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Cynicism towards Political Marketing and Branding

The Cause of Political Apathy among Young People

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Abstract

- Title:** Cynicism towards Political Marketing and Branding: The Cause of Political Apathy among Young People
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- Keywords:** Marketing and branding, marketing and branding in politics, cynicism, political apathy, young people
- Thesis Purpose:** This study investigates the reason for political apathy among the youth despite the growth of marketing and branding in politics.
- Methodology:** The research has employed a qualitative approach, specifically, in-depth interviews to investigate the phenomenon.
- Theoretical perspective:** The thesis was contextualised in two literature streams, one in which the applicability of marketing and branding was praised, and another in which it was heavily questioned. In order to view the empirical material in a novel light, the concept of consumer cynicism was brought in to explain phenomena of political apathy in relation to political marketing and branding.
- Empirical data:** The empirical data revealed the reasons for the development of cynical attitudes and behaviours regarding political marketing and branding. Moreover, it highlighted the different behaviours engaged in and attitudes formed due to cynicism in political marketing and branding.
- Conclusions:** The research concluded that cynicism towards marketing and branding was indeed playing a role in political apathy among young people due to manipulative intent, the projection of false promises, the attacking of other opponents, the preference for promotion over

policy and the creation of a celebrity persona. Because of this, young people were engaging in cynical behaviours and attitudes related to withdrawal, retribution, precaution, disapproval and subversive cynicism.

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1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the reason for political apathy among young people despite the growth of marketing and branding in politics. The concept of consumer cynicism in relation to political marketing and branding is being used to draw conclusions on the reason for political apathy among young people. The introduction section will introduce the concept of both political marketing and branding and how it has gained momentum over the years, and later on, the problematization section will highlight the increase in political apathy among young people and how that is a puzzling phenomenon despite the growing marketing and branding activities in politics.

1.1 Background

Political marketing first arose in the middle of the twentieth century by taking inspiration from commercial marketing experts for political campaigning (Maarek, 1995). Strömbäck, Mitrook, and Kioussis (2010) state that political marketing has grown so fast that readers can find several definitions of political marketing in various literatures. Many researchers agree that political marketing is the implementation of marketing principles and its applications in politics, however, some scholars see the concept as the evolution of political campaigning whereas others describe the political marketing concept as a distinct form of organizational philosophy (Strömbäck, Mitrook & Kioussis, 2010). Therefore, in order to avoid misunderstandings, the concept of political marketing in this paper is based on the definition from O’Cass (1996), where he describes political marketing as the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of political and electoral programs designed to create, build and maintain beneficial exchange relationships between a party and voters for the purpose of achieving the political marketers’ objectives. That is to say, the aim of using political marketing is to gain support from voters and to win an election campaign. Moreover, in this study, the concept of political branding has also been explored. Political branding has gained interest from marketers and in political marketing. The concept highlights the growing consensus that parties and politicians can usually be conceptualized as brands (Needham & Smith, 2015). Scammell (2015, p.7) mentions the use of branding in politics as:

The beauty of the brand as a concept is that it is broad and inclusive; it brings together the rational and apparently irrational, the hard and soft elements of voter choice, the big dimensions of political reputation and the seemingly trivial details of appearance and tone of voice.

Therefore, it can be said that branding is a subset of marketing, where marketing is an act of promoting, and branding is what is being promoted. This research paper is grounded both in political marketing and branding.

Even though political marketing first arose as a discipline in the middle of twentieth century (Maarek, 1995), it has evidently been used from the earliest days of political activities (Lock & Harris, 2010). Kelley's paper published in 1956 was the first pioneering research paper which started the conversation about marketing practice in politics. Kelley's concept of political marketing was later developed and aided further by Rothschild's work in 1978 (Lock & Harris, 2010). At first, his work focused mainly on the effectiveness of political advertising but later extended to the use of political marketing in social policy and political policymaking (Lock & Harris, 2010). In the last 20 years, political marketing has gotten more attention from a wide range of scholars, starting from a smaller group of researchers who have had an interest in politics, and later growing to a significant area of researchers in modern marketing. The rise in political marketing activities and political marketing applications have resulted in an increased amount of quality researches such as 'Phenomenon of Political Marketing' from O'Shaughnessy and the book, 'Handbook of Political Marketing', from Newman (Lock & Harris, 2010). In the past decade, political marketing has increasingly become involved in policy development, service delivery and the engagement and targeting of citizens and voters in politics (Lock & Harris, 2010). The most visible use of political marketing can be seen in communication during electoral campaigns where the marketers' knowledge of consumer behaviour was used to help develop a long term political strategy and positioning for the parties (Lock & Harris, 2010).

1.2 Problematization and Intended Contribution

1.2.1 Problematization

In more recent years, an empirical phenomenon has been on the rise where there has been an increasing amount of disinterest from young people when it comes to political matters (Dahl, Amnå, Banaji, Landberg, Šerek, Ribeiro, Beilmann, Pavlopoulos & Zani, 2017; Mitchell, Gottfried & Matsa, 2015; Henn & Weinstein, 2006; Dalton, 2016; Beaton, 2016). This phenomenon can be referred to as political apathy, described by Dahl et al. (2017) as the lack of motivation and desire to take an interest in politics. The study conducted by Dahl et al. (2017), showed that young European citizens were expressing distrust towards political institutions in their respective countries, and felt as if they were alienated from the system. To explain the latter more comprehensively, alienation meant the young people thought that they could not impact or affect the actions taken by government (Dahl et al. 2017). Similar findings are shared by Henn and Weinstein (2006), as they found out that young people were under the impression that their votes and engagement in politics failed to create a real change and influence future actions taken by political parties. The study they conducted more explicitly

revealed that in the United Kingdom, around 59% of young adults claimed that they had little to no emotional connection with the political parties in the country, and they also had little confidence in their abilities. Moreover, loyalty rates of 28% were attributed to the fact that they could not identify themselves with any political party (Henn & Weinstein, 2006). The paper by Mitchell, Gottfried and Matsa (2015), also highlights that political interest within millennials (born 1981-1996) is greater than Generation X (born 1961-1981) and Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964). Dalton (2016), studied political engagement in the United States from the years 1967 to 2016, and found out that young people in 2016 were less inclined to vote, or influence others to do so in comparison to earlier years. These findings are corroborated by Beaton (2016), where he reveals that millennial voter turnout rate from the US General Election in 2016 had decreased from the elections in 2008. The youth turnout rate in 2008 was 50% compared to just 41% in 2016. In the past, political engagement among young people was higher than it is today (Henn & Weinstein, 2006). Along with dwindling levels of interest, millennials are also less aware of political news and happenings around the world (Mitchell, Gottfried & Matsa, 2015).

Political apathy is a pertinent issue in today's day and age, and have grave consequences for society. In the 2016 Presidential Elections in the United States, statistics revealed that around 23.7 million young voters between the ages of 18-29 participated in the elections. Out of these 23.7 million young voters, 13 million voted for Hillary Clinton, while the remaining 9 million voted for Donald Trump. The 23.7 million young voters amounted to 50% of the young electorate, which was predicted outcome for the elections (Civic Youth, 2016). The numbers make it quite clear that a majority of young people were in favour of Hillary Clinton (Hendrickson & Galston, 2016), as she conclusively won the young millennial voters with a 55% majority (Mudde, 2018), however, lost the elections as she failed to get an overall majority. More recently, an AP-NORC/MTV Youth Political Pulse poll found out that a great majority of millennials were not exactly keen on the way President Trump was handling his duties in office. There were widespread remarks of him being 'mentally unfit', 'dishonest' and 'racist'. Moreover, a Pew Research Centre study showed that millennials in the US were a lot more open-minded and less conservative than previous generations, and supported immigration, global warming laws, measures to reduce racial inequality, etc., (Mudde, 2018), all of which are the polar opposites of what the current Republican Party in office believes in. This case highlights that it is important for young people to go out and vote, as after the elections, many millennials felt that the wrong party and politician had been subjugated to the White House. Political apathy in this case changed the course of the country for a good few years. If more young people had gone out to vote, it is quite likely that Hillary Clinton could have won the election because of the support she had with the young electorate and the clear fit between their ideologies and stances on political issues.

As mentioned earlier, political marketing and branding has gained momentum over the years. It is a bit puzzling to see that despite all of this growing influence of marketing and branding on politics, political apathy is on the rise among young people. Ideally, marketing and branding should be performing the opposite functions. If we go back to basics of branding, a strong brand with a high brand equity should be the foundation on which customer value is created and

meaningful relationships developed. At the same time, marketing should increase the visibility of the brand, leading to more awareness, recognition and buzz about it, which would contribute in the creation of meaningful relationships with customers. Both activities combined should lead to greater sales, profits and customer loyalty (Kotler & Armstrong, 2015). Keeping this in mind, political apathy symbolises a clear decrease in ‘brand’ loyalty, where political brands and politicians are losing out on voter participation and their votes. With the investments being made by political marketers in marketing and branding their parties and politicians, a rising interest in politics among the youth should be the most likely and favourable scenario. Lock and Harris (1996), also point out that voter and especially youth disillusionment with both parties and politicians is growing markedly, which again presents itself as a paradox with brand marketing. Some suggested reasons of political apathy among the youth in literature are a gap between interest and action (Henn & Weinstein, 2006), not being able to find a party to sympathise and identify oneself with (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison & Anstead, 2014), a failure to provide political education to the youth while they are in school (Oxbury, 2018), an increased and unhealthy obsession with social media and streaming services (Cuskelly, 2017), and being caught up in the daily struggle of life, rendering interest in politics as time consuming and irrelevant (Russo & Stattin, 2016). Because of increasing political apathy among young people and its consequences on society, we believe that further research is needed on the topic than what has already been done. Moreover, the paradox mentioned before also warrants a clearer explanation of why political apathy among young people is still on the rise. There is the possibility of marketing and branding doing the opposite of what is supposed to do which makes this topic interesting to explore. To synthesise, we propose the following research question:

Q. Despite the growth of marketing and branding in politics, why is political apathy growing among young citizens?

1.2.2 Importance and Contribution of the Study

Little & McGivern (2014), exemplify the importance of politics in the everyday lives of people by stating that it plays a pivotal role in giving shape and structure to vital activities undertaken by people. From this angle, the phenomena of political apathy becomes important to research because of the implications it could have on individual lives and society. Political interest is also deemed important for the prosperity of democracy (ESS Round 6, 2012) and global democracy could be at risk if political apathy was to become more widespread. Therefore, in order to preserve the sanctity of the institution of democracy this research is deemed viable and necessary.

The study is likely to make contribution to literature on political apathy from a marketing and branding perspective, something which has not been researched before. The strength of this contribution will be intensified by incorporating the viewpoint of consumer cynicism (will be discussed in the theoretical framework) to study political apathy in a marketing and branding perspective. In the paper by Elshtain (1995; Cappella & Jamieson, 1996), it is revealed that destructive cynicism in politics is undermining democracy and the growing cynicism towards

politics may encourage a spiral of delegitimization. However, there are no studies that explore cynical attitudes towards marketing and branding in politics and what affect that can have on the political systems. Cynicism as a construct may be able to provide interesting and novel insights on political apathy, despite the growth of marketing and branding in politics.

2 Literature Review

The literature review presents previous knowledge within the field of marketing and branding in politics. To begin with, the way in which the concept of marketing and branding has been used in politics thus far is discussed and also the way it relates to politics. That section is later followed by the marketing and branding of politicians, the importance of marketing and branding in politics, and concludes with highlighting the difference between political marketing and traditional marketing. The next section in the literature review showcases the alternative school of thought where scholars believe that marketing and branding applications are not applicable to politics and are possibly deteriorating the political system.

2.1 The Use of Marketing and Branding in Politics

2.1.1 Branding and Marketing in Politics

Branding has been widely used in situations where customer choices are involved such as with goods, services, meals, organizations, retail stores, places, etc., (Keller, 2003). For businesses, branding helps a firm to differentiate and position itself from its competitors, whereas for customers, branding helps in simplifying their choices. In that respect, politics is similar as voters have to choose between politicians, ideal policies and the parties (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Scammell (2015) has explained that the concept of branding has been used in politics for a long time, however, in more recent years, there have been continuous attempts to implement it more analytically. Today, the concept of branding is used to analyze and understand how the image of a party can be affected from the minutest of details (Scammell, 2015). The political product is a complex array of elements coming together to create a 'product'. In the paper by O'Cass (2003) and Lock and Harris (2010), the political product was conceptualised as being a mixture of policy, the leader, the candidate, a service, etc. Individual candidates, local councils, local parties, social organizations and the party all contribute in the upholding the party name and are bundled together as the collective 'product' (Lock & Harris, 2010).

The study from Schneider (2004) has highlighted that both political parties and politicians have brand status. The brand status, in this case, is referred to political parties and politicians that manage to distinguish themselves from others and have a high level of familiarity and clear associations in the voters' minds. A similar mindset is shared by O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg (2007) where they explain that a political brand consists of 3 distinct elements which are the party serving as a brand itself, the politicians behaving as the tangible characteristics

and the party's policies being the service offering. Smith and French (2009) also conceptualize political parties as a brand to consumers. They mention that a brand encompasses a name, a sign, a symbol, and a design or a combination of all. This applies to political parties as well because they are also associated with all those aspects. Overtime voters are able to recall party names out of their memory, for example, Democrats, Labour, Liberals, etc., and at the same time, albeit to a less extent, visually recall symbols associated with those names, for example, the donkey for Democrats. The names and symbols help in building mental associations in one's mind overtime, which eventually aid in deciding who to vote for in the elections (Smith & French, 2009). The importance of a brand name for a political party was stressed by Nielsen and Larsen (2013), where they find out that consumers were more likely to vote for a party if they exhibited a high level of political brand value (PBV). PBV was essentially explained as the desirability or undesirability of a political offering when the brand name or in this instance the party name was attached to it. The development of a political brand also allows the association of functional and emotional attributes to it, which aid in creating a clear positioning and communication on a party's policy (Scammell, 2007). Political brands, in essence, are an intangible asset and could convert to financial value for both party and politician (Scammell, 2015). However, the strengths or importance of a political brand depends on several factors such as the competitive environment where the party is operated in, the reliability and attractiveness of the politicians, and how they keep and fulfil their promises in term of a party's policies (Smith and French, 2009).

Political marketing and the use of news media has been deemed important from the perspective of political marketing decision makers. The result is that both the use of marketing and branding in politics has increased over the years and it has encouraged political parties to take on a more marketing-oriented approach (O'Cass, 2003; Schneider, 2004). This market-oriented approach in politics can be recognized from a party's strategy when they increase their resources on campaigning and when a political party hires political consultants for organizational and planning purposes (Kinsey, 1999).

2.1.2 The Marketing and Branding of Politicians

The marketing of political candidates has established itself as a multimillion-dollar business over the past decade or so. During the 2008 US General Elections, CNN reported that almost 580 million dollars were spent on advertising for both political candidates and parties (Guzmán, Paswan & Steenburg, 2015). The Democratic presidential candidate, Barack Obama, spent a staggering \$310 million on personal advertising, whereas, the Republican candidate, John McCain, spent a slightly lower, but still considerable, \$134 million on his personal advertising. To put this in perspective, the five giant multinational companies, namely, Procter & Gamble, AT&T, General Motors, Verizon, and Pfizer, spent around \$400 million each to promote their products and services (Guzmán, Paswan & Steenburg, 2015). This comparison highlights how massive the political advertising industry is. Political campaigning, in general, has become a very important pricey activity (Harrop, 1990).

The paper by Needham (2006), stresses on the inception of politicians as personal brands. The article discusses how successful leaders are the ones that are able to offer themselves as a personalised brand, where the communication is kept unpretentious, ambitious and consistent, based off a limited number of symbolic policies rather than an in-depth legislative programme. Moreover, these leaders create a separate identity for themselves than the party that they are associated with, and by that, are able to secure repeat purchases in terms of getting elected over the years. The politician in question is usually considered to be the focal point of an election campaign, which makes it essential to establish a clear identity or profile for them (Landtsheer, Vries & Vertessen, 2008; Lock & Harris, 1996). In the paper by Guzman, Paswan, and Steenburg (2015), the conceptualisation of a political candidate as a brand is further solidified, where voters consider political candidates as brands which are separate from the brand of another politician and are also unique from their own self-brand image. Moreover, their study also finds out that voters have a higher propensity to vote for a political candidate where there is a high degree of overlap between a person's own self-image and the political candidates brand image. In other words, voters have a more favourable perception towards a political candidate brand that more closely matches their own personality and values. Guzman and Sierra (2009), go to the extent of concluding that since the image of the political candidate has gained prominence over the years, voters have grounded their choice simplification process within the candidates rather than the parties. In a different light, Harrop (1990), highlights that leaders come and go, which means there is variability in the 'service' that is provided, meaning that it becomes even more imperative for the party to convince voters that they not only provide a good quality service but are also able to maintain it over time. In essence, this also emphasises the importance that is placed on the political leader and how crucial it is to focus on marketing them in an effective manner. Successful politicians have always been able to decipher the significance of creating an image for themselves, sometimes even over policy issues. Labour leader, Michael Foot, did not realise the importance of creating a strong image for himself. Despite him being an exceptional writer, an exemplary social thinker, and a striking public speaker, during his short tenure as the leader of the Labour party, the public's perception of him was far from that, with most describing him as the confused leader in the donkey jacket (Beresford, 1998).

Phipps, Brace-Govan, and Jevons (2010) elaborate on the concept of branding in politics and deem the party brand as the corporate brand, and the politician as a brand of their own. In their paper, they describe how both brands are interlinked with one another. For instance, if the corporate brand was struggling with its image, the political candidate still had a shot at getting elected if they were well liked by their community, or in other words, had successfully created community equity. On the other hand, politicians with poor community equity could potentially weaken the corporate brand, i.e., the party. These findings further highlight the fact that appropriate personal branding for the politician is very crucial. Moreover, if voters did not find the politician brand correlating with their preconceived notions about the party brand, they were more likely to focus on the politician than the party, deeming the corporate brand less relevant. This further signifies the importance of a politician brand that scores well on community equity (Phipps, Brace-Govan & Jevons, 2010).

