles, books, authors, and the academe (Christophorou, Şahin, & Pavlou, 2010), the GC narratives failed to generate the desired outcome and to bridge peace and unification in Cyprus. Research studies, historical accounts, and analytical interventions on the GC's political historical narratives have been made by different authors. Manifestations such as those of Papadakis (1998; 2003), Brouwer, (2009), Christophorou, Şahin, & Pavlou, (2010), and Katsourides, 2017) echo a commonality on how the history of political communications of Cyprus have been shaped or reshaped by truths and half-truths, by deletions and omissions, and by information and misinformation. The authors appear to have had difficulty constructing the historiography of political communications in Cyprus without being a party to the reflection of non-reality. Overall, the historical impact of the GC narratives did not

amount to any indicative and persuasive statement of truth and completeness in presenting Cyprus' political history.

Turkish Cypriot / Turkey

Like the GC historical narratives, the Turkish Cypriot (TC) narratives initially evolved from the same mantle of nationalism although the Turkish Cypriot narratives contextually favored an alignment with Turkey. On extended analysis, TC and GC depict a common situation of the same Ottoman past but refer to different points of reference to national identity, which is neither that of Cyprus but Greece, Turkey, Greek Cypriot, and Turkish Cypriot in orientation (Pingel, 1994; Kizilyürek, 2003), while propagating different historical narratives and images in derogation of unified historical accounts (Brouwer, 2009). As Kizilyürek (2003, p.198) stated: "The reason for this is the fact that the ultimate aim to unite with "mother Greece" and "mother Turkey" respectively became the main goal of the nationalisms in Cyprus. And as Kizilyürek (2003, p.198) added:

"The result was the denial of the State-building within Cyprus and the development of the two mutually exclusive ethnocultural communities. Cyprus was not perceived as a self-contained territory, in which an independent state could be created but as a piece of territory, which assumes meaning only if it is a part of the "superfamily" of the Greek and/ or Turkish nation. Therefore, the construction of national identities in Cyprus is to be understood in the context of nation-building processes in Greece and Turkey."

One fundamental difference in the political narratives between TC and GC relates to TC treating the 1974 invasion of Cyprus as a classic military victory for the Turkish

military forces to uphold ethnic kinship with Turkish Cypriots and as a strategic defense initiative to protect the southern border of Cyprus and the deep sea port of Mersin (Stone, 2009). In contrast, the GC narrative propagated the 1974 invasion as a classic case of territorial intrusion that victimized Cyprus and Greek Cypriots. This fundamental variation underlines a dichotomy in political narratives around which other dichotomies in political expressions of TC and GC were propagated (Christophorou, Şahin, & Pavlou, 2010).

Turkish Cypriot, while generally aligned with the Greek Cypriot in the context and techniques of political communications, appeared to have raised the standard of political communications commitment over the GC in the use of state books, newspaper editorials, and articles. Apparently, this intensified drive was the TC's differentiator in reinforcing messaging reach and intensity, especially in rallying people toward nationalist ideals. This appeal to the youth sector drew significance from the emergence of modern Turkey and the personal legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the iconic Turkish leader (Kizilyürek, 2003). As the TC nationalist leaders, Rauf Raif Denkta, ventilated: "We used to read books on Atatürk and the War of Liberation and discussed these topics. We were proud to be Turks. Our greatest wish was to visit Turkey." (Denkta, 1996, p. 58-59). As Kizilyurek (2003) shared, the clear, consistent, and persistent political narratives of the TC regime continued to attract the younger generation into their fold. The youth of TC were expected to be the new leaders who would pursue Turkish nationalism and thwart any possibility of Cyprus merging with Greece, rather than the division of the island and its union with Turkey. Arguably, in terms of consistency, reach, intensity, and impact, it appears the political communications strategies of the TC were better conceived and executed than that of

the GC. This represents an agenda and key action expected of TC because the TC narratives were grounded in kinship and strategic defense, a critical matter for survival, relevance, legitimacy, and sustainability that kept troubling the TC regimes due to the absence of international recognition. Overall, the works of Kizilyurek (2003) and Christophorou, Şahin, & Pavlou (2010) demonstrated the exercise of more purposeful and consistent political communications platform on the part of the TC political actors than their GC counterparts. Nonetheless, the authors proved that the TC narratives similarly failed to present in full the reality of history that characterized the Cyprus problem.

United Kingdom

The political narratives of the United Kingdom (UK), as could be expected from its imperialist background, were largely founded on military consideration in relation to the operations of British bases on the island (Bueno-Lacy & van Houturn, 2018) and to perpetuate its hold on the island pursuant to its divide-and-rule strategy, which caused the ethnic division of the GC and TC (Ozmatyatli & Ozkul, 2013; Demetriou, 2019). Cyprus used to be a dominion of the British Empire, which administered the island from 1878 to 1914 as a protectorate, annexed it by military occupation from 1914 to 1922, and held the island as a crown colony from 1922 to 1960. On August 16, 1960, the UK granted independence to Cyprus and as a condition of the independence agreement, retained custody of the SBAs as a British overseas Territory. The political narratives of the UK on the Cyprus issue currently continue to be defined and snugly insulated by the role of the UK as a guarantor to the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee where, at any onset of transgression by any of the contending parties, as may be necessary, the UK can initiate political actions. For many decades, the UK

has employed a variety of political communication initiatives that involved the conduct of diplomatic negotiations, peace talks, and conferences on the Cyprus issue, not on the quintessence of peacekeeping or unifying TC and GC, but more on ensuring the protection of British interest in the island; in fact, the British had even maximized the utility of influencing the educational and sociopolitical aspects of life in Cyprus (Ozmatyatli & Ozkul, 2013; Dagli, 2017). Overall, as Ozmatyatli & Ozkul (2013, p.2) concluded:

“The British educational policies helped both Turkish and Greek Cypriots to create ethnonationalism, which inspired the subsequent resistance of both communities. Although it is apparent that Cypriots placed a high value on education, this development was confined only to the context of being Greek or Turkish. Indeed, it would appear that within a curricula context, for the most part, this served as a forum in which all parties sought to construct national identities.”

United Nations

As the vanguard of global peace and unification, the United Nations (UN) political narratives on the Cyprus problem, after many diplomatic and peacekeeping interventions, principally hinged on the adoption of the 2002 Annan Plan, a proposal for the reunification of Cyprus by restructuring it as a United Republic of Cyprus, which proposition represents a federation of two states (Global Security.org, 2004). This Plan was revised five times until it was lodged for determination in April 2004 twin referendums where “Greek Cypriots decisively rejected the Annan plan, with 75.8 percent voting against, while Turkish Cypriots accepted it, with 64.9 percent in favour” (Theodoulou, 2016, p.1). While the UN remains an effective neutralizing factor in the

buffer zone between TC and GC, the UN, however, exemplified a case of failed political communication narratives. UN-driven settlement efforts did not produce the desired outcome, with UN peace prescriptions even meeting mixed reactions of doubt, rejection, and skepticism that the UN needs to continue exercising extraordinary vigilance in ensuring transparency of information with all parties concerned (Global Security.org, 2004; Lindley, 2006).

The weakness of the UN political communications framework was evident when the UN evangelized the Annan Plan, only to be subverted by newspaper media operatives in Cyprus, which demonstrated to be even more effective in influencing the historiography of the island. The newspaper dailies *Simerini* and *Machi* viewed the Annan Plan as a catastrophic phenomenon that justified a national obligation to reject it, lest the GC be relegated to extinction; *Phileleftheros*, while not openly impugning the Annan Plan, managed to stress aspects that could be discerned by the GC as harmful; *Politis* amplified that the Plan was not possible; *Haravgi* postulated that the Plan needed to be changed to promote a settlement securing both GC and TC rights; and *Alithia*, as a media exception, came out as the only news agency that considered the Annan Plan a compromise solution with the potential to solve the political impasse (Global Security.org, 2004). By and large, the UN, while being a lead actor in the Cyprus peace negotiation and intervention, remains a bit player in the exercise of political communications brilliancy. The UN should have the communication capacity to support its advocacies toward stakeholder acceptance, and thus be a power catalyst in weaving political communications narratives responsive to the agency's peacekeeping decisions, prescriptions, and actions, and contributory to a Cyprus historiography that helps elicit historical reality.

European Union

Like the UN, the EU seemed to fail to also counteract competing representations of media that tended to undermine the political rationale and communication strategy of the EU toward peaceful settlement (Global Security.org, 2004, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2004/04/www40429.htm>). The EU prioritized accession conditionalities rather than cutting-edge political communications effectiveness.

Since May 2004, when the de facto divided Mediterranean island became a member of the EU, the Cyprus problem is also increasingly becoming a source of concern in Brussels. At the same time, however, expectations for positive developments are growing as more and more views are converging that the time has come for a long overdue settlement. Today the European Union (EU) – its logic, dynamics, and mechanisms -- can play a catalytic role in finding a long overdue settlement on Cyprus and improving Greek-Turkish relations. It is time to have a fresh look at the problem from a European perspective. But above all, it is the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots who are faced with a unique challenge and a golden opportunity to resolve their differences, reunite their island, and take advantage of the European integration process that can offer them the security and stability they have been longing for (Joseph, 2015).

Political Force	Key Characteristics
Greek Cypriots / Greece	- Historical narratives rooted in nationalistic fervor, advocating for enosis (union with Greece).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal division between Left-Wing and Right-Wing politicians, leading to divergent views on history.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of politics of memory to shape historical narratives, with deletions and omissions in textbooks.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failed to generate desired outcomes in peace and unification efforts due to inaccurate historical accounts.
Turkish Cypriots / Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nationalist narratives aligned with Turkey, treating 1974 invasion as a military victory.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong political communications strategy, emphasizing kinship with Turkey and defense initiatives.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilized state books, editorials, and articles to reinforce messaging and rally nationalist ideals.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent and impactful narratives but failed to present the full reality of Cyprus' history.
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political narratives influenced by imperialist background, focused on military considerations and divide-and-rule strategy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role as a guarantor in the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee, intervening in political actions as necessary.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employed diplomatic negotiations and initiatives, maximizing influence in educational and sociopolitical aspects.
UN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocated the 2002 Annan Plan for reunification, faced rejection by Greek Cypriots in 2004 referendum.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involved in peacekeeping efforts but faced skepticism and mixed reactions, failed to achieve desired outcomes.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subverted by media narratives, particularly during the Annan Plan referendum, highlighting UN's communication challenges.
EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failed to counteract competing media representations, prioritizing accession conditionalities over political communications effectiveness.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seemed optimistic about Cyprus' EU membership leading to a settlement, advocating for a fresh perspective and European integration.

Table 3. .1: Collective table of the political forces in Cyprus

3.5 Contemporary issues in Cypriot Politics

The diversity, complexity, and dynamics of external forces influencing institutions in the global environment, which has become borderless and yet interconnected by

emerging technologies as one global village, created discontinuities and propagated new thoughts, views, and paradigms that change the structure and meaning of the economy, politics, and society (Drucker, 1992). As Drucker indicated, these global changes continue to evolve new technologies and new industries, transitions to world economy, a new socio-political reality of pluralistic institutions with radical political, philosophical, and spiritual challenges, and a knowledge environment introducing new constructs in the fields of education, work, leisure, and leadership. In the socio-political realm, changes and transitions underscore the rise of political phenomena, such as populism, fake news, and clientelism, which are discussed in the following sections.

Populism

Populism is a rising world view that continues to support many contemporary political, economic, and social agendas since the beginning of the 1980s, managing to morph into an ideological differentiator and enable political actors (i.e. parties and individuals) to achieve great election success (Bryder, 2009; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). In its simplest definition, populism means “a political philosophy supporting the rights and power of the people in their struggle against a privileged elite” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2016). A compelling definition of populism considers it “as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte general* of the people” (Mudde, 2007, p.23; 2015a, p.1). As Mudde (2015b) shared, populism blends with mainstream politics in five underlying properties, such as: (1) Populism is not right or left, although populists can be left or right, or even centrist; (2) Populism is anti-system, but it cannot be considered as anti-democracy; (3) “Populism is an illiberal democratic response to

undemocratic liberalism” (p.1), which suggests the end of liberal thought in politics where the government had substantial relinquishment of power; (4) Populists usually ask the right questions but give the wrong answers, although they are not always incorrect as far as the public is concerned, especially on issues which established political parties ignore; and (5) The power of populism is generally an offshoot of the actions of liberal democrats, as they picture the populists as the real voice of the people, convincing mainstream politicians to cuddle the view and enabling even minority parties to muster massive public support.

In a major and far-reaching study of populism, Margaret Canovan (1981) discovered and shared seven categories of populism, such as farmers’ radicalism, (2) peasant movements, (3) intellectual agrarian socialism, (4) populist dictatorship, (5) populist democracy, (6) reactionary populism and (7) politicians’ populism. These research findings practically revealed that from the early 1980s, populism appeared to have charted explosive growth as a political phenomenon. Populism is viewed by some scholars as a specific political communication style (Jagers & Stefaan, 2007). Populism accentuates the people and the elite and their antagonistic relationship, the notion of popular sovereignty, the elevation of the people, and the disparagement of the elite (Stanley, 2008). In terms of content elements, populist politics leverage “fake news, post-truth, alternative facts, the new age of xenophobia and racism, inequality and justice, and the earth at stake” (Ross, 2017). Populism also relates to political parties, leaders, movements, values, attitudes, practices, and regimes which are denigrated for being in contravention of the mainstream views (Davide, 2017); as such, it is considered by other analysts as a degraded form of democracy (Müller, 2016), and a threat to the stability of the whole European Union (Schultz, 2015). As common knowledge, borne by numerous studies, populism has permeated societies in the US,

Latin American, Oceania, and Europe, with leaders such as Donald Trump (US), Bernie Sanders (US), Ross Perot (US), and Huey Long (US), Jeremy Corbyn (UK), Robert Muldoon (New Zealand), Hugo Chavez (Venezuelan), Evo Morales (Bolivia), and Juan Peron of Argentina being branded as notable populists (Pappas, 2016; Druke, 2016; Kazin, 2016; Walker, 2016; Denison, 1992). As populism continues to grow, it has given an opportunity to sovereign, inward thinking leaders to strike a chord with many voters who feel let down by both the left and the right. Donald Trump's rise to political power in the US and the UK's Brexit vote took many by surprise (Iosifidis and Nicoli, 2020). From an institutional and movement perspective, the Tea Party Movement (US), Occupy Movement (US), and Brexit (UK) are cogent examples (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Boyer, et al., 2012; Lowndes & Warren, 2011).

In Cypriot politics, populism has deep roots. For instance, ELAM, an extremist political party won two seats in the 2016 Parliamentary elections amid a high level of voters' abstention (Kambas, 2016). ELAM is a nationalist movement that supports the Greek Cypriots and fights illegal immigration, while being accused of promoting racism and acts of violence (Wodak, 2015). Although the rise of populism in Cyprus is not as sensational in dimension as the US and European experience, the Cypriot scenario appears poised for a more intense transition based on people's political behavior in the 2016 elections. Political analyst, Hubert Faustmann, clearly described the situation: "All the big parties lost...A lot (of the result) was dissatisfaction of the public with the bigger parties ...Another reading could be that parliamentary elections in Cyprus are not that important, given the weakness of the Cypriot parliament" (Kambas, 2016, p.1). As a fundamentally populist party, ELAM attributes all wrongs and shortcomings to the Cypriot government and to Turkey or the Turkish Cypriots, which

ELAM considers as the national enemy (PRIO Cyprus Centre, 2015). Hence, no less than the Cyprus Minister of Finance clearly expressed a strong imprimatur that the country should block off “irresponsible populism” if needs to trek a clear path to economic recovery and growth. The Minister added that every time Cyprus abandons responsibility and yield to pressures of populism, the country in effect nurtures the best of populism (InCyprus, 2016).

Fake News

“Fake news” represents a grossly fictitious, fabricated, and misleading report on current developments, which is intended to deceive users of data and prompt them to disseminate such report (Burstein, 2017), including its viral online spread (Peters, 2016). In the online dissemination of fake news, the major purveyors are websites and social media channels (Media Matters, 2016). The proliferation of fake news is one controversial phenomenon that continues to bedevil people, organizations, and societies in many parts of the globe, and as such, remains the subject of contentious discussions and raging debates (West, 2017; Kellner, 2002). As a general situation, it is clear the conception, writing, publication, and distribution of fake news originate from the central purpose of swaying public opinion, especially in the realm of politics under the current partisan media culture (Mittel & Tryon, 2016). Fake news is a complex political issue because it generates multidimensional implications. While fake news generates usefulness for some political actors, it nonetheless builds a heavy private and social burden because fake news makes it doubly difficult for people to know the environmental situation and to discern which political candidates they should prefer and repose their trust on (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

The dimension and impact of fake news on electoral exercises are best exemplified by the 2016 presidential election in the United States. In this election, 115 pro-Trump fake stories were shared on Facebook 30 million times as compared to 41 pro-Clinton fake stories that were shared 7.6 million times. These fake news dissemination outcomes tended to build the impression that had it not been for the influence of fake news, Donald Trump could not have won the election (Dewey, 2016; Parkinson, 2016). Post-election studies in the US provide evidence of the significance of fake news in influencing the behavior of electorates toward a candidate, and these findings are (1) 62% of US adults access news reports from social media (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016); (2) Facebook stands as the primary medium for the extensive sharing of fake news, rather than mainstream media (Silverman, 2016); (3) people who access and engage fake news believe such accounts (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016); and (4) broad discussions on fake news tended to tilt in favor of Donald Trump over Hilary Clinton (Silverman, 2016).

In Cypriot politics, based on current accounts, it appears that fake news is at an incipient stage. There was not much incidence of fake news observed in the 2016 elections, except for the accusation hurled against DIKO leader and presidential candidate, Nicolas Papadopoulos, of spreading fake news in relation to a document that revealed “the Turkish Cypriot leader would appoint the Greek Cypriot members of parliament after a solution to the Cyprus problem. The claims were exposed as false following the release of a document supposed to corroborate the claim” (Anastasiou, 2017). Nonetheless, recent developments indicate there is an early conscious government effort to curb fake news as plans are afoot to pass legislation for 2018

implementation that seeks to regulate media operations and address the spreading of fake news (Andreou, 2017).

Political Clientelism

Clientelism relates to the principle of contingency and dependency between political actors (i.e. brokers, agents, and clients) involving the exchange of goods and services for political support, usually on implicit or explicit *quid pro quo* (Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, & Brusco, 2013). In clientelism, political parties serve as patrons and the entire social groups as clients, with the two groups actively “engaged in impersonal, bureaucratic and institutionalized political exchange” (Piattoni, 2001, p.1). Brokers, on the other hand, serve political leaders, and in such a relationship, brokers may opt not to tap the resources leaders would wish to access. This situation breeds a principal-agent issue that can impede a greater understanding of how clientelism really works (Stokes et al., 2013). In its simple political construction, clientelism is a kind of client-to-patron relationship, where the client undertakes the grant of political or financial support to a patron (e.g. delivery of electoral votes) in exchange for a special benefit or some form of privilege. It involves exchange systems through which electorates bargain and trade political support for different desired outcomes in the public decision-making process (Davidson & Scheiter, 2011).

In Cyprus, clientelism represents an active political phenomenon since the constitutional crisis in 1963 and the forcible geographic division of the country due to the outcome of the Turkish invasion in 1974 (Faustmann & Sonan, 2017). The role of political parties promoting clientelist relations in exchange for votes has so far been harmful to the rule of law and public affairs (Christophorou, 2013).

According to the authors, within the two areas, various forms of clientelism evolved during the geographic separation, which took the form of a consensual arrangement “including all major parties in the Greek Cypriot-dominated south, and an exclusive one, based on a winner-take-all logic in the Turkish Cypriot north in the setting of a de facto state financed by Turkey” (Faustmann & Sonan, 2017, p.1). This typical conflict resolution, as the authors added, involves a substantial cost of settlement and patronage where clientelism is an inevitable transition phenomenon, although it is not unlikely that clientelism can degenerate into more counterproductive practices such as patronage, turnout buying, abstention buying, and vote buying (Stokes et al., 2013). In the words of Faustmann, clientelism in Cyprus can be described as follows:

“Small town politics patterns shape the relations amongst the elites and between the politicians and the ordinary citizens...Consequently, public and private interaction is shaped by a highly developed system of mutual favors, through which one can achieve almost everything if one only has the right connections” (Ker-Lindsay & Faustmann, 2008, p.25).

In a more indicative and descriptive representation of clientelism in Cyprus, Faustmann averred: “Cyprus is a deeply clientelistic society...It is hardly an exaggeration to argue that in Cyprus not even a cleaning lady is hired or promoted in the public and semi-public sector without the intervention of political parties (Ker-Lindsay & Faustmann, 2008, pp.25-26).

Clientelism thrives in conditions of hardship and poverty because the cost of giving gifts or gratuitous grants to constituents assumes a much lower cost hurdle (Hicken, 2011). As studies indicate, in more politicized bureaucracies, elected political actors

exercise greater control over public services and can more conveniently direct government resources to constituents (Stokes et al., 2013). Based on these premises, should the dysfunctional economic, social, and political situations in Cyprus continue, it is not unlikely for clientelism in the country to aggravate in an unconscionable dimension.

3.6 Branding in Cypriot Politics

Political parties are presented in Cyprus since the 1940s. This political system was applied even after Cyprus' Independence and continued commencing up until the death of Archbishop Makarios III. The latter event became the starting point of the modern political system (Christophorou, 2008, p.99).

In 1981, the first elections were held after the death of Archbishop Makarios III who was repeatedly elected as the President of Cyprus, with the majority of votes on his side.

The modern political system almost coincided in time with the fact that from 1978 the press began to become the tool of communication between the parties and the voters (Christophorou, 1985). Therefore, branding had started to influence the political life of Cyprus since 1978, even to a very small extent.

The media have always addressed a mass audience and are the bridge for parties to approach voters. Of course, at the same time, they can be a dangerous tool in the hands of nationalists to polarize voters. Parliamentary party groups are important factors in parliament and political dynamics, especially between right and left parties (DISY, AKEL), which have always been rooted in social behavior (Charalambous, Christophorou, 2019).

Since 1980, political parties have been mediators between citizens and the state. In the 1980s elections, the influence of foreign elections and mainly Greek politicians such as Papandreou, who remained faithful to creating impressions through messages and statements, began to be clearly visible (Hadjikyriakos, Christophorou, 1996).

During the 1980s and 1990s political communication played a role in influencing opinion and election results in Cyprus. This era was marked by a three way rivalry among the parties. DISY (Democratic Rally) AKEL (Progressive Party of Working People) and DIKO (Democratic Party) as noted by Stavridis in 2009. These parties understood the importance of controlling the media to spread their messages and strengthen their voter base.

Having control over the media was crucial for these parties as it allowed them to communicate their narratives and policy priorities to the public. Utilizing newspapers, radio, television and online platforms political parties aimed to shape how people perceived issues like the Cyprus problem and the economy. Their messages were carefully tailored to resonate with voters feelings and bolster their stances on these matters according to Demetrious research in 2008.

The rivalry among DISY, AKEL and DIKO during this period went beyond ideology; it was also about positioning as each party strived for supremacy in politics. The fierce competition highlighted how important political communication was, for solidifying power and outdoing competitors. Political parties devoted resources to advertising campaigns utilizing their authority, over both modern communication channels to engage a broader audience and impact voter actions (Demertzis, 2012). Additionally the technological advancements of the 1980s and 1990s introduced possibilities and obstacles in communication. The emergence of satellite TV printing and the internet

transformed the media scene granting parties avenues to spread their messages. Adapting to these progressions became crucial for upholding the parties sway over discussions and election results (Chrysochoou, 2017). Consequently political communication in Cyprus during the 1980s and 1990s witnessed rivalry among parties with media dominance playing a pivotal role in molding public sentiment and electoral dynamics. The strategic deployment of communication tactics by DISY, AKEL and DIKO underscores the importance of media influence, in solidifying authority and shaping narratives during that era. The above power of influence of the parties had to be maintained over the years and adapted to the development of technology.

To help them in their communication work, the major parties requested the help of specialist communicators, either formally (DISY from Greece since 1990s) or informally (AKEL). The role of experts was limited to technical advice and guidance, since the policies were set by the party (Christophorou, 2011).

Therefore, it is obvious that political branding had made its appearance in the political life of Cyprus during the modern political period. Politicians tried to promote their ideas and their parties with whatever means of communication they had, with the ultimate goal of winning over the voters and dominating the political scene.

The parliamentary elections of 2016, which have extensively been studied in the thesis, were a milestone for political branding in Cyprus since social media began to be widely used. Until 2016, political communication from Cypriot politicians toward their publics little was known about the role of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Komodromos, 2017).

Based on earlier discussions, Cyprus is certainly a fragile republic that stands very vulnerable not only to European influence, but more openly to the rise of political thoughts such as populism, fake news, and clientelism (Wodak, 2015; Kambas, 2016; PRIO Cyprus Centre, 2015; Anastasiou, 2017; Andreou, 2017; Faustmann & Sonan, 2017). The electorate rejection of big political parties and the cuddling of minor political parties including the victory of ELAM, in public repudiation of institutional corruption and decadence committed by established political institutions, reflect the emergence of populism. The Cypriot brand of populism assumes a typical social media-based propagation as evidenced by the wins of minor political parties with very limited financial resources, but with the smart decision to capitalize on the power of social media to get their populist message across. With a rising populism, it is not far-fetched to consider that political clientelism can also prosper in alignment with populism, or the two systems can even have separate trajectories within Cypriot society. And, since clientelism is an open invitation for the onset of corruption and institutional decay, it is not an exaggeration to expect that clientelism can be the core subject of intense populist agenda and the center of festive fake news coverage across social media. Against this tripartite backdrop of populism, fake news, and political clientelism, amid a climate of public discontent, distrust, and repugnance against the established system of government, political branding has become an important mode of connecting with the people. Political branding finds compelling application in Cypriot politics because most political actors, though riding on the reach and ubiquity of social media, fail to capitalize on the power of digital media in communicating new, fresh, and unique ideas that befit a distinct political branding personality (Michael, 2016). According to Michael, Cypriot political actors generally remain fixated on implementing the same old political ideas of several decades ago, a situation that has lean strategic branding value while

missing current branding realities. Hence, it can be discerned that the Cypriot political landscape remains a static branding milieu because its political actors are predominantly conventional in political thinking and utterly deficient in analytical abilities, which unnecessarily strips branding of its fundamental usefulness (Needham, 2005). The lack of competence, compliance, and communication skills to remain aligned with the changing perception and mindset of voters indicates not only deficient internal values (Needham, 2005) of Cypriot political actors but also a prevalent dichotomy between leaders and constituents. In this political dichotomy, political branding is essential not only to catapult certain political actors, but more importantly, to narrow the gap between political stakeholders, promote greater social understanding, and leverage the reputational effect of political accountability (Grant & Keohane, 2005). Political activities or any kind of communication from MPs or politicians might gain more transparency and thus enable citizens to interact with them directly via social media (Komodromos, 2017). Also, social networking and other new media tools can provide citizens the opportunity to communicate directly with politicians (Nicoli and Komodromos, 2013). In the context of Cypriot politics, political branding benefits both the political actor in terms of improving the chances of winning an election and society in terms of pinpointing the identity and values each political actor stands for. This way, electorates are helped in rendering political decisions and allowing trust and optimism to renew the political climate (Demos, 2017). In Cypriot politics, particularly in the 2016 parliamentary elections, many political actors may have demonstrated competence and compliance, but in a paradoxical manner, had clearly shown a lack of communication skills to effectively influence the target audience and propagate distinct brand personality to stave off the anti-establishment sentiment inundating the Cypriot political landscape. And it is in this political vacuum,

populist ELAM and some other minority groups such as Citizens' Alliance and the Solidarity Movement (Associated Press, 2016), even allegedly purveying clientelism, managed their voices to be heard through social media by a restive and disenfranchised Cypriot public in a context much different from traditional political actors.

