

**The Power of Personal Branding as part of a Political
Marketing Strategy in Armenia**

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Abstract

Personal branding is one of the most popular phenomena of marketing field in recent years. It has been widely used by people of different careers in order to get a good position or to create a particular perception about them in the minds of others. Nowadays, many politicians adopt this technique to differentiate themselves from other candidates as well as possibly influence people's opinion of them and reach their intended goals. However, there are limited studies on how it actually affects people and their perception of a particular politician. The primary purpose of this study is to understand what are the key factors of political branding in Armenia and how it possibly affects people and their voting decision. In addition to that, as part of the study, qualitative and quantitative research was conducted in the form of survey and interview to find out the effectiveness of personal branding among Armenian politicians and how it affects their audiences. This paper also explores what role social media play in political branding and how the latter affects the audience's interest in a specific politician. The analysis of the collected data leads to several observations were made that may suggest the effectiveness of personal branding and its connection to the success of a politician's activity in the field.

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Introduction

Personal branding is one of the most popular phenomena of marketing field in recent years. It has been widely used by people of different careers in order to get a good position or to

create a particular perception about them in the minds of others. Nowadays, many politicians adopt this technique to differentiate themselves from other candidates as well as possibly influence people's perception of them and reach their intended goals. As stated by Dr. Kulbhushan Sharma, "a political brand is the overarching feeling, impression, association or image the public has towards a politician, political organization, or nation. Political branding helps the party or candidate to help change or maintain reputation and support, create a feeling of identity with the party or its candidates and create a trusting relationship between political elites and consumers" (Sharma, 2016). Besides, in her research titled "Importance of Personal Branding: Uses of Personal Branding for Career Development and Success" Brenna Collins claims that "with the growing influence of technology and social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, politicians expand their branding to online platforms as well" (Collins, 2012, p.1).

While people may not notice the direct influence of personal branding on their perception about a particular politician, they are constantly influenced and manipulated with it. In fact, the technique of personal branding could be understood through the psychoanalytic theory first brought in by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th century, which mainly referred to the idea of unconsciousness mind. Similar to psychoanalytic theory, politicians use various branches of personal branding to affect people's mind and their decisions unconsciously. What is more, in their book called "Affective intelligence and political judgment" Marcus, G. E., Neuman, W. R., & MacKuen, M. explain the essence of 'Affective Intelligence' theory and argue that voting decision is very much connected and sometimes even manipulated by our own emotions and therefore, many marketing specialists use them to influence and control voters' decision-making process (2000, p. 2).

Although personal branding may be used face to face, it is equally important to use it in the online community as well especially nowadays, when most people use social media to communicate with each other and get informed about anything happening in the world. Besides, many people who are potential voters rely on social media platforms to get to know to the politician, and that eventually influences on their decision of voting. Besides that, according to Hong & Nadler (2011), “Studies have shown that in a very short space of time, politicians in modern democracies across the world have eagerly adopted social media for engaging their constituents, entering into direct dialog with citizens and enabling vivid political discussions (p.20). This type of communication allows both citizens and politicians to engage freely with each at a more direct level and possibly help the latter to focus the interest of the public toward them.

This paper attempts to understand how and why personal branding of a politician can influence the public's perception and decision to vote. In addition to that, it aims to understand what factors influence the effectiveness of personal branding and how much it is connected to social media. The goal of this thesis is to evaluate the effectiveness of personal branding by politicians among millennials by doing case studies on some of the most successful politicians in Armenia. The methodology of the thesis is primarily based on interviews with media professionals and a psychologist as well as qualitative surveys about specific politicians of Armenia and the public’s perception of the recent political situation of Armenia.

Literature review

Nowadays as there is a tough competition in the job market, many job seekers are doing their best to stand out from their mates to get a good position as well as to create and establish a

certain perception about them in the minds of others. This type of action is what we today call personal branding. In her study about the Importance of Personal Branding, Brenna Collins states, “It has been a helpful technique among labor force in the last several decades especially with the growing popularity of self-marketing platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter & LinkedIn which help to create an even stronger image for differentiating oneself from others” (Collins, 2012, p.1). Realizing the importance and potential influence of personal branding, it is not surprising that many politicians use this technique to distinguish themselves from other candidates and also create a specific perception about them among the public to achieve desired goals.

Personal branding is a relatively new term in the marketing sphere, and yet it is probably one of the most popular phenomena that people try to adopt regardless of their career choice. Today we see more and more politicians using this marketing construct to differentiate themselves from other candidates, as well as to establish a particular type of perception about themselves among the public to achieve desired goals. In their research about Personal Branding, Mohammed & Steyn (2016) state that: “Personal branding requires a clear understanding of one’s own profile including personality, strengths, weaknesses, achievements, passions and how one is perceived by others” (p.27).

According to personal brand expert Jennifer Holloway, “personal brand consists of such characteristics as the individual's values, reputation, behavior, skills, and image” (Holloway, 2013, p 14). In other words, everything we do influences our brand, including our everyday actions such as the way we dress, walk, speak, behave, and much more. In the same way, as businessman establish and sell their brand, politicians do the same thing; however, much more delicately.