Furthermore, Needham (2006), places focus on the importance of relationship marketing in politics, where politics is seen shifting focus from being transactional in nature, towards having more emotional based appeals. Relationship marketing in politics could be a useful tool for parties and politicians alike to retain existing supporters and find new ones in time for the next election (Needham, 2006). Dean, Croft, and Pich (2014) reveal that creating a consistent ‘brand story’, which embodies the personal characteristics of the party leader or politician creates a sense of trust, authenticity, and believability amongst the electorate. The authors argue that relationship marketing could help in establishing a consistent brand story. If there is little ideological difference between the parties in a political context and fake news is plaguing the reputation of the political entity, then that warrants the development of a brand story that is emotional in nature, and by doing that, effectively creates differentiation from other parties. The emotional political brand is personalised through the party leader (Dean, Croft & Pich, 2014). Therefore, it can be deduced that the emotional aspect of the brand story is congruent to relationship marketing in politics.

The notion of perception politics, where voters make their decisions on elements such as the language used by the politicians, their appearance and style, and other non-verbal behaviour is brought forward by Landtsheer, Vries and Vertessen (2008). Politicians these days are aware of the fact that voters are basing their decisions on such constructs, and therefore, are actively engaging in perception politics, known as political impression management. Landtsheer, Vries and Vertessen (2008), argue that this political impression management can be considered as a political marketing technique, used by politicians to gain more power and have the electorate in their favour. Political impression management seems to have gained so much popularity and for that reason politics has been conditioned to become impression politics over time. People place greater focus on superficial elements regarding the politician rather than on important issues such as their views on policy (Landtsheer, Vries & Vertessen, 2008). Similarly, Newman (1999) also states that politicians are able to create an image or impression for themselves through visual presentations ranging from the appearance and demeanour of the politician, appearances made on media and television, and their political leadership record. The author contends that this impression management helps in creating a lasting impact over the minds of the citizens. Impression management, charisma and an overall well-rounded personality can aid a politician in achieving short-term goals such as being elected, however, at the end of the day, a politician is truly evaluated through their achievements and failures while in office (Bartels, 2002; Landtsheer, Vries & Vertessen, 2008).

2.1.3 Importance of Marketing and Branding in Politics

According to O’Cass (2003), factors such as the declining support for major political parties, swinging voters, higher costs associated with campaigning expenditures, and a constraint on party finances have all given rise to political marketing. Lock and Harris (1996), corroborated that by affirming that there is empirical evidence available out there to suggest that allegiance to specific parties is declining and voters are susceptible to change their voting preferences, stressing on the importance of two-way communication between the party and the voter.

Traditionally, the political landscape has been rather simple, and some would say that it has existed in an oligopolistic environment with two parties, Liberals and Labour. This has changed today as there are many small political parties competing with the bigger parties (Lock & Harris, 1996).

Reeve, Chernatony, and Carrigan (2006) suggest that the process of voters choosing political parties or politicians is similar to the process of consumers choosing brands. The typical function of branding is to provide information, reduce risks and project an image of prestige (Schneider, 2004). This highlights that political branding is vital when it comes to voting decisions as good political branding should cover all the stated functions mentioned above, provide useful information and project a favourable image to the voters (Schneider, 2004). According to Nielsen (2016), a valuable party brand is vital to grow and maintain support from voters. He further suggests that a strong political brand can have a profound level of influence on the voters' minds. A brand also helps in creating a certain perception of a party in the voters' minds, which is then recalled and interpreted during election time. A strong political brand can also influence voters' assessments on the party, as well as their policies and their standpoints on certain issues (Nielsen, 2016). The brand status inferred on parties and politicians together with the logos, symbols, narratives, and values associated with those brands act as a heuristic device in helping voters simplify their voting choice between different parties, policies and politicians (Dean, Croft & Pich, 2014; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Schneider, 2004). Needham (2006), has also highlighted that brands in politics are used by voters in a similar fashion to brands in the marketplace, highlighting that in both instances, brands help reduce complexity in an environment where there is an abundance of choice and information. Just as choice in the common marketplace has proliferated due to the birth of new brands and the advent of internet shopping, choice in the political world has also increased over the years. In the year 1979, there were 30 political parties standing for the national election in the UK, and that number was quadrupled in 2005, with 130 parties standing for the elections. Moreover, political parties are also disseminating large amounts of information through different mediums and channels, such as their websites and emails. At the same time, they are also getting a great deal of third-party coverage from online news websites, weblogs, message boards, etc., where they are commented on comprehensively. One can argue that all this information present in today's day and age can help a voter make an informed choice, but on the other hand, it also leads to more confusion in decision making (Needham, 2006), thus strengthening the argument for political branding.

Phipps, Brace-Govan, and Jevons (2010) also mention that political brand images play a significant role for voters in selecting which party or candidate they should vote for since the political product is complex and not easy to examine in advance. The political product is part of a complex environment, characterised by an intangible value proposition, where long-term promises or goals are shrouded with doubt and are hard to grasp. For this reason, the political brand helps simplify the voters' decision in order to make sense of the many available options. The political arena today is thus competing on brand images and these images can be very fragile which can be threatened and damaged by scandals and negative news towards the party and its politicians (Scammell, 2015). For this reason, as well, a political brand can be of importance to both party and politicians. Nowadays, a vast majority of people have gone to

universities and acquired higher education, and with the current postmodernity in our society (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998), individuals have also become more individualised in their decision making, which makes party identification important, and warrants the development of a political brand a necessity (Nielsen & Larsen, 2013). Branding in politics along with marketing can help strengthen democracy, making it easier for citizens to get involved in the electoral process but only if focus is placed authenticity (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Smith & French, 2009).

Nielsen and Larsen (2013), state that in practice the focus of political marketing should be on service marketing rather than on product marketing. They explain this using the analogy of a hospital where a surgeon sells his services based on trust, rather on a promotional campaign highlighting the different features of washing powder for instance. When it comes to political offerings, trust is a very integral component, closely woven together with the promise that political parties and politicians vow to deliver. By establishing trust, a political entity, in essence, communicates capability, dependability, and consistency (Harrop, 1990). O’Cass (2003), acknowledges that political parties possess certain characteristics that allow for the transferability of marketing principles from more traditional products, however, marketing in politics can be seen having greater similarities with service marketing logic. Some marketing scholars argue that a valuable brand is more important for organizations dealing with services rather than products, due to the lack of tangibility and the fact that services are almost impossible to evaluate before they are consumed (Berry, 2000; Harrop, 1990). Therefore, in order to communicate this sense of trust in such an environment, a strong political brand, according to Nielsen and Larsen (2013), is important.

2.1.4 Difference Between Political Marketing and Traditional Marketing

Before discussing the literature that critiques the use of marketing and branding concepts in politics, it is worthwhile to note how political marketing is different from traditional marketing. In their popular paper, Lock and Harris (1996), state several reasons how political marketing is different from traditional product marketing. First of all, all voters are required to make their choices the same day, and there seems to be no other purchasing decisions where a large number of people do this. Another way in which voting is different from a regular purchase is that it does not entail the actual purchase of anything in terms of a price. Henneberg (2004), also agrees with the statement stating that the key difference between the two forms of marketing is that in political marketing, nothing is actually being sold. It is also important to note that voters have to deal with the notion of collective choice, even though that might not have been their preference (Lock & Harris, 1996). When purchasing a regular product or service, a consumer is typically able to change their mind, though at a cost, whether they want to keep the product or not or continue with the service. However, voters are unable to do that and have to wait until the next election to alter their choice. Moreover, in the traditional marketplace, there are many brands that come and go with rapid speed, however, in the political sphere of things, the possibility of introducing a new brand or a party is relatively low. Furthermore, in the consumer market, brand leaders such as Coca Cola, Unilever, etc. tend to stay ahead of their competition

at all times, however, this is not the case in party brands, which may leap forward or fall behind their counterparts quite easily in between elections (Lock & Harris, 1996).

Egan (1999), tries to provide a more holistic view of political marketing and does this by counteracting the arguments suggested by Lock and Harris in their 1996 paper as to why political marketing is different from traditional marketing. Some of the counteracting statements stipulated by Egan (1999) are presented next. Most purchases with a hefty price tag are spaced out over a couple of years for most people. He also states that there is a political price that voters pay in terms of national, economic and psychological hope or insecurity (Wring, 1997). Moreover, a voter's predicament is very similar to a consumer buying a rather complex product like a computer. In both cases, 'purchasing' decisions are superficially based on packaging rather on rational cues since practical information is hard to decipher. Furthermore, even in the traditional market, market leaders just like political parties are unable to keep their leading positions over the years. In more recent times, market leaders such as Sainsbury's, IBM, and Ford have slipped down from the topmost positions in their respective industries (Egan, 1999). The counter statements by Egan (1999), show that within literature there are disagreements on how similar or different political marketing is from traditional marketing and whether concepts and theories from traditional marketing have much applicability in the political world.

2.2 The Critique of Using Marketing and Branding in Politics

The literature brought forward on political marketing so far has highlighted the applicability of marketing and branding concepts and theories to politics. However, there is a stream of literature that is more sceptical about the complete transferability of traditional marketing concepts to politics. Political marketing occupies a rather difficult position in literature, and time after time, it has had to defend itself from criticism that traditional marketing practices are not fully applicable in the political arena (Henneberg, 2004). The critique in some instances has been so severe that it has been deemed inappropriate to use marketing concepts to research about politics, claiming that the political marketplace has nothing to do with marketing (Henneberg, 2004). The argument given is that from a theoretical perspective, marketing carries around a very narrow definition of itself, limiting it to exchanges that are governed economically thorough prices (Luck, 1974). Lock and Harris (1996), state that political marketing has to develop its own theoretical framework within the context of traditional marketing, and it is only then when the discipline will be in a position to inform and effect political action. Marketing also places more emphasis on the ideas and interests voters share rather than those on which they conflict. To explain the latter in simpler words, marketers are more concerned with trying to increase the party's 'market' share, whereas political scientists, on the other hand, aim to understand the reasons why a voter votes for one party and not the

other. A political scientist is more concerned with social division rather than numbers (Harrop, 1990; Egan 1999).

The study from Scammell (2015) is similar to Harrop's (1990) as he mentions that implementing marketing and branding in politics does not give an explanation as to why people vote for one party or candidate over another. In practise, political marketing has only made use of marketing partially. Marketing is usually only used to promote the party and the politician and has ignored the ideation process of creating a suitable brand image for both party and politician (Scammell, 1999). Furthermore, Lilleker and Negrine (2003) discuss that even though the usage of marketing tools in politics could help improve the image and communication strategies of political parties, it could also run the risk making all parties look similar to one another which would lessen their appeal to their constituency voters. Butler and Kavanagh (1988), two British political analysts, condemn political marketing in a rather stern manner, stating that the nation's destiny should not depend on four weeks of carefully engineered marketing material, but rather on the judgments and perceptions voters have formed over the past four years running up to election time. The criticism on political marketing has been twofold; on political marketing practice and on research regarding political marketing practice (Henneberg, 2004). From this general discussion, the following sections of the literature review will deepen the understanding of the critique for political marketing and branding by categorising similar literature into themes.

2.2.1 Damaging Democracy

Lock and Harris (1996) are of the opinion that the direct transferability and applicability of marketing practises in the political arena is questionable. Egan (1999) also acknowledged that political marketing does not present itself as a neat fit with the current marketing paradigm. The paper further goes on to say that politicians and political pundits have always found the concept of marketing in politics as uneasy, and some even go to the extent of criticising it as damaging the political process. Sharing the same idea, Scammell (1999) also believes that political marketing could be a threat to democracy and its ideology. Savigny (2007, p.133), takes on a similar stance and comments that marketing has not fully been "adapted to enhance the democratic process", and there is a real possibility of it actually hampering it by depoliticising it. Similarly, Henneberg (2004), highlights that research on political marketing is sometimes condemned because of the belief that political marketing harms the democratic process in political parties. Smith and French (2009), also argue that branding in politics could possibly cause negative effects such as increase confrontation, narrow down the political agenda and lead to an increase in political disinterest at the local level.

2.2.2 The Political Product is More Service-Oriented and Complex

The use of marketing and branding in political campaigns has been on the rise. However, there is doubt among scholars whether the marketing concept which is appropriate for the profit-

seeking sector is suitable for non-commercial markets (Scammell, 1999). As mentioned earlier, political marketing has more in common with service marketing than with traditional marketing. Harrop (1990), contends that a part of the reason why traditional marketing concepts may be problematic in their implication for politics is due to the fact that the domain has more in common with services than traditional physical products. Political products are seen as more complex and intangible in nature. The services offered by political parties are usually harder to comprehend for the average voter (Scammell, 1999). Aaker (1997) assumes a similar position and mentions that branding concepts cannot be fully applied to politics because political parties and politicians are not exactly a product and voters are not comparable to consumers because the market for politics is not a perfect competition (Scammell, 1999). Smith and French (2009), are also in agreement with the rest, as they have been sceptical about the relevance and applicability of political branding in brand management. They make their point by stating that the conceptualization of political entities as brands is not completely correct because politics is different from commercial markets.

2.2.3 Policy Over Promotion

Despite the increase in the promotional activities related to political parties and candidates, Harrop (1990), argues that the true success of a party lies within their overall strategy. A well-rounded strategy helps a party in demonstrating their ability to deal with core issues. If the strategy of the party is poorly formulated, or even worse, does not exist, then promotional activities may not help achieve electoral success (Harrop, 1990). Moreover, marketing as a discipline is different from political science in two main regards. Marketing tends to focus more on the party image than on the party policy. Harrop (1990), discusses the importance of party policy in electoral success. Parties that focus on policy areas that are deemed to be important by the electorate, and also demonstrate the capabilities to handle and deliver on those policies are usually more successful than their counterparts. The critics of political marketing suggest that if less emphasis was placed on marketing, campaigns would become more about debates on issues, essentially what politics should be about (Harrop, 1990). The focus on the party's image has led to the distortion of important political messages by merely reducing them down to plausible phrases and soundbites. When the media strategy adopted by political parties focuses more on the image, there is often a risk of outpacing information on the policy. Political marketing has shifted the focus of politics from content to appearance which has led to the undermining of policy issues (Henneberg, 2004).

Maarek (1995), conceptualises the same notion in a slightly different way. He highlights in his research that using marketing in politics could cause depoliticization of politics when trying to influence voters. Depoliticization of politics is the result of targeting swing voters who are considered to be an important influence on the election outcome. Swing voters are citizens who have less interest in politics but at the same time have the power of changing the political outcome. These voters are generally influenced through the election campaign. The political parties and politicians can trick the swing voters by toning down the political core of their campaign and often offer a more populist policy. Therefore, instead of campaigning on the

serious and unpopular issues they instead focus on citizens' everyday life which is considered more beneficial, ultimately leading to a positive election result for the political parties (Maarek, 1995). Moreover, he also points out that the way in which politicians address the public these days has changed. In order to reach broader audiences including voters, politicians are now making use of marketing techniques where they act more like show-business celebrities, discussing superficial issues such as one's private life affairs instead of policy initiatives. Maarek (1995) also states that political marketing has created excessive personalization. Personalization occurs when the political parties underplay issues and policy but focus more on politicians' personal charisma, their look, and their private lives. Therefore, the personalities of the political candidates become the main voting reason for electors rather than the party's policy and their political agenda. This change in political communication sometimes gives politicians who rely too much on this marketing tactic a backlash because their basic capability and ability as a politician may be questioned by the voters (Maarek, 1995).

Scammell (1999), takes on a slightly different perspective to this, reiterating that some researchers are cynical about political marketing because they are not fully convinced whether it gives rise to genuine politics or stirs up an old version of propaganda with the help of new modern technology. The critics of political marketing also stress that it has given rise to negative marketing in politics, where the sole purpose of campaigns is to personally attack other political opponents on basis of their character, personal relationships, past history, etc., (Maarek, 1995; Henneberg, 2004). Fundamentally speaking, political marketing has driven focus away from pertinent policy issues towards individuals, and unfortunately, character assassinations and insults have worked out to win elections for some (Maarek, 1995; Henneberg, 2004). Henneberg (2004), also argues that since political campaigns are all about empty promises and personal characteristics of the political leader, this results in very little factual information about political issues. This insinuates that political marketing impairs a voter's ability to make an informed decision since a voter requires important factual information on policy issues to do so (Henneberg, 2004). Tse and Wilton (1998), point out that if a political party or politician is unable to deliver on the promises pledged or policy initiatives discussed during the campaign, there is likely to be dissatisfaction among the people. This is likely to jeopardise the success of any future campaigns as dissatisfied brand loyalists will switch preferences to other parties and politicians (Antonides & van Raaij, 1998). To synthesise the discussion, it can be said that political marketing has made voters more impulsive and less rational (Egan, 1999).

2.2.4 Effectiveness of Political Advertising

Another critique presented forward by Harrop (1990), is that paid advertising is not that effective in selling the party to the electorate as there is so much noise in the communication channels in the form of news coverage that the message in the advert could easily get drowned in that. The exposure that political parties and candidates get from the media is very high, suggesting that 'noise' from third party entities is a serious issue affecting political marketing (Lock & Harris, 1996). There is also very little evidence to suggest that political advertising has any effect on the way electorate votes or increases their inclination to vote (Lock & Harris,

1996). D'Souza and Allaway (1995), also affirm that research has certainly overstated the positive link between campaign spend and an election win. A large amount of money spent does not necessarily translate to commercial success for the party (D'Souza & Allaway, 1995). On a slightly different note, Henneberg (2004), boldly condemns political marketing by emphasising how entities with the most money could effectively 'buy out' an election. This could put other suitable and more qualified candidates with less money at a disadvantage (Wray, 1999).