3.7 Assessment and Conclusion

The hegemony and effectiveness of social media in the last Cyprus parliamentary elections proved that despite dichotomies and distortions in narratives and propagandas, media can bridge understanding between political parties, candidates, and the electorates in a way that wins campaigns and charts new prospects for indicative political communications historiography in Cyprus.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Chapter overview

The chapter discusses the actions taken to examine the research problem which this study had addressed: how political branding fit into the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections amid the unfolding of a different voter mindset that has been impregnated by intense anti-government sentiment, imbued with desire to abstain from political exercises, influenced by rising populism, pervaded by clientelist dependency, and empowered by new digital communication. Theoretically, from the appreciation of this problem, the chapter presents the justification for the specific research techniques adopted to identify, select, process, and analyse the data and information selected for the study. The idea here was to engender greater awareness and understanding of the problem so that it can be critically evaluated. The chapter responds to the question of how the data was collected, processed, and analysed. Structurally, the chapter presents the: (1) context and general principles of research philosophy; (2) rationale for chosen research philosophies and how these constructs applied to impinging research issues; (3) description of the data collection methods and tools adopted, including relevant processes and explanations on the application of inductive and deductive approaches; (4) discussion of other methods studied but not adopted in the study; (5) resume of research limitation; (6) motivation for research; and (7) ethical considerations. Overall, the study recognized that the adoption of an appropriate research method constitutes one of the most important elements of a research study due to its impact upon the final research findings (Crotty, 1998), with great care and foresight exercised in the choice of the research method.

4.2 Context of Research Philosophy

Social research, which is the province of this thesis, comprises the study of diverse types of social subject in a clear and systematic manner for arriving at specific research outcomes -- an integral activity from conception to completion of specific social research projects (Straits & Singleton, 2004). This diverse, systematic, and integral context of social research finds illumination in the work of Saunders et al. (2007) that amplifies the significance of the research onion paradigm. As applied in this study, this paradigm commenced with the definition of the context of research philosophy, and then transitioned to the application of the chosen research philosophy, going to the formulation of the research process, strategy, and data collection methodology, and ending with the discussion on alternative research methods. Hence, the research onion (see Figure 4.1) helped create a series of stages to understand the different methods of data collection and the steps for the description of a methodological study (Saunders, et al, 2007).

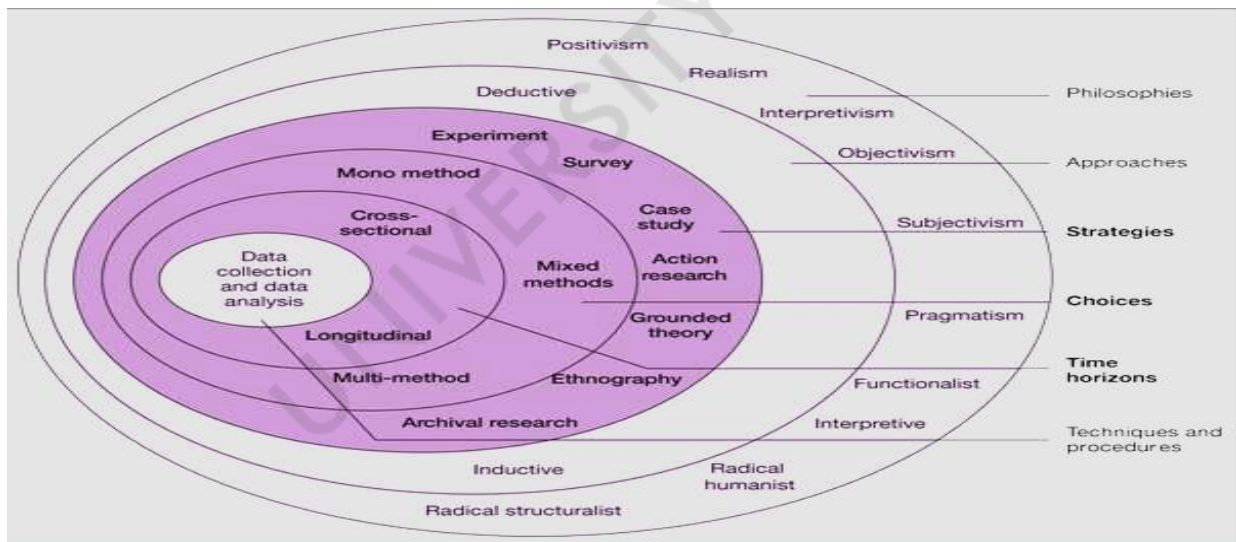


Figure 4.1: Research Onion Diagram

Source: Saunders et al. (2007)

Research philosophy signifies a clear and useful guide to the researcher in the conduct of the research design, research strategy, questionnaire design, and sampling (Malhotra, 2009) – how data about a phenomenon should be gathered, examined, and used. Research philosophy pertains to the development of the research background, research knowledge, and its nature (Saunders et al., 2007). It is propounded that when defining the appropriate research philosophy in support of a research study, there are two major dimensions to keep in mind: ontology and epistemology. Ontology relates to the philosophy of world reality, while epistemology refers to the philosophy that tells how people come to know the world. Ontology has two branches, and these are positivism and interpretivism (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Greco and Sosa (1999), the positivist framework, drawing origin from scientific research, asserts that for social research to be meaningful, it must be rational and logical in its approach and must make use of physical and sensory observations on research-associated phenomena. Greco and Sosa advanced that these observations must be recorded in detail and thereafter be examined with the help of acknowledged numerical or statistical methods to arrive at generalizable research findings and conclusions. The positivist framework uses deductive logic for the formulation of research questions or hypotheses, which construct follows a top-down direction involving breaking down a broad research hypothesis into smaller versions (Ernest, 1994). Positivism considers the world as external and maintains there exists a specific reality to a research phenomenon, irrespective of the researcher's belief or perspective; it adopts controlled and structural approaches in the conduct of research through the identification of clear research topics and the adoption of suitable research methodologies (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Positivist researchers seek objectivity and use consistently logical and rational

approaches in investigations, with a clear distinction between experience and science and value judgment and fact (Creswell & Clark, 2006).

In contrast, the interpretivist framework, which emerged in response to the rather narrow and linear approach of positivism, makes the point that social research concerns the attitudes, approaches, and behaviors of humans, which are often irrational and illogical in character (Faubion, 2005). According to Faubion, interpretivism makes use of inductive reasoning or logic, which works in a bottom-up manner for the formulation of hypotheses, and with such an approach involving moves from specific observations through exploratory and probing processes to broader theories and generalizations. The knowledge obtained through the adoption of interpretivism is socially constructive, rather than determined in an objective manner, as interpretivists tend to avoid fixed and rigid structural frameworks in favor of more flexible and personal research structures (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Interpretivist research continues to be open to new knowledge throughout the research project and lets such knowledge develop with the assistance of informants (Darlington & Scott, 2002). As Darlington and Scott (2002) added, the objective of interpretivist research is to understand and assess meanings in human behavior, rather than engaging in generalization and prediction of causes and effects (Darlington & Scott, 2002). While both interpretivism and positivism are extensively used in social research, positivism, however, was found to be inadequate for the study of multidimensional, multi-layered research subjects, which are investigated best with the help of exploratory and comprehensive interpretivist approaches (Davies, 2007).

From an epistemological view, there are two broad dimensions, and these are rationalism and empiricism. The empiricist concern regarding how individuals develop

an understanding of the world originates from the idea that knowledge and comprehension of the world are attainable only through the practice of objective study, analysis, and the testing of verifiable reality. This approach is closely aligned with the scientific method, which involves formulating and testing hypotheses through controlled experiments (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Empiricists view and argue that an objective study and analysis is the only way to create and build knowledge free from biases, introducing that data generation underpins solid methodology and meaningful research conclusions. Empiricists consider data as the solitary source of explanatory power in a research exercise, as contrasted to the rationalist's view that data alone does not reveal the mysteries of the world as data must be subject to the rigorous screening and analytical power of the human brain (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). Rationalists do not necessarily impugn the conduct of objective study and analysis to achieve a typical research aim; instead, they impute a different value on the data a research method produces. Rationalists are convinced data remains amplified and contextualized by the demonstrated power of the human mind, which can process a piece of data with many other pieces of data and tackle a wide variety of inductive and deductive exercises (Davies, 2007). As Cohen and Crabtree (2006) propounded, methodological approaches drawing context from both empiricist and rationalist constructs can co-exist with other techniques in one and the same methodology. According to the authors, this combination epitomizes a valuable set of data in the same research environment, which integrates and harmonizes research approaches toward more meaningful and binding conclusions.

4.3 Application of Chosen Research Philosophy

The study adopted a research philosophy that leveraged the application of the interpretive paradigm of the ontological approach and the empiricist and rationalist

paradigms of the epistemological approach. The thesis relied upon the well-settled postulate from many studies that any research exercise using both epistemological thoughts could align with other approaches within the same methodology, with such kind of combination introducing incremental data in the same research environment and producing more responsive conclusions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The rationale for the interpretivist component, as part of people's reality, pertained to the focal point of the study to examine, discuss, and highlight the lived experiences of people and groups (Sandberg, 2005) with respect to the conception and use of political branding for election purposes. The evident research impetus was to fathom, understand, and assess the meanings of human behaviors in relation to political actors' decisions and actions for public alignment and political gain. Also, the impetus pertained to human behaviors relating to how the electorate body received and accepted the branding initiatives of political actors. In the study, the interpretivist element could be appreciated from the conception and resolution of the research purpose, while the literature review provides predominant complementation through the elaboration and explication of the important role of social media in political branding during the 2016 Cypriot parliamentary elections. The use of the empirical approach in the study originated from the need to create and build primary data and information on specific issues (Mills et al., 2010; Gerring, 2005; Soy, 1997), which research requirement was in part appreciably responded to through the adoption of case studies. The case study method supported the research in unraveling the meanings behind the behaviors and decisions of political actors, such as DISY, AKEL, DIKO, EDEK, and POLITON, in relation to political branding, audience targeting, communication, and social media implications of such political actions. Additionally,

the empirical context of the study stems from the use of data extracted from the key informant interviews. The rational construct included the outcomes of the key informant interviews that helped address the research problem (Chater & Oaksford, 1999) and supported causal inferences and reasoning (Chatter & Oaksford, 1994). The rational element of the study also draws upon the thematic analysis (Hancké, 2009) of the different responses elicited from key informants, which aided the analysis, categorization, integration, interpretation, and illustration of such responses (Greene et al., 2007; Hancké, 2009).

4.4 Data Collection Methods

The study's research design is based on qualitative methods to address the research agenda (Teddlie, 2003), such as gathering qualitative data and subsequently quantifying the generated data. Based on the treatise of Tashakkori and Teddlie, this research format was pursued under the following circumstances: (1) the application of a deductive approach (e.g. top-down elaboration of theoretical framework such as brand audit, market segmentation, and digital marketing) (2) the research recognition that human behavior is a key predictable element (e.g. responses of Cypriot electorates to prevailing poor quality of governance and responses of political candidates and political parties to adverse public sentiment); (3) the engagement of various research questions with a multidimensional approach; for example, on the question of determining the effectiveness of branding strategies in the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary election, the process adopted content analysis of election results to resolve the research question; whereas, on the question intended to discover the thoughts, attitudes, and approaches of 2016 candidates and communicators to connect with Cypriot voters, the process used in part thematic analysis to examine,

classify, and code responses in the key informant interviews to support the formulation of responsive research conclusion; (4) the study of human behavior in more than one condition, such as examining the variation in the political communication and priorities of political parties and candidates or the variation in the political perceptions and responses of Cypriot electorates; (5) the research recognition of commonsense realism and pragmatism (what works is what is real), such as the demonstrated support of some political parties to the anti-establishment sentiment of Cypriot electorates; this situation was considered a sheer reality in an emerging regime of populism amid mediocre quality of public governance; another situation referred to the power of social media to reach and connect with Cypriot voters, which many political actors failed to effectively appreciate; (6) the adoption of two different forms of data collection; the case study, and key informant interviews; (7) the enrichment of data representation highlighted by the combination of words, number, and images; (8) the use of qualitative data analysis; and (9) the production of generalizable corroborated findings, such as the results affirming the power of social media to influence parliamentary election outcomes based on literature review, in-depth key informant interviews, and post-election media reports. The research model which the study adopted was predicated on a multi-tier configuration shown in

Figure 4.2.

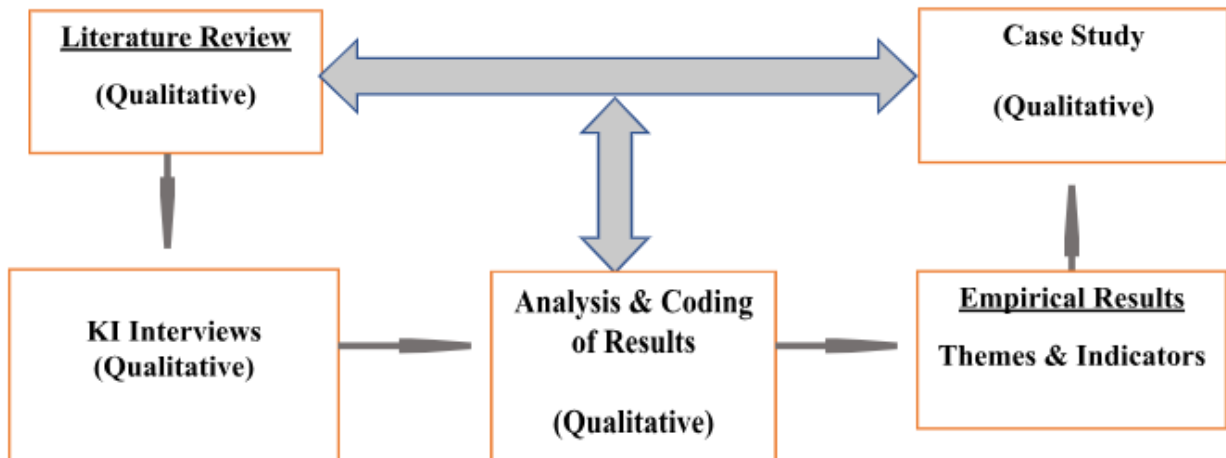


Figure 4.2 Mixed Research Design

Use of Semi-Structured Interviews with Key Informants

From the completion of the literature interview, all the add-on challenges for data particularity and infusion of expert knowledge to raise the level of information quality, as well as resolve the incremental research gap, magnified the necessity of using other research solutions. Hence, we decided on the conduct of semi-structured interviews among key informants as the most responsive research options in filling the insufficiency of specific and special data on Cypriot politics. Rather than a structured model, we chose the semi-structured research format to take advantage of the latter's inherent benefits that accrue to the research agenda of the study. These benefits pertained to the following: (1) the process yielded the relevant and desired data about the Cypriot political actors and political communication consultants, as they were specifically targeted; (2) the exercise allowed comparison of research outcomes from respondent political actors; (3) the format provided the freedom to the research participants to explore views and opinions in detail; and (4) the interaction afforded discussion of sensitive topics (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p 83) such as anti-

establishment feelings of Cypriot electorates or corruption in Cypriot government. Semi-structured formats are widely used in social research for obtaining comprehensive primary information from a selected group of respondents. These formats are conducted with the use of specific open-ended and close-ended questions that elicit comprehensive and detailed information from the respondent on diverse aspects of the research subject. In the interviews, we implemented the exercises by using a semi-structured questionnaire, which questionnaire had appreciable research value because (1) it proved to be a practical and manageable approach that allowed the coverage of all respondent political actors in less time and less cost; (2) the interview questionnaire had the flexibility of being administered to political candidates by outsourced competent third-party researchers without vitiating research validity and reliability; (3) the questionnaire outcomes were easily quantified even with Excel applications; and, (4) quantified data allowed comparison of results (Gomm, 2008) involving different political actors.

Key informants were used as research participants in the interviews. Key informants are experts, including community leaders, professionals, or residents, who have first-hand knowledge about the community and who can provide insights into the nature of issues and render recommendations for solutions (UCLA, 2004). Hence, in this research, key informants were election specialists endowed with indicative knowledge about election issues, voters' mind and attributes, political communication, and political branding. Based on the research assumptions in the study, communication consultants and candidates both possess expert knowledge and experience to render an indicative assessment of the voter's mind with respect to political issues and their participation in election exercises, which assessment could be generally relied upon

with respect to knowing the voter's belief, perception, and values. In like manner, the views of the candidates with respect to the understanding of the voter's mind and their thoughts about political communication and branding remain aligned with that of their party's communication consultants due to their common institutional affiliation. In the words of Payne & Payne (2004), "key informants are those whose social positions in a research setting give them specialist knowledge about other people, processes or happenings that is more extensive, detailed or privileged than ordinary people, and who are therefore particularly valuable sources of information to a researcher, not least in the early stages of a project." By using key informants as research respondents, especially in the requirement of the current study for data specificity and participant's expert knowledge about Cypriot politics, we managed to achieve the following: convenient and inexpensive data gathering; research-reinforcing rapport with participants; convenient access to key informants for research clarity; and enhanced relationship with participants (UCLA, 2004).

Pre-Election Semi-Structured Interviews of Political Candidates

The first phase of the semi-structured research exercise in the study was the engagement of political candidates in a pre-election interview. The interview was conducted in convenient mixed formats – eight (8) phone interviews, four (4) email responses, and two (2) personal engagements. A complete list of the 19 questions propounded in the semi-structured interview is presented in [Appendix 1](#). The interview participants represented an inclusive sample of fourteen (14) candidates from large, medium-sized, and small political parties in Cyprus, as shown in the Table 4.1.

Political party	Size of political party	Number of interview(s)
AKEL	LARGE	4
DIKO	MEDIUM	3
DISI	LARGE	4
EDEK	SMALL	1
OIKOLOGOI	SMALL	1
SUMMACHIA POLITON	SMALL	1

Table 4. 1: List of Cypriot political parties

This selected sample of 14 expert respondents provided a diversity of perspectives and first-hand data that generated quantifiable results (McKee, 2013) from the 19 common questions propounded to each political candidate participating in the interview.

On close examination of the results, the interview generated answers that linked to the problem, research aim, key questions, and theoretical frameworks (see Chapter 5). These controlling links were reinforced by the three major categories of interview questions that were distilled from participants' responses, and these categories are (1) branding tools and techniques (8 questions), which related to the fundamental problem on how political branding fit with Cypriot politics, particularly in conjunction with the four (4) research questions pertaining to digital engagement, audience targeting, branding communication, and political branding impact, as well as to the theoretical frameworks of branding audit, market segmentation, and digital media; (2) opinions and experiences (4 questions), which linked with the research problem, research question on political branding impact, and the theoretical frameworks on market segmentation and digital media; and (3) socio-political themes (7 questions), which

related to the research problem, new voter’s mindset, rising populism, prevalence of historical clientelism, and the three (3) theoretical frameworks. [Figure 4.3](#) presents a configuration that shows the research links of the interviews.

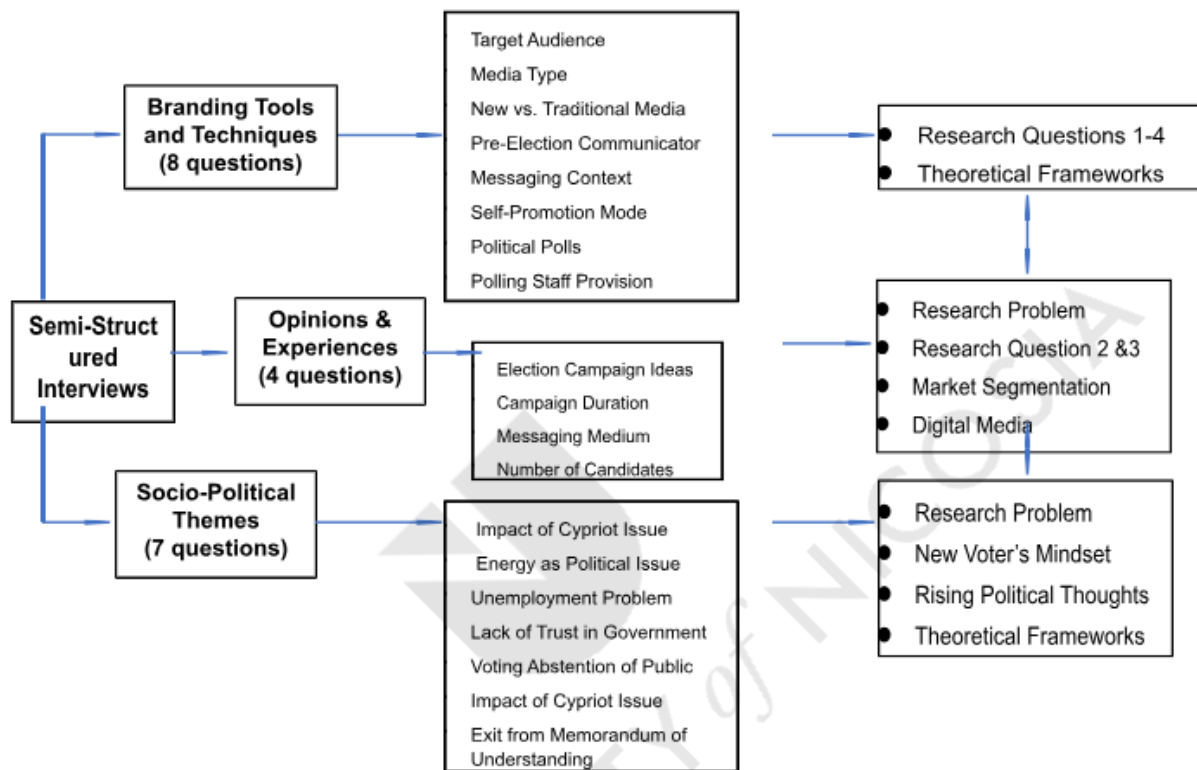


Figure 4.3 Research Links of Semi-structured interviews

Post-Election Semi-Structured Interviews of Communication Consultants

The second phase of the semi-structured research exercise in the study was the engagement of five (5) communication consultants in post-election interviews. These semi-structured interviews propounded 16 questions (see [Appendix 2](#) for a complete list of questions). Two (2) interviews were personally undertaken by us and three (3) other instances were done via online communication through Skype. For the nine (9) questions from the general category of branding tools and techniques, the interview engagements generated indicative responses relating to the research problem, all four

(4) research questions on digital engagement, audience targeting, branding communication, and political branding impact, including the theoretical frameworks of market segmentation and digital media. On the second broad category of socio-political themes, responses to the seven (7) questions linked with the research problem, new voter's mindset, rising populism, and digital media usage. The links of the semi structured interviews are elucidated in Figure 4.4.

As can be learned later from the results of the study (Chapter 5), the interviews achieved three (3) incremental accomplishments, and these pertained to (1) the interview outcomes validated the effectiveness of the political communication and branding strategies used by political actors during the pre-election campaign; (2) the interview results discovered indications on what key factors influenced the win or loss performance of candidates and political parties; and (3) the interview elicited responses that identified which type of media strategies and channels predominantly contributed to the success of political winners.

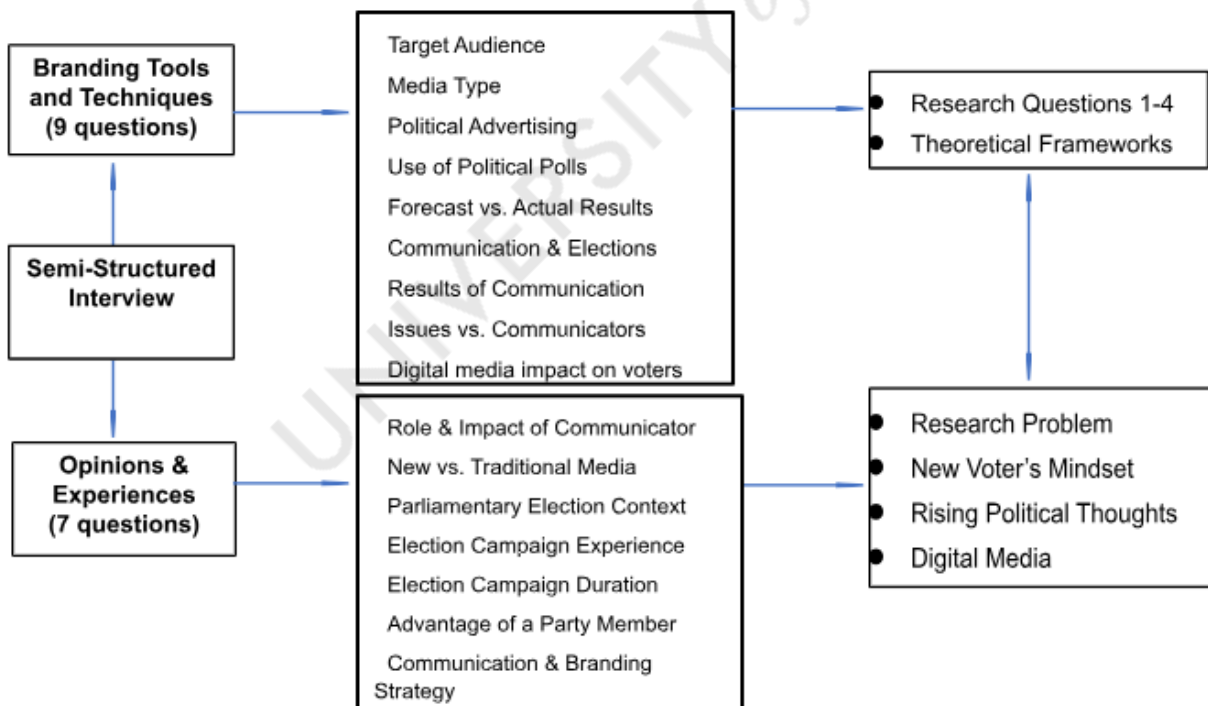


Figure 4.4: Research links of Semi-structured interviews of Communication consultants

Use of Case Study

A strong outcome of this thesis relates to having succeeded in building a solid case study from the combination of the semi-structured interviews with candidates and political communicators experts (Appendices 1-2E). The thesis applied a qualitative research methodology to analyze the data based on previously successful alternate data collection designs linking quantitative and qualitative results (Mathew Miles and Michael Huberman, 1994). Hence, it focused on the advantages of research designs that comprise primary data creation, and produce original research results. This enabled us to estimate the effects of political branding through analyses that were tailored to Cypriot political parties and voters explicitly.