There seems to be a difference in the way in which people perceive advertising messages from a traditional brand and from a party brand. In their paper, Boerman and Kruikemeier (2016), reveal that when voters are aware of paid advertising messages from political parties, party trustworthiness tends to be negatively affected. The reason for this is that voters do not want to be manipulated when making such important decisions and may develop an attitude of resistance towards the party. A typical consumer comes in contact with advertising for consumer brands a lot more often than political advertising, which means that they are familiar with the persuasion tactics they use. Therefore, when they see an ad, they are more aware of the usage of such devices. When it comes to a political party, a typical citizen is unable to recognise promoted messages in the form of advertisements, and therefore, the awareness surrounding persuasion tactics is not necessarily activated. Voters may make rash decisions which are not based on factual information. Political marketing messages have typically employed a number of manipulative methods to lure in voters (Henneberg, 2004), insinuating that voters need to be more aware of their usage. The implications this has for a political party is that it is important for them not be viewed as a direct promoter, as this could have a possible negative effect on voter turnout and both the image of the party and the candidate (Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016). To state in more explicit terms, traditional advertising might not be very useful for political marketing, as there is a risk of appearing as a 'sell-out'.

2.3 Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review makes it evident that there are two schools of thought in relation to marketing and branding in politics. One stream of literature favours the application of marketing and branding in politics and believes that its use is justified. The scholars in those camp believe that political parties and politicians have the same function as a traditional brand. Therefore, the use of marketing and branding principles in politics is plausible with some authors suggesting that it helps to grow democracy by engaging citizens and voters in politics. On the other hand, there are researchers who think otherwise. These researchers believe that marketing and branding principles are inapplicable to politics because the political market is different from the traditional goods market. They further highlight that the use of marketing and branding in politics can deteriorate democracy.

However, both schools of thought do not address the issue of political apathy in relation to marketing and branding in politics. The pro political marketing and branding camp has only explained that the use of marketing and branding is applicable and helps grow democracy. The phenomenon of political apathy among the youth is a stark contradiction with that. At the same time, those against the use of marketing and branding in politics have also not established a clear conclusion whether the use of marketing and branding applications are contributing to political apathy in people and especially among the youth.

3 Theoretical Framework

This section of the thesis introduces the theoretical perspective which we will be grounding the research in. In order to understand the reasons for growing political apathy among young people despite the increase in political marketing and branding, we use the concept of consumer cynicism to interpret and analyse the findings in this paper. In this section, a comprehensive overview of the literature on cynicism has been provided. The literature helps construct a theoretical framework on cynicism which has later been used to view the empirical phenomenon from a distinct and novel theoretical lens.

3.1 Political Cynicism Exists

Trust is considered to be the fundamental binding force in maintaining a strong relationship between politicians and voters (Ahmed, Lodhi & Shahzad, 2011). Levi and Stoker (2000) mention that trust is based on the nature of the relationship between political establishments and country citizens. The actions taken by personnel working for the government also have a significant impact on the level of trust. Trust in politics is diminishing and that can notably be observed in various literatures. Some researchers have suggested that political trust has diminished significantly over the years (Miller, 1974; Ahmed, Lodhi & Shahzad, 2011). The study from Miller, Miller, and Schneider (1980) cites the unresponsiveness from government institutions and politicians as a cause of political distrust. Ahmed, Lodhi and Shahzad (2011) also mention that distrust in politics has been increasing today because voters are more aware of and have the ability to judge the actions of politicians on what they promise before the election and what they actually deliver after the election and whether they keep their promises from the election campaigns or not. They further explain that the stability of trust in politics depends on the running policies of the government. If the policies are successfully implemented by the government, the degree of trust in politics will be fairly stable (Sherman & Schiffman, 2002; Ahmed, Lodhi & Shahzad, 2011). In contrast, if voters have a hard time trusting the government with the implementation of policies and are plagued by the constant need to check whether the policies have been correctly implemented, they are likely to have political cynicism. Therefore, political cynicism can be termed as distrust in politics, governmental institutions, and politicians (Agger, Goldstein & Pearl, 1961). In fact, political distrust and political cynicism are the same and can be used interchangeably (Barber, 1983; Ahmed, Lodhi & Shahzad, 2011).

Cappella and Jamieson (1996) reveal that the public's confidence in politics and governments has shrunk. People who are more engaged and well informed about politics tend to have a higher

degree of political cynicism. Political scientists Mann and Ornstein (1994) mention that in the past political scepticism was a healthy phenomenon, however, lately it has become a very strong sentiment and can be classified as destructive cynicism.

After discovering that cynicism was a prevailing phenomenon in the political context, we decided to construct the theoretical framework by drawing on literature from cynicism in the traditional market. Metaphorically speaking, consumer cynicism will be a fresh pair of eyes to view and understand political apathy within the context of marketing and branding in politics, since it has not been dealt with in research before. In the following sections, a comprehensive overview of what cynicism is, how it affects advertising, how it develops and what behaviours it encompasses will be provided.

3.2 Consumer Cynicism

Helm, Moulard, and Richins (2015, p.516) define consumer cynicism as “an individual consumer’s stable, learned attitude towards the marketplace characterized by the perception that pervasive opportunism among firms exists and that this opportunism creates a harmful consumer marketplace”. In easier words, Helm (2004), describes cynicism a learned attitude which develops through a process of unrealistic expectations leading to disappointments and a sense of disillusion. A cynical attitude is formed when one is let down by others, or on a deeper note, one feels that they have been betrayed, deceived, cheated or used by others (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989). In such a situation, cynics are not dissatisfied, rather they are livid, upset, acrimonious and resentful. They develop such feelings as a defensive strategy to not be ‘taken for a sucker’ again (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989). On a similar note, Helm (2004), discusses that consumers are likely to develop a cynical attitude if a company is unable to meet their needs or break their trust by engaging in malpractice. From a more general point of view, cynicism is viewed as a ‘negative effect’ (Dean, Brandes & Dharwadkar, 1998). Helm (2004) expresses that empty promises and false appearances are central to concept of cynicism. She also states that one of the main hallmarks of cynicism is the pretence of unselfishness to shroud selfish aims. Chaloupka (1999), conceptualises cynicism in a similar manner, describing it as situation where people feel like they have been manipulated or ethically violated by someone, for his or her own self-interest. Cynicism as a subject has mostly found its ways in philosophical and literary works for centuries, however, in the last five decades or so, it has emerged as a social scientific construct (Helm, 2004).

Cynical consumers are actually considered a force in the marketplace and need to be dealt with by marketing managers (Helm, Moulard & Richins, 2015). Cynicism in the United States is an actual problem, with experts stating that it has reached crisis proportions as citizens have lost faith in media and political and educational systems (Helm, 2004). This shows that cynical behaviours are no longer only affecting the more every day or mundane consumption behaviours but have also found their way to high-profile activist behaviours. The

disappointments faced by the public due to un-kept promises both in the economic and political realm leads to distrust in any altruistic discourses put out by them (Pollay, 1986). In general, consumers are increasingly becoming doubtful of businesses stating that companies are putting profit as the epicentre of their business operations, neglecting their duty towards their employees, the consumers they sell to and the natural environment (Helm, Moulard & Richins, 2015).

3.2.1 Cynics vs Sceptics

Helm (2004), conducted a study on consumer cynicism which was grounded in dispositional trust. Dispositional trust is not the capacity to trust, but rather the predisposition to trust. From the study, Helm (2004), was able to divide consumers into three main consumer groups; trusting consumers, sceptics, and cynics. Dispositional trust was the highest among trusting consumers and the lowest among cynics, with sceptics somewhere in the middle. Sceptical consumers were more trusting of advertising material with the knowledge that third-party entities as competition in the marketplace (keep other players in check), the government, the legal system, certifications, and licenses, were keeping a check on the advertising material by the company. In other words, their involvement was a 'safety blanket', ensuring consumers that the communication material was trustworthy. Consumers who were classified as cynics had the lowest level of dispositional trust and were of the opinion that companies only valued profit, classifying it as the main aim of any business. For them, the pursuit of profit meant that companies would ignore more important issues. They believed that the competitive business landscape discouraged companies to be ethical and work with integrity. Since they were of the opinion that companies were inherently untrustworthy, they believed that they had to protect themselves from them by taking precautionary measures (Helm, 2004).

3.2.2 Advertising Scepticism

Advertising scepticism and consumer cynicism are closely related in literature. According to Mangleburg and Bristol (1998), consumers are of the opinion that advertisers have specific motives, with the main one being persuading consumers to buy the product. Since advertisers are trying to fulfil their selfish aims, consumers believe that the communications may not be entirely truthful and may be biased. This leads consumers to view advertising in a sceptical light. From the perspective of consumer cynicism, this is in line with its conceptualization of being characterised by empty promises, false appearances, and selfishness. Scepticism is considered a milder form of cynicism but performs similar functions. In both contexts, consumers are essentially cognitively defending themselves against marketing stimuli (Roux, 2007). On a slightly different note, Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998, p.160) define it as "the tendency towards disbelief of advertising claims".

Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998), state that advertising is a great way for consumers to gain access to information about products in the free world, however, in more recent times, due to

overt promises being made in advertisements, consumers have developed a sceptical attitude towards them. This scepticism can be directed towards the accuracy of ad claims, the motives of advertisers, the value of the information to customers or society, its appropriateness for specific audiences such as children, or appropriateness in marketing a specific product such as alcohol and cigarettes (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Calfee and Ringold (1994) also suggest that consumers are gradually developing scepticism towards advertising. They find out that most customers believe that advertising is generally untruthful, persuading people to buy things that are unnecessary. They additionally stress that it needs to be better regulated. Consumers can have a hard time trusting the content in advertisements because their peers, family and friends and lived experiences give them an alternative perspective to ponder on and thereby has them question the credibility of advertising (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Furthermore, Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998), also reveal that acquiring information from trusted sources time after time can improve the propensity to trust the content put out in advertisements. Moreover, the structure of the advertisement and execution factors also play a role in ad scepticism. Ads using attention-seeking tactics may create a perception of manipulative intent (Campbell, 1995). Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) state that the perceptions of manipulative intent may further result in counterargument, resistance, and decrease in a positive attitude towards advertisers or brands. Furthermore, the variables that affect ad claim credibility the most is product type. Products that are too complex and need much expert knowledge to evaluate will be perceived in a more sceptical light from customers (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

Koslow (2000) proposes that a general scepticism towards advertisements could be a useful, beneficial and essential skill for consumers to have, which could protect them from the deceit of advertisers. A cynical mindset allows them to uncover the hidden facets of marketing by understanding the manipulation tactics used by companies in persuading people and also by developing a critical perspective on the consumption code imposed by a consumerist society (Oudou & de Pechpeyrou, 2011). Koslow (2000) stresses on the fact that in today's day and age, consumers need to learn how to resist gimmicky tactics and related advertising claims.

3.2.3 Reasons for Cynical and Sceptical Behaviours

Chylinski and Chu (2010) found out that consumers were more likely to engage in positive and reinforcing behaviour in favour of the company when they realised that there was a match between their goals and the company's. Goals in this sense are defined as the desired ends by the consumption of goods and services. However, on the other hand, if this perceived congruity between the goals of oneself and the company was missing, then a cynical attitude was likely to be developed. If consumers were to find repeated instances of incongruence, their cynical behaviours were likely to become more frequent in occurrence and stronger in their actions. In the study, the consumers' goals were defined as the intentions to achieve certain goals. On a similar note, if the consumers' personal values, such as being passionate about environmental issues, were not represented in the company actions, consumers were to engage in cynical behaviour. Value incongruence was found to be a very crucial determinant of cynical behaviour

on part of the consumers, more so than failures and shortcomings related to product and service performance. Moreover, in terms of goal incongruence, consumers were more likely to spread negative word of mouth about the company, however, when there was an incongruence with values, consumers switched to other companies. Some of these behaviours were to become more severe if the consumer was unsuccessful at multiple occasions to reach a better outcome. The paper concluded by stating that as more companies deviated away from customer expected outcomes, there was more likely to be an increase in cynical behaviours, both in terms of frequency and severity (Chylinski & Chu, 2010).

According to Clee and Wicklund (1980), the reactance to advertising material also develops when overt attempts are made to persuade one to purchase the product in question. Studies by Kirmani (1990) and Homer (1995) highlight that when consumers are under the impression that advertisers are trying too hard either by using too many advertisements, or by creating material that is over the top, they are likely to become more sceptical. This is not because they have necessarily found anything deceptive in the advertising material, but rather because they find the actions of the advertiser as unusual and pushy. Consumers associate such practices with tactics used by advertisers to manipulate them (Kirmani, 1990; Homer, 1995).

Koslow (2000), states that persuasive and seemingly truthful advertising may lead to increased enquiry about advertising claims from consumers, termed as scepticism. The reason for this scepticism is that consumers may think that the honest, substantiated and persuasive nature of advertising is too good to be true and that something might be amiss. This puts them on the guard to look for any hidden advertising tactics which they think that the advertisers might be using. To state this in simpler words, consumers are not sceptical of advertising because they believe that advertisers sometimes lie or the claims made in the advertisements are not credible, but because they are trying to develop a mechanism to resist or cope with a system whose function is frequently viewed as 'selling' rather than 'informing' (Koslow, 2000).

3.2.4 Cynical Behaviours

Cynical consumers are forced to continually interact with the market which they mistrust, and over time, they develop various coping strategies to deal with it (Helm, Moulard & Richins, 2015). Helm (2004) revealed that cynics partook in four different kinds of behaviours involving disapproval, withdrawal, precaution, and retribution. The cynics showed their disapproval in different ways, such as by bringing up children with a more cynical mindset and spreading negative word of mouth. The withdrawal was exercised by actively boycotting a company or by avoiding buying from them at all possible costs. Moreover, cynical consumers exhibiting behaviours related to withdrawal were also keen on adopting a more simplistic lifestyle, where they consumed less by avoiding impulse buys or by resisting marketing tactics. Precautionary measures were also a characteristic of avoidance behaviours. Lastly, in terms of retribution, cynical consumers were said to be punishing companies which they believed were engaging in malpractice or were violating their trust (Helm, 2004). The cynics also revealed

that their cynical attitude towards the market developed over time and was not attributed to a single event.

Helm, Moulard and Richins (2015), also investigated the behaviours of cynical consumers. They discovered that cynical consumers were of the view that companies were frequently manipulating and deceiving consumers. Moreover, they were also of the opinion that the system lacked integrity and was driven by corruption. In an attempt to control the market, they punished companies which they believed to be engaging in dodgy practices and rewarded companies which were up keeping high levels of ethical and moral standards. The cynics were revealed to be punishing companies in a few different ways such as by boycotting their products completely, retaliating against them, spreading negative word of mouth about them to family and friends, or by supporting companies which offered a closer match with their values. Moreover, they were also likely to withdraw from the market and resolute to a life of voluntary simplicity where they had minimal interaction with the market (Helm, Moulard & Richins, 2015). Both pieces of research paint a clear narrative of cynical behaviour on part of the consumers be interconnected to anti-consumption behaviour.

In older times, in order to act out their disapproval, cynics resorted to provocative and satirical acts such as pissing, shitting and masturbating in public spaces (Flemming, 2002). If they weren't engaging in such obscene acts, they actively tried to change the market or began disparaging it by mocking and criticising it (Bertilsson, 2015). On the contrary, Sloterdijk (1987), in this highly influential and popular book, 'Critique of Cynical Reason', argued that cynicism or modern cynicism had lost its power in acting as an effective form of resistance as it did in earlier times. According to him, the reason for this was attributed down to the fact that modern cynics had realised that having a more reflexive and enlightened outlook to the market system did not lead to any changes in contemporary ideology. The modern cynic was therefore considered to be the average yet an enlightened citizen, who understood the ins and outs of the market and took all necessary measures which ensured they were not taken as a sucker. Despite their heightened sense of enlightenment, they did not take any actions against the market system due to the belief that they could not change the ideological system (Sloterdijk, 1987).

3.2.5 Types of Cynicism

Oudou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), conceptualise 4 different kinds of consumer cynicism. The first type, 'defensive cynicism' is described as having a sceptical attitude towards advertising material, direct selling, telesales, etc. Consumers develop a sceptical attitude towards companies because they believe that they are only working for their own self-interest. The scepticism is brought to a head by being doubtful and wary of the persuasion attempts used by companies, and unfortunately, by also mistrusting any altruistic motives they might have. To explain the latter in more detail, consumers with a cynical mindset treat communication messages from virtuous and non-virtuous firms in the same way. Companies trying to showcase virtuous behaviour through their communications might suffer due to a lack of credibility, making them unsuccessful in enhancing the perceived ethicality of their business. In short, the

consumer is trying to protect themselves from marketers by being wary of their marketing tactics. The second type of consumer cynicism mentioned in the paper by Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), is 'offensive cynicism'. It is described as the opportunistic exploitation of the marketplace on behalf of the consumers by using manipulative tactics in order to achieve their own consumption objectives. The premise of this behaviour boils to the notion that everybody is hiding their self-interests underneath apparent virtue the consequence of which is not protect oneself from the malpractice of companies but rather to engage in and use the same techniques against them to get back at them and become a part of the game. Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), further exemplify this by stating that consumers adopt the classic principle of profit maximization and cost minimization to their own consumption. They turn marketing material against the company and use things such as promotional deals, free products, and cash refunds to try to get most of their consumption free of cost. Both defensive and offensive cynicism is based on the idea of not being fooled by marketers. Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), label the third kind of consumer cynicism as 'subversive cynicism'. With this kind of cynicism, consumers denounce and ridicule the colonization of the market. In other words, the idea is to shun the consumerist ideology by using sarcasm, irony and scornful humour. An example of this can be seen with the Burning Man festival in the deserts of Nevada, where participants are denouncing the market agents by participating in alternative forms of exchange such as art and artistic performances (Kozinets, 2002). The last form of cynicism described in the paper by Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), is 'ethical consumer cynicism'. The idea behind ethical cynicism is that one should be taking complete control over their life by not being bound by the pleasures of consumption and by voluntarily adopting a life of frugality and simplicity. In other words, it can be described as the spiritual quest for a more natural self, which can be achieved by alienating oneself from the commoditization forced upon by the deluded consumerist society we live in. Just like subversive cynicism, anti-consumption is also the main construct in ethical cynicism, the difference lying in the desire to revamp oneself to naturality. Both subversive and ethical cynicism is considered more extreme than the latter two because of their anti-consumption stances.

3.3 Summary of Theoretical Framework

Consumer cynicism is being used as a concept to analyse the findings in this research since previous literature has already agreed upon the inception of political cynicism. However, in order to really understand its role in political apathy among young people, the theoretical framework was created from a broader stream of consumer cynicism literature. Cynicism is described as a learned attitude which forms when unrealistic expectations lead to disappointments or when one feels let down or betrayed by others. It can predominantly be seen directed towards advertisements because consumers often view the material in them as untruthful and manipulative. Literature has also identified certain reasons for consumers' cynicism such as consumer values not aligning with those of the company, or companies creating advertisements that are too good to be true or pushy in nature. Cynical consumers are

also seen undertaking a variety of different behaviours such as withdrawing from the market, adopting a simplistic lifestyle to detach oneself from market practices or on a more extreme level, by punishing companies they feel have double-crossed them. Different kinds of cynical behaviours are also seen evident in 4 different conceptualizations of consumer cynicism, such as protecting oneself from manipulative advertising material, denouncing the market and its practices, being on a quest for a more natural self-stripped from materialistic items, etc. Together this created a theoretical framework for consumer cynicism, highlighting its meaning, its most common forms, its antecedents, and its behaviour.

4 Methodology

This chapter will discuss the research methods used for data collection and the methodology behind them. The discussion will give a comprehensive overview to the philosophical stances used in this research, the approach, strategy and design of the research, and the subsequent data collection and analysis of the study, with concluding remarks on the trustworthiness of the study.

4.1 Research Philosophy

In this section, we elaborate on the research philosophy that underpins this research paper. The ontological and epistemological stances applied have been discussed in this section on length. The literature review revealed that there were clearly different ways in which political marketing and branding had been conceptualised. There were scholars who believed that the use of marketing and branding in politics was justified and applicable and on the other hand, there were a number of authors who argued that it was inappropriate, with limited applicability and further suggesting that it had played a role in the deterioration of democracy. This means that there is no single truth that centers the topic, and therefore, from an ontological point of view, the subject matter of the research has its roots in relativism. The relativist perspective in research states that there are a number of truths out there and that they are dependent on various perceptions of reality or the notion that reality is man-made (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). Moreover, these contrasting views on political marketing and branding highlight that scholars have inherent viewpoints and perceptions which play a significant role in the kind of research they do. As has been established, political marketing and branding harbours different schools of thought and in order to capture those in this research, interviews have been chosen as the data collection method. Interviews have been used in research where participants are urged to share differing viewpoints. In terms of the research question, understanding the reasons for political apathy despite the growth of marketing and branding in politics suggests that there could be altering views on this phenomenon, which also centers the research in the relativist position as well.

In terms of epistemology, the investigation of the research question falls under the social constructionist paradigm, correlating with a relativist ontology. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2018, p.70), social constructionist is “the idea and the aspects of social reality that are determined by people and not by objective or external factors”. The social constructionist view is in line with the aim of this paper where we are not seeking to find out an objective truth, but rather are interested in investigating the perceptions of young individuals

towards political marketing and branding through in-depth interviews to determine the reason for political apathy. Collecting different viewpoints from young individuals through in-depth interviews is necessary because the phenomena is complex. Thus, different views and perspectives on political marketing and branding from different individuals can help us understand the phenomena better. Moreover, the causes of political apathy discussed in the literature co-exist, and there could be many other explanations for it that have not been studied or investigated before. In that regard, bringing in the dimension of consumer cynicism may offer an additional dimension to the explanation of the empirical phenomenon.

4.2 Research Approach

The aim of this study is to understand why political apathy among young people is on the rise despite the growing use of marketing and branding in politics. In order to understand this phenomenon, an abductive approach has been employed. According to Timmermanns and Tavory (2012), the abductive approach is a reasoning technique used in qualitative research. It is termed as the approach which moves back and forth between existing theory and empirical material in order to generate a sequence of outcomes. Moreover, the approach rests greatly on the theoretical background which is considered necessary in finding out about the knowledge that is missing in an area of the study (Timmermanns & Tavory, 2012). Aliseda (2006, p.28) states that the abductive approach is:

A reasoning process starts with the set of observations which are invoked to explain a puzzling phenomenon. The outcomes derived from the process of thinking from evidence to explanation, a type of reasoning characteristic of many different situations with incomplete information.

The abductive approach is best suited in this research because the cause of political apathy in young people is perplexing. The growth of marketing and branding in politics should ideally be benefiting the democratic process by spreading the word around however that is not the case. The literature which contends the use of marketing and branding in politics does not connect it to political apathy, and existing literature on political apathy is not very extensive and has not employed the use of consumer cynicism to explain the phenomenon. Therefore, in light of the abductive approach, we brought in the concept of consumer cynicism to explain the findings generated from the research interviews. Therefore, it can be said that consumer cynicism is used as a tool to find out knowledge that is seen missing in political apathy.

4.3 Empirical Material Needed to be Gathered

In the past, research on political engagement has mainly been conducted through quantitative methods, where the disinterest of young voters has been widely established. Despite the results clearly indicating a decrease in the interest levels of young people, the methods have been unable to capture any differences or variances in interpretation. This has prompted the need that more studies within this domain take a more qualitative approach and gain interesting insights within the consumer perspective on politics (Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005). Considering this, the study has taken a qualitative perspective, and this is also reflected in the research question.

To answer the research question, 'Despite the growth of marketing and branding in politics, why is political apathy growing among young citizens?', we decided that the collection of qualitative data would best answer the question. According to Austin and Sutton (2015), qualitative research is undertaken when there is a need to gain insights into how people feel about a particular topic and what are their thoughts on it. The thoughts and feelings subsequently have an effect on the way in which people behave and carry out their daily lives (Austin & Sutton, 2015). Alshenqeeti (2014), states that qualitative research is a fantastic medium of understanding human behaviour and beliefs. It gives the researcher the opportunity to understand how and why certain behaviours are taking place (Austin & Sutton, 2015). Polkinghorne (2005), conceptualises qualitative research in a slightly different light, expressing that it takes into account specific characteristics of human experience, in order to enable the investigation of experiences. According to Schwandt (2001), qualitative research methods are best used to understand and clarify certain aspects of the experiential life of people. In contrast to quantitative research methods, qualitative research relies on in-depth responses to questions regarding how someone has constructed or understood their experience. This leads to the development of the 'thick descriptions' which offer detailed and rich accounts of participants' experiences (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007).

In short, qualitative research aims to gain insights on thoughts and feelings, experiences and human behaviour. In order to understand the reasons for growing political apathy in today's marketing laden political environment, it was apparent that different types of data needed to be collected. First and foremost, it was deemed important to draw on from people past experiences with marketing and branding in politics, so that they could offer their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on it. The thick descriptions were to give greater context to the participant's thoughts and feelings, which were to aid in developing a clearer understanding of them. From these thoughts and opinions, it was also crucial to probe into the subsequent attitudes developed and behaviours engaged in, revealing the reasons for the continued rise in political apathy.

4.4 How the Empirical Material was Gathered

4.4.1 The Chosen Method

Once it had been established that qualitative data was needed to answer the research question, the next step was to choose a qualitative data collection method. The most commonly used qualitative data collections methods include interview recordings and ethnographic research where images, videos, company documents, etc., are observed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018). After a thorough analysis of the different methods that could be used to collect the types of data needed for this research, interviews were considered to be an appropriate fit. Interviews are conversations based on a specified topic conducted between an interviewer, the person who asks the questions, and the interviewee who responds with answers to those questions (Lofland & Lofland, 1984).

As mentioned in the earlier section, we were looking for thick descriptions of the experiences people had had with marketing and branding in politics, their opinions on it and the kind of attitudes and behaviours that were consequently formed. Rowley (2011), discusses that interviews are an appropriate research method when a researcher wishes to collect ‘facts’, or is interested in gaining insights or understanding opinions, attitudes, experiences, processes, and behaviours. Similarly, Kvale (1996), stresses the importance of interviews in extracting narrative data, such as stories and tales. An interview is viewed as being conducive in allowing citizens, users, consumers or employees to share all the aforementioned discourses (Rowley, 2011). Moreover, according to Charmaz (2014), interviews are considered to be an excellent medium to gather qualitative data that is rich in nature because they allow an in-depth exploration of the empirical phenomenon. The same sentiments are shared by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), as they mention that interviews lead the pathway to rich data since the research method allows the researcher to ladder-up or down, in other words ‘probe’, allowing the participants to explain their reasoning in detail. In a slightly different light, Kvale (1994), states that the true strength of an interview lies in the fact that the data uncovered can be interpreted in different ways and generate more than one meaning. Considering this, we thought that interviews would be able to generate rich descriptions of experiences, opinions, and attitudes regarding political marketing and branding, which would be highly valuable to this research. At the same time, the empirical material collected from the interviews would establish different ‘interpretations’ and ‘viewpoints’. The subjectivity within the data would aid in answering the research question more holistically.

Considering the nature of the topic, a qualitative approach, and more specifically interviews, was thought to be a suitable data collection method. Politics has had a history of being discussed at dinner tables, at parties, workplaces and other social gatherings (Walsh, 2004). From this, it can be inferred that politics exists in discourse and language. According to Alshenqeeti (2004), qualitative research methods have been excellent in collecting and analysing data which is embedded in an individual's social life. Since politics has been a popular discussion topic in

social settings and is typically seen to have a high degree of significance in one's social life, studying this topic from a qualitative perspective through interviews was again considered suitable.

4.4.2 Structure and Preparation for Interviews

After deciding on interviews as the chosen data collection method, the next thing to consider was the structure of the interviews. Interviews can be highly structured or unstructured in nature or fall somewhere in the middle (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018; Rowley, 2012). Structured interviews can be quite similar to questionnaires, where instead of leaving the participant to complete the questionnaire in their own time, the interviewer asks the questions face to face, and the type of questions used only elicit brief responses (Rowley, 2012; Qu & Dumay, 2011). The structured interview was eliminated from the pool of contenders quite early on because it served as an inappropriate medium to extrapolate thick descriptions regarding participants past experiences with political marketing and branding, their thoughts and feelings on it, and their subsequent attitudes towards it. On the complete end of the spectrum are unstructured interviews, where there is no formal guide to steer the interview in a certain direction, but rather a few topics or themes the researcher has in mind, on which the conversation with the interviewee hangs around (Rowley, 2012). Unstructured interviews also did not appeal to the research purpose as we wanted to keep the conversation within the periphery of marketing and branding within politics and feared that if the interviews were structure-less, participants would begin talking about politics in general and their feelings towards that.

Between these two interviews types, lies the semi-structured interview, which is arguably considered the most popular interview type. The semi-structured interview entails prepared questioning which has been guided by identified themes and topics, along with probes that are premeditated to produce more elaborate responses. A semi-structured interview is considered an excellent medium for disclosing hidden facets of human behaviour and is especially valuable to researchers who are looking to understand the way in which interviewees view the social world under study (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Considering this information, a semi-structured interview was decided upon as the chosen interview structure, as it fit the purpose of our study the most accurately. The conversations in the interviews allowed us to capture thick descriptions of the experiences, opinions and attitudes/behaviours interviewees had towards political marketing and branding. In a semi-structured interview, the questions are prepared as a topic guide, which can be highly scripted or loosely structured. Whatever structure adopted, all guides are created to serve the same function, which is to ensure that the same thematic approach is applied in each interview conducted (Qu & Dumay, 2011) and that the conversation does not deviate from the main topic of inquiry (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The topic guide helped us in keeping within the defined parameters, but at the same time, elicited responses which were rich in explanation. While the topic guide helps keep the interview focused, it also gives the researcher the liberty to modify the formulation, pace, and ordering of questions, as it is grounded in human conversation, eliciting the fullest and comprehensive of answers from the interviewees. In other words, a semi-structured interview is popular among researchers because

it gives a high degree of flexibility in conducting interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews meant that the momentum gained in conversations was not lost. If the participant touched upon a line of inquiry which was meant for later on in the interview, it was discussed there and then, giving a richer and more comprehensible overview of that aspect of the interview. The questions were also reformulated at times when the participants had difficulties in understanding them, allowing us to elicit meaningful responses which were beneficial to the research purpose.

As mentioned earlier, since a semi-structured interview was chosen, a topic guide (Appendix A) was created. Rowley (2012), suggests that when drafting up interview questions for a topic guide, researchers must keep in mind that participants might not necessarily understand ‘jargon’ terms related to that topic, and therefore, should try to avoid them. Keeping this in mind, all questions were formulated in simple and easy to understand language, without too many technical political or marketing terms. Another reason for keeping it simple was that we wanted the interview to feel like a conversation rather than an interrogation and felt that overly complex words would make the conversation feel unnatural. The topic guide consisted of 12 overarching questions, which usually had more than one question in them, and many of those questions had further sub-questions in them.

Qu and Dumay (2011), stress that it is important to carefully plan the formulation of questions both before and during the interviews. Rowley (2012), suggests that interview questions should not have leading assumptions in them, or have two questions in one, or elicit yes/no/vague responses, and most importantly, should not be invasive of the privacy of the interviewee. These pointers were kept in mind when the interview questions for the topic guide were drafted out. Questions of a similar theme were not forced into one question but rather were kept as separate questions under an overarching theme. It was also ensured that invasive questions such as a party or politician support, election participation, etc., were not asked in the interview, and if the interviewees mentioned those things themselves to establish greater context, the conversations were then welcomed.

According to Weller, Vickers, Bernard, Blackburn, Borgatti, Gravlee and Johnson (2018), open-ended questions give participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and the information that they are providing, either by ‘probing’ or by asking follow up questions, or simply in which the questions are formulated. In that vein, yes and no question were also actively avoided, with almost all questions starting off as ‘do you think’, ‘what are your opinions’, ‘how do you deal with’, etc., eliciting rich descriptions and maintaining the integrity of the conversations at the same time. Rowley (2012), states that words such as ‘what’ and ‘how’, can be considered as prompt words which encourage interviewees to speak more. The questions were also kept as open-ended as possible, since Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), state that open-ended question help in reducing or completely avoiding the possibility of interviewer bias. We believe that the open-ended nature of the questions played a role in freeing up the questions from having leading assumptions in them. The questions in the topic guide also emulated the laddering interview technique and both laddering up and laddering down was used in the topic guide. The laddering technique is unique to semi-structured interviews and is used

to understand the way in which the informant sees the world (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Guided by this technique, the questions also had some ‘why’ type of questions, designed to encourage interviewees to reveal their value base towards the subject. Moreover, the interviewees were often prompted to provide more explanations of what they were talking about, either by asking them to elaborate or by asking them to give an example of what they just spoke of, if appropriate.

4.4.3 The Interviewees

After the creation of the topic guide, it was time to recruit participants for the interview. In order to gather the empirical material that we needed; a purposive sampling strategy was used. According to Mason (2002), researchers employ a purposive sampling strategy when a-priori theoretical understanding leads them to believe that certain individuals may have a unique or important perspective to share in regard to the research question. In other words, a researcher decides upon what needs to be found out and then goes about looking for people who can and are willing to provide relevant information from their past experiences and knowledge repository (Tongco, 2007). In our case, this meant that the participants needed to be of a young age (under 30), and also have some experience with or knowledge of political systems. The selection of participants should follow a clear rationale and fulfil the specified purpose of the research question (Collingridge & Gantt 2008). Tongco (2007), also exemplifies the fact that the research questions play a huge role in deciding upon who to recruit for interviews. For our research, that held true as we were investigating political apathy among young people, and therefore, the participants for the interviews had to be under a certain age. Moreover, it was also important that the participants had some knowledge of politics, otherwise, they would not be familiar with political marketing and branding, and therefore, would not be suitable candidates for answering the questions in the topic guide. It was believed that this participant profile would generate rich and focused information on the research question, and thereby, allow us to offer a narrative on the phenomenon (Walsh & Downe, 2006).

Our purposive sample had characteristics of both ‘Maximum Variation Sampling’ and also ‘Homogenous Sampling’. Maximum Variation Sampling is used when a researcher intends to view a particular subject from different angles in order to achieve a greater understanding of it. In other words, it means selecting candidates from a variety of different backgrounds relating to the topic of research (Etikan, 2016). The sample was varied in the sense that each participant was from a different part of the world (more information in Appendix B). This was purposely done so in order to see whether the youth have the same views on political marketing and branding across several nations and if political apathy within the context of political marketing is a global phenomenon. At the same time, there were also elements of Homogenous Sampling in our purposive sample. A homogenous sample comprises of people who share comparable traits or specific characteristics. The homogenous element in our sample came from the educational background of our participants. All interview participants were educated to degree level, but the only difference was that they came from different educational backgrounds such as business, engineering, arts, environmental science, etc. A part of the reason why the sample

was homogenous in this aspect was attributed down to the fact that the snowball sampling technique was also used for our purposive sample. In the snowball sampling technique, an informant or interview participant suggests another person they think would be a good candidate for the interview (Tran & Perry, 2003). In order to recruit more candidates for the interviews, we took leads from an informant of ours who introduced us to two other candidates. Since the informants were in her social circle, they ended up coming from similar educational backgrounds.