Moreover, the case study achieved the production of indicative data on branding tools and techniques, opinions and experiences, and socio-political themes without losing research validity and reliability.

4.5 Analysis, Coding, and Categorization of Research Results

In this thesis, is analyzed each semi-structured interview transcript separately before studying the collective results (Sidorova, Arnaboldi, & Radaelli, 2016) with the objective of assessing how these findings relate to the specific information requirements for which the research exercises were run. To facilitate the process, the research results were coded to identify the presence of research evidence in terms of relevant and meaningful themes, concepts, and trends germane to the research issues similar to Rabionet, 2011. In the coding process, the information were separated from the text, culminating to categorization, which deals with classifying data generated from the responses and organizing these data into categories based on similar

meanings (Schulenberg, 2006). Data categorization was pursued based on continuous revision and change (i.e. constant comparison) until new segments could be grouped in correct categories, without the need of being expanded even with the inclusion of additional categories (Parveen, 2012). The categorized segments comprised the empirical indicators extracted from the review of all interview research transcripts for descriptive categories, and the codes were created based on our research outcomes (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The coding measure enabled us to (1) identify the most compelling themes and their linkages, including the comparison of such results to determine their corroborative context; and (2) determine the degree of importance of each theme or concept to research participants, providing indications on which themes or concepts the participants gave more time and focus (Longhurst, 2003), thus, enabling the formulation of general response categories that facilitated response tracking and measurement; (3) relate the coded responses to controlling research issues as evoked by the research problem and key questions, and as subsumed in the theoretical frameworks;

Table 4.2 (1) presents the codes distilled from the semi-structured interview results, (2) outlines which codes promoted ease in the organization, analysis, and interpretation of the research outcomes pertaining to which voter groups different political candidates targeted and (3) explains the reasons for aiming at different voters' groups. These codes were significantly helpful in the study, even in applying the theoretical frameworks of brand audit, market segmentation, and digital media usage.

Table 4.2: Codes from Semi-Structured Interviews

Voter Group	Code	Reason for Choice of Voter to Address	Code
Registered Party Voter	RPV	Size of Voting Population	SVP
Young Cyprus Voter	YCV	Helping the People	HTP
Undecided Cyprus Voter	UCV	Non-committal to Political Brand	NPB
Working Middle Class	WMC	Previous Voter's Interest	PVI
Jobless Cyprus Voter	JCV	Demonstrated Political Maturity	DPM
Mid-Life Voter	MLV	Promise of Hope	POH

Table 4.2 Codes from Semi-Structured Interviews

4.6 Sampling Method

The five (5) communication consultants in the semi-structured interviews represented five (5) political parties: AKEL, DISY, DIKO, POLITON, and EDEK. The 14 political candidates in the semi-structured interview had the following party representations: AKEL (4), DISY (4), DIKO (3), EDEK (1), POLITON (1), and OIKOLOGOI (1).

4.7 Other Research Methods Studied

The project used focus-group-interviews to engage the Cypriot electorate and the political candidates, in at least four (4) sessions with the electorates and one (1) session with the candidates. However, due to perceived time, financial, and intervention handicaps, we chose to focus on the mixed method approach aforementioned. The focus group approach was initially considered due to its demonstrated benefits, such as: generating different views, insights, and themes from the engagement of selected participants interacting on group dynamics format; eliciting enriching debates among participants beyond the depth and breadth

interviews can offer (Berg & Lune, 2004); and, reducing research cost as it allows two or three focus group sessions over a total of 20 respondents, instead of covering 20 people in twenty separate interviews. Nonetheless, the focus group format is also burdened by limitations, such as: challenges in finding a mutually convenient time and venue for participants in a focus group interview; requiring a high level of communication and facilitation skills to moderate a focus group interview; and, the focus group remains vulnerable to conflicts and disorder among participants especially if the moderator lacks the required skills (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Hence, we excluded the focus group methodology as a data collection alternative as we did not have the skills and predictable effectiveness of an experienced facilitator for engaging focus group participants.

4.8 Limitations of the Study

Although the study succeeded in highlighting a totally insightful illustration of the role and influence of political branding in Cyprus' 2016 parliamentary elections, it could have been incrementally amplified with two other elements included, and these are:

1. **Details of Media Mix Usage:** The study did not delve into the specifics of the media mix usage made by political parties, such as the political expense structure or distribution of political candidates and/or political parties. While the quality of the analysis and the reliability and relevance of research results have not been eroded by the absence of these details, the overall significance of the study could have been elevated to greater paradigmatic value had these factors been included.

2. Cost-Benefit Appraisal: Similarly, the study did not include a cost-benefit appraisal of the political branding strategy. A typical component of strategic evaluation in both business and non-business engagements, such an appraisal could have delivered a supplemental measure of political branding performance.

The limitations were bound to arise and were beyond our control due to a lack of time during the pre-election period and because of competing priorities during the post-election period for both political winners and losers. In both periods, neither the political actors nor the communicators had the luxury of time, convenient physical availability, and mental liberality to address more sensitive interview questions needing greater circumspection to respond to.

Additionally, logistical challenges were encountered in accessing candidates post-election and communicators pre-election due to their busy schedules and involvement in campaign activities. Despite efforts to overcome these challenges, the constraints limited the feasibility of conducting interviews both before and after the elections.

The limitations were viewed as extraordinary variables beyond the ambit of the thesis, and for this reason, the limitations were considered appropriate subjects of new and separate future research. In the overall assessment, it can be inferred that the study had addressed the identified research gap and had contributed, to no small degree, to the creation of new knowledge and the expansion of the existing literature in political branding.

4.9 Ethical Issues

We adhered to every ethical norm required in social research (Grady, 2002). The consent of all research participants for the interviews were obtained. All respondents were informed of their rights, with specific regard to the strict confidentiality of their identity, to refrain from answering any, or all, of the questions and to withdraw from the research at any time they choose to (Anderson, 2004). A completed freedom was given to all the respondents in answering the questions and ensured the framing or content of the questions did not upset the emotions of the respondents (Black, 2006). With the research being significantly qualitative in nature, we exerted best effort to maintain complete impartiality and avoidance of bias (Anderson, 2004), with care being exercised in sustaining work originality and in acknowledging in detail all information sources, cited or otherwise (Grady, 2002).

4.10 Motivation for Research

I have taken a strong interest in marketing, advertising, and communication and have, over the years, studied these subjects with intense excitement. These learning engagements motivated me to pursue marketing and communication as the subject of my thesis, whilst I remain equally interested in politics and election activities. Amid intense excitement over the possibility of a multi-dimensional post-graduate thesis addressing my compelling interests, I decided on a convergence of communication, marketing, politics, and elections with the relevant thesis topic: ***the role and relevance of communication in the 2016 parliamentary elections in Cyprus***. For this reason, I have done a comprehensive background study of the subject and have found it to be extremely interesting. I also discovered there was very little research conducted on marketing, brand-building, and communication in the political context, outside the USA, the UK, and some European countries. This new revelation motivated me, even

more, to conduct research in an interesting and comparatively unexplored area, hoping that in the actual research project, I could create new knowledge, whilst having the leverage to enhance current understanding of the subject.

4.11 Chapter Summary

The Chapter discussed the governing research philosophy of the thesis from its ontological and epistemological frameworks, including the relevant contexts pertaining to interpretivist, empiricist, and rationalist constructs characterizing social research. Qualitative research models, methods of data collection, and techniques of case study, content analysis, and thematic analysis were research notions similarly covered in the chapter. One of the most essential research subjects tackled by the chapter related to the conduct of semi-structured interviews with key informants. These research exercises served as vital data collection strategies, in tandem with case studies and newspaper post-election indicators on the effectiveness of pre-election communication and branding strategies supporting the pre-election campaigns. The chapter amplified the data collection techniques used, the context of data analysis, ethical issues, and the underlying research motivation of the study. This methodological topology provided the basis for the conduct of the semi-structured research exercises, the outcomes of which are discussed in the following Chapter 5 (Results of the Study).

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS OF THE STUDY

5.1 Introduction

The chapter dwells on the results of two research exercises that addressed the research problem and key questions, and how the questions propounded related to the research frameworks. The first research exercise pertained to the conduct of a semi-structured interviews covering fourteen (14) different political party candidates in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The second research exercise involved interviews of five (5) election campaign experts who were hired by the different political parties in Cyprus as communication consultants or communicators. Respondents in both research exercises were key informants with indicative, reliable, and specialized political knowledge. The chapter highlighted the notion that the use of key informants to respond to the research inquiries provided a good view of the voter's mind and perceptions about the elections even without direct research interaction with the electorates. This research measure relied on the expert readings of the voter's mind from the key informants because of the latter's specialized knowledge and experience about Cyprus election matters. The gist of this research approach has been reflected in the two major research assumptions in Chapter 1.

The chapter presents research findings bearing on how the candidates responded to the questions under the three major categories: branding tools and techniques, opinions and experiences, and socio-political themes. The chapter also indicated how the communication experts addressed the questions under the two major categories of branding tools and techniques and opinions and experiences. Appendix 1 provides the organized results of the interviews with candidates. Appendix 2 presents the

results of the communicators' interviews and Appendix 2A - Appendix 2E provide the individual transcripts of these five (5) interviews.

5.2 Result of interviews with Candidates

5.2.1 Branding Tools and Techniques

Target Audience

The responses to the interview questions provided a clear segmentation of the groups of electorates chosen by political candidates as essential targets of pre-election campaign efforts, and this market subdivision is presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Segmentation Analysis: Direction of Election Campaign (interview)

Market Segment	Reply Code	Preference of Political Parties					
		AKEL	DISY	DIKO	EDEK	Politon	Oikologoi
Registered Party Voter	RPV	X	X	X			
Young Cypriot Voter	YCV	X		X	X	X	X
Undecided Cypriot Voter	UCV	X		X	X	X	
Working Middle Class	WMC	X	X	X			
Jobless Cypriot Voter	JCV				X	X	
Mid-Life Voter	MLV						X

Table 5.1 Segmentation Analysis: Direction of Election Campaign (interview)

Source: 2016 Political Candidates Interviews, including basis of segmentation

When asked about their reason for choosing a group of electorates to which the pre-election campaign effort was directed, the candidates indicated different target groups which are segmented and summarized in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Segmentation Analysis: Voter’s Group Rationale (interview Responses)

Reason for Choice of Voters’ Group		Preference of Political Parties					
		AKEL	DISY	DIKO	EDEK	Politon	Oikologoi
Previous Voters’ Interest	PVI	X	X	X			X
Size of Voting Population	SVP	X	X	X			X
Non-Committal to Political Brand	NPB			X	X	X	
Demonstrated Political Maturity	DPM		X	X			X
Desire to Help	DTH	X					
Promise of Hope	POH				X	X	
Match-up of Voter & Candidate	MVC				X	X	

Table 5.2 : Segmentation Analysis: Voter’s Group Rationale (interview Responses)

Source: 2016 Political Candidates Interviews, including basis of segmentation

Basic Messaging Context

When asked about the context of their communication messages to promote their party's interest and individual candidacy, the political candidates stated the following core messages:

AKEL: Our accomplishments in public service demonstrate our ability, unity, and commitment to our common future.

DISY: Our capacity to enjoy a vibrant society, now and in the future, depends on who you are going to vote. We welcome you to join us.

DIKO: Let us share values, realities, dreams, and passion for change. Let us build a new society with a vibrant economy. Let us vote. Together, we can do it.

POLITON: Vision, knowledge, action, and transparency ...our simple ways to change the present and secure the future, as we cherish our past. Let us unite to change our destiny.

EDEK: We are committed to the change and the future our people dream of. Join us. We can share what we will build as one nation.

As can be noted from the messages, AKEL and DISY, which are the largest and most established political parties, propounded classic traditional messages of rallying people into their ranks by claims of experience, capacity, and commitment. In contrast, DIKO, another major party, joined minor parties, POLITON and EDEK, in evoking hope and unity for change – new partnership, new vision, new dreams, and new future – in a new society shared by the Cypriot people. The messages of EDEK, POLITON, and DIKO demonstrated directedness and alignment with the people.

Perception of Digital and Traditional Media Differences

From the interview responses, it was apparent the political candidates possessed a good understanding of what traditional media and digital media are, and how these media platforms are used to reach target audiences. The political candidates did perceive differences between traditional and digital media, and based on responses, these differences are compared in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Perceived Differences between Traditional and Digital Media

Traditional Media	Digital Media
Made up to television, print (e.g. newspaper and magazine), radio, and outdoor channels	Consists of Internet, online links, website, mobile, video, email, and social media.
Non-user-generated content messaging; does not afford real-time interactions with audiences	User-generated content messaging allows real-time interactions with political audiences
Does not need critical technical skills, with the engagement of agencies & consultants	Needs specialists to handle both systems and messaging, can be in-house or outsourced

Addresses mass-market communication with public roll-out of one political messaging event	Offers one-to-one interaction with audiences, creating personal context for candidates
Measured by audience reach and frequency of communication exposure of political actors	Measured by the quantity and quality of online engagement of political actors with audiences
Communication or messaging must be formal and structured to comply with protocols	Messaging need not be formal, but informal; can be in unstructured format and casual tone
Generally expensive option, especially TV and newspaper with lower audience reach	Generally inexpensive and cost-effective, with high audience reach, nationally and globally
Does not offer precise audience targeting and does not guarantee correct audience reach	Has precise audience targeting and ensures reaching the right target political audience
Has time lags in determining the effectiveness of political communication campaigns	Political campaign effectiveness can also be gauged immediately, with no need to wait for days
Political campaigns, information, and videos cannot be shared instantaneously	Political campaigns, information, articles, and videos can be shared instantaneously

Table 5.3 : Perceived Differences between Traditional and Digital Media

As denoted in Table 5.3, political actors did have a good grasp of the benefits of digital media (i.e. social media) in terms of real-time interactions with target audiences, such

as: user-generated content, informal and unstructured conversation, personal context, broad reach, instantaneous connectivity, cost-effectiveness, accurate audience targeting, simultaneous information sharing, and a high degree of measurability with respect to campaign performance, which allows undertaking segmentation analysis on the data generated. What was clear in the candidates' representation was the need to provide dedicated staff to address the specialized technical requirements of digital media. This dedicated posting was what POLITON and OIKOLOGOI did to support communication offensive through social media by tasking digitally-knowledgeable social media practitioners for handling content, messaging, audience interaction, and results tracking. To a large extent, the common preference of major parties (i.e. AKEL, DISY, and DIKO) for the full range of major traditional and digital channels was influenced by the need to respond to a new voter's mindset that included the attribution of prevailing deterioration in governance to ruling parties and major political forces. All major political parties, as represented in candidates' responses, did have adequate financial latitude to pursue aggressive and combined media strategies.

Combined Digital and Traditional Media Strategy

All 14 candidates voiced out their choice of combined digital media and traditional media on integrated marketing communications (IMC) platform as a preferred pre-election communication strategy. Although all candidates viewed such a combination as the ideal communication solution, not all political parties adopted this strategy in the pre-election promotion of their political candidates. As shown in [Table 5.4](#), except for campaign collaterals, POLITON and OIKOLOGOI did not use traditional media;

instead, POLITON and OIKOLOGOI concentrated on the use of digital media through the social, online, and mobile spaces.

Table 5.4: Segmentation Analysis: Media Mix Strategy (interview Responses)

	Traditional Media				Digital Media			
	Print	TV	Radio	Collateral	Social	Mobile	Online	Email
AKEL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
DISY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
DIKO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
EDEK	X			X	X	X	X	X
POLITON				X	X	X	X	
OIKOLOGOI				X	X	X	X	

Table 5.4: Segmentation Analysis: Media Mix Strategy (interview Responses)

Source: 2016 Political Candidates interviews

As shown in Table 5.4, marketing collateral (e.g. leaflets and cards) was the only traditional media channel that had 100% usage from the six political parties interviewed. Only four of the six parties used print and three used TV and radio as investments in traditional media to support pre-election campaign efforts. For digital media, online, mobile, and social media had 100% usage by political parties, followed by email at 67% (four of the six parties).

While 13 out of 14 candidates stated that digital media has not replaced traditional media, all candidates recognized the value of an integral framework where political

branding hinged on the combination of digital and traditional media. The candidates that acknowledged the use of digital media demonstrated that it could achieve audience reach and engagement, best targeting, messaging impact, and cost-effectiveness, adding that these factors improved the efficiency of content delivery to target audiences. The integral combination of digital and traditional media was observed to have the capability of giving depth and breadth to political communication and branding. The fusion of two media was also observed to have helped address hurting issues in a fragmented Cypriot society, on which political parties struggled to build individual and institutional political images. All respondents, however, took cognizance of the fact that digital media, especially social media, offered unique advantages in achieving instantaneous connectivity to broad target audiences at the least cost.

Importance of Communication practitioners in Pre-Election Campaign

When queried how they view the importance of communication practitioners-- professional election advisers, strategists, and tacticians hired by political parties as consultants -- in pre-election campaigns, all candidates considered the role important. However, three older candidates from two major political parties appeared to be cautious on the services of communication practitioners since they said they have the experience to sustain their campaigns. These candidates said they could alternatively use the money for paying communication practitioners, but they could not do so because they were bound by party rules. Candidates representing medium-sized and small political parties contended they felt the need to engage the services of communication practitioners – expressing the view that they could help them keep

pace with the trends and intricacies of strategic communications from a political campaign perspective.

In the exercise of self-promotion, all candidates reiterated the value of the integral approach where combined digital and traditional media was the default strategy. All candidates resonated with the central importance of digital media and the ubiquity of social media – especially in going online on Facebook which in 2016 enjoyed an online following of 554,000 subscribers, equivalent to almost half of the population of Cyprus.

Conduct of Election Polls

Polls were conducted by political parties, and ten of the candidates admitted their parties conducted polls through focus groups to support pre-election campaigns. As one political candidate stated, “we need to have some quantitative basis and fairly revealing data on how our party and candidates stand.” Two other party representatives shared that it is not uncommon for political parties to sponsor polls if only to ensure being properly updated and guided on voters’ behaviors and preferences. In their personal or individual capacities, all candidates admitted they personally would not resort to polls because they regard polls as expensive campaign tools. Two candidates even stated that “polls are not needed,” adding that “as we engage the people, we could sense whether or not we are accepted.” Overall, four of the candidates said their observations might at times be wrong, but generally, they are indicative. Based on trust, extended family relationships, social networks, technological knowhow, and low budgets, polling teams used in past elections were from a small staff size of 1-5 people to a large group of 10-20 people.

Pursuant to the idea of strengthening the basis for political branding and communication, all candidates shared the view that election polls are important because polls provide quantification of potential outcomes apart from drawing strategy implications from the minds of communication consultants engaged by their respective parties. The only drawback, based on candidates' responses, was that polls are expensive, and candidates would not have the financial capacity to personally invest in such modes of political branding assessment.

5.2.2 Socio-Political Themes

As interview respondents indicated, Cyprus has proven to be a political landscape much more difficult to address because a new voter's mindset happened to evolve, and populism managed to emerge. Critical societal issues built intense public frustration, dissent, resistance, resentment, and mistrust against the government and ruling political parties. These societal issues, which embraced economic deterioration, youth unemployment, corruption in government, energy problem, Cypriot issue, and post-exit risks from Memorandum of Understanding, all found clear expressions in the people's avowed abstention from the 2016 parliamentary elections and manifestation of intense anti-establishment feeling – signs of emerging populism that could not be undermined from a political branding standpoint. Although the questions were predominantly social and political in context, the overarching economic problems in Cyprus did not escape being highlighted in the responses. All issues, nonetheless, which served as causal factors of emergent populism in Cyprus, are discussed in the following sections based on interview responses.

Economic Difficulties and Youth Unemployment

The political candidates generally acknowledged economic deterioration as the most pressing issue that political actors needed to address. Succinct statements from interview participants gave descriptive accounts of what the people perceived about the Cypriot economy, and these respondent statements pertained to: continuing double-digit unemployment; high youth unemployment; declining labor productivity due to shortcomings in technology adoption and human capital development; weak institutional performance in knowledge management and sharing, and investment ramp-up. To the respondents, these are grand issues political parties must decisively address.

All candidates recognized that the daunting economic issues could not be resolved in a sweeping manner and the reality was that the problems could not be successfully overcome by any political party without the collective support of the Cypriot citizenry. All candidates also acknowledged the gravity of youth unemployment as a socio-economic malaise bedeviling Cyprus because of the dysfunction related to a high unemployment rate equivalent to 33% of the labor force. The candidates considered this problem as a common obligation they needed to individually and collectively respond to, especially where 17% of the youth were out-of-school or out-of-training based on UN reports. The candidates argued the government must provide the stimulus for improvement and that the youth must respond favorably. To improve the situation, the candidates propounded the use of newspapers, social media, and online communication in informing the electorates how their respective parties intended to solve the problem, including the concomitant issue of strengthening human and youth development. In these responses, due to a critical issue continuously causing public indignation, the candidates apparently leveraged unemployment as a political

branding issue by which they could invoke and take a clear political stand defining a target audience-based branding position.

Candidates from Turkish-occupied areas indicated their campaign would stress the resolution of the Cypriot issue as a top concern, while thereafter addressing national economic woes. Candidates from non-Turkish-occupied areas declared they would prioritize improving and stabilizing the economy over the politically-charged Cypriot issue. All candidates stressed the importance of communicating their respective thrusts to the people during the pre-election campaign.

Energy Development Requirements

When questioned if energy development would be a subject in their election campaign messaging, all candidates manifested that correcting the economic problem should take precedence over the energy issue, which idea they needed to articulate lest people not get the core value of their campaign thrust. The candidates represented that while energy is a significant problem since Cyprus imports 95% of its power requirement, with oil imports consuming 50% of the country's foreign exchange earnings, the energy issue could be addressed in the distant future only. They narrated Cyprus' solar energy development effort has been outstanding, with 35% of government-controlled housing under solar power. They added Cyprus has no known deposits of mineral fuels and lacks rivers, making hydroelectric power impossible. Nonetheless, they argued economic problems are more pressing, raising the question: "How can we effectively address long-term issues like expensive large-scale power generation if we are saddled with short-term economic problems?" In these responses to the energy issue, the candidates clearly bulleted a political alignment with the

populist sentiment and clientelist proposition as they voiced out willingness to support expedient, popular, and short-term action, rather than a strategic approach to the energy issue – in exchange for political votes.

Corruption in Government and Weak Governance

All candidates shared the view that people have significantly lost trust and confidence in government and political institutions because of corruption scandals and political machinations that rock Cyprus society. These issues continue to adversely affect public perception of government, thus causing avowed withdrawal from political exercises. The candidates articulated that it remains difficult to forthwith change the situation because what has been lost was trust, which takes time to restore because, as candidates unanimously averred, only actual performance of those in government, more particularly the winning and ruling parties, could mitigate and correct the situation. All candidates advocated the pursuance of relentless and meaningful communication with the public to assuage the trust-eroding impact of perceived corruption and machinations of political actors, especially those in power. The candidates' responses echoed a common political branding construct that sought to picture a disconnect of their political parties with corruption and poor governance. However, from these responses, it is clear candidates from major political parties were leveraging their clientelist links with the people, based on statements such as: "we have helped many people in their needs, and because of this proven attachment, people will not forget us, but will surely support us."

Memorandum of Understanding and Post-Exit Imperatives

When queried on Cyprus' exit from the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) relative to the country's economic relief, 71% of the candidates rationalized that going out of the MOU on March 31, 2016, was a sign of improvement, although it signified new challenges for which Cyprus needed to be vigilant. While Cyprus received around €7.2 billion (out of a total of €10 billion available) financial bail-out, with a very low interest rate of about 1%, the respondents advanced the view that the question was whether Cyprus could sustain repayments as the evaluation comes every six months until 75% of the loan is paid. The respondents expressed worry that the exit could spell new pain and misery for the people, suggesting that the issues of corruption, non-competitiveness, lack of transparency, and weak governance are major growth hurdles that could exacerbate the post-bailout situation.

On a more action-oriented posture, 29% of the candidates supported the pursuit of continuing communication with the people. As the respondents maintained, the fact that Cyprus successfully exited the MOU indicated a positive development that meant Cyprus had begun regaining the trust and confidence of foreign investors and markets. These candidates strongly posited that Cyprus needed to pursue fiscal consolidation, banking and financial sector reforms, and structural reforms, while addressing the challenge of loan repayments. On an optimistic note, the candidates though described the exit and the rationale behind it as an upliftment from the worst condition of the economy in April 2013.