As researchers, we were aware of the fact that the adequacy of participant numbers undertakes careful decision-making, where too few may lead to the potential risk of inadequate depth and breadth in the information, and too many may lead to large amounts of superficial data that is difficult to manage and sort through (Sandelowski, 1995). Therefore, in order to have the right amount of interview participants, we used the ‘information saturation’ rule of thumb. Saturation of information or redundancy is described as “the process of sequentially conducting interviews until all concepts are repeated multiple times without new concepts or themes emerging” (Trotter, 2012, p.399). Researchers conduct a quick analysis of the information collected after each interview, and if they see that the conceptual wellspring has dried up or the interview participants are reiterating what each other has said, in one way or another, theoretical saturation or redundancy has been achieved. In other words, saturation is achieved when all interview questions have been thoroughly and carefully been explored, and following interviews reveal no new information, concepts or themes (Trotter, 2012). In our case, almost all interview participants had a similar stance on political marketing and branding, albeit with slight variations, and with every new interview we conducted, no new or ‘shocking’ information was being revealed. Therefore, we made the collective decision of halting the data collection process at eight interviews, as we believed that we had collected all the relevant information needed to answer the research question, and with every new participant recruited, no new themes or concepts emerged. It can be argued that more interviews could have been conducted, but as stated by Robinson (2013), the sample size in qualitative research is also influenced by practical considerations. From a practical standpoint, the time constraints in which the research project was bound did not make the interviewing of further people conducive. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the achievement of theoretical saturation, gave us the green light to stop interviewing after eight people.

4.4.4 The Interviews

According to Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, and McKinney (2012), the location in which the interview is conducted plays a very important role and can influence the outcomes of the interview. Therefore, choosing an appropriate location for conducting interviews is of great relevance in the data collection process (Gubrium et al. 2012). Jacob and Furgerson (2012), suggest that interviews should ideally be conducted in places that are easy to reach by the interviewee, provide a quiet and safe environment, and offer minimal distraction, such as libraries. Therefore, considering this, we chose quiet private rooms in the facilities of Lund University School of Economics and Management. The location was easy to reach for most

interviewees, and the solitary nature of the rooms allowed both us and the interviewees to focus solely on the interview. Moreover, the quietness in the room helped in producing audio-recordings that were of high quality with no background noise.

Once welcoming interviewees into the room for the interview, they were briefly described the objective of the research and then were asked for consent. Edwards and Holland (2013), stress on the fact that social researchers should clearly inform participants about the objective of the research project and what it is about, and also try to gain their informed, in most cases, written consent, which is representative of good ethical practices. Jacob and Furgerson (2012), also highlight that a research interview should not begin before written consent has been collected from the interviewees. The consent forms should contain clauses which give interviewees the rights to withdraw from the research, guarantee confidentiality, command the destruction of data if requested, etc., (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Therefore, keeping these things in mind, a consent form (Appendix C) was developed, which incorporated all the aforementioned clauses, and was signed by interviewees before the start of the interview.

As mentioned earlier, the interviews were audio recorded. Fernandez and Griffith (2007), mention that an audio recorder can serve as an effective and convenient tool for researchers to document the information being spoken, and also paves out an excellent opportunity for researchers to solely concentrate on the conversation taking place rather than scrambling to take notes. Jacob & Furgerson (2012), also emphasise the usefulness of recording interviews by stating that the interview atmosphere can be jeopardized if researchers fail to maintain eye contact with the interviewees by having their noses in notepads writing down what is being spoken. Considering this, we decided to record all interviews and took consent from interviewees whether they would want their interview to be recorded or not.

The interviews averaged around to be 40 minutes. Both researchers were present at the interview site, where one's role was to conduct the interview, and the other was in charge of the recordings and taking notes where necessary. Collis and Hussey (2013), discuss that while it is possible for one author to conduct the interview all on their own, it could be beneficial to have additional support as well. This held true in the interviews especially when the interviewer forgot about or overlooked a theme, the other was able to point that out. Therefore, all elements in the topic-guide were exhaustively covered in the interviews, although not in the same order. The interviews were treated more like conversations, and if the interviewer brought up a theme or idea that was to be dealt with later on in the interview schedule, it was discussed there and then to give the interview a more natural flair to it. Jacob and Furgerson (2012), highlight that the topic guide should always be present in front of the researchers, and should be followed carefully so that important material is not neglected, and all interviews cover the same kind of information. This advice was taken, and the topic guide ensured that all interviews were dealt with in a similar manner and covered all aspects that were central to the research. Detours in interviews may not exactly be fruitful when the participant is touching on tangents which are not exactly useful or conducive to the research (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The topic guide therefore also ensured that the conversations were kept focused and in a way, were to the point.

4.5 Trustworthiness of the Research

Qualitative research is a study method which focuses on exploring individual experiences, narrating phenomenon and developing theory but it is often faced with criticism that it is quite subjective and can be influenced by researchers (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004; Koch & Harrington, 1998). Cope (2013) therefore states that good qualitative research should have a high degree of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have developed 4 criteria to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research. These criteria are namely credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

According to Polit and Beck (2012), credibility refers to the truth of the empirical material or the participants' views and the interpretation and representation of them by the researchers. One technique which is used to enhance credibility of the research is respondent validation (Torrance, 2012). Respondent validation or the member check technique can be done by encouraging research participants to check the accuracy of initial data which can proceed during interviews or at the conclusion of the study. Therefore, we used the respondent validity technique to ensure the highest credibility of our research. During the interviews we stated and summarized each question and asked the participants to confirm the accuracy. Later, the participants were given the final findings so that they could double-check the findings of our research and provide feedback, which affirmed the accuracy of the findings.

In term of dependability, a research piece is considered dependable if the data is constant over the same condition (Polit & Beck, 2012; Tobin & Begley, 2004; Cope, 2013). Koch (2006) explained that dependability can be achieved when another researcher comes to the same conclusion when they follow each and every stage of the research with similar participants in similar conditions. Therefore, in order to make sure that the study was dependable we extensively explained each stage of the research process and provided information on the methodology part about philosophical underpinnings of the research, the selected research approach, the kind of empirical material needed and how it was collected. Furthermore, detailed information was also given on the interviewees. We believe that all of this information will make our research more dependable and any researcher who wishes to conduct a similar study can apply the same method and methodology, and hopefully reach the same conclusion.

Confirmability refers to the ability of the researcher to demonstrate that the empirical information represents the participants' responses and is not subject to biases and opinions from researchers (Polit & Beck, 2012; Tobin & Begley, 2004; Cope, 2013). Cope (2013) further mentions that by demonstrating confirmability, the researcher should be able to describe how conclusions and interpretations were established and illustrate that the findings were derived directly from data and not from the researchers point of view. This can be done by providing rich quotes from the participants that depict each emerging theme (Cope, 2013) Therefore, we assured confirmability in our research by providing direct quotes from participants as much as possible in each emerging theme in our findings and that shows that the emerging themes and

our conclusion have genuinely been derived from the findings and not from our own opinions. However, despite all possible attempts to avoid errors and minimize biases during interview, it is worth to acknowledge that some interview responses might have gotten influenced by us due to our inexperience as interviewers.

Moreover, for the research to be considered trustworthy, it should be transferable. Qualitative research is transferable when the findings from the research can be applied to other settings or groups (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012; Cope, 2013). There are some specific strategies used to achieve transferability such as thick descriptions and purposive sampling (Byrne, 2001). Therefore, the use of a purposive sampling strategy in selecting our research participants helped us achieve transferability in this research. With all measurements mentioned in each criterion, we believe that our research has been conducted with good faith and has a high degree of trustworthiness.

4.6 Analysis of Empirical Material

Before analysing the data, the interview recordings were transcribed. An interview transcription reduces down spoken words from an audiotaped interview into written text (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, and French (2016), suggest that it is beneficial to transcribe interviews as soon as possible after conducting them because the conversation is still fresh in the mind of the interviewer, which makes the process of transcribing much easier. Keeping this in mind, all interviews were transcribed the same day they were taken.

An abductive approach has been employed in the methodology, which is where researchers normally go back and forth between empirical material and the existing literature and theoretical framework in order to generate a sequence of outcomes (Timmermanns & Tavory, 2012). Therefore, for the analysis of the empirical material, we went back and forth between the collected material and the literature and the theoretical framework on consumer cynicism to find out the reason for political apathy amongst young people despite the growth of marketing and branding in politics.

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), state that before one begins analysing the empirical material, it is important to develop an 'intimate' relationship with it, by reading it again and again. Bearing that in consideration, each interview transcript was read several times to get a good idea of what the interviewee was trying to convey. The transcriptions on average were around 5-6 pages in length, which meant that the empirical material collected was quite vast in nature and needed to be reduced and sorted down. One way of making sense of the empirical material collected is by thematising or coding it (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Coding or categorization of data has played quite an important role in qualitative analysis. Its main purpose is to break up the data by subdividing it and placing it in categories that are denoted by tags or labels. Varying chunks of data, which can be in the form of words, phrases, sentences or even whole paragraphs,

are attached to the codes or labels (Basit, 2003). The coding or thematisation technique was therefore adopted in order to make the collected material more manageable and illicit clear explanations in regard to the theory. Since an abductive approach was being used, the themes or codes primarily emerged from the theoretical framework, and additional codes were developed from new information in the interview transcripts. For example, cynical behaviours and attitudes found within the empirical material were thematised in guidance with the theoretical framework. However, this could not be done for the reasons for those cynical behaviours and attitudes, since the empirical material revealed new information which warranted the creation of new themes in that category.

After reading through the material repeatedly, colour coding as suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003), was employed to mark various sentences and phrases in all eight transcriptions. These sentences and phrases were color-coded according to priori defined themes and new themes. Once specific chunks of empirical material had been assigned from the transcriptions, we searched for patterns and similarities within and across themes, to further develop links, commonalities and red threads within the empirical material, in order to undertake a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis (Burnard, 1994).

5 Findings and Analysis

This section of the thesis will bring forward the results from the empirical material, and at the same time, analyse and discuss them in terms of theory and prior literature. The section will begin by addressing the prevalence of political marketing and branding activities these days. After that it will highlight the various reasons for the development of cynical attitudes and behaviours in regards to political marketing and branding. In addition to that, it will also touch upon some other reasons which have contributed to a cynical attitude towards politics in general. A large part of this chapter will also bring forward the cynical attitudes and behaviours young citizens are engaging in due to their frustration with political marketing and branding. Lastly, a contrasting outlook to political marketing and branding will also be given, which will help provide a more holistic perspective.

5.1 Prevalence of Political Marketing and Branding

It was evident from the interviews that all participants had a fair idea about marketing and branding in politics. When the participants were asked if they had come across any political marketing and branding activities or not, participants N1, E, had this to say:

Participant N1: *especially during election period there are a lot of a branding campaigns that they have so there's a lot of posters they put out there, a lot of TV commercials that go up and there's a lot of hiring the youth to wear their merchandise and talk to people and go to people individually to tell them about their campaign (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).*

Participant E: *You can see the advertisements, posters and campaigns everywhere during the election. But today they even use memes to get attention from the people because I think they really understand that today meme is a thing and you have to use it to reach a wider audience (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

Participant D touched upon how political marketing is not only confined to traditional media but has also crept its way into social media and the digital world. She revealed:

Participant D: *Since I was young I have seen people handing out goodies during the election and also outdoor ads and cut-outs, but I haven't seen many ads on TV though. These days I see extensive use of online campaigns especially on Facebook and I think today politicians rely on social media campaigning a lot too (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).*

These quotes give weight to the fact that the political marketing industry is indeed a big one. Guzman, Paswan, and Steenburg (2015) exemplify the significance of the political marketing industry in the US, by comparing its expenditure to 5 of the biggest multinational companies in the country. They reveal that the cost of Obama's election campaign was a little shy of the total marketing expenditure by all the multinational companies in one year. The explicit acknowledgment of the enormity of political marketing expenditures was not made very evident in the interviews, however, gathering from the participants' knowledge and awareness of the various marketing communications mediums used by politicians and parties, it can be concluded that the industry is active and works with ferocity in other countries as well. For this reason, the average citizen, at one point or another in their lives, has come in contact with political marketing activities and is also able to identify them.

The participants also had some insights about political branding. The participants mentioned that political entities usually try to brand themselves based off of emotional appeals such as religion. These stances are made more apparent by these statements from participants P and L:

Participant P: *What comes to my mind when I think about political branding is more like emotional branding, appealing to voters on their value and emotion because I think humans rationale things form their own personal values. What it seems to me is that political parties target very specific values, maybe freedom or freedom to have a gun, something like that*
(Interview, May 3rd, 2019).

Participant L: *Back home in Lebanon, politicians try to brand themselves based on their religion because it helps them get elected and some of them brand themselves as anti-corruption and suddenly everyone is anti-corruption. The same goes for Trump, when he against Mexican immigrants and wants to build the wall and that is how he branded himself to be something that is appealing to his voters in order to get elected* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

The quotes by participants L and P highlight that young citizens are aware of how politicians brand themselves to their audience. This gives credibility to the work of authors such as Needham (2006), Landtsheer, Vries and Vertessen (2008), Guzman and Sierra (2009), Phillips, Brace-Govan and Jevons (2010), etc., who argue that political brands, both in relation to parties and politicians, are gaining prominence over the years. Judging by the statements from these participants, it can be seen that political entities in different parts of the world have jumped on the branding bandwagon and are using various tactics to appeal to their supporters. For example, when Participant P mentioned the use of emotional branding to appeal to certain causes such as 'freedom', this according to Dean, Croft, and Pich (2010) and Needham (2006), can be seen as an attempt to create an emotional brand story, which would help in garnering support from people with a similar vision. Moreover, it can also be considered a way to differentiate oneself from other political parties and politicians, who might create an alternative brand story based off of a different emotional appeal (Dean, Croft & Pich, 2010). In a similar vein, the comment by Participant L can also be seen as a case of emotional or relationship branding, where religion

is used as an emotional branding vessel, to gain support from people who share similar religious views.

Moreover, a lot of the participants also agreed with the notion that political markets and traditional markets did indeed have some similarities in them. Participant N2 was able to accurately describe the similarities between the two markets. She stated:

Participant N2: *Actually, both markets are the same. In the traditional market, people or companies sell goods and services but in politics, parties and politicians sell their policy to voters. So, I think there is a similarity between the two but maybe it is more complicated in the political market where variables are harder to control* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

As witnessed from the literature review there are certain scholars who are convinced that the traditional market and political market are similar. The political product is slightly more complex, encompassing an array of different elements such as the policy, the leader, the service, etc., (O' Cass, 2003; Schneider, 2004; Guzman, Paswan & Steenburg, 2015). The response from participant N2 can be seen as a confirmation to this body of research, as she is able to understand that the product being sold in this instance is policy and a persona rather than a physical product.

In essence, the interview participants were able to identify and spot political marketing and branding activities all by themselves without any help or context given by us. This pays homage to the work done by the authors in the first half of our literature review, as participants understood and were able to identify political marketing and branding activities. This also exemplifies that the phenomenon actually exists in different parts of the world, and political entities are increasingly making use of it. However, the following sections of the analysis will reveal the cynical attitude most participants had towards marketing and branding activities in politics, which will align more closely with the work done by authors opposing the applicability of marketing and branding activities in politics.

5.2 Development of Cynical Attitudes/Behaviours Towards Political Marketing and Branding

This section of the chapter will touch upon the various reasons found within the empirical material leading to development of cynical attitudes towards marketing and branding in politics. The five reasons discovered were manipulative intent, the projection of false promises, the downgrading other opponents, the preference for promotion over policy and the creation of a celebrity persona. Each of these reasons will be presented, analysed and discussed in detail in following sub-sections.

5.2.1 Manipulative Intent

The first reason that was apparent in the empirical material was related to manipulative intent. A majority of the participants in the interviews touched upon the presence of manipulative intent in a few different areas pertaining to marketing and branding in politics, specifically in political advertisements, in the targeting of swing voters and in the heavy marketing done before election time. First of all, when participants were asked to reveal their views on political advertisements, the main point they conveyed was that they felt as if they were trying to be sold something, instead of being informed on important issues. Due to this, they viewed political advertisements as manipulative. This is what participants L, E and N2 had to say about political advertisements:

Participant L: *The advertising used by politicians do not give you actual facts of information instead they are trying to manipulate you in order to get elected* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

Participant E: *I think it (political marketing) is very manipulated that is why you have to stay informed and they don't really give you the information but instead, they are selling you something* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

Participant N2: *I think all ads are manipulated in general, they try to be appealing as much as possible and try to manipulate people to believe in them. That's also the case in politics. They try to sell you something and not giving you the information. They shove it to you!* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998), mention that scepticism towards advertising is affected by the value that it provides to customers and society. The participants, in this case, feel that political ads provide no factual information, but rather are an elaborate sales pitch, insinuating that they provide no real value to them. Mangleburg and Bristol (1998), state that consumers are of the opinion that advertisers have specific motives, with the main one being persuading consumers to buy the product. The participants, in this case, made it quite evident that they were aware of the fact that political advertisers were just trying to sell them a product. It is plausible to conclude, especially since the participants explicitly point it out themselves, that the sell-out nature of political adverts, is a major contributor to their view of them as manipulative. Chaloupka (1999), describes cynicism as a situation where people feel like they have been manipulated or ethically violated by someone, for their own self-interest. From the quotes and the discussion above, it is evident that the participants feel like political marketing and branding has elements of manipulation in it because of its sell-out nature. Therefore, according to Chaloupka (1999), the perceived manipulation in political adverts is likely to lead to consumer or in this case voter cynicism. In addition to that, this situation can again be linked back to the work of Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) but in a slightly different light where they state that sceptical attitudes are likely to develop when consumers question the motives of the advertiser. From the quotes, it can also be seen that the participants are challenging the marketing motives of political entities where they feel that they are being sold something instead of being informed. Political entities are viewed as 'selling' something because they want

to win elections, which according to the participants, should not be the case. Instead, they should be informing them on policy issues and what needs to be done in the country, and that could be classified as the motive which the participants would want evident in their marketing materials. Therefore, according to Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998), this misalignment of motives leads to scepticism towards marketing material from political entities. Scepticism is considered to be a milder form of cynicism (Roux, 2007), and therefore, it can be concluded that the participants had a cynical attitude towards political advertising due to this misalignment of motives.