5.2.3 Opinions and Experiences

Context of Self-Promotion

When asked whether they would continue using the same ways or new means of political promotion, the candidates' responses indicated the following: (1) personal political campaigns were better focused, generally directed to their respective target audiences; (2) individual campaigns were much more specific, more rifle-shot in context rather than the shotgun approach which previous campaigns adopted; (3) campaigns leveraged less wasteful and less stressful ways that optimized the use of resources, whether individual or party-funded, which involved reaching the right audience with the right message through the right medium (where digital media did have a significant role); (4) technology was considered as a great enabler of audience targeting and messaging to a significantly broader population, including the marginalized members of the Cypriot society. The context of self-promotion, as responses suggested, tended to demonstrate audience reach beyond party specification, and toward expanded coverage with grassroots grounding. Hence, personal campaign ideas had populist color as a personal safety net for political candidates, without necessarily being alienated from party focus.

Length of Pre-election Campaign

Based on their political experience, candidates aired different views on the ideal time pre-election campaigns should run. To get a good registry in the voter's mind, new candidates expressed they needed 6-9 months of pre-election campaign engagement, although they admitted campaign duration did not guarantee an election win. Older candidates, re-election aspirants, and incumbents considered 1-3 months of

preparation would be sufficient. For high-profile incumbents who would be all over the media, 1-2 months was a period deemed sufficient for campaigning. Incumbents or experienced candidates acknowledged the need to plan and integrate efforts, lest they be outdone by smart and young candidates.

Mode of Remote Political Communication

Candidates responded along similar lines when asked how they would communicate to voters in remote or isolated areas. The responses echoed the use of face-to-face communication, plain old telephone links, wireless communication, mobile, Internet, and social media. The idea of sending party representatives or campaign champions to administer pre-election campaigns in isolated locations was brought out by major political entities.

Impact of Doubling Parliamentary Membership increasing the threshold

When asked how the doubling of Parliament membership from 1.8% to 3.6% would affect their campaign, eight out of fourteen candidates, which represented those from two major political parties, stated the new hurdle would not affect them. They added party campaigns considered the presence of broad competition and that they maintained structure and resources to respond even to an enlarged parliamentary organization. It was highlighted that small parties would be the ones severely affected by expanded parliamentary representation. As six out of fourteen candidates averred, minor parties would have to rethink and optimize their campaigns for greater reach under well-managed logistics. Minority candidates intimated they needed to see how

the electorates would react to the unwanted development since political realignments could happen.

5.3 Results of Interviews with Communication Practitioners

5.3.1 Branding Tools and Techniques

Segmentation Analysis – Direction of Election Campaign

As shown in [Table 5.5](#), four political parties directed their campaigns to young Cypriot voters and undecided Cypriot voters; three political parties to registered party voters; two to working middle-class and jobless Cypriot voters; and one political party to mid-life voters.

Table 5.5: Segmentation Analysis – Direction of Election Campaign (Interview)

Voter Group	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL
Young Cyprus Voter (YCV)	X		X	X	X	4
Undecided Cyprus Voter (UCV)	X		X	X	X	4
Registered Party Voter (RPV)	X	X	X			3
Working Middle Class (WMC)	X	X				2
Jobless Cyprus Voter (JCV)				X	X	2
Mid-Life Voter (MLV)		X				1

Table 5.5 : Segmentation Analysis – Direction of Election Campaign (Interview)

Source: 2016 Political Communicators' Interviews

Respondents highlighted that undecided voters may constitute a significant portion of the total voting population, while youth voters are estimated to represent a considerable demographic. The working middle class is projected to make up a substantial segment of the total voter population. Attention in the election campaign was notably directed towards jobless Cypriot voters, acknowledging their significant presence as a double-digit portion of the labor force. In sum, the parties aimed their strategies towards engaging a large number of registered voters, encompassing young voters and undecided voters among others.

Table 5.6 presents the highlights of these responses, with size of voting population (SVP), non-committal to political brand (NPB), and promise of hope (POH) being the top three rationales for targeting voter's groups.

Table 5.6: Segmentation Analysis: Voter's Group Rationale (Interviews)

Rationale for Choice	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL
Size of Voting Population (SVP)	X	X	X			3
Non-committal to Political Brand (NPB)			X	X	X	3
Promise of Hope (POH)				X	X	2
Helping the People (HTP)	X					1
Previous Voter's Interest (PVI)			X			1
Demonstrated Political Maturity		X				1

Table 5.6 : Segmentation Analysis: Voter's Group Rationale (Interviews)

Source: 2016 Political Communicators' Interviews

Segmentation Analysis: Media Mix Strategy (Interview Responses)

As shown in Table 5.7, all parties used a combination of traditional and digital media in the 2016 parliamentary election campaigns. In traditional media use, all communicators leveraged inter-personal messaging and collaterals (e.g. banner), and four implemented newspaper and TV advertisements. In digital media, five communicators used social media, mobile, and other online forms of communication. Google advertisements and some outdoor were also cited as communication vehicles used in the elections.

Table 5.7: Segmentation Analysis: Media Mix Strategy (Interview Responses)

Advertising Channels	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL
Digital Media						
Online Channel	X	X	X	X	X	5
Social Media	X	X	X	X	X	5
Mobile & Smartphone	X	X	X	X	X	5
Inter-personal communication	X	X	X	X	X	5
Other Portable Devices	X	X	X		X	4
Traditional Media						
Inter-personal communication	X	X	X	X	X	5
Collaterals	X	X	X	X	X	5
Newspaper	X	X	X		X	4
TV	X	X	X		X	4

Table 5.7 : Segmentation Analysis: Media Mix Strategy (Interview Responses)

Source: 2016 Political Communicators' Interview

When queried on whether Cypriot voters appreciated being engaged in new media like Internet and social media, all communication practitioners stated that Cypriot voters demonstrate high receptiveness and liking in their being engaged in digital media during the election campaign.

Conduct of Election Polls

Three out of five communication practitioners conducted polls to sense and pulse the standing of the party and its candidates in the minds of the electorates. Two out of five communicators representing small parties, did not conduct any polls for budget considerations and doubts on the reliability of polls. Observations from the pre-election polls included indications on the voter's abstention, with loss of voter's trust in the political institutions being the topmost reason. Major political parties were found to have been linked by voters to issues bedeviling the Cypriot society. The polls enabled one party to mitigate foreseeable institutional damage based on insights generated. Reactions to the pre-election polls included consolidation of political bases and focusing of election campaign thrust on possible sources of swing votes – the youth and the undecided voters.

Poll Results vs. Actual Election Results

Feedback from all three communication practitioners who conducted election polls indicated the results of their polls were at variance with actual election results -- all poll outcomes fell short of the actual election results. While all communication practitioners successfully sensed from the polls the likelihood of significant voter's disinterest and abstention, they admitted having underestimated the adverse impact of this withdrawal

behavior on their party's political representation. Initial poll results indicated major political parties were the eye of voters' indignation due to corruption and other serious issues attributed to them as ruling parties.

Centrality of Political Communication and Branding

All communication consultants considered political communication and branding as the heart and soul of the election campaigns. In this critical zone, all communicators viewed their communication strategies as effective in terms of reaching desired audiences with the right content and right media channels. Four out of five communication practitioners admitted their parties suffered political erosions due to major abstention among voters, especially the youth and the undecided voters. However, communication practitioners ventilated that the ability of major political parties to remain at the top provided an illustration of the effectiveness of their political communication and political branding, even if they were being blamed for the ills and dysfunctions being suffered by the Cypriot society. The communication practitioners of politically-eroded parties argued that their political erosion was something they were not in a position to prevent or fully address as it related to extensive voters' disenchantment, mistrust, and withdrawal – a hard burden that impacts upon the effectiveness of political branding in Cypriot politics.

Top Political Branding Issues

The top two issues that served to complicate political branding, based on 60% of the respondents, were the severe economic hardship being experienced by the people and the strong negative perception of the sincerity of the government in addressing

society's problem. These issues have created intense anti-establishment feelings, which, as 60% of the respondents maintained, spread in accelerated and expanded dimension through the demonstrated power of social media – a game-changing technology- led communication tool that enabled small political parties to reach and connect with target audiences on equal footing with major political parties. As the interviewers suggested, the economic crisis posed a great challenge for the communicators to work on reduced election campaign budgets as political parties adopted optimal campaign investments. This contraction in financial provisions and logistics had to happen despite the challenges of the political stimuli with respect to rising populism, new voter's mindset, and public mistrust with political institutions and government. There were other comments introduced, which pertained to: hostile and dissatisfied electorates; small parties as a new force to reckon with; opportunity for election communicators to be more strategic and optimal in approach; and challenge to overturn the loss of trust in the government.

5.3.2 Opinions and Experiences

Role of Communication Consultants

In the crucible of political issues, the role of communication consultants was reinforced. All respondents described their role as advisory or consultative functions where they were tasked to conduct research, planning, and analysis of political issues, personalities and programs, and then recommend appropriate communication strategies and key actions. The communicators highlighted their roles were essentially the development of political communication and political branding strategies intended to position their parties and candidates to a winning election platform. One respondent

stressed his role was inherently impressed with the task to sense, analyze, and respond to the voter's needs, wants, and preferences in a manner that connects to the voter's emotion and leads to actions in favor of the party. The critical aspects of the role involved: reading the voter's mind and the political situation correctly; crafting the communication strategy; and ensuring communication and connection with the customer is achieved.

Another respondent articulated they analyze political situations, voter's behaviors and attributes, and competitive election agendas, including recommending aggressive and defensive election strategies that elevate the quality of political brand positioning, and communication. The communication practitioners represented they have the experience and credentials to support their roles, a high-level competency that serves as a persuasive factor for the candidates to follow their advice and proposed strategies while being mandated by party rules to comply with practitioners' prescriptions. Nonetheless, when asked specifically if their advice was being followed by candidates, two communicators admitted there were instances during individual campaign events that candidates at times made representations contrary to party values and stand – either as a deliberate alignment with populist sentiments or as a reflex response to get connected with target voters. When asked about the context of the main campaign messages, the communicators expressed the same messages raised by the candidates in the interview, suggesting that while their messages propounded a general context, they communicated their respective party values to target audiences.

Traditional Media vs. Digital Media

Four out of five communication practitioners maintained that digital media has not replaced traditional media as main election campaign enabler, although they admitted using combined traditional and digital media in integrated marketing communications (IMC) setup. One communication practitioner, representing a minority party that succeeded in having social media as its main communication vehicle, stated digital media has replaced traditional media, although recognizing that TV remained the most powerful medium in political branding communication.

Context and Significance of Parliamentary Elections

All communication practitioners recognized the 2016 parliamentary elections were characterized by extensive voters' abstention that charted a high 33% of the voting population. This high abstention was sensed during the pre-election sorties and in the political polls conducted. The abstention was interpreted as voters' manifestation of mistrust and indignation, including protest, indifference, disinterest, and withdrawal from the exercise of voting rights. The cause of this large-scale abstention was attributed to the major political parties, which as the ruling parties, were blamed for the corruption, political machinations, and other issues that constricted people's lives.

The 2016 elections exemplified a great challenge to the political maturity of the electorates, as the elections represented critical issues impacting the quality of people's lives especially because of the economic crisis. Another communicator figured it out as a battle of media power, suggesting that if they won largely on social media, then it showcased digital media as a game-changer.

New Insights on Cypriot Voters

Greater militancy in the exercise of their political rights was observed among voters. Voters were able to create the impression they have become more watchful on how political powers discharge their mandated function. This new mindset imposed new challenges in political communication and branding, which required hard work and full preparation because people ceased to become trustful, with minds a lot deeper to fathom for establishing emotional connections. The observed last-minute surge of people to vote ran counter to the abstention trend; it was a contradiction that has to be appreciated as a learning opportunity, especially for election campaign communicators.

Voters were perceived to be a lot more difficult to convince because they have transitioned to be much more inquisitive and rebellious in the exercise of political rights, with the propensity to quickly change their mind on whether to vote or not, or who to vote. They have become more updated on issues due to the dynamic efficiency, broad coverage, and long reach of new communication technologies and media channels.

Advantage of Political Party Affiliation

Four of the five of communication practitioners deemed affiliation with a political party is generally advantageous for the candidates, especially if it is with a major political party. This party affiliation gives convenient access to strategy development, campaign funds, campaign machinery, collective logistics, broad network, and systematic campaign procedures. It was cited, nonetheless, the political advantages have a descending context from big to medium-sized to small political parties. Party

affiliation has some drawbacks. If a political party, in its incumbency or governance, had been linked to corruption or other acts constituting betrayal of public trust or non-delivery of public needs, it becomes vulnerable to voter's repudiation like what happened to political erosions suffered by major political parties in the 2016 parliamentary elections.

Ideal Period for an Election Campaign

All communication practitioners considered a minimum period of 8-9 months and a maximum of one (1) year as a good range for election campaign period. Some respondents raised their reservation that duration of the pre-election campaign was not the clincher, but the quality of preparation in political communication and brand positioning that differentiates a political actor from competition.

Political Communication and Branding Strategy

All communication practitioners exuded working knowledge of the communication and branding processes in election campaigns. Communication practitioners manifested a common branding framework involving: (1) the acquisition of immense knowledge about the electorates (e.g. attitudes, lifestyles, and behaviors) through prior research studies and surveys; (2) segmenting the target audiences and crafting the messages to connect with the targets, testing and changing the messages when necessary based on feedback; (3) identifying the media strategy and the mix of media channels; (4) setting up campaign systems and logistics, including conducting financial and optimal analysis for campaign viability; and (5) undertaking combined media strategy on an integrated marketing communications (IMC) setup. Candidates demonstrated

awareness and knowledge that what they are doing in the political arena is a representation of communication and branding in the context of business world practices – building and promoting a brand from a strategic standpoint so that it could sell and be accepted as a preferred choice. One central indication in the interviews pointed to the extensive use of audience analysis and segmentation to support branding development. The power of branding was exemplified by a winning minority party that invested in strong localized branding initiative pursuant to the party's basic notion "elections are won locally."

5.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter presented the results of the interviews conducted with parliamentary candidates and the interviews held with communication consultants who worked as communicators performing expert advisory services to the different political parties in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The findings of the candidates' interviews covered the importance of communication in election campaigns; direction and rationale of audience targeting and choice of media and media channels based on segmented responses; messaging context and delivery; views on election polls; rebuilding of voter's trust; combined traditional and digital media within integrated marketing communications setup; key pre-election insights and predictions; context and impact of important national issues; and implications and actions on exit from Memorandum of Understanding.

The findings of interviews with communicators also embraced the importance of communication in election campaigns from a consultant's perspective; media mix and messaging strategies, including discussions on traditional and electronic media, as

well as the conduct of election polls; and insights on the 2016 parliamentary elections. These insights included the central role of political branding, key issues affecting political branding, and the vital role of communicators in the effort to deconstruct the enigma and challenge of Cypriot politics through the rendition of political communication and branding strategies using combined traditional and digital media approaches.



CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The chapter analyzes and interprets the findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with 14 political candidates and of the semi-structured interviews with five (5) communication practitioners of major political parties in the 2016 Cypriot parliamentary elections. This analysis and interpretation touch on the major dominant themes distilled from the research responses, which can be grouped into three (3) categories: branding tools and techniques, socio-political themes, and opinions and experiences.

The chapter unravels how the results relate to: (1) the research problem (i.e. how political branding fits into Cypriot politics amid intense anti-establishment sentiment, new voter's mindset, and emerging populist thoughts); (2) the four research questions referring to the profile, perception, and motivation of target audiences; thoughts, attitudes, and approaches of political actors; the role and relevance of communication and branding, and the effectiveness of political branding strategies in the 2016 elections. The chapter expounded on the alignment of interviews findings with the theoretical frameworks of brand audit, market segmentation, and digital media.

6.2 Analysis and Interpretation of Interviews' Findings (Candidates)

Branding Tools and Techniques

The research findings on branding tools and techniques provided answers to the four research questions. On the first research question about audience targeting, market segmentation, general profile, perception, and motivation of Cyprus electorates with

respect to 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections, the candidates demonstrated awareness and knowledge of their respective target audiences, including the rationale behind the choice of target segments. The segmentation of answers indicated that candidates manifested clear perception of which groups of voters they were targeting and for what reasons they were focusing campaign efforts on such groups. The major groups targeted were the registered party voters, young Cypriot voters, undecided Cypriot voters, and the working middle-class voters, with the top reasons for such choices being the size of the voting population and previous voter's interest. This awareness and knowledge of the voter's profile and perception conveys foundational value for political branding strategy and techniques in conjunction with how the voters could be reached and influenced.

With respect to the second research question on thoughts, attitudes, and approaches of political candidates to connect with the voters, the political candidates showed a clear understanding of the differences and comparative values of digital and traditional media, including the edge of digital media over traditional media (social media in particular) in terms of speed of transmission, audience reach, targeting impact, and cost-effectiveness. The use of traditional media was premised on the newspaper ownerships of AKEL and DISY, while the high cost of using traditional media, including TV advertising, was confined to major political parties because of their superior financial capacity; even with the current significance of traditional media, minor parties decided to forego these benefits due to limited financial capacity which social media managed to address. The candidates upheld the importance of competence-based political branding as they unanimously recognized the critical intervention role of outsourced communication consultants or communicators, with their expert knowledge of brand communication and positioning, including the rendition of focus

groups and election polls to generate empirical basis for assessing potential election results. Each political party had specific content and messaging strategy which sought the promotion of a distinct positioning in the voters' mind and the creation of value for the political brands. Hence, apart from their knowledge of the target audience, the candidates apparently knew what should be done to reach them through combined traditional and digital media strategy, with the expert intervention of party communicators. The segmentation of responses on the media mix strategy, based on interview responses, illustrated the context of political communication as an enabler of political branding in Cypriot politics.

On the third research question about the role and relevance of communication and branding in the 2016 parliamentary elections, the results underscored how candidates expected to leverage the combined use of digital and traditional media in responding to a new breed of voters incensed by populist thoughts and heavy anti-establishment feelings, which scenario related to the central problem of the study – how political branding fits into the Cypriot politics. The common view of political candidates that communication practitioners perform a vital function in election campaigns put forth the critical importance of communication and branding in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The reliance of candidates on the expert intervention of communication practitioners bolstered the reality that it takes expertise, experience, and specialized knowledge to relate to the Cypriot electorates and to combat growing anti-establishment and populist sentiments due to economic, social, and political dysfunctions. The fact that major political parties were similarly reliant on the expert intervention of communication practitioners indicated that these major parties wanted to be doubly sure that the bond of clientelism with their followers would not be wilted by the intense heat of anti-establishment sentiment. In the twin threats of rising

populism and corroded clientelism, major party candidates suggested communication and branding as the solution to invest in.

With respect to the fourth research question on the effectiveness of the political branding strategies in the 2016 parliamentary elections, the interviews' responses encapsulated positive indications in relation to pre-election campaigns. The interview elicited answers demonstrating that political candidates and parties appeared to have operated with working knowledge on where to direct campaign efforts, how to reach their target audiences, and what to say to them in conjunction with the current context of Cypriot politics. This knowledge of branding fundamentals gave the candidates a good foothold to interact with target audiences personally and along party lines.

From the summation and organization of interviews' responses relating to branding tools and techniques, it is apparent the theoretical frameworks this thesis was predicated on had notable application. From a brand audit perspective, responses illuminated that the candidates and the parties they represented had undertaken prior study, analysis, planning, and action on who their target audiences really were, how they should reach and address them, and whether the candidates themselves had what it takes to launch political communication and branding offensive. The reliance on the expert services of outsourced communicators epitomized intended and demonstrated compliance with brand audit imperatives – from internal analysis, research and survey, target audience analysis, messaging and media mix strategizing, systems and logistics provisioning, feasibility and optimization study, competitive analysis, communication, and feedback. The market segmentation theoretical framework enabled the study to identify and stratify the target groups or target audiences, the rationale for reaching and connecting to them, and the media mix to accomplish customer connectivity. The interview responses also emphasized the

utility of combined traditional and digital media in trying to fit political branding with Cypriot politics, with digital media perceived to be an emergent communication power over traditional media.

Socio-Political Themes

From the interview outcomes on socio-political themes, it was clear the political candidates and the parties they represented embraced the prevailing economic and socio-political issues as campaign platforms on which to anchor their political branding positions. As interviews' feedback indicated, all candidates appeared to have exercised the disposition on two political positioning frontiers: (1) alignment with populist sentiments on prevailing economic and socio-political dysfunctions (e.g. abandoning energy development initiatives in favor of short-term economic problems); and (2) disconnect from the causal factors of societal problems including corruption, scandals, and weak institutional governance (e.g. purposeful communication to cushion or obliterate the impact of party-led poor public governance). These positioning measures, however, projected a political enigma – as strategy, most candidates tended to politically cuddle the dichotomy of party interest and the populist perspective. Hence, the Cypriot elections depicted a political scenario characterizing the complexity of political branding communication and the uncertainty of predicting successful emotional connection with target audiences.

The socio-political themes distilled from the interview responses evoked evident signs of emergent populism and increased political militancy of electorates, which were reflective of the new voter's mindset defining the challenges of the time. Interviews' responses indicated that candidates understood: (1) what they needed to know and

follow (i.e. brand audit); (2) that they had to undertake correct targeting, differentiation, and positioning strategies (i.e. market segmentation) as borne by their capability to identify target groups most likely supportive of their representation; and (3) that they had to determine which media format they should leverage to reach and establish an emotional connection with the voters as demonstrated by their recognition of new media (i.e. digital media) as a powerful and helpful campaign tool that could overshadow traditional media. Overall, the responses encased socio-political themes that were relevant to the research agenda, although indications on how deconstruction of the complex political situation and the obliteration of adverse public political perception could be achieved to support political branding were not evident in the answers. In this case, the ideal perfection of political branding for the 2016 parliamentary elections became even more obligatory for political actors because of the necessity to get closer to all age groups.

Opinions and Experiences

The opinions and experiences of candidates, as enshrined in the interview responses, were responsive to the research problem of how political branding fits into Cyprus politics where voters generally appeared distantly alienated from government and political institutions. Candidates gave their thoughts and approaches on how they would connect to voters, including their ideas of self-promotion, which representation also responded to second research question. Candidates articulated the importance of communication and branding, stressing the value of remote communication, reliance on digital and social media, and posting an ideal number of people to support

political campaign structure, thus conveying views that addressed the third research question.

It could be appreciated that candidate-led individual campaigns were market segmentation-driven, target market-focused, and technology-enabled. Clearly, these were learned campaign capabilities principally honed through mutually reinforcing relationships with expert communicators, and complementarily, by the political experience of candidates. As earlier propounded, this political endowment sought to appropriate the power and effectiveness of political branding in debunking the complexity of Cypriot politics and in defusing the public temperament of the time. The socio-political themes expressed were alert signals for all candidates, regardless of party affiliation. Even if major party supporters were under the claws of clientelism for which they appeared not to be vulnerable to any political erosion, it was not unlikely that the raging populist and anti-establishment thoughts all over Europe could intensify the populism that had started to invade Cyprus. Should this happen, the captive effect of clientelism could be wilted and eroded, as could be discerned from the growing political militancy in Cyprus that tended to give voice to minority, if not marginalized, groups. For the ruling parties, this remained a serious threat that raised the level of complexity in finding the perfect political branding strategy that could simplify and ensure political wins in Cypriot politics. This political challenge described the rationale for brand audit, market segmentation, and digital media marketing applications.

6.3 Analysis and Interpretation of Interview Findings

(Communicators)

Branding Tools and Techniques

The interview questions similarly elicited responses highlighting branding tools and techniques addressing the research questions and amplifying the relevance of the theoretical frameworks. On the first research question concerning audience targeting and market segmentation, the respondents were clear on what voter's group they were targeting as illustrated by the market segmentation that was configured from the answers. The reasons for the choice of market segments were also spelled out by the respondents' knowledge of the specific circumstances about each voter's group, which was also established by segmentation analysis. On the second research question about the thoughts, attitudes, and approaches of 2016 candidates and communicators to connect with voters, interview responses indicated the communicator's concern for a difficult political situation that presented challenges for political communication and branding. In this instance, as interview responses denoted, political actors had to strategize, such as what they did in adopting combined media use, conduct of elections polls, and optimal campaign orientation. On the third research question with respect to the importance of communication and branding, as communicators revealed, the ability of major political parties to stay on top, despite the attribution to them of society's ills and dysfunctions, illustrated the importance of their political communication and branding strategy. As interview respondents suggested, they suffered political erosion, but it was not significant to pull them down from the seat of political power. On the fourth research question, in connection with the outcome of political branding strategies, the responses unanimously echoed their strategies to be effective, yet the Cypriot politics proved to be a difficult situation to deconstruct

especially because of the devotion to tradition and beliefs, especially of older people. This situation was dramatized by the mismatch between the poll results and actual election results -- poll outcomes falling short of election results.

Interview responses brought forth compelling brand audit principles regarding campaign dimensions, with reference to market analysis, internal skills and logistics appraisal, and competency assurance through outsourced expert services. Market segmentation was an offshoot of the interview responses in terms of categorizing target audiences, rationale for target segment choice, and subdivision of media choices. Interview responses established the emerging hegemony of digital media as shown in the comparative media mix strategies of political parties, with the recognition of the continuing impact and power of television in connecting to target voters for political campaign purposes. The interviews similarly highlighted the relevance and importance of political branding and communication in addressing the challenges of Cypriot politics, especially as it continued to be blurred by a new voter's mindset that was heavy in anti-establishment feelings and populist sentiments and obfuscated by clientelism in historical and widespread dimensions. Overall, interview responses on branding tools and techniques mirrored a branding-compliant group of candidates and communicators in serious struggle with complex Cypriot politics that appeared to have been tempered by historical clientelism and new populist thoughts.

Opinions and Experiences

The context of opinions and experiences expressed by communicators related to the point of addressing the research problem, engaging the new voter's mindset and emergent populism, and maximizing the power of digital media. The central theme of these responses reinforced the intricate process of adapting political branding to highly

sensitive Cypriot politics. As respondents averred, the use of outsourced expert services of communicators to perform for the party and its candidates the task of formulating political strategies (i.e. market analysis, segmentation, differentiation, positioning, media mix, and messaging) underlined the importance of deconstructing the wall of public frustration, mistrust, indignation, and withdrawal; otherwise, the political candidates and their respective parties would not have the effectiveness to interact with and convince the electorates. Thus, based on responses, the communicators assumed the missionary role of undertaking political branding strategies that fit the context of Cypriot politics — through the combined media approach, with the power of social media being strongly leveraged by political parties.

6.4 Tough Context of Cypriot Politics and social media

In both the interview of candidates and interview of communicators, the key concern of political actors was how to address the very tough nature of Cypriot politics that made it difficult to get to the mind and hearts of voters. As earlier emphasized, a new voter's mindset, rising populism, historical clientelism, and a regime of corruption and poor governance were hard barriers for political communication and branding because all the dysfunctions have created deep public feelings of mistrust, indignation, and withdrawal. This seriously dysfunctional situation, amid other issues such as energy problem, political divisiveness on the Cypriot issue, unemployment, deficient justice system, poverty, and other socio-economic woes appeared to have solidified and had brought to the fore the central importance of political branding and positioning. In this strategic search for a political solution, the rise of digital media gave new perspective on reaching and building connections with the electorate, which in turn, gave way to the use of social media that proved to have afforded quick, interactive, and frequent

person to person engagement with the electorate. As election results indicated, social media provided ordinary people and minority organizations with a new way to be heard, a new way to openly communicate, and a new way to share information about every conceivable topic. In the same vein, political actors needed to communicate with the public through social media. The gravity of national issues that adversely affected the Cypriot society pushed most candidates to the point of uncertainty and insecurity that they needed to be heard and understood as political brands worthy of electorate appreciation.

6.5 Election Results: 2016 Parliamentary Elections

Context of Election Results

Apart from a 33,26% voting abstention in the 2016 parliamentary elections (in comparison with parliamentary elections in 2011 when the abstention was 21,30%), what bewildered political stakeholders in Cyprus, even the government, was the extensive transition of political forces that characterized the elections. No less than the President of the Republic, Nicos Anastasiades, expressed concern over the election outcomes depicting a polarized society and a situation needing a climate of unity and consensus (Cyprus Expat, 2016a). As shown in [Table 6.1](#), the ruling party, DISY, managed to retain its leading position by garnering the largest share of the vote. The main opposition party, AKEL, came in second, followed by DIKO, and then by EDEK. The four major parties, however, all suffered political erosions, which caused loss of parliamentary seats for three of the four parties. The pattern of political erosions had the following dimensions: AKEL lost 7.07% of its previous volume of votes, causing a loss of three (3) parliamentary seats; DISY dropped by 3.66% and lost two (2) seats;

EDEK deteriorated by 2.75% and lost two (2) seats also; and DIKO weakened by 1.25% (the smallest damage among major parties) without any loss of seats.

Table 6.1: Results of 2016 Parliamentary Elections

Political Party		2016 Votes Won			Parliamentary Seats	
Official Name	Acronym	Total Votes	% Share of Total	% Increase (Decrease)	Won	Increase (Decrease)
Winner's Votes:						
Democratic Rally	DISY	107,825	30.69	(3.66)	18	(2)
Progressive Party of Working People	AKEL	90,204	25.67	(7.07)	16	(3)
Democratic Party	DIKO	50,923	14.49	(1.25)	9	0
Movement for Social Democracy	EDEK	21,732	6.18	(2.75)	3	(2)
Citizens' Alliance	POLITON	21,114	6.01	New	3	3
Solidarity Movement	ALLILEGYI	18,424	5.24	New	3	1
Ecological & Environmental Movement	OIKOLOGOI	16,909	4.81	2.59	2	1
National Popular Front	ELAM	13,041	3.71	2.63	2	2
Sub-Total		340,172	96.8	-	56	-
Reserved Seats for Minorities		-	-	-	3	-
Loser's Votes:		11,217	3.2	-	-	-
Total Votes		351,389	100%	-	59	-

Breakdown: 2016 Voting Population						
Total Valid Votes		351,389	96.92	0.19	-	-
Invalid Votes		7,675	2.12	0.04	-	-
Blank Votes		3,478	0.96	(0.23)	-	-
Voting Turnout		362,542	66.74	(11.96)	-	-
Total Abstention		180,644	33.26	11.96	-	-
Total Registered Voters		543,186	100%	-	-	-

Table 6.1 : Results of 2016 Parliamentary Elections

Source: [Stavri & Jakovlevic \(2016\)](#)

Two new political parties (POLITON and ALLILEGYI) qualified and won three (3) seats each in the new parliament. Two other smaller parties achieved improvement in political bases: ELAM grew by 2.63% for two (2) seats and OIKOLOGOI improved by 2.59% for two (2) seats.

Observers and analysts ([Stavri & Jakovlevic, 2016](#)) considered the 2016 parliamentary elections as a turning point since the event spawned many signs of people's pent-up emotion for change. In the news analysis, these milestones of change included: the significantly high voting abstention; the greatest shift of political forces causing the number of political parties in parliament to increase surprisingly to eight, the highest in 15 years; the significant diminution in representation by the two biggest political parties, AKEL and DISY, which amplified the change in the electorate's mindset; and, the rise of reinforced small parties and newly formed parties. Corollary to these transitions, the electorate repudiated with extreme bitterness and anger the political machination of DISY and AKEL in doubling the threshold to enter the parliament, with

the overarching motive to serve party interest. Katsourides (2016) considered DIKO and all the smaller parties, except EDEK, as the biggest winners in the elections. DIKO was the only historical or mainstream party that managed to preserve its parliamentary seats even with the loss of about 13,000 voters, which paled in comparison with AKEL's loss of 42,000 voters and DISY's loss of 30,000 voters. AKEL and DISY suffered the heaviest losses, although DISY remained the ruling party. According to Katsourides, the disconnect between the people and the political powers could have accounted for the significant increase in the number of young candidates who were insulated from accusations of corruption. Based on exit polls, Katsourides reported there was clear realignment of political forces with up to 25% of voters having switched party allegiance, benefitting newer parties at the expense of traditional political organizations.

Overall, it can be advanced that political branding, in the context of Cypriot politics, failed to significantly curb the impact of the strong wave of populist thoughts and anti-establishment sentiments as illustrated by the high voting abstention rate of 33%. Even the political bailiwicks, which major political parties bragged about as sort of captive markets due to long-running clientelist partnership with the voters, were not spared by political capital erosion as demonstrated by shifting of loyalty and follower outmigration in favor of other parties. In a nutshell, it can be espoused that the pernicious effects of dysfunctional societal issues had coagulated into a powerful force much stronger than the political branding effectiveness of political actors in relating to and influencing the voter's perception, behavior, and action. However, it cannot be dismissed, that political branding to some extent did help political actors in mitigating and cushioning the full impact of adverse populist and anti-establishment sentiments. It should be appreciated that, despite adverse voter's perception, branding-compliant major political parties

remained as dominant forces, although politically eroded with the loss of parliamentary seats, except DIKO. In the same vein, all branding-compliant minor/new political parties gained notable public acceptance and parliamentary seats due to the politically expansive transition of new voters and migrants from other parties.

Content Messaging: The Political Branding Shortfall

If Cypriot political parties correctly significantly relied on the proven power of digital media in instantaneously reaching broad audiences, to the extent of sustaining person-to-person engagement such as in the case of social media, the key question at this juncture is why political branding appears not to have significantly won the hearts and minds of Cypriot voters. For example, it remains a valid question to raise on why, despite an all-media campaign offensive including social media, major political parties failed to achieve the objective of quelling the impact of the new voter's mindset to preserve long-established political capital – while a new and small political party such as POLITON managed to win three (3) seats through the virtual solitary use of digital media. In the fundamental situation that all parties, regardless of size, leveraged the same dimensions of digital media use, what then would be the differentiator of the political branding effectiveness of POLITON against the inferior performance of other political parties? Based on post-election analyses by different analysts, most political parties, especially the major ones, were stuck to traditional messaging across all media, devoid of any meaningful proposition of change and hope. As Charalambous (2016) articulated: "If there really is one message it is that we remain incurable – our president, our politicians, our parties and our journalists. Always the same, sloppy, unprepared, sloganeering, know-it-all fools" (p.1). Although cognizant of the

penetration power of social media, political actors failed to build content messaging premiums on such power to bullet new and unique ideas differentiating a winning brand personality; rather, they were fixated on the traditional political thoughts while failing to go by the current political realities, thus substantially devaluing the fundamental usefulness of political branding (Michael, 2016; Needham, 2005). On the other hand, new and small political parties (e.g. POLITON) concentrated on relentless social media communication with target audiences, clearly conveying distinct messages of vision, change, action, and transparency, as well as unity for a new destiny and new quality of life.

6.6 Critical Evaluation of the Study

Other Studies and the Research Gap

The Literature Review highlighted numerous studies about political branding, but not one study elicited specific research findings that propounded a model, paradigm, or index reflective of a finite level of political branding performance and competence in relation to actual election results – this is the research gap the thesis successfully resolved. In an extended literature review to address the research gap, three (3) studies were identified with a modicum of similarity with the thesis, although not entirely responsive to the research rationale. To elucidate, Marland (2013) expounded on the iconic political branding story of Justin Trudeau of Canada and what pushed the brand to classic strength and popularity. Marland, nonetheless, confined the paper to a review and narrative presentation of what political branding is, and how it helped Trudeau. Whilst Marland mentioned attempts on measuring political branding effectiveness, we did not venture on a specific approach, stating “there is no obvious way to measure a party brand, a candidate brand or the image of a political brand

extension... no standard method to inform the analysis of a candidate brand or political spinoff brand, and brand analysis is an inherently subjective exercise,” (Marland, 2013, p.6).

Cwalina and Falkowski (2014) dealt extensively with the positioning of political brands using multi-dimensional scaling techniques (MDS) based on positive and negative associations of candidates with perceived ideal candidates and key competitors in the electoral race. Though the research model, used in 2007 to analyze the 2005 presidential elections in Poland, explicated how candidates' image and positioning related to actual election results, the study did not touch on how communication strategy, including the use of media, was leveraged to publicly convey image and positioning and establish emotional connection to target audiences. The study succeeded in discussing the sender and the receiver of the message but failed to define the medium -- as it elaborated more on policies but with very little on practices.

One most recent research that has a close similarity to the thesis refers to the study of Michaelsen (2015) that extensively discussed the political branding success story of Barack Obama in 2008. Like the thesis, Michaelsen's work provided a compelling conceptual backdrop on marketing and political communication, including market (voter) segmentation, candidate positioning, strategy formulation and execution, and historical development of political marketing. From this initial thrust, Michaelsen transitioned to the Barack Obama brand phenomenon where was similarly pictured the broad span of political and socio-economic issues impinging on the Obama candidacy and the blurring political communication horizon. Michaelsen discussed Obama's positioning for hope and change, special appeal to the youth, visual rhetoric in communication, investment in TV, reliance on the Internet, extensive use of new media and social media, organization, role of communication consultants, and strategy

execution. However, Michaelsen's study was predominantly narrative, without any semblance of indexation of performance and competence in political branding, although the integral marketing model being analyzed proved to have differentiated the brand and favorably influenced the election results. All respondents of the interviews in the thesis were key informants, thus mitigating the risk of non-reliable research results. The thesis's use of 100% key informant respondent base provided a rich inventory of primary data and expert views that elevated the quality of research information. In contrast, the three other studies did not have a 100% key informant provisioning. Marland (2013) relied totally on literature-based approach as he dutifully acknowledged in the opening footnote of the report, stating "this paper is somewhat inhibited by an absence of data obtained through depth interviews with party insiders. Attempts to interview Justin Trudeau have been unsuccessful." Cwalina & Falkowski (2014) engaged 70 research respondents, with half having lower education and another half with at least a college education. The authors did not acknowledge that the latter half represented key informant respondents. Michaelsen (2015), like Marland (2013) had a total literature-based study, with a high historical accent. It was not intended in any way to impugn the information value of these three similar studies but would simply wish to stress that the research method used in the thesis was robust and sustainable, and contributed immensely to new knowledge creation, as discussed in the following section.

Significance of the Research Process

This section evaluates the value and contribution of the thesis in the field of research and the creation of new knowledge, based on its relevance, methodology, and information value. The thesis represents an original contribution to the existing

literature in the field of political marketing, more particularly political branding and communication. The relevance of the thesis has been sufficiently tested and proven as underlying measures of political branding set out clear causal contexts to the variations of political actors' performance in the 2016 parliamentary elections. This alignment of the 2016 Cyprus election results with the political branding model of the thesis suggests that the outcome of the study has incremental use and value for other applications beyond Cyprus. In terms of methodology, the study has adopted a robust multi-modal data collection of primary and secondary data from interviews and specialized election news updates. The research employed penetrative data analysis by using the triangulation of semi-structured interview results, frequency distribution-based statistical appraisal of research responses, thematic analysis, and process-based evaluation. Overall, the methodology afforded rigorous and extensive research exercises that helped generate meaningful, indicative, and reliable results for the thesis.

The informational value of the thesis, as enhanced by its relevance and methodology, will benefit numerous research practitioners in both academic and non-academic settings with a new approach to gauging the effectiveness of political branding in election campaigns, or to assess other non-political ends which the study can help respond to. Whether political actors are incumbents seeking reelection, new entrants or returning losers aspiring for elective positions, the study spells out what it takes in terms of competence and performance to connect with target voters and win. Funders, financiers, donors, sponsors, and other interest groups supporting political marketing initiatives will stand to benefit also from the integral and optimal contexts of the political branding approach. Non-government organizations (NGOs) and other similar institutions with stakes in election outcomes can find it advantageous to assess the

potential election performance of some candidates based on the methodology set forth in the study. In broader application, the study can be dovetailed to national political branding strategy.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

Strengths:

The study draws research strengths from the confluence of key factors, which included: (1) extensive and well-organized literature review that touched on the central importance of communication in political messaging and branding strategies, the exercise of marketing and brand building, and the relationship between brand building and political activity; (2) the conduct of semi-structured interviews with key informants in order to effectively address the research gap that was discovered in the literature review, with the interview allowing the crafting of new questions for the conduct of subsequent interviews with communicators; and Overall, the strength of the study can be related to having overcome the research gap with integral political branding indices, which have been sustained by significant substantiation when aligned with the theoretical frameworks of brand audit, market segmentation, and digital media marketing. The study stands on multidimensional research platform, which yields persuasive and generalizable results, beyond their original application in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The general framework of the research questions was not strictly country-specific or area-delimited but can be conveniently replicated or modified to suit other research venues in political branding and communication.

Weaknesses:

The study could have been a more insightful illustration of political branding had it incrementally amplified on two elements: (1) the details of the media mix usage made by political parties even in terms of percentage expense distribution; and (2) the cost-benefit appraisal of the political branding strategy. Although the quality of the analysis and the reliability and relevance of research results were not eroded by the absence of these two elements, the overall significance of the study could have been elevated to greater paradigmatic value had the factors been included. The details and investment content of the media mix could have elucidated what media choice strategy delivered the most effective political branding impact based on the win-and-loss nature of election results. The cost-benefit appraisal, typical of any strategic evaluation in both business and non-business engagements, could have provided a supplemental measure of political branding performance. The limitations were bound to arise and were beyond of our control due to political actors' lack of time during the pre-election period and because of competing priorities during post-election period for both winners and losers. It can be inferred that the study addressed the identified research gap and contributed, to no small degree, to the creation of new knowledge and the expansion of the existing body of literature in political branding.

Direction for Future Research

In the conduct of future research to study the role and influence of political branding in the conduct of elections, whether on a national, regional, or local level, it is suggested an expanded version of this study. The proposed expansion should include purposeful research on the media mix strategy adopted by political actors and communicators, more particularly on the investment utilization for media channels. Furthermore, the

study should consider a multifactorial analysis, where political branding is combined with additional factors potentially influencing the voters' decision such as clientelism or even voice pitch (Shapiro, 2012, Tigue et. al, 2011). The expanded study should also cover indicative cost-benefit evaluation on the nature and magnitude of resources invested in the election campaigns and what actual benefits the election outcomes generated. This expanded version will contribute to the development of an integral and optimal political branding strategy with pre-election, election, and post-election value in maximizing the utility of investments, especially when scarcity of resources stunts most political parties and candidates.

6.7 Chapter Summary

The Chapter presented the analysis and interpretation of the semi-structured interviews and illuminated diverse implications that elaborated on political branding and communication in the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections. From interviews' responses, the Chapter spelled out that the variety of major national issues constituted strong noise factors blurring the communicating process and the communication horizon for political branding. With these interview outcomes, the discussion elucidated the critical value of correct audience targeting and the alignment of ideology, message, and public perception in communicating brand values under a combined media strategy. The chapter transitioned to the analysis and interpretation of interview findings, dissecting the opportunity and problem dimensions of Cyprus politics; the congruence of the role of communicators and political branding; and media communication insights. The Chapter presented the highlights of the 2016 elections results and then triangulated these outcomes with the interview results,

including alignment with political branding indices. Comprehensive alignments of the study with the research aim, and key questions were made. In its final section, the Chapter offered a critical evaluation of the study, which discussed and analyzed other relevant studies that unfolded a compelling research gap; the significance of the research process that supported the reliability and stability of results; the strengths and weaknesses of the study; and the proposed direction for future research.

The next chapter will embrace the Conclusion Chapter, which briefly summarized and highlighted the findings of the study, including some key recommendations about political branding.



CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The Chapter highlights how political branding, amid the broad variety of divisive and contentious national issues, was leveraged to indignant, apathetic, and disenchanting electorates representing a significant part of the national population of Cyprus. The chapter summarized the important insights about political branding based on the context of Cypriot politics and the key factors that need to be considered by political actors in election campaigns, especially when viewed within the sphere of major challenges defining the 2016 Cyprus parliamentary elections, including the win and loss performance of political parties. The chapter ends with a political branding prescription based on the results of the study.

7.2 Political Branding Effectiveness in Cypriot Elections

With a large population of voters being disinterested and non-committal to the 2016 political exercise in Cyprus, the situation was a tough hurdle for major political actors who were stigmatized by government scandals, corruption, and poor performance which was considered the proximate cause of societal ills. Before and during the election campaigns, political branding had two major daunting challenges: (1) how to connect, influence, and get the winning support of the electorate population harboring mistrust, frustration, and indignation, and declaring voting abstention from the 2016 elections; and (2) how to insulate party supporters from the impact of populist and anti-establishment sentiments and defend existing political capital from being eroded by potential shift in the loyalty of existing supporters. On the first political branding challenge, the results of the 2016 Cyprus elections provided a confirmation that

political branding did afford to reach target audiences, but not at the level of effectiveness sufficient to defuse avowed voters' abstention, which had to happen at 33% of the total Cypriot voting population. This election result featured a marked mismatch of persuasive power: the force of populist thoughts and anti-establishment sentiments had much stronger impact and influence on the electorates than the political brand strategies of political actors, despite the latter's aggressive all-media application including social media. Alternatively expressed, the gravity of national issues tormenting the Cypriot society had solidified in the voter's mind that even a large quantum of political branding could not be deconstructed. This situation meant the dysfunctional socio-economic and political situation had to be changed, dispelled, or significantly improved before any decisive change in the voter's mindset could evolve or before any new acceptable terms of endearment could be accepted by the public to the full benefit of major political institutions in Cyprus.

On the second political branding challenge, except for DIKO, the high incidence of political erosions highlighted the fact that political branding failed to effectively counteract the strong corrosive effect of rising populist thoughts and anti-establishment sentiments on the existing followers of major political parties. Political branding failed to contain bailiwick erosions generally suffered by major parties, despite their heavy investment in political capital build-up and historical relationship with their followers under the aegis of political clientelism.

Nonetheless, as election results showed, candidates and political parties that chose to be properly guided by the political branding paradigm, before and during the election campaigns, achieved the best election performance in terms of the number of qualifying votes and the least incidence of political erosion. In non-compliant applications including erroneous content messaging, as demonstrated by the failed

initiatives to counteract the avowed voting abstention of Cypriot electorates, political branding could cause continued adverse public perception, mistrust, and erosion of political capital. Incrementally, seriously dysfunctional socio-economic and political issues, coagulated in the minds of voters, could defeat the power of political branding to influence voter's behaviors and decisions especially if the campaign was predicated on erroneous content messaging. The context of Cypriot politics and the nature of elections results did show all branding possibilities where the winning model centered on the adoption of integral and process-compliant political branding strategy; otherwise, the power of political branding could not be maximized to suppress or defeat the impact of populist thoughts and anti-establishment feelings.

As to how political branding relates to the major objectives of the study in conjunction with the research problem, the key concerns are conjoined in their theoretical and practical significance. In conjunction with the first research objective, within the purview of brand audit principles, it was revealed Cypriot electorates possessed appreciable knowledge of digital media as they used and engaged the technology in their current lifestyle and communication interactions. Based on responses to interview questions, the Cypriot electorates recognized the importance and power of digital media in affording them quick and long-reach communication solutions. This updated knowledge necessarily required a similar level of understanding for political actors intending to trek the online space in the conduct of target audience communication, which concern pertained to the second research objective. Research findings pointed out that political actors did have sufficient knowledge and understanding about target audiences. These candidates were able to segment the Cypriot voter's groups, identify what group they wanted to be affiliated with, and pinpoint the groups they could focus campaign resources on to generate impact and greater political value. On the third

research objective regarding the importance of communication in branding strategy development for political purposes, the study posed a contradiction. Although political actors showed recognition and great respect for the centrality of communication in political branding strategy, they generally overlooked the critical importance of content messaging and its concomitant dynamics with the changes in the Cypriot political landscape. As election results illuminated, improper content messaging dissipated the power of digital media and political branding as a high 33% voting abstention and political capital erosion prevailed. Only those political actors that embraced change and non-traditional values in their messages effectively connected with Cypriot voters. In relation to the fourth research objective concerning the general effectiveness of political branding strategies in the 2016 parliamentary elections, as earlier established, the political branding strategies of political actors did not generally meet desired outcomes. The general political branding shortfall in the 2016 parliamentary elections remained clearly dramatized by the 33% voting abstention and the political erosions suffered by major political parties. The intense impact of national issues in the voter's mind, as incensed by populist and anti-establishment thoughts, were too serious and deeply imbedded to be easily obliterated by political branding that stood on partial process and quality compliance platform.

7.3 Critical Analysis: Political Branding in Cypriot Politics

One of the most meaningful discoveries from the study referred to the victorious campaign of POLITON. This highlight of the Cyprus elections reinforced the fact that social media effectively provided the means of communication and leveled the playing field in favor of small political entities. The POLITON electoral win represented a regimented execution of a political branding strategy with powerful content messaging

carried out through the reach, speed, and economy of social media. POLITON was a new entrant in the Cypriot political arena, with scant provision of resources for pre-election and election campaign purposes. POLITON relied on its alignment with target audiences: youth -- unemployed, and undecided electorates – and poured the party's best resources with the correct estimation that captivating such political bases could catapult the party toward some visible parliamentary representation by way of electoral wins. POLITON registered decisive wins due to predominant branding process and quality compliance, which was made intense by fervor and consistency in content messaging.

The conceptual adequacy and promotional significance of political branding can be assessed through the frameworks of brand audit, market segmentation, and digital media designs. These frameworks provide guidelines on internal capability assessment, target audience identification, differentiation, content messaging, and media mix strategy development. However, based on the 2016 parliamentary election results, the exercise of political branding was generally not responsive to the new imperatives governing strategic alignment with Cypriot politics. Again, the failure to contain voting abstention and the high incidence of political erosion marked the importance of a solid value chain where political branding becomes as strong as its weakest link. The weak content messaging that generally prevailed among major parties in the 2016 parliamentary elections prevented the exercise of political branding from achieving desired outcomes with respect to influencing the voters toward participation in electoral exercises. Political branding is a holistic process grounded in marketing principles, methods, and communication as encased in the frameworks of brand audit, market segmentation, and digital media usage. Failure of any political actor to abide by these marketing principles and imprimatur would necessarily

represent a failure-bound political candidacy because of critical omission in the political branding process.

Even if the preeminence of combined traditional and digital media strategy was leveraged by major political parties, election results showed that it could not guarantee favorable election outcomes, unless the strategy is methodically adopted on a competence-based execution such as what POLITON did. As Cypriot politics denoted, political branding must be well-planned for specific target audiences, stipulating process compliance and quality of thoughts and decisions as predictors of political branding effectiveness. The dichotomy of positive and negative election results represented an enigma as to how the expert intervention of communicators generally failed to preserve the political capital of major political parties, apart from failing to counteract populist and anti-establishment forces. It is somewhat disorienting to note how the primacy of content messaging escaped the expertise of political communicators. Whilst there was no question on the importance of expert advisors in Cypriot politics, shortfalls in political branding outcomes imbedded a vital lesson adverting to more circumspection in political analysis, especially where political branding must contend with human perception, behavior, and attitude adversely alienated from government and political institutions.

The results of the 2016 Cyprus elections epitomized the power of enormous campaign resources to defy the odds and stave off the impact of adverse public perception. The case in point here relates to the case of well-funded and well-organized major political parties like AKEL and DISY. Even if AKEL and DISY had been the object of intense public disapproval and repudiation for their being associated with the socio-economic ills of Cyprus, AKEL and DISY managed to stay as ruling parties, although they suffered political erosions. AKEL and DISY had enormous financial resources and

formidable bases of political beneficiaries more than sufficient to influence election victory and retain political power. This power of money to beget political power was not only an unfortunate political reality, but it also reflected the continued operative influence of clientelism to which Cyprus remained historically linked.

In contradiction, nonetheless, the election results also highlighted that the power of smart political branding strategy, not necessarily bigness or size of a political party, could jumpstart a minority party to a momentous electoral win. The election results showed that it was not big money that catapulted POLITON to a position of campaign strength and convincing election victory despite being a new entrant in the Cyprus political arena. The POLITON victory dramatized the power of political branding over the power of money and institutional bigness (Audit Service of the Republic, Special Report No. Pk/06/2017).

7.4 Political Branding Prescriptions

Based on the findings of the study, particularly on how political branding fared in addressing the intricate context and dynamics of Cypriot politics, it behooves every political actor eyeing to participate in any election exercise to undertake political branding at the highest level of process compliance and quality of political thoughts and decisions. These compliance and quality imperatives should draw vitality from the exercise of brand audit, market segmentation, and digital media communication. In this light, it is propounded the following political branding prescriptions that should be sequentially considered in execution:

1. Acquire a clear understanding and appreciation of the context of politics and the different dimensions of societal issues, including a good knowledge of prevailing public needs, and electorate perception, beliefs, and motivations.
2. In comparison with key competing political actors, conduct in-depth self-analysis that inventories personal strengths and weaknesses, including resources and capabilities, which can be leveraged to target audiences, whilst creating a clear and compelling basis of differentiation in their minds.
3. Be a member of a political party that underpins one's personal values and political beliefs, goals, and motivations, and remain guided by the party's strategy, positioning, campaign directions, and preparation imperatives.
4. Understand the profile of each voter's group and determine the voter's group to which pre-election branding and communication campaign can be directed as a top priority.
5. Understand traditional and digital media and be actively engaged in social media in preparation for the election campaign proper where purposeful communication and engagement of target audiences constitute topmost priority for an election win.
6. To strengthen online presence, develop and launch a robust personal website that can send and receive online and social media messages to and from target audiences, a website with interactive and user-generated features for enlivened interaction.
7. Make time to engage target audiences daily through online posts, comments, replies, likes, and shares, ensuring that all news and information shared or communicated are real, verified, and fact-checked for political branding credibility and integrity.