In a similar vein, when participants were asked about how they felt that the destiny of a nation might be dependent on three to four weeks of carefully engineered marketing material, they also either explicitly called it out as manipulation or implied that. For example, participant A said:

Participant A: *I think the carefully engineered marketing that has been used 4 weeks before an election uses a lot of designed psychological tactics in order to attract voters. People who have money know how to manipulate!* (Interview, May 4th, 2019).

Participants E and L did not explicitly use the word ‘manipulation’ when speaking about their opinions on this subject, but from their responses, one can imply that this is what they meant. This is what they had to say:

Participant E: *I think they are very good at polishing their marketing campaigns right before elections and it works so well and people fall for it* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

Participant L: *I think it’s a lifelong process. You can easily get access to all relevant information on the Internet on what they have done in different areas and I think that this information provides us with a track record on who we should vote for and focus should not be placed on the campaigns that have been launched in the last 3-4 months which are very carefully crafted* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

The research participants also implied that politicians and parties had manipulative intent when targeting swing voters with marketing and branding activities at the tail end of campaigns. For example, participant N2, E and P said:

Participant N2: *Yes, definitely, I think you can see this in many countries that the ads are directed towards vulnerable people in order to swing the vote in order to make them win* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

Participant E: *I think these campaigns are directed to those who are less informed (swing voters) about politics and it works. I think it is frustrating because people should inform themselves more in advance* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

Participant P: *Swing voters are very decisive and that is the issue with the American society. We rely on receiving information and not researching information. If you do research about politics I don't think any ads will be able to swing your decision and those who only rely on the ads, of course, they fall to the trap. And I think politicians try to do everything to get votes so they would use marketing tactics to get the swing voters and I think this practice is so wrong* (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).

If we read in between the lines, it is plausible to suggest that the participants viewed the targeting of swing voters by marketing and branding activities as manipulative. For example, comments like 'falling to the trap', 'directed towards vulnerable people' and 'directed towards less informed people', indicate that participants were aware of that fact that politicians and parties create a trap for swing voters by creating alluring marketing campaigns which they cannot resist. The comments in regards to the carefully engineered marketing material right before election time, which seal the fate of the country, also revealed a similar notion. Remarks such as 'people fall for it', 'it's should be a lifelong process' and 'carefully crafted (marketing material)', insinuate that heavy marketing disrupts the natural process of forming opinions regarding parties and politicians over time, and tricks vulnerable voters in voting in favour for political entities with the most elaborate marketing campaigns right before election time. In essence, whoever has the most elaborate campaign ends up taking the cake. An elaborate marketing campaign can be viewed as an attention seeking tactic, and according to Campbell (1995), ads or campaigns which make use of attention seeking tactics are likely to be viewed as manipulative from the receivers' end. Along with the tricking element, this could be another explanation for the reason of viewing political ads and campaigns as manipulative. Helm (2004), discusses that cynical attitudes are formed when one feels betrayed, cheated or deceived by others. From this discussion, one can say that the participants are able to see how political marketing and branding is used as a vessel to prey on vulnerable people, and essentially, cheat them, leading them to view the entire practice as manipulative and therefore develop a cynical attitude according to Chaloupka's (1999) conceptualisation of it. In summary, we found that the participants had developed a cynical attitude towards political marketing and branding due to their realization of the existence of manipulative intent in it.

5.2.2 False Promises

A vast majority of participants revealed that they did not believe that political entities kept their marketed promises. They were of the opinion that political entities were overpromising brighter futures, and when they were given the opportunity to act on those promises, completely changed their tune for the worst. These quotes from participants N2, A and Q, succinctly capture this:

Participants N2: *No, most of the time I don't think so. Even if they do, they do it because they want to get elected again next time. They over promise and they promise to solve the big issues but at the end, they don't do it and that is disappointing* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

Participants A: *No, at the end of the day it's all talk and no action. I kind of never believe on what they promise and when nothing happens, I'm not so disappointed because I know from the beginning that it wasn't going to be happening anyway* (Interview, May 4th, 2019).

Participants Q: *Well some of them do but mostly they don't... as soon as they get the votes and are elected, they just vanish into their own personal lives and they don't do anything. For example, they will just do one big project to show other people that they have done something but after the elections are over they won't do anything... like 90% of the time. Such cheats!*
(Interview, May 2nd, 2019)

Comments such 'it's all talk and no action', 'they don't do it (keep their promises)', and 'vanish into their personal lives and don't do anything', highlight that political entities make empty promises in their marketing material. According to Helm (2004), empty promises and false appearances are central to the concept of cynicism. From this it can be deduced that participants have potentially developed a cynical attitude towards political marketing as it fails to keep stated promises. Moreover, Helm (2004), also discusses cynicism as a learned attitude which develops through a process of unrealistic expectations, leading to disappointments and a sense of delusion. While none of the participants had high hopes from political entities, comments such as 'it's disappointing' and 'such cheats', highlight that they still feel disappointed and frustrated when political entities fail to keep their promises. This makes the case of cynicism towards political marketing even stronger. In summary, not keeping marketed promises can also be viewed as another reason for political cynicism.

5.2.3 Attacking Other Opponents

The participants in this research demonstrated cynicism towards political marketing and branding when political entities used marketing applications to downgrade opponents. When participants were asked how they felt about the use of marketing tactics in which politicians made use of political adverts and other communicative materials to attack other opponents, most of them expressed their disapproval towards it. Moreover, it was also evident from their responses that they had a negative perception towards this tactic. Some of them even pointed out that they would not vote for politicians who made use of such tactics. Rather than bashing the opponents on their personal lives, the participants believe that politicians should focus on their own agenda and policy and communicate this to the voters, and thereby, provide them factual information on more pertinent issues. The negative views regarding this marketing tactic are explicitly voiced out in these quotes by participants L, D and P respectively:

Participant L: *I have witnessed this in Hungary, and I think it's such a shame that they use such tactics because such strong language was being used to attack the opponents. I think this is unethical and I disapprove of this kind of tactic.* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

Participant D: *I really hate it when they are doing that, and I find it very unfair. I think they should focus on themselves and their policy and what they can improve. There was once an*

incident in Romania where the candidate from the Youth Social Democrat Party handed out fake leaflets to attack his opponents and he got caught on that, it's so embarrassing!
(Interview, May 3rd, 2019).

Participant P: *It's not really genuine. I think degrading other opponents isn't nice or genuine and shows a definite lack of character. I feel disappointed, and for someone I want to vote for, I need to see authenticity* (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).

In the literature review, Scammell (1999) states that some researchers are sceptical about the use of marketing and branding in politics because they are not fully convinced that the applications have been used to promote genuine politics. The studies from Maarek (1999) and Henneberg (2004), have highlighted that there is a rise in negative marketing in politics where the sole purpose of the campaign is to attack other political opponents on the basis of their character, personal relationships, past history, etc. Since a greater emphasis is placed on targeting competition rather than revealing one's stance on policy, this negative use of political marketing and branding gives citizens very little factual information on pertinent issues. The answers from the participants are all testament to the fact that political marketing and branding activities have frequently been used for the wrong purposes and that there is indeed a rise in negative politics. Comments such as 'I think it's unethical', 'not really genuine' and 'find it very unfair', indicate that the participants view the activity as malpractice. Helm (2004), suggests that consumers are likely to develop a cynical attitude towards a company if they think they are engaging in some sorts of malpractice. Therefore, since participants viewed this marketing activity as malpractice, it is reasonable to suggest that they have developed a cynical attitude towards political marketing and branding because of this reason.

5.2.4 Policy Over Promotion

Political parties and politicians have a brand status (Schneider, 2004; Guzman, Paswan & Steenburg, 2015). The brand status is referred to the ability of the parties or the politicians to distinguish themselves from others and have a clear association in the voters' mind (Schneider, 2004). The brand and the image of political candidates has gained prominence over the years and successful politicians have been able to create a considerable image for themselves, sometimes even more significant than the policy issues (Schneider, 2004; Guzman, Paswan & Steenburg, 2015; Guzman & Sierra, 2009). Therefore, the politicians these days have gradually shifted their focus to their personal brand rather than on policy. The issue related to politicians focusing on personal brand image rather than the policy has been highlighted in the study from Henneberg (2004), where he states that political marketing has shifted the focus of politics from content to appearance which has led to the undermining of policy issues. A lot of participants agreed with that notion, and this is what participants L, N2, E and P had to say about that:

Participant L: *Oh, definitely that's what they do. They don't really care about the country's issues anymore on the campaigns and such. It's so wrong actually!"* (Interview, April 30th, 2019)

Participant N2: *Definitely, I think all of them claimed that they want to serve the people and their main interest is the people but what they really want is just to get votes and to be in power. So, instead of focusing on the policies they invest a lot of money on building an identity and their brand in order to get elected. It's frustrating actually because policy should be the most important message to communicate to people (Interview, April 30th, 2019)*

Participant E: *I think that is the way it works today. They don't talk about policy. The example I can give that is one of the politicians in my region. He is very handsome and has the charisma and later he met the beautiful actress and they became a couple and the entire focus of the campaign was on them as a couple instead of his policy and he got elected because of that. It's crazy! (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

Participant P: *Yes, I think it's focusing too much on individuals rather than policy even though it's common in America where politics is more about person and the story behind him/her. But I think they should communicate more on what they want to do and what they can do for the country (Interview, May 3rd, 2019)*

It is prominent from the quotes that most participants think political campaigns are focusing on the party and its politicians instead of the policy which they believe is very important for the elections. These opinions from the participants are similar to Henneberg (2004) where he states that political marketing has focused more on appearance which hinders policy issues (Henneberg, 2004). Harrop (1990) has pointed out that policy strategy is vital for political parties. Parties that focus on policy areas deemed to be important by the electorates can result in great electoral success. Moreover, when the media strategy adopted by political parties focuses more on the image, there is often a risk of outpacing information on the policy (Harrop, 1990). As explicitly shown in the comments from the participants, they are very disappointed that political marketing these days is turning away focus from policy. They further stressed their disapproval by saying 'it's wrong', 'it's frustrating' or 'it's crazy' and suggest that politicians and political parties should focus more on policy and communicate this information to voters. Therefore, the disapproval and scepticism in this political marketing tactic has indicated cynicism towards politics (Helm, 2004; Odou & de Pechpeyrou, 2011).

5.2.5 Celebrity Persona

The participants mentioned during the interviews that politicians these days were increasingly conducting themselves like celebrities. However, this was negatively perceived by interview participants because they thought that politicians who conducted themselves like celebrities had a hidden agenda which was primarily to get more votes. Therefore, the celebrity persona of politicians lessened their trustworthiness. During the interviews, when participants were asked how they thought politicians these days were conducting themselves compared to older times, this is what participants Q, E and A had to say:

Participant Q: *I think they try to be famous. Well yeah, for example, as I said before, the more popular you are, the more people are going to know about you. The more commercially you market yourself the more numbers you are going to get and it has become more about being famous and being more known (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

Participant E: *I think they have become celebrities and that has become normal these days. You can see the case of Barack Obama, Justin Trudeau or even Donald Trump. Also they're very active on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. I think they want to be likeable and more appealing to their target group (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

Participant A: *I think many of them try to act like a celebrity and want to become famous because they believe that they will get more votes from being famous (Interview, May 4th, 2019).*

As we have mentioned earlier in the literature review, there are several scholars such as Maarek (1995) and Landtsheer, Vries and Vertessen (2008) who believe that the way in which politicians address the public these days has changed drastically. In order to reach broader audiences including voters, politicians are now making use of marketing techniques where they act more like show-business celebrities, discussing superficial issues such as their private lives' affairs instead of policy initiatives (Maarek, 1995; Landtsheer, Vries & Vertessen, 2008). Thus, the political candidates' personality has become the main voting reason rather than their policies and agendas. Newman (1999), called this marketing tactic as perception politics, also known as political impression management. The prevalence of this marketing tactic is evident from the quotes, as the participants did think that politicians these days act like celebrities and desire to become famous. Newman (1999), suggests that the charisma and an overall well-rounded personality can aid a politician in achieving short-term goals such as being elected. However, conducting oneself as a celebrity, and making regular appearances on the media can give politicians backlash because their basic capability and ability as a politician may be questioned by the voters (Newman, 1999). Keeping that in mind, it can be seen that the participants acknowledge that politicians are primarily employing this marketing tactic for their own selfish reasons with comments such as '(want to) get more votes', 'want to be likeable' and 'get more numbers'. According to Helm (2004), cynicism is strongly bound in the pretence of unselfishness to shroud selfish aims. The emulation of a celebrity persona does not necessarily point out to an activity where politicians are trying to cover up selfish aims, but instead can be viewed as a show to capitalise on selfish aims. While the responses do not necessarily evident out 'backlash', the recognition of selfish aims in emulating a celebrity persona, indicate that the participants are cynical towards the practice.

Trust in politics is steadily diminishing and that can notably be observed in various literatures. In the research paper from Miller (1974; Ahmed, Lodhi & Shahzad, 2011), it is stated that political trust has diminished significantly over the years. Ahmed, Lodhi, and Shahzad (2011), further mention that trust is considered to be the fundamental binding force in maintaining a strong relationship between politicians and voters. However, unfortunately, that trust has dwindled these days. One interesting finding in our empirical material that has highlighted this issue and could possibly be one of the reasons why people do not really trust politicians

anymore is that politicians these days are conducting and brand themselves more like celebrities and focus less on policy. When participants were asked whether the politician's personas as celebrities affects their trustworthiness, this is what participants E, P and A said:

Participant E: *I think people only perceive them as good looking and charismatic, but can people really trust them, that's the questionable part* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

Participant P: *I don't think it's good to act like a celebrity. I think if they have this genuine celebrity persona then I find it ok but if you try hard to be then it I think it lessens your trustworthiness* (Interview, May 3rd, 2019)

Participant A: *Yes, I think it gives the wrong image to people. It's less genuine and that makes me not trust them at all* (Interview, May 4th, 2019)

These quotes reveal that when politicians employ perception politics as one of their marketing tactics, to broadcast themselves as celebrities, it decreases their trustworthiness. Helm (2004), conducted a study on consumer cynicism which was grounded in dispositional trust, where he explains that dispositional trust is not the capacity to trust, but rather the predisposition to trust. He divides consumers into three main consumer groups; trusting consumers, sceptics, and cynics depending on the level of dispositional trust (Helm, 2004). In this case, these participants can be categorised as cynics or sceptics because they have a low tendency to trust politicians that act like celebrities. Therefore, it can be said that the celebrityization of politicians is a contributing to political cynicism amongst young citizens.

5.3 Development of Cynical Attitudes/Behaviours Towards Political Practices in General

The empirical material not only revealed the reasons for the development of a cynical attitude towards political marketing and branding, but also towards the political system in general. The acknowledgement of the presence of manipulative intent in the practice of buying out elections, and a sense of hopelessness towards political systems in general, were found to be two extra reasons contributing to political cynicism. We believe that these reasons, along with the ones specifically related to political marketing and branding, together lead to strong political cynicism among the youth these days.

5.3.1 Manipulative Intent in Buying Out Elections

In the previous section, manipulative intent was discussed within the context of political ads and swing voters. The participants, however, also touched upon how they felt that there was an element of manipulation present in the 'buying-out' of elections by wealthy politicians and

parties. Some of the responses explicitly pointed that out, while some had an implied meaning in them. The views of participants Q and N2 are presented in the following quotes:

Participant Q: *There's one party in our country, it's called the PPP and they usually spread out their political figures to different areas of the country usually the more smaller rural areas where people aren't very educated, and they bribe them by giving them money and by that they manipulate them to vote for them (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

Participant N1: *I think it's wrong... I think you are taking advantage of people who don't know better and if they know better then they can't do better simply because they are not able to. If somebody is making like \$1 which is like 100 Kenyan shillings a day and you tell them that you will give them 5000 Kenyan shillings which to you is nothing because it's \$50 and since you are a politician you have access to that money and give everyone maybe 250 shillings or 500 shillings to people who would otherwise have to work consistently 5 days to make that money and because you know they won't have access to that money you take advantage of this person because they can't do any better (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).*

As mentioned in the earlier section, Chaloupka (1999) describes consumer cynicism as a situation where people feel as if they have been manipulated by someone for their self-interest. Participant Q clearly states that he views the practice of politicians and parties buying out elections as manipulative. Since cynical attitudes and behaviours can ensue upon the realisation of manipulative intent, it can be said that participant Q is cynical towards politics the practice of buying out elections because he views it as manipulative. On the contrary, Participant N1 did not explicitly use the word 'manipulation' when voicing out how she feels about elections being bought, but from what was said, it can be implied that she had a similar stance to participant Q. The comment of 'taking advantage of people who don't know better', clearly shows that participant N1 also views this tactic as manipulative, and for that reason, can be seen as having a cynical attitude towards it.

In addition to viewing the practice of buying out elections as manipulative, participants E and A, also expressed feelings of sadness and anger towards this practice. This is what they had to say:

Participant E: *When I see or hear of this (buying out of elections), I'm very angry and the only thing to avoid this kind of tactic is providing education to the citizens and people should be informed about politics (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

Participant A: *Yes, there is one party in my village that promises people a TV if they voted for them. And I think that is absolutely wrong, but some people are desperate and want to have it (Interview, May 4th, 2019).*

Participants A and E express their disdain towards this practice by explicitly being dismissive of it, and by showing their anger towards to it. The comment, 'I'm very angry' by participant E, clearly shows that she has feelings of anger towards this political practice. Moreover, the comment, 'it (buying out of elections) is absolutely wrong but some people are desperate and

want to have it (a TV)', by participant A, can be seen as expressive of sadness. Participant A feels sad at the plight of people who have to give in to such cheap marketing tactics by political entities, just to gain access to some basic wants in life. Kanter and Mirvis (1989), state that cynics usually exhibit anger and sadness when they realise that they have been cheated, led down or used by others. The anger felt by participant E most likely leads us to believe that she feels led down by political entities employing such practices, and for that reason is cynical towards politics. Furthermore, while participant A does not feel like he has personally been cheated on by political entities, his sympathising with people who fall in the trap of such practices, alludes to a sense of being cheated on. Hence, the sadness felt because of feeling cheated on also points to participant A being cynical of politics in general.