8. Craft and articulate individual and party messages to target audiences in consistent and high-impact construction, evoking differentiation and delivering relevance in relation to target voter's needs, preferences, and expectations.
9. Maximize working relationship with communication consultants of the party, drawing insights from their expert knowledge and constantly conferring with them on how personal campaign effectiveness can be sustained.
10. Learn to balance party position and representation with that of the electorates, especially where conflicts may potentially arise; and as far as practicable, skirt arguments, debates, or contentious discussions with the electorates, whilst supporting party stand and representation.
11. Learn current local and national politics, engage and maintain alliances with all voter's groups, and demonstrate a clear understanding and knowledge of critical issues, thus creating the favorable public impression of capability and dependability.
12. Ensure the availability of adequate election campaign wherewithal that can defray all costs related to technology support (e.g. website development and upload), manpower (e.g. social media practitioners and phone brigades), mobilization (e.g. transport and logistics), and other personally-attributable repetitive requirements over the campaign period.

Hence, to be responsive to any political situation, political branding must be undertaken as a practice of perfection, a process that cannot be performed haphazardly because it contends with human perception, behavior, and attitude.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

RESULTS OF SURVEY WITH CANDIDATES 2016 CYPRUS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Coding Highlights

1. Target Voters: registered party voters (RPV); young Cyprus voter (YCV); undecided Cyprus voters (UCV); working/middle-class (WMC); jobless Cyprus voter (JCV); Mid-life voters (MLV)
2. Reason for Target Voter Selection: past voter's interest (PVI); size of voting population (SVP); helping the people (HTP); demonstrated political maturity (DPM); non-committal to political brand (NPB); match-up of voter & candidate (MVC), promise of hope (POH); voter's resistance to change (RTC)

Candidate Distribution by Party

Political Party	Representatives Interviewed	
	No.	%
AKEL (Focus)	4	29
DISY (Focus)	4	29
DIKO (Focus)	3	21
EDEK	1	7
OIKOLOGOI	1	7
SYMMACHIA POLITON	1	7
Total	14	100

A. BRANDING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1. To what group of voters will you direct your pre-election campaign? What is the reason behind your choice/s?

AKEL:

- To political party's voters who voted especially in 2011 election...Their previous voting indicates their involvement and interest in the political exercise; for this

reason, I need to reach them...those who participated in the 2015 represent about 80% of the voting population...a big number to ignore/ **(RPV; PVI & SVP)**

- To undecided young people/voters... I can consider this group to represent those who did not actually vote in the 2011...based on my research, undecided could be around 13%, while youth voters around 15% for a total of 28% of the voting population...a good base if I could convince a large part of this population/ **(YCV, UCV; SVP)**
- To working class, because is the main social class who suffers because of the economic crisis... this class, if I could recall it right, is around 70% of the total population...again, a big number that must be helped...and, of course, for election purposes/ **(WMC; SVP & HTP)**

DISY:

- Middle class, primarily because this class represents more than 75% of the total Cyprus population...which at 75% of 1.2 million should be no less than 900,000 electorates...almost equivalent to the total voting population/ **(WMC; SVP)**
- Ages of 30-50 (people who are already shaped politically but also open-minded to discussions)...these people have demonstrated experience in choosing candidates with substance for which I offer my qualifications...if I'm not mistaken, these people would be no less than one-third of the population/ **(WMC; DPM & SVP)**
- People who are already followers of their political party/ **(RPV; PVI)**; it is necessary that these people will again exercise to vote...it is very important for the party

DIKO:

- To political party's voters, because they have proven interest in election activity and knowledge how to exercise their right...they can better appreciate the values I need to communicate/ **(RPV; DPM & PVI)**
- To undecided/ young people/voters...these people are non-committal to a political brand/ **(UCV & YCV; NPB)**, and youth could be around more than 15% of registered voters...undecided voter could be around at least 10% / **(SVP)**

OIKOLOGOI:

- Young people and people of ages 40-50 years old...they represent a large majority I should communicate my plans and programs to/ **(YCV & MLV; SVP)**... they are interested and committed to the political exercise and could be in the best position to...be guided by their candidate's qualifications and programs/ **(PVI & DPM)**
- Not to old people, because they have already their political opinions and they don't want to discuss political issues (they mostly are not open-minded people)/ **(VRC)**

EDEK & Symmachia Politon

- **EDEK:** It depends based on the age of the voter & the candidate. Their aim was to collect votes of their social environment for alignment of voter & candidate so that candidate's message will resonate with voters / **(MVC)**
- Young people, unemployed, undecided...**EDEK:** young people, aged 15-24 years, are flexible and without much preconceived ideas, and they represent 15% of the population at around 180,000; **Politon:**unemployed for their being marginalized and open to new promise of hope; **EDEK & Politon:** undecided for non-affiliation to a political cause or personality /**YCV, UCV, & JCV; NPB & POH**
- **Other Small Parties (3)**
We will go for previous election participants; young voters are also our concern, including undecided voters; of course, the middle class electorates are also our target election communication campaign / **RPV, YCV, UCV & WMC** The experience, interest, knowledge, population, and active involvement of our target audience provide a great rationale for us to engage...including the undecided and the unemployed we seek to help, we wish to usher them to a hopeful society... we deem them their non-committal could induce the swing vote for this election **PVI, SVP, DPM, NPB, HTP**

Target Cyprus Voters

PARTY AFFILIATION	RPV	YCV	UCV	WMC	JCV	MLV
AKEL	4	4	4	4		
DISY	4			4		
DIKO	3	3	3			
OIKOLOGOI		1				1
EDEK		1	1		1	
Symmachia Politon		1	1		1	
Total	11	10	9	8	2	1
% of Total Respondents	79	71	64	57	14	7

Reason for Target Voter Selection

PARTY AFFILIATION	PVI	SV P	HT P	DP M	NP B	MV C	PO H	VR C
AKEL	4	4	4					
DISY	4	4		4				

DIKO	3	3		3	3			
OIKOLOGOI	1	1		1				1
EDEK					1	1	1	
Symmachia Politon					1	1	1	
Total	12	12	4	8	5	2	2	1
% of Total Respondents	86	86	29	34	36	14	14	7

2. Which type of media are you aiming to focus on for your campaign?

- **DISY & AKEL:** As the two biggest political parties in Cyprus, AKEL and DISY candidates manifested first preference for newspaper, with both parties owning newspaper companies in Cyprus, although AKEL and DISY candidates confirmed their use of traditional and new media (social media), as dual channels in their media strategy.
- **DISY...**for obvious reason, we will have traditional newspaper messaging for our campaign...although we recognize the emerging power of social media...in which we are committed to invest for pre-election campaign...overall, we will adopt integrated marketing communication (IMC) using traditional and online formats
- **AKEL...**it will be a multi-channel campaign platform, with newspaper and social media providing the impetus...definitely it will be sustained and relentless messaging...we will ride on the traditional benefits of newspaper...and on the reach and economy of social media...we will use different media channels on an integral sense / IMC; multi-media adoption
- **DIKO /EDEK** We will use combined media; principally, however, we will leverage the priority for online and social media platforms...it is also our way also of reaching old & young voters alike; social media is user-generated and user-controlled so we can interact with our audiences...but we will be wary of traditional media value
- **OIKOLOGOI / Politon:** especially they aim to social media, because of small budgets. / emerging power of social media; we are circumscribed by limitations in our financial capacity, being small political entities...it is the reason why we have to be very particular about the mix of media we have to use for reach, speed, and economy; social media is a two-way communication allowing open engagement with our public; social media has guaranteed engagement with audiences...not on one-way ads without audience contact.
- It depends on the age of the candidate. The older candidates don't know the use of the social media. They lean on the traditional media/ lack of knowledge on social media by older candidates; we know new media and social media / we have qualified people dedicated to specialized handling of the medium from content, messaging, audience interaction, and results tracking.

Highlights: Target Media

PARTY AFFILIATION	TRADITIONAL MEDIA	ONLINE / SOCIAL MEDIA	IMC / COMBINED / CROSS-MEDIA
AKEL	4	4	4
DISY	4	4	4
DIKO	3	3	3
OIKOLOGOI		1	1
EDEK	1	1	1
SymmaChia Politon		1	1
Total	12	14	14
% of Total Respondents	86	100	100

3. Do you think electronic media (social media, mobile applications) have greatly substituted the traditional media (newspaper, television, radio), especially during pre-elections' campaigns?

DISY There is pattern of continued growth for electronic media... but we cannot ignore newspaper advertising in terms of voter's reach, engagement, targeting options, and messaging / readership convenience... we are on newspaper business for which we will maximize our strength on the channel...to some extent although it is expensive, we will use TV, but newspaper and social media will be extensive...we are also considering mobile messaging...so, we can see at least four major communication channels for the campaign

AKEL Apart from newspaper and TV, we will rely on online and wireless access to get our message across...about 80% of the population read new through online newspapers and magazines...70% participate in social networks, so we will be in social media...and of course, we will be in mobile also because at least three-fourths of people who access the Internet sue mobile or smartphones...and around 30% use portable gadgets (PC, tablet, netbook) for internet access...we just need a seamless integration of all these channels to be effective...more of new media may be in our campaign

DIKO Yes, we cannot discount the rise of electronic media, although we would think they have not overshadowed completely traditional media. As our consultant aver, while we continue to sense the advantages of newspaper and TV, we see our

campaign rolling on a cross-media platform..... combining electronic and online formats, including email campaign, online advertisements, social media, and mobile communication...on a higher sense, our campaign will be premised on an integrated marketing communications (IMC) perspective...we hope we could have reach and economy for our content strategy...media will help explain the issues that continue to plague the electorate...how we do it is a matter of our party's communication platform and strategy...we consider using all media channels applicable to our campaign in urban and remote communities; we use social media to overcome the limitation of traditional media in precise audience reach...campaign effectiveness can be measured much more easily in social media...and can be shared fast.

OIKOLOGOI / EDEK & Politon: OIKOLOGOI & EDEK Traditional is still ahead but electronic fast growing; **Politon** Electronic a bit over traditional...ALL INTERVIEWEES Both groups acknowledged the value of IMC campaign stating: our campaign consultants expect the IMC approach to be a better approach to reach people and establish emotional connections with them / with IMC we can have both depth and breadth in our communication strategy...and hopefully, it could be cost-effective... in this election, the role of communication becomes exceptionally vital because they are deep and hurting issues that must be explained to let people understand how we are going to resolve them...social media messaging on key societal issues can also be shared immediately...in our fragmented society, the role of cross-media communication in elections is critical so that people can vote wisely in favour of genuine public servants. Social media lets us communicate what we want to tell the people in a personal manner, and in casual language... but not in TV or newspaper where language must be restrained or formal.

**Highlights: Electronic vs. Traditional Media
(Has electronic media substituted traditional media?)**

PARTY AFFILIATION	Ye s	No	Media Preference
AKEL		4	Will consider IMC, with TV, newspaper, social, and mobile
DISY		4	Will consider TV, newspaper, social, mobile, smartphone
DIKO		3	IMC, to include TV, online ads, email, social, mobile
OIKOLOGOI		1	IMC
EDEK		1	IMC
SymmaChia Politon	1		IMC
Total	1	13	
% of Respondents	7	93	

4. Do you think a communicator is essential for your pre-elections' campaign?

All Candidates (100%)

DISY We have been in public communication business for a long time ...we have adequate background with respect to strategic campaign and messaging...our election experience speaks well of our capacity. Nonetheless, as party standard, we still appreciate the value of consultants as good pre-election campaign partners. We do allocate the funds for solid communication platform.

AKEL Over the long span of our political experience, we know numerous consultants, and we engage the services of a number of reliable strategist and tacticians...but we continue to principally rely on our experience, knowledge, and intuition about the election arena. Our engagement of communicators has added values...more heads being better than one; alternatively, if not for party rules we could use the money for communicators to support our individual campaigns.

Other Interviewees

In the political arena, despite their professional credentials, they feel the need to engage the services of communicators so that they can keep pace with the trends and intricacies of strategic communication from a political campaign perspective.

5. What is the central context of your message for the political campaign?

Party Affiliation	Main Campaign Message
AKEL	Our accomplishments in public service demonstrate our ability, unity, and commitment to our common future.
DISY	Our capacity to enjoy a vibrant society, now and in the future, depends on who you are going to vote. We welcome you to join us.
DIKO	Let us share values, realities, dreams, and passion for change. Let us build a new society with a vibrant economy. Let us vote. Together, we can do it.
OIKOLOGOI	In the idealism of our youth, we remain guided by the great past. In our passion for strategic change, we defy tradition with competence, action, and honesty.
POLITON	Vision, knowledge, action, and transparency ...our simple ways to change the present and secure the future, as we cherish our past. Let us unite to change our destiny.
EDEK	We are committed to the change and the future our people dream of. Join us. We can share what we will build as one nation.

6. What is your preferred way of promoting yourself through advertising?

All CANDIDATES As we earlier stated, we will go IMC or multi-media...we will combine the strengths of new and old media...definitely, we will not miss social media, especially Facebook, with 554,000 subscribers in Cyprus, almost half of the national population...we will also liberally use cards and leaflets because they are more cost-effective than having street posters and outdoors, which are very expensive...the certainty of reach and economy is well proven in social media...we will maximise the usefulness of social media in our election campaigns

7. The polls have always been a trusted way for the political parties to discover how they influence the voters and to predict chances of election success. However, polls are sometimes not reliable. Will you use polls as a political strategy?

AKEL/DISY /DIKO (76%)

Based on responses, it appears political parties are the ones that conduct polls, through focus groups, to ascertain their standing across communities. As one political party representative stated “we need to have some quantitative basis and a fairly revealing data on how our party and candidates stand.” Two other party representatives shared that it is not uncommon for political parties to sponsor polls if only to ensure being properly updated/ guided on voters’ behaviour and preferences.

Other Interviewees (24%)

In their personal or individual capacity, all candidates admitted they do not resort to polls because they perceive polls are expensive; two candidates even stated that polls are not needed, stating “as we engage the people, we more or less sense whether or not we are accepted...we can somewhat have an idea whether or not people will vote for us...our observations might at times be wrong, but generally they are indicative.

8. How many people are there in your polling staff? What were the criteria for choosing them?

- **AKEL:** the candidates don’t have personal assistants and polling staffs. The colleagues work equally for all candidates especially for the party.
- **DISY:** polling staffs of 10-20 people. (Criteria: people close friendly and family environment, trustful and who are technology familiar)
- **DIKO, EDEK, OIKOLOGOI, SYMMACHIA POLITON:**
 - Polling staff of 1-5 people
 - Low budgets
 - Trustful people and relatives

- People with wide social circle

AKEL /DISY / DIKO (76%) Personal and family relationships, anchored on trust, constitute underlying considerations for choosing members of the polling staff, whether the choice is for party or individual candidate level

DISY / DIKO We tap 10-20 members for party polling group

EDEK, OIKOLOGOI & POLITON (24%) Technological savvy, professionalism, social Connectedness are added qualities in the selection of polling staff...we use 1-5 people as polling assistants

B. OPINIONS – EXPERIENCES

1. What did your last pre-election campaign teach you? Will you continue using the same ways of promotion or will you make use of the new sources as well? (current members of the Parliament)

Our campaign now is better focused, generally directed to the voting population segments we wish to address...it is more carefully developed and more rifle shot in context, not shotgun approach so to speak, like we had in previous campaigns...it is less wasteful in resources and less stressful...our new targeting focus aims to give us greater voter's impact as our messaging hits the right audience aligned with our party platform and candidates representation...this should strengthen our campaign over past engagements

Well, our targeting goals relate to communicating with the right audience with the right message through the right medium...a strategy design intended to ensure reach, impact, and positive outcome...an optimal use of our party resources

Technology has helped us become more sensitive to who our target audience are...you will note the focus on marginalized members of society...they are many, and with legitimate concerns, which as public servants we need to address...our new campaign needs to communicate our desire to help and contribute to positive change

2. Based on your assessment, what is the ideal time that should be spent on a pre-election campaign?

- New candidates: in order to be known to the Cypriot voters, they need 6-9 months pre-election campaign
- Older candidates who were also previous parliamentary members: said that the campaign could be short-term (1-3 months), because Cypriot citizens know their actions and activities.

New Candidates To have a good registry with Cypriot voters, between 6-9 months pre-election campaign engagement would be necessary...unlike the incumbent parliament members who need much shorter campaign exposure

New Candidates A 6-9 months period of preparation, however, does not guarantee election win; the campaign must be well-planned, integrated, and effectively communicated; otherwise, the campaign would fizzle out in favour of the opponents.

Older Candidates / Re-electionists For us incumbents or previous parliament members, 1-3 months of pre-campaign would be sufficient...we do not have to reinvent the wheel since we know what it takes to promote our public service record and our candidacy; for high-profile incumbents who have been all over public media for the many engagements in public issues, 1-2 months would be alright...of course, incumbents or experienced candidates still need to plan and integrate efforts, lest they be outdone by smart and young candidates.

3. How will your message be spread to more isolated areas?

AKEL /DISY /DIKO (76%)

AKEL Like what we did before, we will meet our electorates in person...we should find time to engage them face-to-face...of course, we will capitalize on the plain-old-telephone and new media...technology reaches more people than before.

DISY / DIKO Access to isolated areas is not as difficult as in the previous elections...the rise of online communications enables remote access, even on wireless format like mobile and Internet...we have social media...there is no substitute for meeting our voters personally...we will also use the option to designate highly selected area party representatives or campaign champions to lead the way in isolated or remote locations

EDEK, OIKOLOGOI & POLITON (24%)

We might not have the luxury of resources like what big political parties enjoy, but definitely we will level up through the use of new technologies and new media...we will maximize our social media links and we will utilise other online options including target marketing and direct email campaigns

4. The percentage of people entering the Parliament has been doubled, specifically from 1.8% to 3.6%. Will this affect your campaign? If yes, in what way?

AKEL /DISY (57%)

It will not affect us. Our campaign has always been premised the presence of broad competition...it is a reality that we have always anticipated...no significant impact for us since we are well-organised and we have the resources to communicate despite more number of people entering the Parliament.

DIKO, EDEK, OIKOLOGOI & POLITON (43%)

Small or minor parties would be severely affected with the increased number of candidates vying for parliamentary seats...in all likelihood minor parties will have to rethink and optimise their campaigns for greater reach on well-managed logistics provisions...we see this as an unwanted new development for small parties... we have yet to see how the electorates supporting the political agenda of minor political representations would react to this... it is not possible political realignments can happen

THEMES

1. The financial crisis and the “Cypriot issue” remains are key problems in Cyprus that must be solved. Do you think these problems affect all sectors and age groups of society in the same way?

All Candidates While the Cypriot issue remains one of the twin problems that bedevil Cyprus, the more compelling problem that affects all sectors and age groups of society in the same degree is the economic difficulty the country is going through...Unemployment continues to be at double-digit rate...youth unemployment is high...labour productivity is declining due to shortcomings in competition, technology, human capital, and institutions...technology adoption and knowledge sharing are weak...investment activity is also weak

All Candidates The economic problems of society are part and parcel of the grand issues our political agenda seeks to address...but we recognize that these daunting economic issues could not be resolved overnight...we also have to accept the reality that these problems could not be successfully overcome by any political party without the collective support of the citizenry...and this is the great challenge that all political representations have to face...we cannot continue to be a divisive nation to solve our economic problems.

All Candidates The challenge in all these representations will be well-founded policy pronouncements... launched on high-impact communication, target-based messaging, and responsive feedback management...it is essential that all development messages get across to the electorates.

2. Cyprus has been the centre of attention for news about energy sources over the last three years. Will energy development be one of the main subjects of your political campaign?

DIKO & Others (43%)

Although energy is a problem in Cyprus, our development effort in solar power has been outstanding, with 35% of government-controlled housing under solar power...and in the long-term, we can see that we will be at the forefront of alternative energy generation... While energy is really a problem since we import 95% of our

power requirement, with oil imports consuming 50% of our foreign exchange earnings, this is a problem that can only be addressed in the very distant future...We cannot conveniently resolve the long-term energy issue, but we need to act immediately on our devastating economic issues, which are actually growth barriers...between energy and the economy, we would go for resolving our economic ills first, this is something we have to articulate for fear that people may not get core value of our campaign thrust.

AKEL/DISY (57%)

Cyprus has an unfortunate energy situation...We do not have known deposits of mineral fuels, and our lack of rivers makes hydroelectric power impossible...energy is really an issue where our party stand to contribute in the long-term...but we prefer to be at the helm of the more pressing economic problem in the short and mid-term; How can we effectively address long-term issues like expensive large-scale power generation if we are saddled with short-term economic problems...it will be prudent if we appreciate the twin problems of energy and economy from a more practical perspective of boosting the economy... but the crux of the matter is how people will understand the complexity of prioritising the issues, again, here communication is vital

3. Today, unemployment affects the Cypriot society, more particularly the youth. Many young people need to leave the country in order to find jobs abroad. If you are elected, what are the actions you will take to overcome the unemployment problem?

DIKO & Others (43%)

Youth unemployment remains high at 33% of the total labour force...we consider this as a key concern – individually as candidates and collectively as a party... we have to decisively address this as a top priority as it impacts not only the present but the future...To address this problem we are agreed to intensify youth education and training as no less than 17% of our youth are out-of-school or out-of-training based on UN reports...It is evident that we have to reach the youth and communicate to them the value and need of education and training to secure their future and be a productive member of society...It is state's responsibility to provide the stimulus, but the youth is equally tasked to respond and act...how we communicate the values rests on how we can tap the media they are closely attached to...it's that simple but it's also that difficult in terms of fail-safe content and message dissemination strategies

AKEL/DISY (57%)

It is common knowledge that we have a problem of high youth unemployment...for this reason we have been vigilant in reaching the youth...we have capitalized on our newspaper resources...but we recognize the need to be more active in online and social media fronts because these are the areas where the youth communicate...we consider tapping the social media, which is the youth's media, in trying to address the youth displacement in the labour market at home and globally...which leads them to

low-paying, menial jobs due to lack of skills...we will reinforce our thrust on human development to open the threshold for more youth employment.

4. Research shows people, especially the young people, lack trust in political institutions. How do you intend to address this problem to gain back people's trust? Do you think lack of trust is mainly due to the government scandals which are published from time to time? Is it possible that there are more issues on this? Which are they?

All Candidates (100%) Respondent shared the view that people have significantly lost trust and confidence in political institutions because of scandals that continue to rock the Cyprus society...It would seem that people demonstrate a growing withdrawal from political participation...it is really a precarious situation because you build trust over time and to regain it would also call for a significant lapse of time...trust is earned, so is the confidence that builds on it; it is indeed very difficult to restore people's faith in the government...even the best communication strategy towards voters could only induce hope, but not trust, the winner has perform and satisfy people's needs and wants to get back their trust

All Candidates (100%) The erosion of public trust could be attributed to the major scandals in the country, as well as due to corruption and political machination...it is tragic and it should be nipped in the bud by political will... unresolved ticklish issues that erode public trust include the Cypriot issue, raising of parliamentary threshold, unemployment including youth unemployment, close to 30% poverty rate, weak human development, and weak justice and consumer protection system, perceived corruption and questionable political maneuvers of major players have their share in the burden...relentless and meaningful communication with the youth in responsive media engagement could mitigate the problem of trust loss

5. During the last few elections there is an increased absence in voting. What is your prediction for the upcoming Parliamentary elections? In your opinion, what is the best way of decreasing or even eliminate this phenomenon?

DIKO & Others (43%)

With the people's loss of trust and confidence remaining high and with no appreciable development happening in our midst to overturn that people's disenchantment, we do not foresee any uptrend in voting participation, but a continued abstention in the exercise of right to vote ...we predict more people would not vote in the coming parliamentary elections than in previous electoral exercises, most probably within the 30%-40% abstention window...with a foreseeable decline in voter's turnout, we should consolidate our forces in our political bailiwicks and convince the undecided to participate...this loss of trust is a kind of added campaign burden, and it really demands excellence in purposeful communication with the voters...We have to communicate, and be vigilant and active in trying to renew and restore people's faith

in political institutions, lest our party be dragged into extended people's withdrawal we have not been a cause of.

AKEL/DISY (57%)

With the country's problems, the people, including the youth, have all the motivation to participate in the coming parliamentary elections...we would think of no deterioration in the voter's turnout this coming election...the cross-cutting issues and problems our society faces need more robust legislation which the people realize, a reason for people to participate more actively in the electoral exercise...if ever there is a potential for people to not participate, our campaign emphasizes unity and commitment and this should address somehow the issue...we have helped many people in their needs, and because of this proven attachment, people will not forget us, but will surely support us (AKEL)...we can be sure our constituents will be solid for the party, and even the undecided as we reach and invite everyone to join us in our cause (DISY)

6. This year, the Parliamentary elections will be held at a very crucial time in terms of the Cypriot issue. Do you think this will play a crucial role in your campaign as well?

The Cypriot issue continues to be a critical issue for candidates coming from the Turkish occupied areas (Famagusta and Keryneia districts), but not for non-Turkish locations, which focus on the more popular economic issue that has common grounding in people struggling for sustainable living.

Candidates from Turkish-occupied areas indicated that their campaign would stress the resolution of the Cypriot issue as a top concern, while thereafter addressing national economic woes.

Candidates from non-Turkish-occupied areas voiced out that they would prioritize improving and stabilising the economy over the political-charged Cypriot issue.

All candidates stressed the importance of communicating their thrust to the people during the pre-election campaign.

7. Finally, the elections occur at the same time as the exit from the Memorandum of Understanding. What values or messages are you going to convey to voters with regard to post-memorandum threats and impact? If you are elected, what are the actions you will take at the Parliament?