5.3.2 Sense of Defeat

In addition to the frustration felt with the activity of buying-out elections, participants were also expressive of an attitude where they had almost given up on the political system because of such practices. When participants L and Q were asked about how they felt about politicians buying out elections, and using bribery to get to the top, this is what they had to say:

Participant L: *It's very corrupted and I feel very frustrated and hopeless because even though you tried to do everything, you tried to vote for the independent party and try to spread the news but at the end those who pay money to voters win the election (Interview, April 30th, 2019).*

Participant Q: *It really makes me feel angry and I get confused and sometimes I think that nothing good can happen to this country (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

Moreover, a similar attitude of defeat was also made evident in the statements by participants N1 and Q when they spoke of their general perception of the political system in their country. This is what they said:

Participant N1: *Personally, the Kenyan attitude and my attitude as well is becoming very complacent. We are very OK with the fact that things don't work and that the systems put in place don't actually do anything to help the common citizen so we've become very OK with the fact and that's how it is and that's a problem because we are not willing to change anything because we know that nothing will change and that is very deeply ingrained in society right now so I feel like kind of helpless (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).*

Participant Q: *I just feel helpless, like if you are not from a powerful and rich family you can't really do anything, so you just feel helpless at a point (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

According to Sloterdijk (1987), modern cynics are enlightened citizens but despite that they do not take any actions against the market system due to the belief that they cannot change the ideological system. The statements from the participants highlight this quite well, as they allude to a sense of hopelessness due to the inability to change the political system. The frustration

with the political system has led citizens to become modern cynics, where they are aware of everything that is happening around them but no longer believe that their actions can make difference and henceforth feel helpless.

5.4 Cynical Behaviours and Attitudes

The case for cynicism will be made stronger in this part of the analysis by bringing forward the cynical behaviours and attitudes the participants engaged in due to their discontentment with political marketing and branding and with politics in general. The analysis will broadly classify behaviours and attitudes within the categories of disapproval, withdrawal, precaution and retribution, which were revealed as the 4 most common behaviours cynics engage in by Helm (2004). In addition to that, the analysis will also make use of the four types of cynicism introduced by Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), with subversive cynicism having its own section.

5.4.1 Disapproval

The participants exhibited a disapproving attitude towards political entities both on a general level and also towards their marketing and branding activities. Specifically, within marketing and branding, participants disapproved the practice of downgrading other opponents and the targeting of swing voters. More generally, participants were also seen emulating a disapproving attitude towards the buying out of elections. To start off, most participants had very stern remarks about political entities degrading other opponents in their marketing material/adverts. This is what participants D and Q had to say about that:

Participant D: *I really hate it when they are doing that, and I find it very unfair. I think they should focus on themselves and their policy and what they can improve (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).*

Participant Q: *Well, I find it very obnoxious, disrespectful and distasteful. If you are against someone in a political party during election time, I don't think you should be degrading them. Just talk about yourself, talk about what you're going to do and don't bad mouth other opponents (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

When participants D and Q used phrases such as, 'really hate it', 'it's unfair' and 'find it obnoxious, disrespectful and distasteful', it is very apparent that both of them are clearly dismissive of marketing activities that degrade other political opponents, and show their disapproval to the practice by using such harsh words.

The disapproval was not only limited towards the practice of attacking other opponents in marketing but also towards the targeting of swing voters through elaborate marketing campaigns. Regarding that matter, this is what participants A and L said:

Participant A: *I think this is an unfair tactic and there should be more regulations on it*
(Interview, May 4th, 2019)

Participant L: *These people (swing voters) shouldn't even be allowed to vote because they are so aloof and blindly follow people* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

Comments such as 'it is an unfair tactic' and 'shouldn't even be allowed to vote', again highlight a disapproving attitude, albeit, this time towards the practice of attracting swing voters through heavy marketing right before election time.

In addition to that, the disapproving attitude or behaviour towards political entities was not only directed towards their marketing and branding, but also towards the practice of buying out elections. Some of the participants had a very harsh stance towards that. Participants E and Q stated:

Participant E: *Oh, that really makes me angry!* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019)

Participant Q: *It makes me feel very angry and confused at times... I don't think anything can change in this country if this is what happens* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

Anger as an emotion is often used to show one's disapproval towards something. In this case, the anger that participants E and Q felt towards the practice of political entities buying out elections shows that they disapprove this kind of behaviour. According to Helm (2004), cynics usually engage in disapproving behaviours by spreading negative word of mouth or by bringing up cynical children. The empirical findings did not highlight the aforementioned behaviours but brought forward disapproving attitudes both towards political marketing and branding, and other related activities. The exhibition of disapproval shows that the participants are increasingly becoming cynical towards political marketing and branding.

5.4.2 Precaution

During the interviews, the participants were seen also exhibiting precautionary behaviour towards political marketing and branding in a number of different circumstances. When participant A was asked about whether he could trust political ads or not, this is what he had to say:

Participant A: *I think they (political ads) are very convincing so you need to be careful before believing the information in them* (Interview, May 4th, 2019).

Participant E who viewed a majority of political marketing and branding activities as manipulative stated:

Participant E: *Try to get information as much as possible so you won't be manipulated from the ads* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

When participant L was asked about whether she was influenced by a politicians overall look and personal characteristics, this is what she had to say:

Participant L: *No, not really because I always try to get more information on them rather than just perceive what they pretend to be* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

Helm (2004), classified precaution as an avoidance behaviour, however, in our empirical findings, precaution is seen more as a protective measure. Comments such as 'get as much information as possible' and 'be careful', suggest that precaution is seen more as a measure to protect oneself from the manipulative intent of political marketing and branding by properly researching the entity one supports and by being critical of the information that they provide. Even though our empirical findings did not support Helm's (2004) conceptualization of precaution, but it can be indicated that the protective measures employed by the research participants are exemplary of cynical behaviour. This statement can be supported by the work of Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), when they define defensive cynicism. When a consumer is trying to protect themselves from marketers by being wary of their marketing tactics, they are essentially practising defensive cynicism. In that regard, the quotes pointing out protective behaviour, are essentially highlighting cynical behaviour.

5.4.3 Retribution

Behaviours that pointed out to retribution were also seen in the empirical material. When participant L was asked about how she dealt with manipulative intent in political marketing and branding, this is what she said:

Participant L: *I try to spread awareness among my family and friends by sharing things on Facebook especially when I see the politicians doing bad things and I also attend demonstrations* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

Participant E had an angry attitude towards rich politicians with elaborate marketing campaigns winning elections and retaliated towards that, which is evident through the following statement:

Participant E: *I try my best to vote for the one who has less money and is evidently doing something better for the country, even though they have a slim chance to win* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

The comments both by participants L and E, though spoken in different contexts, highlight their frustration with the political systems and the marketing and branding that they do. Helm (2004),

mentions that one of the behaviours that cynics engage in is retribution, where they punish dishonest and ethically questionable corporations. According to Helm, Moulard and Richins (2015), consumers take on the punishing role in a number of different ways. This is either done by boycotting products from those entities, or by retaliating against them, or by spreading negative word of mouth about them to family and friends, or by supporting companies which offer a closer match to their values. Participant L is seen spreading negative word of mouth about politicians and parties after being fed up of their manipulative marketing, and also participates in demonstrations which can be considered as severe form of retaliation. Participant E, on the other hand, shows retribution towards traditional political entities by supporting the exact opposite of them. It is possible that participant E perhaps relates to unconventional political entities more since they provide a closer match with her values as a person. This discussion highlights that political marketing and branding activities have led young citizens to exercise behaviours related to retribution, which are seen typical of a cynic.

5.4.4 Withdrawal

One of the most alarming behaviours that was seen repeatedly recurring in the interviews was withdrawal. The interview participants tended to distance and withdraw themselves from politics when they came across political marketing and branding that was too over commercialized or when they witnessed manipulative intent in it. When participants D, L and N1 were asked how they felt about the over commercialisation of politics, this is what they said:

Participant D: *I don't really interact much with politics anymore because of these aggressive attempts to try get votes and try to win the election (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).*

Participant L: *I think it makes me distance myself a bit from politics... it's mostly unpleasant stuff so I better not be involved (Interview, April 30th, 2019).*

Participant N1: *In Nairobi, we have billboards everywhere, I see them and I move on with my life because they are everywhere so that's kind of how I have become with politics I see it and I move on I've seen it enough times for it to just not really matter anymore (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).*

The quotes highlight that the participants had either distanced themselves from politics or had developed a complacent attitudes towards it due to its over commercialisation in recent years. In addition to that, when the participants were asked about how they deal with the manipulative intent within political marketing and branding, a majority of them also said that distancing or keeping away from politics was the best route to go. This is what participants N2, P and Q had to say about that:

Participant N2: *Withdrawing from politics is the best way to go but not always (Interview, April 30th, 2019).*

Participant P: *Yes, I just avoid by distancing myself from it. I think just not watching TV all day long helps because these kinds of manipulative ads come on TV a lot* (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).

Participant Q: *I don't even watch a lot of the news channel anymore, so there's that!* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

One of the behaviours that cynics mostly resolve to have to do with withdrawal. In that instance, cynical consumers are seen adopting a more simplistic lifestyle by avoiding or resisting marketing tactics (Helm, 2004). Helm, Moulard and Richins (2015), also discuss withdrawal as a common cynical behaviour, where consumers withdraw from the market, and take on a life of voluntary simplicity where they have minimal interaction with the market. Participant N2 explicitly uses the word 'withdraw' to explain the way she deals with political marketing manipulation, and thereby very evidently highlights that she indeed withdraws from politics. Moreover, comments such as 'I just avoid' and 'I don't even watch news channels' from participants P and Q, also show that they are resisting or trying to avoid any marketing and branding activities from political entities. In regards to the over-commercialisation of politics, comments such as 'I don't really interact' and 'makes me distance myself from politics' also suggests minimal interaction with political entities. It can be said that by distancing themselves from politics, people are adopting a simple life by cancelling out the toxicity. This discussion can also be linked back to Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011) when they talk about ethical consumer cynicism which has an anti-consumption viewpoint to it. The aforementioned quotes in this section all allude to an anti-consumption stance, which further strengthens that argument that the participants have a cynical attitude towards political marketing and branding.

5.4.5 Subversive Cynicism

During the interviews, the participants also alluded to some behaviours or attitudes which can be seen related to subversive cynicism. For example, participant Q confessed that he did not care about politics when he was asked how he felt about the over saturation of political posters in his locality during election time. He stated:

Participant Q: *To be honest, I'm not a very political person, and I just don't even care about politics that much* (Interview, May 2nd, 2019).

On a different note, when participant N1 was asked of her opinion on political branding, she said the following:

Participant N1: *I don't even focus on what they are trying to emulate, and to be honest, I wouldn't even give these people (politicians) the time of the day* (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).

According to Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), subversive cynicism is basically when consumers denounce and ridicule the colonization of the market. In other words, the idea is to shun the consumerist ideology by using sarcasm, irony and scornful humour. In the case of

politics, the consumerist ideology refers to the overt use of marketing and branding in politics. Comments such as ‘don’t even care about politics’ and ‘wouldn’t even give it the time of the day’ allude to sarcasm in the sense that both participants Q and N2 suggest that they have better things to focus on than waste their time on politics. These sarcastic comments suggest that both participant Q and N2 are cynical towards political marketing and branding.

Participant N1 brought to light a very interesting phenomenon when she was sought for her opinion on politicians gaining fame and trying to become famous. This is what she said:

Participant N1: *We have a lot of people making memes about the President and that makes us take it even less seriously simply because it’s so funny* (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).

The creation of memes can be seen as a perfect example of scornful humour. While participant N1 does not actively engage in the creation of political memes, her finding them ‘funny’ suggests that she enjoys it when political entities are mocked in a humorous manner. In this particular instance, the over commercialisation of politics has led to the creation of memes, which is a mechanism by which people show their cynical attitudes towards it. Participant N1 enjoying the memes implies that she partakes in subversive cynicism.

5.5 Political Marketing and Branding Helps

In spite of the overwhelming responses pointing out to cynical attitudes and behaviours towards political marketing and branding, participants also acknowledged that its use, to some extent, can be advantageous to the overall political system. Participant N2, who primarily had a negative view of political marketing and branding, acknowledged that in this modern world, the applications can be a useful vessel in helping politicians spread their message and standpoint. She stated:

Participant N2: *I mean I think it has become a must with the changes that happen in the markets especially with social media and everything. If you want your voice to be heard you have to commercialize yourself* (Interview, April 30th, 2019).

On a similar note, participant P also believed that marketing and branding in politics can assist politicians in engaging with their electorate and that the applications can help politicians improve their relationship with them, granted that they know how to brand themselves appropriately. He stated;

Participant P: *Political marketing and branding gives politicians a chance to engage with people and voters. Furthermore, politicians idolize fame and a celebrity status because they are aware of the influence of celebrities and to be celebrity it gives them a connection with people. So by becoming a celebrity you get respect from citizens because our society adores celebrities* (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).

Another advantage of political marketing and branding which was brought forward by participant A was that it helps politicians reach out to a wider audience and may help them get elected. This is what he said about that:

Participant A: *I witnessed in the last election that our prime minister was using social media such as Twitter to promote his campaigns and policies and I think that it helped him win. Also I think he used these marketing applications because he has seen the success of Barack Obama where he was also using a lot of social media during his election campaign. In general, I think it helps to reach out to a wider audience (Interview, May 4th, 2019).*

Furthermore, participants also believed that the political marketing and branding helps promote politics and gets more people involved in the democratic system. The applications can further help spread awareness and also get people involved in politics. Participants D and N1 explained:

Participant D: *I don't think marketing and branding in politics will pose any threats when it becomes commercial with time but instead it can be beneficial. If it became commercial in the sense that politics gets promoted more, I think it's actually good because you can get more people involved in politics (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).*

Participant N1: *I mean definitely political marketing and branding can help more people to be aware of the political situations, especially people in remote areas. Political marketing used in politics such as radio and TV advertisements can reach to rural areas so people can get themselves informed and have information to exercise their freedom to vote (Interview, May 3rd, 2019).*

The positive views towards marketing and branding in politics exemplified by comments such as 'helps engage people and voters', 'helps reach out to wider audiences', 'helps promote politics', 'gets more people involved in politics' and 'helps people get informed about politics and exercise their freedom to vote', brings us to the realisation that political marketing and branding in politics can also play a role in strengthening the position of politics in society and help foster democracy. This is in line with studies from Lees-Marshment (2001), Needham (2006) and Smith and French (2009), who mention that political marketing and branding can help strengthen and expand democracy if the applications help people get access to political information and makes it easier for them to get involved in the electoral process.

Despite the positive aspects highlighted by some participants, the negative aspects of political marketing and branding applications seem to outweigh the positive ones. Participants seem to have several concerns about the use of marketing and branding in politics. They stressed that the applications these days are being used to promote negative politics such as attacking political opponents and projecting false promises. Moreover, they also said that due to political marketing and branding, there has been a change in focus in politics, from content to appearance. Thus, marketing and branding have heavily been used to promote politicians by focusing on their personal brands, in order to create a celebrity persona for them. This has been done on the expense of communicating on policy and the provision of important factual

information which can help voters make better choices and decision. Most participants viewed political marketing and branding activities as manipulative, which is also a huge red flag. Instead of engaging people in the democratic system, the applications are actually turning people away. A majority of the interview participants have withdrawn and distanced themselves from politics. The negative feelings towards political marketing and branding in general, have essentially disengaged participants from politics.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, we will summarize the findings of this research and answer the research question, as well as discuss the theoretical contributions and managerial implications. Furthermore, we discuss the current political landscape and what should be improved both in the system itself and in the use of marketing and branding in politics. The limitations of the research and suggestions for future research have been also discussed in this chapter.

6.1 Recap of Findings

After the lengthy findings and analysis section, we would like to recap the main findings from the section. The first half of the section will deal with the reasons for cynicism towards political marketing and branding. The later part will shed light on the 5 categories of subsequent cynical attitudes and behaviours that the interview participants engaged in and developed due to their frustrations with political marketing and branding.

6.1.1 Reasons of Cynicism

The findings revealed that young people were cynical towards political marketing and branding. The five reasons which fuelled the development of cynicism attitude towards political marketing and branding were manipulative intent, the projection of false promises, the attacking of other opponents, the preference for promotion over policy and the creation of a celebrity persona.

A great number of interview participants revealed that there were several marketing and branding activities in politics that had manipulative intents in them. Firstly, in terms of political adverts, a lot of the participants believed that they did not provide them with any factual information and were instead an elaborate sales pitch. The sell-out nature of the adverts was a major contribution to participants' view of them as manipulative. Moreover, manipulative intent was also seen in marketing campaigns targeting swing voters. Political entities were essentially viewed as cheating vulnerable and misinformed people by clouding their decision-making process with attractive marketing. Furthermore, heavy marketing right before election time was also perceived to be manipulative. The carefully crafted marketing campaigns right before the elections were viewed as an attention seeking tactic. Participants were of the view that such tactics disrupt the natural process of forming informed political opinions, and essentially trick voters into supporting political entities with the most elaborate campaigns.