AKEL, DIKO, and Other Parties (71%)

Yes, we had officially gone out of the MoU on March 31, 2016, and it's a sign of improvement...but it signifies more daunting challenges for which we should never blink our eyes... the new challenge appears to have just begun...we received around

€7.2 billion (out of a total of €10 billion available) with a very low interest rate of about 1%, the question is could we sustain repayments as evaluations come every six months until 75% of the loan has been paid...there is that attendant risk that it could spell new pain and misery for the people...the issues of corruption, non-competitiveness, lack of transparency, and weak governance remain as major growth hurdles...we will pursue strong programs assisting marginalized social classes, youth employment, and human development, while being connected with the people

DISY (29%)

We support gradual development and the maintenance of robust communication policy with the people...the mere fact we have exited the MoU, in itself, indicates substantial progress has been made, which is evidenced by our being able to regain the trust of foreign investors and markets...we recognize though that it's a long way to full economic transformation as we need to pursue and achieve fiscal consolidation, banking and financial sector reforms, and structural reforms...we have to address the challenge of loan repayments...nonetheless, we have to recognize that the programme has lifted Cyprus from the worst condition of the economy in April 2013 ...we have to convey to the people in clear and unmistakable manner the implications and challenges that go with our MoU exit.

Appendix 2

Semi-Structured Interviews: Communication Consultants Research Results Based on Interview Transcripts

1.1 Direction of Election Campaign and Rationale for the Choice

Voter Group	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Registered Party Voter (RPV)	1	1	1			3	60
Young Cyprus Voter (YCV)	1		1	1	1	4	80
Undecided Cyprus Voter (UCV)	1		1	1	1	4	80
Working Middle Class (WMC)	1	1				2	40
Jobless Cyprus Voter (JCV)				1	1	3	60
Mid-Life Voter (MLV)		1				1	20

Rationale for Choice	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Size of Voting Population (SVP)	1	1	1			3	60

Helping the People (HTP)	1					1	20
Non-committal to Political Brand (NPB)			1	1	1	3	60
Previous Voter's Interest (PVI)			1			1	20
Demonstrated Political Maturity		1				1	20
Promise of Hope (POH)				1	1	2	40

1.2 Types of Media Given Emphasis

Type of Media	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Traditional Media	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Electronic/Online Media	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Integrated Mktg. Comm. (IMC).	1	1	1		1	4	80
Cross-Media	1	1	1			3	60

1.3 Advertising Channels Used to Reach Target Audience and Promote Candidates

Advertising Channels	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Newspaper	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
TV	1	1	1		1	4	80
Online Channel	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Social Media	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Mobile & Smartphone	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Other Portable Devices	1	1	1		1	4	80
Word-of-mouth /Personal Referral	1	1	1	1	1	5	100

1.4 Use of Pre-Election Polls to Measure Influence on Voters and Ratings of Candidates

Poll Action	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Using Pre-election Polls	1	1	1			3	60
Not Using Pre-election Polls				1	1	2	40

1.5 Poll Results or Projections vs. Actual Election Results on Party Performance

Party Performance	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
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Superior to Actual Election Results				1		1	20
Inferior to Actual Election Results	1	1	1		1	4	80

1.6 Importance of Communication

Perception	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Very Important	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Important							
Somewhat Important							
Not Important							
Do not Know							

1.7 Observed Effectiveness of Communication Strategy

Perception	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Effective	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Not Effective	1					1	20

1.8 Key National Issues or Events Affecting Communicator's Work and Techniques

Observation	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Economic Hardship/ Crisis	1		1		1	3	60
Negative Public Reaction	1	1			1	3	60
Greater Power of Social Media			1	1	1	3	60
Loss of Trust in Government		1			1	2	40
Hostile & Dissatisfied Voters		1				1	20
High Voter's Abstention					1	1	20
Rise of Small Parties				1		1	20

1.9 Receptiveness and Liking of Cypriot Voters to New / Online Media

Receptiveness and Liking	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Very High	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
High							
Medium							
Low							

Do not Know							
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2.1 Role and Ascendancy of Communicators over Political Party and its Candidates

Representation	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Advisory role, listened to by party	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Advisory role, not listened to							

2.2 If online media has replaced traditional media, especially during election time

Observation	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Online has replaced traditional				1		1	20
Online has not replaced traditional	1	1	1		1	4	80

2.3 Observed Characteristics of the 2016 Parliamentary Elections

Observation	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Extensive voter's abstention	1	1	1			3	60
Lack of youth interest	1					1	20
Loss of people's trust			1			1	20
Challenge to political maturity					1	1	20
Battle of traditional & new media				1		1	20

2.4 Experienced and Learning of Communication Consultants in Elections

Level of Experience	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Experienced	1	1	1	1	1	5	100
Lack of Experienced							
No Experience							
Learning Areas							
Voters more militant in their rights	1					1	20
Less people's trust in political actors	1					1	20
Inquisitive and rebellious voters			1			1	20
Public more updated on issues			1			1	20

Growing power of online media			1			1	20
Fluidity of Voting Mindset		1				1	20
Value of content and media mix					1	1	20
Messaging quality & consistency				1		1	20
Right audience, content & medium				1		1	20

2.5 Ideal length of time for an election campaign

Assessment	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Nine months for party candidates	1	1	1	1		4	80
One year for individual candidates	1	1	1	1		4	80
Eight (8) months to one (1) year					1	1	20

2.6 If party affiliation is an advantage or a liability and ways it becomes a liability

Assessment	AKEL	DISY	DIK O	POLITON	EDEK	TOTAL	%
Party affiliation is advantageous	1	1	1		1	4	80
Party affiliation is a liability				1			
When party affiliation is liability:							
Betrayal of public trust	1	1		1	1	4	80
Party faced with adverse issues			1	1	1	3	60
Party values against people values		1		1	1	3	60
Bad record of party performance		1			1	2	40

2.7. General political communication and branding strategy framework for party and candidates

Political Branding Process	Political Parties				
	AKEL	DISY	DIKO	POLITON	EDEK
1. Understand strengths of political brand	1	1	1	1	1
2. Under take prior research / surveys	1	1	1	1	1
3. Study & understand target audience	1	1	1	1	1
4. Segment target audiences	1	1	1	1	1

5. Develop messaging content	1	1	1	1	1
6. Develop media strategy in IMC format	1	1	1	-	1
7. Communicate and promote	1	1	1	1	1
8. Set up systems and logistics	-	1	1	1	1
9. Use financial, feasibility, & optimal guide	-	-	1	1	1
10. Evaluate competing political brand	-	1	1	1	-
11. Assess and act on feedback	1	1	1	1	-
Political Branding Compliance Level	8	10	11	10	9
Political Branding Compliance Index	73%	91%	100%	91%	82%
Party Strategy:					
Communicate what party stands for	1	1	1	1	1
Position, promote and sell political party	1		1	1	1
Candidate Strategy:					
Communicate strengths of political brands	1	1	1	1	1
Position, promote, and sell candidates	1		1	1	1

Source of Data: Semi-Structured Interviews with Communicators

Coding Legend

12. Target Voters: registered party voters (RPV); young Cyprus voter (YCV); undecided Cyprus voters (UCV); working/middle-class (WMC); jobless Cyprus voter (JCV); Mid-life voters (MLV)
13. Reason for Target Voter Selection: past voter's interest (PVI); size of voting population (SVP); helping the people (HTP); demonstrated political maturity (DPM); non-committal to political brand (NPB); match-up of voter & candidate (MVC), promise of hope (POH); voter's resistance to change (RTC)

Appendix 2-A

Interview Transcript Communication Consultant #1 -- AKEL

Coding Highlights:

- 14. Target Voters: registered party voters (RPV); young Cyprus voter (YCV); undecided Cyprus voters (UCV); working/middle-class (WMC); jobless Cyprus voter (JCV); Mid-life voters (MLV)**

15. Reason for Target Voter Selection: past voter's interest (PVI); size of voting population (SVP); helping the people (HTP); demonstrated political maturity (DPM); non-committal to political brand (NPB); match-up of voter & candidate (MVC), promise of hope (POH); voter's resistance to change (RTC)

1. BRANDING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1.1. To which group of voters did you direct your campaign? Why?

As a major political party, with extensive following, we had multiple target audiences in the last election campaign – registered party voters (**RPV**), undecided voters (**UCV**) and youth voters (**YCV**), and working middle class (**WMC**).

Why? Well...we have all the numbers in these groups of voters (**SVP**)...our party's registered voters represent a big population with long-running interest (**PVI**), the undecided no less than 13% (**UCV**), the youth age group should be around 15% of total voting population (**YCV**), and the working middle class could be around 70% of total voting base (**WMC**)...we had the based covered...we communicated to them we are a party out to help (**HTP**)

How sure are you that you had directed your campaign to the correct audiences?

Based on our experience...we have not failed on this...because the voting structure has not materially changed...and the issues appeared similar except for some increased voter's militancy...we have proven delivery record that leveraged in the campaign trail.

Did it produce your desired result?

Yes and No. Yes, because many of our candidates; but no, because we suffered some erosion in our political representation...a meltdown in a number of political areas.

1.2. What types of media have you given more emphasis?

I orchestrated the adoption of an integrated marketing communications (IMC), with traditional media anchored on newspaper and TV...the online communication platform was founded on social media...we also used mobile ads. I think we adopted a robust cross-media strategy that afforded us reach, impact, and intensity of recall at optimal and cost-effective provisions. We had banner and Google ads, we used Facebook and Twitter, and of course, word-of-mouth referrals.

1.3. What advertising channels did your use to promote your candidates and get your message across the target audiences?

Our public communication strategy... you know was predicated on TV, newspaper, social media, portable gadgets (mobile, smartphone, tablet, PC & notebook) and

online marketing channels...these channels made up our **messaging and political branding platform** in the last elections. We go on personal referrals also.

You mentioned political branding...but you suffered political erosion...how would you explain it?

I think the **channel and content strategies** generally served our purpose, **despite some political erosion**...which is something beyond my control because the cause appears to be linked with the party's past performance...the fact that many of our candidates won, despite what seemed to be extensive public withdrawal from major political institutions, confirmed the **vibrant and energizing role of communication** behind our campaign.

Did you in anyway anticipate the political erosion?

We anticipated **there would be abstention**, but we did not anticipate it would be beyond 30% of the voting population, and that we would be impacted...it's something that does not speak well of the situation and of **people's sentiment**...it's something the government, winning parties and candidates must address.

1.4 Polls has always been a proven recipe for parties to measure the influence on voters and provide some possible indications as to how candidates' are rated during pre-elections. However, sometimes it is not reliable. Did you personally use this method as a communicator?

Yes, I ran two (2) polls to sense the voter's behavior toward the party. Phased 30 and 15 days before the elections, none of the poll results indicated adverse impact about the party or its candidates. We were satisfied with the poll results. Based on the election results, there could have been changes in the voter's mind over less than two weeks before the elections.

1.5 How would you compare your poll results / forecast / projected results with the actual results of the election with respect to your party's performance? Please explain any variance in results.

I am not at liberty to divulge the details, but the results were not fully in accordance with what we expected. Actual election results fell somewhat significantly short of the poll results. I suspect it was because of the ambivalence, withdrawal, and militancy of the undecided and youth voters...you could add the volatility of their voting decisions, the last-minute changes due to peer pressure...could be a lot more

1.6 How would you describe the importance of communication in the development and adoption of election strategies? Please check / cross your assessment from the answers provided below:

- **Very Important** XXX
- **Important**
- **Somewhat Important**
- **Not Important**
- **Do not Know**

1.7 Would you say your communication strategy was effective based on the comparative results? Why?

As I earlier said, it is yes and no. Yes, because the campaign was able to put in place many of the party's candidates; No, because we suffered political erosion in the magnitude we never experienced before...for a cause, I am not in a position to control or arrest because of what appeared to be a large-scale negative public perception bordering on loss of trust. You build trust over time...and so it is really something to address.

1.8. What new developments or conditions in the national scene affected your work and your technique as a communicator, for example financial crisis?

Well...I think the economic hardship that hit the country built **negative assumptions, beliefs, and feelings among the people** of Cyprus that it was all the **fault of the government and politicians**. This general negative posture made it a lot more **difficult for us to communicate** and let people understand that the party is out to correct the situation. Also, the economic crisis **regulated party investment** / budget for election campaign. While business-wise the crisis dampens opportunities, it however, led us communicators to be more **circumspect and optimal** in our approach...a new regime that could make **political communication more effective and investment-friendly**.

1.9 How would rate the receptiveness and liking of Cypriot voters in their being engaged in the use of new media like the Internet, social media, mobile, and other new technologies during election campaigns? Please check / cross your assessment three times from the answers provided below:

- Very High XXX
- High
- Medium
- Low
- Do not Know

2. OPINIONS – EXPERIENCES

2.1. What do you think is your role in an election campaign? Did you actually perform this role in the last election? Did the candidates of your party listen to you or follow your advice?

My role was principally advisory, interspersed with heavy strategic analysis. It is also my duty to tell the party and the candidates the truth in every perceivable political situation, including **mistakes in our actions**, no matter how hard or bitter the reality is for the party or candidate. That should be the norm because we have to address every issue...oftentimes as a collegial body.

I have been with the party as communication consultant. I have been at it over the party's peaks and valleys. For this reason, candidates listen to my advice, either

individually or collegially. I would admit, however, there are instances where candidates make representations of their own during their individual campaign sorties...this is where problems crop up...well...because at times what they say contravene party messaging lines. This type of individual campaign posture distracts, and even confuses, target audiences...although there could not have been any conscious intention to undermine party values.

Would you consider this distraction as something serious in your present campaign scenario?

Yes, to some extent. There are a few cases...and what we immediately do is collaborate with the candidates and brief them on campaign protocols and messaging themes and standards. As far as practicable, they should communicate within certain thematic boundaries...Of course, we do not and cannot monitor and manage all their campaign activities, and that's why we have to be vigilant.

2.2. Do you think the online media (social media, mobile applications) have largely replaced the traditional (newspaper, TV, radio), especially during election campaigns?

No, online media has not substituted for traditional media as the prime enabler of political communication or election campaigns. It is true online media could soon overtake traditional media. As of now, however, it's still traditional media over online media. In fact, in all my cross-media or IMC proposal newspaper and TV remains a communication powerhouse, although I never miss making liberal provisions for online, social media, and mobile communications. The effectiveness of IMC or cross-media or multi-media cannot be undermined in **political communication** exercises, or in **political branding**...it's no different in **marketing or promoting brands from a business sense**.

2.3. What characteristics, in your opinion, did the parliamentary elections have?

The last parliamentary election was obviously marked with **extensive voter's abstention** to the tune of more than 30% of the total voting population. This is worrisome for all political stakeholders. You can interpret it as **public indignation, protest, indifference, disinterest, withdrawal, or pressure to effect change**. Relevant analysis indicates the youth's lack of interest to participate, as to what degree that is something for parties to find out...it has to be addressed...some people say the last election was an exercise of abstention.

2.4. Have you participated in other campaigns? If yes, what have you learned from your experience?

Yes, I have been engaged... in presidential and parliamentary elections. What I learned from the last elections is the emerging reality that **voters have become more militant in the exercise of their rights**. They have learned to use the right to vote to express their being aghast with the system. This collective manifestation should send alarm signals to political institutions that voters now demonstrate keen and **watchful eyes on political powers**. For us communicators, this represents more daunting challenges because it **raises the hurdles for political communication and branding** as people become ceases to become trustful to political representations. It

means a lot of hard work and preparation for the party, candidates, and for us – great difficulty in establishing emotional connections.

2.5 What do you think is the ideal length of an election campaign?

The election campaign period is stipulated by law. From a practical standpoint, for parliamentary elections, it should be at least nine (9) months preparation for a party-affiliated candidate. For an individual candidate relying on personal resources and campaign machinery, a minimum of one (1) advance preparation is needed.

2.6. Based on your experience, would major political party affiliation be an advantage for candidates, especially in the access for campaign funds, organizational structure, communication strategy, and operational systems? If yes, in what ways then could major political party affiliation be a political liability or risk?

Yes, to a great extent it is an advantage...from whatever angle. Individual candidates are **always at a disadvantage** against an opponent affiliated with a political party. Even assuming that an individual candidate has plenty of money to spend for an election campaign, the **built-in superiority of party machinery, collective logistics, broad network, and other political assets** would always tend to marginalize individual sustainability during elections. The only exception is when the major-party affiliated candidate or the party itself **happens to have betrayed public trust** during incumbency or in recent developments...in which, case voters will go for the individual candidate or the underdog.

2.7. How did you strategise the general framework of your political communication and branding for the party and for the candidates?

For the party it involves basically the communication of party values, what we distinctly stand for and what our track record is... for the candidates it involves amplifying and conveying their credentials, accomplishments, and plans. The framework deals with undertaking background surveys, understanding the superiority of our political candidates, knowing our target audiences including attitudes, lifestyles, and behaviors... identifying the right media mix... segmenting our target audiences, and communicating the message on time, and doing relentless promotions... using integral marketing approach...the idea is to correctly and effectively position both the candidates and the party. We check interim results through polls.

---- END OF INTERVIEW /QUESTIONNAIRE ----

Appendix 2-B

POST-ELECTION RESEARCH Communication Consultant #2 -- DIKO Interview Transcript

Coding Highlights:

16. Target Voters: registered party voters (RPV); young Cyprus voter (YCV); undecided Cyprus voters (UCV); working/middle-class (WMC); jobless Cyprus voter (JCV); Mid-life voters (MLV)

17. Reason for Target Voter Selection: past voter's interest (PVI); size of voting population (SVP); helping the people (HTP); demonstrated political maturity (DPM); non-committal to political brand (NPB); match-up of voter & candidate (MVC), promise of hope (POH); voter's resistance to change (RTC)

1. BRANDING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1.1. To which group of voters did you direct your campaign? Why?

Well...it's the party we were engaged in that directed the campaign. I was tasked to by a major political party to handle the election communication program for the undecided group of voters (**UCV**), which represents at least 10% of the voting population, and the youth group (**YCV**), which totals about 15% of the voter's population. From here, you could see that the size of the voting population (**SVP**) appeared to be the primary consideration...in giving special importance. The party deemed the groups could be the swing votes...another thing was that the groups would be a lot easier to convince on the values the party stood for because they generally were non-committal to any political brand (**NBP**)... and they were receptive to change and new ideas, which the party tried to communicate to the electorates...**change was a key issue** in the last election due to serious issues fueling the **loss of trust** in institutions.

There's another communicator from our group handling the registered members of the party (**RPV**), who the party must keep intact because they represented sure voters for the party's candidates...their interest in party values and activities remained high (**PVI**)

1.2. What types of media have you given more emphasis?

We adopted an integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy because the IMC approach is proven and tested. We have a very strong IMC team composed of our communicators and internal bright boys...we rely on them. I would say we had an optimal media mix strategy that included: (1) reasonable TV exposure for impact and visibility; (2) medium newspaper ad insertion; and (3) heavy online and social media advertisements such as FB and Google, including mobile campaign especially to the youth sector. We bombarded the Web with messaging, including selective direct email, to generate incremental reach and impact to the undecided.

1.3. What advertising channels did your use to promote your candidates and get your message across the target audiences?

As I earlier stated, we leveraged the use of IMC approach to promote our party's candidates to the voters. The ad preferences, based on our terms of engagement included TV, newspaper, social media (Facebook), mobile, and online (direct email and banner ads). Personal referrals also supported our campaigns. We had very limited outdoor ads...very selective, not high-profile.

1.4. Polls has always been a proven recipe for parties to measure the influence on voters and provide some possible indications as to how candidates' are rated during pre-elections, although polls sometimes it is not reliable. Did

you personally use this method as a communicator? If yes, how did you find it?

Yes... it's a standard research tool in assessing voter's likely response to the communication stimulus of candidates and the parties they represent...in essence, it provides some sort of index on the voters' likely voting behavior for or against certain candidates.

I had used it thrice in the last elections. I would say the polls I ran gave me clear indications of a **looming voter's abstention** due to **loss of trust in political institutions**. It is exactly the reason why we accorded premium to **consolidating our political bases**, and **focusing on the undecided and the youth** as likely sources of swing votes.

1.5 How would you compare your poll results / forecast / projected results with the actual results of the election with respect to your party's performance? Please explain any variance in results.

As a **mid-sized party**, I think we were not very much adversely impacted by the **people's seeming repudiation of large political parties**. While we might have lost some representation, it was not very much... Overall, I think we could be more or less **1% short of our previous political holding**. I would think though that we were somewhat affected by prevailing loss of trust with political institutions...some people might have thought we are a large political party like **AKEL & DISI**...these parties have **lost a lot of representation** that favoured small and medium-sized parties.

1.6 How would you describe the importance of communication in the development and adoption of election strategies? Please check / cross your assessment from the answers provided below:

- **Very Important** ✓ ✓ ✓
- **Important**
- **Somewhat Important**
- **Not Important**
- **Do not Know**

1.7 Would you say your communication strategy was effective based on the comparative results? Why?

Yes, I think our communication strategy was **very effective**... I think we were able to effectively communicate with our target audiences...the mere fact that we experience **no major erosion in our political representation** represents a good index of our communication strategy effectiveness...results show that we were not dislodged from many of our political bases, having in fact won new ones.

Overall, it was effective, but we remain wary that whatever is the negative perception against political parties, **it is not unlikely that we might be perceived in cahoots with political parties**. Under worse scenario, this operational risk (e.g. voter's mistrust and withdrawal syndrome) could in reality impact our **credibility and our capacity to communicate**.

1.8. What new developments or conditions in the national scene affected your work and your technique as a communicator, for example financial crisis?

As expected, due to the impact of the economic crisis, a **much lower campaign budget** than the previous election downgraded the extent and mobility of our 2016 campaign, as compared to the previous elections... Well, from the positive side of it, the 2016 exercises strengthened our skills in running **optimal media communication strategy**, especially from an **integrated marketing communication (IMC)** perspective. The **power of social media** has become even more pronounced.

1.9 How would rate the receptiveness and liking of Cypriot voters in their being engaged in the use of new media like the Internet, social media, mobile, and other new technologies during election campaigns? Please check / cross your assessment three times from the answers provided below:

- **Very High** ✓ ✓ ✓
- **High**
- **Medium**
- **Low**
- **Do not Know**

2. OPINIONS – EXPERIENCES

2.1. What do you think is your role in an election campaign? Did you actually perform this role in the last election? Did the candidates of your party listen to you or follow your advice?

Our role relates to our being communication consultants to the party, tasked to **sense, analyse, and respond** to the voter's needs, wants, and preferences in a manner that **connects to emotions** and **leads to action** in favor of the party. My assignment covers the undecided and the youth sectors, so I had to identify their peculiarities and communicate the party's values in alignment with these voter's attributes...after the alignment, I then craft the **communication strategy** and **guide its implementation** over the campaign period...it's generally the party that manages the campaign, we are in the advisory side.

Yes, I did perform my role of communicator in its complete context. I am delighted the party's candidates **heeded to my advices and strategic leads**. Had they turned down my advisory representation, I would think our performance could have been bad like the large parties... **we were able to read correctly the voters' minds and found way to communicate with them well**.

2.2. Do you think the online media (social media, mobile applications) have largely replaced the traditional (newspaper, TV, radio), especially during election campaigns?

I think **online media has not actually replaced traditional media**, especially for election campaign purposes. Online media use is growing, but it has not overtaken the usefulness of traditional media in terms of impact and effectiveness. For example, I proposed the use of TV and newspaper in the last elections, although we had heavy exposure in online and social media. Though much more expensive, **TV remains the most powerful medium in public communication**...what we did was to **run social media** relentlessly, while having **optimally-phased TV campaign** strategy.

2.3. What characteristics, in your opinion, did the parliamentary elections have?

Based on what I had sense and observed from the results of the last parliamentary elections, we can draw varying conclusions that **reflect a common disenchantment** among voters on what is happening in the country. The **high rate of voters' abstention** in the last elections, more than 30% of the voting population, indicates **people's indifference** or even **protest action** against political institutions in general and their candidates in particular.

The abstention could be interpreted as a sign that **political parties failed to communicate effectively** with their target audiences, because of observed erosions of the political bases of major parties. However, I disagree with this view because we were aware of the issues, and we did our best, but it was simply beyond our complete control. Generally, I would think the last elections highlighted **loss of people's trust and interest in political exercises** and the system and in the personalities they represent.

2.4. Have you participated in other campaigns? If yes, what have you learned from your experience?

Yes, I have participated in other campaigns, both parliamentary and presidential election consulting engagements. I would consider myself as well-experienced in the field and can manifest indicative observations.

One illuminating insight I had in the last election...well, while voters may be a lot **more difficult to convince** nowadays because they are a **lot more inquisitive and rebellious** in the exercise of their rights, results indicated they can change their opinions a number of times with regard to who they would actually vote...I think this propensity to change could be a function of the **dramatically growing power of online media**, especially social media, that provide quick and descriptive updates on each candidate's political behaviours and representations. The youth sector, especially, are **closely updated on media dynamics** with regard to every conceivable national issue...this is why communication strategy should be **highly discerning and dynamic in messaging development**...which pulls practitioner back to correct media channels.

2.5. What do you think is the ideal length of an election campaign?

It depends on the type of election being addressed. For a party-supported election campaign it is significantly shorter in duration...for parliamentary, it's around nine (9) months and for presidential, it's about one (1) year. For an individual candidate, running and campaigning on own personal resources and structure, it could be a year for parliamentary, and about two (2) years for presidential. The **nerve center** on all types of election campaign is the strength and reach of the **communication backbone of the campaign**... without it or the lack of it, it is very difficult.

As you will note...**the effectiveness of the election campaign is not determined by the length of time provided by law**, but by the quality of communication which the parties and candidates have invested in the campaign...**time does not communicate, but people and media channels do.**

2.6. Based on your experience, would major political party affiliation be an advantage for candidates, especially in the access for campaign funds, organizational structure, communication strategy, and operational systems? If yes, in what ways then could major political party affiliation be a political liability or risk?

Yes, definitely. Major political party affiliation is an advantage for any candidate. In the election campaign circle, many people consider candidates with major party political affiliation have **greater chances of winning**, some people say those candidates are **50%-60% sure of winning**...it may be an exaggeration but it happens because of added advantages in mobilization of funds, more systematic campaign roll-out, much more guided campaign messaging and communication, and systematic conduct of operations.