Other than manipulative intent in politics, the projection of false promises also contributed to cynicism. A vast majority of interview participants indicated that politicians did not keep their marketed promises. They pointed out that political entities were overpromising brighter futures, and most of them failed to keep their promises after they were given the opportunity to act on those promises. Another reason for cynicism towards political marketing and branding was related to downgrading competition. A majority of the participants had a very negative perception towards this tactic and almost all of them expressed their disapproval towards it. Research participants also believed that there had been a shift in politics from concentrating on policy to focusing on personal branding. Information on policy was considered to be an important element in politics and focusing too much on personal branding carried the risk of outpacing information on the policy. Thus, many respondents were disappointed that political entities were downplaying policy, the talk of which was deemed necessary by them. Because of this reason, they were also cynical towards political marketing and branding. Lastly, many participants mentioned that politicians these days were conducting themselves like celebrities and were using their personality as a vessel to get elected rather than their stance on policy. A lot of the participants believed that politicians who created such personas were generally less trustworthy and they also questioned their capabilities as a politician. People with low levels of disposable trust were classified as cynics, and for that reason, this was also attributed as a reason for cynicism.

6.1.2 Cynical Attitudes and Cynicism Behavior

After discovering the reasons for cynicism in political marketing and branding, the cynical attitudes and behaviours exhibited by the interview participants were also explored. The participants' cynical attitudes and behaviours were broadly classified into 5 main categories which were disapproval, withdrawal, precaution, retribution and subversive cynicism.

Starting with disapproval, the participants exhibited a disapproving attitude towards political entities both on a general level and also towards their marketing and branding activities. Most research participants were disapproving of political marketing and branding tactics, especially when the applications were used to downgrade other opponents, target swing voters and to buy out elections. Additionally, withdrawal was considered to be the most alarming behaviour in the findings. The research participants had distanced themselves from politics due to being frustrated with its over commercialisation in recent years, and also because of marketing and branding they deemed overly manipulative. Moreover, participants were also cautious of political marketing and branding activities. The precaution, in theory, was classified as an avoidance behaviour, however, in the findings, it was seen as more of a protective measure where participants were seen protecting themselves from manipulative political marketing and branding. Furthermore, the participants were also seen engaging in retribution. They made this evident by spreading negative word of mouth about political entities to their family and friends, and by supporting candidates offering a better fit with their values. Lastly, participants were also found engaging in behaviours related to subversive cynicism

where they were seen sarcastically mocking political entities due to political marketing and branding.

6.2 Cynicism Towards Political Marketing and Branding Leads to Political Apathy

The findings highlight the various cynical attitudes and behaviours young people were engaging in due to them being cynical towards certain marketing and branding practices in the political sphere. While all the behaviours and attitudes identified were important in insinuating that young people were indeed cynical towards political marketing, the one that offered the closest fit or explanation for political apathy was 'withdrawal'. When participants were reiterating their behaviours related to withdrawal, the most common response was that they had distanced themselves from politics. To offer a more general explanation, people were fed up of manipulative intent within political marketing communications, the focus placed on personal branding than policy, the downgrading of competitors and the projection of false promises. For them, one of the ways to deal with all of this was to withdraw and distance themselves from politics. Instead of engaging more people into the political system by developing meaningful relationships, political marketing and branding can actually be seen doing the opposite, which is driving people away.

In addition to that, the participants also mentioned that they felt defeated by the political system in general. Despite being aware of status quo, they have opted not to take any actions against it due to the belief that they cannot change the ideological system, an attitude or behaviour exemplary of a modern cynic. To explain further, they feel a sense of hopelessness and have given up on the political system. Even though the participants voiced this while speaking of politics in general, it is possible to believe that this attitude is a result of their frustration with political marketing and branding. They believe that political entities will continue to be manipulative in their political marketing communications, will keep projecting false promises, will carry on placing more emphasis on promoting themselves rather than the policy and what they stand for and will not stop downgrading their competition. The attitude or behaviour of giving up, and expressing a sense of hopelessness is also indicative of political apathy. Because of the belief that nothing will change, political involvement is reduced down.

In conclusion, to answer the research question, it can be indicated that cynicism towards certain political marketing and branding activities has been playing a role in political apathy among young people, despite its growth in recent years. Due to their cynical attitudes towards political marketing and branding activities, young people have distanced themselves from politics and limited their involvement with it. Therefore, the growth of political marketing and branding can be seen having a negative effect on political involvement among the youth, instead of increasing their interest and participation.

6.3 Theoretical Contributions

The findings from this research offer theoretical contributions in three different areas. To recap, the literature used in this research paper is based on two different views on political marketing and branding. The first camp was in favour of the use of marketing and branding in politics, highlighting that marketing and branding concepts were applicable to the political context, and their increased use was expanding democracy and engaging citizens in the political system. The opposing literature stream was critical of the use of marketing and branding in politics and argued that it was actually damaging democracy. The findings in our research are positioned in this latter literature stream. We were able to come to the conclusion that young people were cynical of certain political marketing and branding activities, and were, therefore, engaging in attitudes and behaviours exemplary of cynics. In addition to all the critique highlighted in the second literature stream, the existence of cynicism towards political marketing and branding can be considered as a new inclusion as to why the use of marketing and branding applications in politics is problematic. Therefore, this can be considered as our contribution towards that literature stream.

Moreover, in the problematization section, several different reasons for political apathy were brought forward. Some suggested reasons of political apathy among the youth were a gap between interest and action, not being able to find a party or politician to identify with, an increased interest in superfluous activities such as Netflix and online shopping, or simply not having the time to care for politics. This research has effectively contributed to the literature stream on political apathy as well since we were able to conclude that cynicism towards political marketing and branding was leading to political apathy among the youth. This connection had not been made in previous research, and therefore, offers a new and novel perspective on the reasons for political apathy.

In addition to these two contributions, this body of research also makes a contribution to the literature on political cynicism. By using theories and concepts from consumer cynicism, we were able to show that political cynicism was also powered by political marketing and branding. In this regard, we were able to identify the reasons for cynicism towards political marketing and branding, and the cynical attitudes and behaviours young people resolved due to those reasons. We believe that these are novel contributions, as political marketing and branding have not been viewed from the perspective of consumer cynicism before, and with that, adds to the literature on political cynicism.

6.4 Managerial Implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions, our research findings also have implications for political entities engaging in political marketing and branding. As mentioned earlier, the sell-

out nature of political marketing adverts was one of the reasons why young people viewed it as manipulative, and hence, were cynical of political marketing. In order to curtail the development of the subsequent cynical attitudes and behaviours because of this reason, we suggest that political marketers should change the trajectory of their marketing activities to being more informative. The average political marketing message should not solely contain cues to 'purchase' or to 'buy' but should make use of actual reasons as to why citizens should support and cast their votes. By employing such an approach, political adverts and other communicative materials will come across as more genuine and will emulate a sense of care for the electorate.

Another important finding in our research was that young people were exhibiting a cynical attitude towards political marketing and branding because they were of the opinion that it was focusing too much on personal branding and very little on policy. The participants frequently voiced out that they would appreciate seeing more of what someone would do for the country, rather than what their personality is like. Even though a strong personal brand for a politician can prove fruitful in winning elections, we think that people would be more receptive towards political marketing and branding if the applications were simultaneously used to highlight the changes someone would make in the country, rather than, for instance, which line of nobles they come from. Such an approach would hopefully help diminish the cynical attitude people have towards political marketing and branding.

Young people had a disapproving attitude towards political adverts and other marketing communications material which were downgrading and targeting political opponents. Their disapproval towards it was one of the reasons why they were cynical of the practice. To combat this source of cynicism towards political marketing and branding there is an obvious solution: political entities need to quit this cheap marketing tactic and focus on themselves and what they can do for the country. This doesn't mean that they should exhaust their marketing budgets on creating personal brands because young people were not entirely receptive of that either. Instead, as mentioned earlier, they should place more focus on their stance on policy and what they will do for the electorate once they come into power. The interviewees repeatedly highlighted that they would much more be receptive to that than seeing political entities brutally tarnish their competition.

It was evident in our research findings that participants did not trust politicians who conducted themselves like celebrities, and that was attributed as the reason for their cynical attitude towards political impression management. In our opinion, the creation of a celebrity persona, if done right, can reap benefits to politicians. As long as politicians are able to convey a sense of authenticity and genuinity in their celebrity personas, we believe that young people would find them more credible and thereby develop a trustworthy attitude towards them. This way, the success of political impression management will be more likely and will also hopefully alter the cynical perspective of the public.

Another important aspect that fuelled cynicism amongst young people, was the inability of political entities to keep their marketed promises. Therefore, it goes without saying that political

entities should have realistic policies and promise things which they can actually do. Even if they get elected on the basis of their false ‘advertising’, during their tenure, people will catch up on their lies, and that will undermine their success for the future because the electorate will now be cynical towards them.

6.5 General Conclusions

As can be seen with the results from this research, political systems are not viewed in the best light by the public. While our research specifically points out to issues with political marketing and branding, we believe that the problem is not only limited to the periphery of that. A major overhaul is needed in the way political entities manage and conduct themselves. Many participants highlighted issues with corruption, bribery, the buying-out of elections, etc., and with such grave issues plaguing the political community, it is not a surprise that young people have developed a cynical attitude towards political marketing and branding. Political entities these days think that marketing and branding themselves in a positive light can overshadow their flaws, but that does not seem true in today's well informed and educated society in which the younger generation lives in. They are able to spot a fake from miles away and have their weapons ready to punish them. Unfortunately, the way in which they are punishing political entities for their wrongdoings is by withdrawing from the ‘market’, which is ultimately proving out to be the most harmful for them. By being apathetic towards political issues, they are giving corrupt politicians a fairground to continue with their assaults on the masses and further deteriorate the democratic process. Young people need to shudder off their cynical attitude in which they have stopped caring and taking action and should step up to the plate by keeping political entities in check and holding them accountable for their actions. That is the only way a change will happen on a societal level.

Moreover, if political marketing and branding is to reap its rewards for political entities in the future, where young people will be equipped with even better information and knowledge, they need to set their corrupt, dishonest and underhanded agendas straight. If not, no amount of marketing and branding will be to mask their malicious agendas. It is important to acknowledge that a complete overhaul of the political system is not possible, but both political entities, and citizens are in charge of bringing a change in their surroundings. Political entities can use marketing to engage more people in the political system, and citizens with their enlightened sense of the world, are responsible for getting the right people in power, hopefully, setting the entire system in an upward spiral.

At the same time, we would also like to offer some remarks on the use of marketing and branding in politics. It seems as if both these constructs have found their way in all walks of life, and arguably in areas where they should not be. While personally we do think that political marketing and branding can help the political system when used appropriately, at the same time, we think that it is also important to take a step back from it. As our research has revealed, young

people are cynical towards marketing and branding in politics. A system which is put in place to help the masses and elevate the position of a country globally, is now disgruntled in a world where numbers, image, and sales are taking the leading position. Instead of helping people out, it has become a race dominated by winning and acquiring power. Having said that, we believe that marketing and branding activities need to be applied in non-traditional market contexts with care, and for the right reasons. People are catching up on the manipulation in it all, and instead of actually helping out political entities, marketing and branding is unfortunately doing the opposite. A reworked approach, with ground level changes in the political core, can help reap the maximum benefits from political marketing and branding.

6.6 Critique of the Study and Future Research Suggestions

In this section of the chapter, we will outline the limitations of this research as well as provide several suggestions for future research. In term of limitations, there are some aspects that need to be taken into consideration. First and foremost, it should be acknowledged that this research is not meant to be generalizable. The study employed a qualitative method which was meant to study a specific age group, in this case, people who are younger than 30 years of age, for the case of political apathy. Therefore, the findings in this research are not generalizable. However, it has captured the phenomenon that we were looking for which is the role of cynicism in political apathy among young people. Second, it should be also acknowledged that interviews responses might have gotten influenced by us during the interview because of our inexperience as interviewers. Third, the majority of our research participants were from the countries that are ranked very high in Corruption Perception Index (Moreira, 2019), an index which ranks countries based on the corruption perception. The participants confirmed during interviews that their countries and politicians were corrupt in general. Therefore, most of our participants expressed a more of negative perception towards politics in general and also towards marketing and branding in politics.

For future research, we present the following recommendations. First of all, our research is limited to young people under the age of 30, coming from educated backgrounds only. Considering this, it could be interesting to find out how young people coming from less privileged backgrounds view political marketing and branding and whether cynicism plays a role in political apathy or not. Furthermore, future research can be more challenging by studying two different demographic groups such as young people under 30 and people who are over 30, and then compare the results. Thus, the research could shed more light on how all adults make sense of political marketing and branding. Moreover, it would be interesting to see research results when participants are from the countries that are less corrupt. Would cynicism in marketing still play a role in political apathy? Therefore, we recommend future researchers to recruit research participants from countries that have a low ranking in Corruption Perception Index such as Denmark, New Zealand, Finland, Singapore, etc. Last but not least, it is important

to mention that our research was conducted with the help of in-depth interviews with young participants which produced thick description and revealed rich information on the phenomenon. However, we think that in order to see how widespread these cynical attitudes are, future research should employ a quantitative approach with a larger number of participants, to determine the exact severity of it.

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Appendix A – Topic/Interview Guide

Question 1

- A. What are the main problems with the contemporary political systems you think, and why?
- B. How do you feel about these frustrations? (Why are you frustrated?)

Question 2

- A. Have you come across any marketing and branding activities in politics? Can you give us examples of any?

Question 3

- A. Is it possible to observe an increased market logic in contemporary politics? And if so...in what way?

Question 4

- A. Do you think that the political system, like everything these days, has become too commercial with time? If so.... what are the dangers (pros/cons) with that?
- B. Has that affected the way in which you deal with politics now?

Question 5

- A. What are your thoughts on marketing and branding in politics? Have you seen instances where politicians and/or parties try to brand themselves....and what do you think about that? Can you see any potential problems with that?
- B. Do you think that policy issues are being put under the rug these days and focus placed on more superficial things such as elaborate marketing campaign where a lot of money is spent? And how that makes them feel?
- C. Do you think marketing and branding have been used to promote the party and its politicians instead of its policy (which is more important in the grander scheme of things)?

- D. Do you think that marketing and branding practices in politics have focused too much on the private lives of politicians, making those the central feature of an election campaign, rather than focus on things that really matter such as their stances of important issues plaguing the country? And how does that make you feel?

Question 6

- A. What are your opinions on political adverts and related messages that are too over the top, potentially degrading other opponents, or are frequent in nature and potentially irritating?
- B. Do you think that the marketing tactics usually used by politicians and parties in their advertising material align with your own personal values (honesty, integrity, truthfulness, caring attitude)?
- C. Can we trust political ads and politicians in general? Why and why not?

Question 7

- A. Do you feel any element of manipulation when exposed to marketing activities/advertisements from parties and politicians? Are they selling you something or giving you information?
- B. Is there a way of protecting yourself against political manipulation and dishonest politicians you think? How do you try to protect yourself against that? (behaviours)

Question 8

- A. Some political scientists have suggested that a nation's destiny should not depend on three to four weeks of carefully engineered marketing material but rather on the opinions they have formed through judging different parties and politicians through experience over say 4 years? Do you agree with these statements, if so, why?
- B. Do you think politics has become more about numbers and winning (sales) than actually caring about people and society?

Question 9

- A. Do you know any instances or examples where politicians or other actors for that matter have tried to buy elections? What do you think about that? How could that be avoided?
- B. Who/what party is it that generally wins elections? Why? In what way?

- C. Do you think the party that wins the election is the one that has the most money? Why?
- D. Can we trust the contemporary political ads? Do you perceive them to be convincing?

Question 10

- A. Do you think or believe that politicians keep their marketed promises (campaigns) after the election?
- B. Do you think you can trust the government in implementing policies? Or do you always have an urge to check on them regularly?

Question 11

- A. Do you think marketing and branding in politics been properly used to spread genuine politics about policy issues or other pertinent stuff or have they been used to attack the opponents and get one up on them? What do you think of such practices?
- B. Do you think that marketing because of its alluring properties, brings in people to vote who essentially don't have any interest in politics (swing voters), but are influenced by marketing to vote, and end up voting for something which they have no idea about, turning around the outcome of an election completely? How do you feel about that?

Question 12

- A. How do you think politicians conduct themselves these days, compared to before? Is it important for them to become famous you think, and why do you think they want to become famous?
- B. Do you think that their personas as celebrities these days affect their trustworthiness?
- C. Have you ever been influenced more by a politicians overall look and personal characteristics than their stances on policy initiatives?

Appendix B – The Interviewees

Participant	<i>Code Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender Identity</i>	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Date of Interview</i>
Participant 1	N2	23	Female	Morocco	Apr 30th, 2019
Participant 2	L	27	Female	Lebanon	Apr 30th, 2019
Participant 3	Q	23	Male	Pakistan	May 2nd, 2019
Participant 4	E	30	Female	Mexico	May 2nd, 2019
Participant 5	N1	24	Female	Kenya	May 3rd, 2019
Participant 6	D	23	Female	Romania	May 3rd, 2019
Participant 7	P	31	Male	USA	May 3rd, 2019
Participant 8	A	25	Male	India	May 4th, 2019

Appendix C – The Consent Form

Consent to take part in a research

- I _____, age ____ sex, _____, have agreed to voluntarily take part in this study
- I realise that at any time, I can refuse to answer the questions or withdraw from the interview completely.
- If for any reason I want to deny permission to for my interview information being used, I can claim my right within one week. In that case, the material will be deleted.
- The interviewers have explained to me the purpose of this study and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I acknowledge that taking part in this research will not benefit me directly.
- I acknowledge and agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I acknowledge that the information I provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality.
- The interviewers agree to keep my identity anonymous in this research. This will be done by changing my name and deter any details of my interview which may reveal my identity.
- I have been given the contact details for the interviewers and a person involved in this research and free to contact them for further clarification and information.

Signature of participant

Place/Date