Major political party affiliation could be a threat or liability **if that party is saddled with serious adverse issues**, like corruption or any betrayal of public interest or trust, **perceived by the people** as the key causes of their ongoing sufferings...that party becomes very **vulnerable to voter's repudiation**... a good candidate who happens to be a member of that party unnecessarily suffers.

2.7. How did you strategize the general framework of your political communication and branding for the party and for the candidates?

I think it is generally similar for the party and its candidates...it is one and the same communication exercise. In both cases, they are taken together in overlaps. It goes with knowing who we are, who the voters are, and their psyches and wishes, **establishing what to tell who in different groups**, and **how do to reach them**, and then determining the **types of media** to communicate with them...We follow system-based procedures and we look at it with a lot of business sense...meaning we evaluate the payoffs from our campaign investments...it involves spending with well-calculated results, and I hope we are right in our estimation. Well...of course...before all these moves we undertake surveys to sense the public pulse about us, our candidates, and our political adversaries.....You know, it is like **promoting and selling** a product or brand...you build the value of the brand so that it can be accepted as a preferred choice. We **check back** the effectiveness of our branding initiatives, including our adversaries...It was a taxing campaign.

Appendix 2-C

Interview Transcript Communication Consultant #3 -- DISY

Coding Highlights:

18. Target Voters: registered party voters (RPV); young Cyprus voter (YCV); undecided Cyprus voters (UCV); working/middle-class (WMC); jobless Cyprus voter (JCV); Mid-life voters (MLV)

19. Reason for Target Voter Selection: past voter's interest (PVI); size of voting population (SVP); helping the people (HTP); demonstrated political maturity (DPM); non-committal to political brand (NPB); match-up of voter & candidate (MVC), promise of hope (POH); voter's resistance to change (RTC)

1. BRANDING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1.1. To which group of voters did you direct your campaign? Why?

Our campaign thrust covered the working middle class (**WMC**), representing three-fourths of the national population...it should be around 900,000 voters (**SVP**)...which population included the 30-50 years age group, which is the most politically-minded and mature voters (**DPM**). Our campaign also reached registered party voters (**RPV**). Our party maintains high following on this...because we are a large political party. We are rich in mid-life electorates who generally have politically savvy (**MLV**). As you will note, these target audiences brings forth population size, previous participation, and fairly mature political disposition, which are all contributory to political power...what more can you ask? (**RPV, PVI, & DPM**)

1.2. What types of media have you given more emphasis?

In the last parliamentary elections, we relied on a mix of traditional and online media channels. For traditional, we used newspaper, TV, referral, and outdoor; while for online, we used social media, email, FB, Twitter, Google, and online and banner ads; on wireless media, we leveraged mobile and smartphone messaging. I would think with this major multi-media approach under an integrated marketing communications (IMC) set-up, we achieved reach, audience engagement, impact, and cost-effectiveness.

1.3. What advertising channels did your use to promote your candidates and get your message across the target audiences?

Newspaper and TV provided the central promotion power for our candidates, which **traditional media duality** was heavily supported by **relentless social media insertions** and online promotional thrust, including mobile and access to portable gadgets. There was so much synergy in our IMC political communication strategy; it exuded good balance, alignment, and timing, which converged with **good content context** – a **good political branding** as I view it.

1.4. Polls has always been a proven recipe for parties to measure the influence on voters and provide some possible indications as to how candidates are rated during pre-elections. However, sometimes it is not reliable. Did you personally use this method as a communicator?

I am a firm believer in polls. Over my years of experience in it, I have witnessed the value of conducting a series of polls in being able to read more reliably the voter's mind. In the last parliamentary elections, I spearheaded the conduct of **five (5) well-phased polls before the election**. We got **good insights** from these exercises, including adverse comments **linking the party to serious and sensitive issues**. I think through the polls we were able to **mitigate the foreseeable institutional damage** on us because it gave us **fresh indicative updates** about our targets.

1.5 How would you compare your poll results / forecast / projected results with the actual results of the election with respect to your party's performance? Please explain any variance in results.

While we are glad because we are the winner in the elections for having garnered the **highest share of the vote at about 31% of the votes cast**. This winning was reflected in our last two polls before the election. Our polls, however, did not show that our representation would be losing by more than 1% – actual election results indicated we lost 3.7%, although AKEL lost much bigger with 7.1% drop.

Despite your political erosion, you said you won and had the highest share of votes cast? What do you think were the top reasons for this?

Well...by quick reflection...I would think the party machinery, resources, network, and election campaign experience were the main reasons...I am inclined to believe we communicated well the values of our party and our candidates...and the messages got across. We are a major party...we all know we do not sit well with the electorate... but still we did thrive...you can be perfectly sure it was cutting-edge communication...we managed to maintain emotional connection with the public. I think we succeeded promoting and differentiating our party and our candidates...our brands as we are fond of calling.

1.6 How would you describe the importance of communication in the development and adoption of election strategies? Please check / cross your assessment from the answers provided below:

- **Very Important XXX**
- **Important**
- **Somewhat Important**

- **Not Important**
- **Do not Know**

1.7 Would you say your communication strategy was effective based on the comparative results? Why?

Yes, as I earlier stated. I think we were able to communicate with our audiences in the best possible manner. In a **strong whirlpool of voter's discontent**, which we sensed beforehand, but **failed to read its gravity**, our communication strategy proved effective as it sent us to a ruling position in the legislative chamber, while containing our loss much lower than AKEL. We were **catapulted to the top by our political agenda**, more particularly by our **communication strategy and political branding at the party and candidate levels**.

1.8. What new developments or conditions in the national scene affected your work and your technique as a communicator, for example financial crisis?

Clearly, the new impinging issue for us as communicators, in my honest opinion, is the **radical change in the voter's behavior and mindset**. As I see it, the voters, especially the youth and the undecided, appear to have become hostile and dissatisfied electorates. For us, it means back to the study table and review room. We have to rethink our communication approaches as we struggle to overturn serious loss of people's trust and confidence in the government.

As a winning political institution, do you think you could overturn the radicalism in voter's attitude, and influence more active political participation, which is a common concern?

Of course, we will... I think we can still consider that we were not generally repudiated by the electorates. We need to respond to them very positively by high performance...and that we need to communicate to our constituents even if the elections are over...it's continuing engagement with the public.

Oh, that's perfect in consideration of the present negative public perception.

Yeah, it really is great.

1.9 How would rate the receptiveness and liking of Cypriot voters in their being engaged in the use of new media like the Internet, social media, mobile, and other new technologies during election campaigns? Please check / cross your assessment three times from the answers provided below:

- **Very High XXX**
- **High**
- **Medium**
- **Low**
- **Do not Know**

2. OPINIONS – EXPERIENCES

2.1. What do you think is your role in an election campaign? Did you actually perform this role in the last election? Did the candidates of your party listen to you or follow your advice?

As communicator to the party, I perform **consultative role**...that's why we are alternatively called communication consultants. We **analyse political situations, voter's behavior** and attributes, we evaluate **competitive election agendas**, and we **recommend aggressive and defensive election strategies**. Overall, my function hinges on **political communication, branding, packaging, and positioning**. In essence, I am a political marketer and brand manager...I leverage my communication expertise...and my products are party agendas and political personalities.

My track record and communication credentials stand out...it's known across the party...and even in the last election, there's no way the candidates could have thrashed my advices or recommendations. I think I have the professional ascendancy to influence candidates to follow my election campaign leads.

Were there no instances that candidates make representations contrary to the party or your advice?

Oh, sorry. Yes, it's a little problem...there are some incidents of that kind of non-compliant responses to electorate's stimulus. It's a problem because it sends erroneous or different signals as to who we are as a party and who the candidate is as a people's representative. The non-compliant candidate's message or view disorients the audience and cuts off messaging consistency. In the marketing world, it is the anti-thesis of branding effectiveness. Well...it may be difficult to avoid...but we are exceptionally on the lookout to nip that problem in the bud.

2.2. Do you think the online media (social media, mobile applications) have largely replaced the traditional (newspaper, TV, radio), especially during election campaigns?

I do not think electronic media has replaced traditional media, **the latter still has the upper hand**...perhaps, it could be reversed...but as of now, not yet...the power of traditional media continues, although gradually being chipped off

2.3. What characteristics, in your opinion, did the parliamentary elections have?

It's pathetic that the last election was **stigmatized by large-scale abstention** due to adverse public perception... of corruption and scandals. A **33% abstention rate** is unusually high, which is **highly suggestive of government dysfunction**...and what is sad in the situation is that government problems are **being attributed to major political parties** because they are in power. There appeared the **last minute surge of voters** to participate, although at first they showed signs of disinterest in the elections...this last minute change of heart could have built the **swing votes – it could also be a learning opportunity for us communicators**.

2.4. Have you participated in other campaigns? If yes, what have you learned from your experience?

I have handled communication consulting engagements for both presidential and parliamentary elections, including the last one in May 2016. What have I learned in the last elections...I think it concerns the **fluidity of the voting mindset** that electorates have now. I mentioned about the last minute surge of voters...this explains what I refer to...**voter's choice can now change much more easily**. Every political party or every candidate needs to exercise vigilance and patience in sensing the dynamics of the voter's mind...it is also a challenge to us communicators. Political communication in Cyprus seems to have transitioned to a more complex case for professionals like us.

2.5. What do you think is the ideal length of an election campaign?

For parliamentary, many say it should be between nine months to one year, and for presidential it should be a lot longer. However, I view it differently. After all, the law has something to say on the duration of the election campaign. I do not think there is any hard-and-fast rule on this. There is **no substitute for preparation** and a potential candidate should take advantage of every opportunity to connect with voter – even if it is long before the official campaign period. **Personal engagement**, personal connection, or **personal friendship with the electorate** is not hard to come by, and can be done without transgressing any election law.

2.6. Based on your experience, would major political party affiliation be an advantage for candidates, especially in the access for campaign funds, organizational structure, communication strategy, and operational systems? If yes, in what ways then could major political party affiliation be a political liability or risk?

It's a no-brainer. Political party affiliation has a **lot more advantages**, and least disadvantages. In all aspects, a party-supported candidate has all what it takes to win, while an individual non-party supported candidate has a lot to struggle for. **The advantages descend -- from major to medium to small party affiliation**. The size of the party is material to the extent of available funding, structure, systems, and strategies. The only drawback here is when a party espouses **values contrary to what the people aspire or look for**...and equally difficult...if the party is burdened by a **checkered or decadent past governance record or performance**.

2.7. How did you strategise the general framework of your political communication and branding for the party and for the candidates?

We adopt the common pattern of brand-building and promotion in business and marketing, which calls for identifying our brand strengths and knowing the needs of different target audiences through segmentation and research, developing the message, determining the media strategy, communicating the message, and changing the message when necessary especially when it appears it does not decisively connect. Well...you know we have an ongoing system that enables us to track everything. These activities are preceded by series of market surveys, message tests, and positioning exercises... It's always tough, but it pays off all the time...we have to practice the discipline and the regimen...it is integrated marketing and power brand-building supporting a well-defined political communication agenda. Added to this discipline, is assessing competition and implementing monitoring and control. We are reliant on our IMC approach, and we see some alignment with our internal

counterparts who can help us implement the approach...they have some good experience.

---- END OF INTERVIEW /QUESTIONNAIRE --

Appendix 2-D

Interview Transcript Communication Consultant #4 -- EDEK

Coding Highlights:

4. **Target Voters: registered party voters (RPV); young Cyprus voter (YCV); undecided Cyprus voters (UCV); working/middle-class (WMC); jobless Cyprus voter (JCV); Mid-life voters (MLV)**

5. **Reason for Target Voter Selection: past voter's interest (PVI); size of voting population (SVP); helping the people (HTP); demonstrated political maturity (DPM); non-committal to political brand (NPB); match-up of voter & candidate (MVC), promise of hope (POH); voter's resistance to change (RTC)**

1. BRANDING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1.1. To which group of voters did you direct your campaign? Why?

I was tasked to direct our communication campaign to young people, unemployed voters, and the undecided voters. The young, 15-24 years, are pliant minds without much bias with the world...they are fairly convenient to engage with and they represent 15% of the voting population. The undecided electorates do not have specific party or candidate affiliation, so it is less complicated to connect with them, although to some extent their being non-committal would be something to really look at...their underlying reasons had to be studied and theorized on. We also had to ascertain the marginalized sector for the sense of hope that we needed to communicate to them. **YCV, UCV, & JCV; NPB & POH**

1.2. What types of media have you given more emphasis?

We depended on IMC strategy that combined traditional and electronic or new media. It was an approach designed to reach all corners of the election marketplace; in other words, to connect effectively to our audiences. Depth, breadth, clarity, impact, and economy were the main portals of our IMC strategy.

1.3. What advertising channels did you use to promote your candidates and get your message across the target audiences?

TV on a limited basis, newspaper, social media, online ads, email, banner, FB, Google, Twitter, and mobile communication provided impetus to our communication campaign toward our desired audiences. We used heavy word-of-mouth messaging.

1.4. Polls has always been a proven recipe for parties to measure the influence on voters and provide some possible indications as to how candidates are rated during pre-elections. However, sometimes it is not reliable. Did you personally use this method as a communicator?

No. I did not conduct any in the last elections because we were trying to maximize the utility of our campaign funds for greater reach and higher frequency. I was under pressure to stretch the usefulness of our resources and launch a viable and sustainable election campaign.

1.5 How would you compare your poll results / forecast / projected results with the actual results of the election with respect to your party's performance? Please explain any variance in results.

We did not have any poll, so there was nothing to compare on. However, we made some party projections before the elections. The results of these projections did not jibe with our party's performance results. We **underestimated the emerging feelings about the voters** as observed from the ranks of political parties. There was common observation that **people appeared to be detached**, they seemed to have lost interest in the political exercise. We lost political grounds as a result, but we never expected that because **we are not a big political party**, which was the key cause of voters' withdrawal. In short, our expectation differed much from what we got since we were hit also by adverse public perception.

1.6 How would you describe the importance of communication in the development and adoption of election strategies? Please check / cross your assessment from the answers provided below:

- **Very Important** XXX
- **Important**
- **Somewhat Important**
- **Not Important**
- **Do not Know**

1.7 Would you say your communication strategy was effective based on the comparative results? Why?

Generally, yes it was effective. We had the right content and right media channels. We had elected candidates. I think we were able to connect somehow although it did not end with our party being the ruling party. I said generally because we lost some political grounds to around 2.8%; but it was much better than what AKEL and DISI lost – respectively it was 7.1% and 3.7%

1.8. What new developments or conditions in the national scene affected your work and your technique as a communicator, for example financial crisis?

Well, everything appeared to be normal in the last elections, except for the high rate of voters' abstention, which ironically sent signals of an abnormal situation. What could you conclude from abstention – lack of people's trust, dismay, don't care attitude, withdrawal behavior. But, why? That question was what bothered us because to decipher it needed time and resources, which were difficult to manage on account of the economic crisis, restricted election campaign budget, and other competing priorities brought about by hard socio-economic situation. I think those factors affected our mobility and maneuverability in the last elections to address the anticipated voter's withdrawal. I think it was also part of the **revolutionary new media in instantaneously informing the people**, there was always quick and decisive reaction.

1.9 How would rate the receptiveness and liking of Cypriot voters in their being engaged in the use of new media like the Internet, social media, mobile, and other new technologies during election campaigns? Please check / cross your assessment three times from the answers provided below:

- **Very High XXX**
- **High**
- **Medium**
- **Low**
- **Do not Know**

2. OPINIONS – EXPERIENCES

2.1. What do you think is your role in an election campaign? Did you actually perform this role in the last election? Did the candidates of your party listen to you or follow your advice?

My role as consultant was to craft the political communication strategies of the party, in conjunction with the branding and positioning of their candidates in the last parliamentary elections. One source of fulfillment in my job was the respect I got from candidates as they heeded my advice. While I perform in my individual professional capacity, we agreed on election campaign strategies and activities as a solid team -- charting party and individual branding moves based on my recommendation. There are few instances, however, where candidates have made representations not totally in keeping with party stand. It happens, but not something serious.

2.2. Do you think the online media (social media, mobile applications) have largely replaced the traditional (newspaper, TV, radio), especially during election campaigns?

Electronic media have not overtaken traditional media. In the last election it was evident TV and newspaper channels were extensively used as main messaging vehicles, supported broadly by social media and online ad campaigns.

2.3. What characteristics, in your opinion, did the parliamentary elections have?

The last parliamentary elections were a **great challenge to the political maturity** of the electorates because the elections represented a crucible of critical issues that impinged on the **psyche, logic, and common sense** of the people. The elections were a political exercise where the people pursued greater freedom of choice in their political decisions – young and undecided – due to frustration and anger. The winners need to abide by the people’s aspirations for positive changes in society.

2.4. Have you participated in other campaigns? If yes, what have you learned from your experience?

Yes, I have participated in other election campaigns, presidential and parliamentary. These engagements afforded me the ability to pierce through and understand the voter’s psyche, and from there develop content strategy and the media mix by which the party could communicate and connect with the voters. It’s an integral exercise intended to build and sustain political brands.

2.5. What do you think is the ideal length of an election campaign?

Generally, it is between 8 to 12 months for parliamentary candidates. The lower estimate relates to a party-affiliated candidate, while the higher estimate refers to individual candidates without party affiliation.

2.6. Based on your experience, would major political party affiliation be an advantage for candidates, especially in the access for campaign funds, organizational structure, communication strategy, and operational systems? If yes, in what ways then could major political party affiliation be a political liability or risk?

Of course, major political party affiliation is a great advantage because of the adequacy in funding, network, and systematic mobilization. But such affiliation has also some drawbacks especially when the majority of the electorates go for certain issues contrary to the stand of the major political party. Another drawback is when a major political party is perceived as the culprit for past and present ills a country, region, city, or area suffers. Under any of these adverse scenarios, one may be tempted to conclude it is better to be affiliated with small or medium-sized party, or even run as an independent candidate.

2.7. How did you strategise the general framework of your political communication and branding for the party and for the candidates?

It is fundamentally brand management, advertising, and promotional strategy...no more, no less. It relates to the usual product-market scope strategising. We have and we know our products, our party and our candidates...but we have to discover if we have markets for them, which are the electorates. We research, survey, and analyse our markets, we study how to reach them with right message, we determine the right ways of communicating with them through our media channel, and we test the feasibility of the whole communication and branding strategy. We figure out the systems and logistics, and then we implement branding built on our party and candidates’ strengths. At party and candidates level, we crow about our strengths in a highly intense marketing and promotional approach.

---- **END OF INTERVIEW /QUESTIONNAIRE –**

**Interview Transcript
Communication Consultant #5 -- SYMMAHIA POLITON**

Coding Highlights:

6. **Target Voters: registered party voters (RPV); young Cyprus voter (YCV); undecided Cyprus voters (UCV); working/middle-class (WMC); jobless Cyprus voter (JCV); Mid-life voters (MLV)**

7. **Reason for Target Voter Selection: past voter's interest (PVI); size of voting population (SVP); helping the people (HTP); demonstrated political maturity (DPM); non-committal to political brand (NPB); match-up of voter & candidate (MVC), promise of hope (POH); voter's resistance to change (RTC)**

1. BRANDING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

1.1. To which group of voters did you direct your campaign? Why?

We directed our election communication campaign to the young people, the unemployed, and the undecided... simply because **they have the numbers and legitimate concerns** we could easily identify the party with. Also, they were not aligned or committed to any political brand, group, or cause. Hence, we communicated our values intended to connect to them. We wanted to create the impression and convince them that with us they could look forward to a **regime of hope and change**.
YCV, UCV, & JCV; NPB & POH

1.2. What types of media have you given more emphasis?

We invested in social media which suit our financial capacity and small campaign budgets. TV, while effective in impact building, is very expensive, so we decided to keep a low profile on this; although we were in newspaper. With social media we achieved **speed and broader reach at the least cost**. Social media enabled us also to **reach our desired and target audiences** in the ranks of the young, undecided, and jobless voters. By the way, we also had a little of newspaper exposure for our campaign.

1.3. What advertising channels did your use to promote your candidates and get your message across the target audiences?

We adopted heavy social media particularly Twitter and Facebook...online ads, email, Google, banner ad, and mobile communication messaging, as well as newspaper, to support our election campaign and reach our target audiences with the right content

and the right mix of channels in traditional and online spaces. We also really depended on word-of-mouth communication.

1.4. Polls has always been a proven recipe for parties to measure the influence on voters and provide some possible indications as to how candidates are rated during pre-elections. However, sometimes it is not reliable. Did you personally use this method as a communicator?

No. we did not hold any polls. We recognize that polls might indeed be helpful but the **cost of running** these polls are beyond the party's convenient financial capacity. We are a new party and have yet to build our resources. Also, as you said, sometimes polls are not reliable, which observation is correct and gives us the rationale for not having to **gamble our limited resource in something that would have some doubtful results.**

1.5 How would you compare your poll results / forecast / projected results with the actual results of the election with respect to your party's performance? Please explain any variance in results.

There was nothing to base a comparison on because we did no polls in the last elections. What I could say is that **we were always conservative in our election projections** because we operated on a **shoestring budget.** We could view our results to be reasonably **much over the windows of our expectation** in the midst of intense competition and the brewing voters' withdrawal during the pre-elections.

1.6 How would you describe the importance of communication in the development and adoption of election strategies? Please check / cross your assessment from the answers provided below:

- **Very Important xxx**
- **Important**
- **Somewhat Important**
- **Not Important**
- **Do not Know**

1.7 Would you say your communication strategy was effective based on the comparative results? Why?

Yes, it was for sure very effective. I would assert that we were able to connect with our target audiences. Based on the election results, it is delightful to note that we registered 6% improvement in political representation, while major political parties suffered losses – AKEL at -7%, DISI at -3.7%, EDEK AT -2.8%, and DIKO at -1.3%. You know these are public knowledge and we are proud we were able to nullify the trend, which means the people are with us.

1.8. What new developments or conditions in the national scene affected your work and your technique as ac communicator, for example financial crisis?

The last elections were a political arena where **small parties** had demonstrated they are now a **force to reckon with**, both as a single institution and collectively as a

political bloc. While overall results show that major political parties remain as the ruling bloc, small parties could be a strong neutralizer in the Parliament.

1.9 How would rate the receptiveness and liking of Cypriot voters in their being engaged in the use of new media like the Internet, social media, mobile, and other new technologies during election campaigns? Please check / cross your assessment three times from the answers provided below:

- **Very High xxx**
- **High**
- **Medium**
- **Low**
- **Do not Know**

2. OPINIONS – EXPERIENCES

2.1. What do you think is your role in an election campaign? Did you actually perform this role in the last election? Did the candidates of your party listen to you or follow your advice?

I was a communication consultant in the last elections and my main function was to **develop political communication, representation, and branding strategies** for the party and for the candidates of the party. I would think I was the nerve center of the party's campaign machinery. It was also my function to be a **recommendation generator for all campaign issues**, big or small. Yes, the candidates had to follow my advices because that was a condition I negotiated for before I accepted the job.

2.2. Do you think the online media (social media, mobile applications) have largely replaced the traditional (newspaper, TV, radio), especially during election campaigns?

Personally, I think **social media has outpaced and replaced traditional media as prime communication tool and campaign enabler** if we are to base our evaluation on the results of the last elections. We invested our campaign resources predominantly in social media, with a small portion in traditional format. On the contrary, the major parties were skewed to traditional media especially TV, although they also had social media; but, look at the results, we gained 6%, while all major parties had losses. I think it highlighted that the power of social media...especially when **used to relentlessly toward the desired audiences**. I would think I made correct testimony on the toss-up between the two types of media – although both would have depth, breadth, and impact, economy is better addressed by social media.

2.3. What characteristics, in your opinion, did the parliamentary elections have?

I tend to perceive the last elections not only as a political battle between parties and candidates, but also a battle between traditional media and online media...which one is better than the other. Of course there might not be a conclusive answer especially when the communication strategy is pursued from an IMC perspective. Nonetheless, based on our case of having to launch our campaign on a shoestring budget and on

the imprimatur and bias for social media, it appears that the last election was indeed a battle of media power that underpinned political communication, connection, and branding.

2.4. Have you participated in other campaigns? If yes, what have you learned from your experience?

Yes, in all types of elections. My experience tells me that planning, research, analysis, strategy development, and communication remain the great pillars of an election campaign, with communication predicated on the right audience, right content, and right medium. Persistence, intensity, and quality in messaging form part of a winning communication strategy.

2.5. What do you think is the ideal length of an election campaign?

Many say that it is between **nine months to one year**. I can subscribe to that; but honestly, I do not buy the idea of having an ideal length of time for any pre-election campaign. If a candidate is serious and wants to win, he could start on a personal campaign context much earlier, but the initiative must roll out on quality of thought and quality of decisions. Otherwise, it is useless to start early. A candidate could start late, but the hurdle for perfection becomes higher. We must note that all campaign exercises are parts of a branding discipline that needs planning, research, actions, feedback, and correction before and during the campaign period.

2.6. Based on your experience, would major political party affiliation be an advantage for candidates, especially in the access for campaign funds, organizational structure, communication strategy, and operational systems? If yes, in what ways then could major political party affiliation be a political liability or risk?

The 6% gain in our political representation as a small party during the last elections, to my mind, **appears to deconstruct the myth that major party affiliation is essential for an election win**. In fact, the results also proved that being a major political party, or being affiliated with it, could spell election losses or rejection. When a major party is **identified with adverse perception of corruption** or some other damaging issues, then it becomes **vulnerable to political erosion**.

2.7. How did you strategise the general framework of your political communication and branding for the party and for the candidates?

Our strategic integrated framework are heavily founded on deep knowledge of our candidates; and of course our target audiences – who and where they are, and what they specifically need and want. We do simple, quick, and indicative baseline research to support this initial evaluation. We tailor specific messaging based on different profiles, location, and segments of target audiences. We are heavy also in segmentation... and our messaging to reach these segments is precise, specific, and cutting-edge communication, with strong marketing and promotional context. We are strong believers in the basic notion that elections are won locally by systematic and efficient operations. However, despite messaging variation, we adopt a one central message to convey our party stand and candidates' strengths and values...something that guides voting segments on what our brand personality is. We are very optimal in

our approach...and we monitor and track including competition...understandably, we have to practice high discipline because we are a small party...we have more to lose than gain if we slacken in our actions.

---- END OF INTERVIEW /QUESTIONNAIRE --