When talking about personal branding in business, the measurable indicator of a successful brand is the financial area, while in the political context, the successful, measurable brand value is expressed in votes. In his article “Party brands and voting,” Martin Vinæs Larsen argues that political brands can have a powerful influence on people and their voting behavior (Larsen, 2012, p. 160). However, before going further on how political branding is related to voting, there should be a clear understanding of what personal branding is and how it works. In his thesis, Albert Kobby Mensah states that: “Political branding is the way parties identify and differentiate themselves to voters and the political market in general, including the media, civil societies, prospective financiers and even the competing parties (Mensah, 2012, p. 6).

As mentioned before, the ultimate goal of personal branding is typically gaining votes of citizens. However, it is not an easy process; in fact, substantial effort goes into personal branding before reaching the desired goal of obtaining votes. As G. Smith and A. French mention in their article “in order to be successful in the world of politics, political brands ought to achieve deep connection as well as create sense of community and authenticity while trying to maintain key brand characteristics necessary to voter-consumers” (Smith & French, 2009, p. 219).

There are numerous discussions about the various tactics that politicians use as part of their brand in order to become more successful and yet there is still a question about what exactly do politicians need to gain success in the field. According to Adam Hughes, “the personal brand of a politician should consist of four elements of attributes, promised benefits, values, and personality” (Hughes, 2011, p.2). Each of these four elements helps to communicate with the audience and establish a credible in the mind of the public. At the same time, in his Article titled “Authenticity in Political Discourse,” Ben Jones argues that authenticity is another

key component of a political brand which affects on the public's perception about a politician (Jones, 2016).

When speaking about politics, most of the time, people are inclined to say that voting is a sensible choice. However, if we look at all of these qualities of successful political brands or campaign, it can be evident that all of them include one significant aspect in them, which is the use of pathos on the audience. In fact, in their book called "Affective intelligence and political judgment" Marcus, G. E., Neuman, W. R., & MacKuen, M. argue that voting decision is very much connected and manipulated by our emotions (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000, p. 2). Taking into consideration the above-mentioned facts, it can easily be said that emotional factor is probably one of the most significant parts of a successful political campaign.

What is more, as Zaria Gorvett states in her article, "people may not be as in control of our own vote as they tend to think" (Gorvett, 2015). The interesting detail in all this is that most of the time, the audience is manipulated by marketing professionals with their own emotions. In fact, according to Eyal Winter, our political preferences and choices can sometimes even be influenced by our unconscious mind (Winter, 2015). Most of the time, the public itself wants to be fooled to believe in their own powers. Marketing scholar Philip Kotler says, "every few years, the American public is trained to believe in the illusion that they run their country by choosing among the people who want to run their country for them" (Kotler, 1975, p.767).

As it can be seen, emotion is one of the significant factors affecting of the political branding, however, living in the 21st century, where technology is developing literally every second, it is impossible not to talk about the online personal branding of politicians. It is no news that the internet has revolutionized communication between individuals. Nowadays, millions of people utilize the internet to get informed or to engage with relatives. As for the politics,

Khazaeli, S. & Stockemer, D. claim that “the Internet has also become an integral part of politics, particularly in democracies, where it promotes free dialogue between the government and the public” (Khazaeli & Stockemer, 2013, p.464). This way, by establishing a social media presence, politicians create a closer relationship with their audience. As a matter of fact, Van Santen & Van Zoonen argue in their article that a high level of personalized communication in the social media can possibly strengthen the connection between the politician and the mass audience (Santen & Zoonen, 2013, p.54). In addition to that as Maria Asmarianaki states in her research, that according to studies “the individual who is disclosing tends to be liked by the individuals he chooses to disclose to, thus, positively influencing attitudes through disclosure” (Asmarianaki, 2017, p 8).

There are many politicians who successfully used social media to reach their desired goals. However, one of the most popular politicians using social media effectively was former U.S. president Barack Obama. In fact, Staci Zavattaro mentions in her article that the effective use of social media platform tactics indeed helped President Obama and his team to spread the pre-established image of his among massive audiences both for little money and effort (Zavattaro, 2010, p.125).

When talking about political branding in the 21st century, we can not miss millennial generation’s connection to the latter. Millennial generation includes all the who were born between 1980 and 2000 (Smith & Nichols, 2015). Also, they are called Millennials because due to them being raised in the digital era, they tend to show greater interest toward media, communication and digital technologies in general (Kaifi et al., 2012). Besides, as part of his thesis, David Rankin surveyed 2500 students in order to understand their engagement in U.S. politics. The results showed that there is a strong connection between the interest of those

students in politics and their behavior and engagement in it (Rankin, D. 2013, p.13). In their book called *The Politics of Millennials*, Stella M. Rouse and Ashley D. Ross also mention that the political identity of Millennial generation is based on various factors that include family, religion, institutions, prosperities on the future as well as their life experiences (p.5, 2018).

As can be seen, the previous research mentioned above provides background material about political branding and its importance. These sources also give some information about the connection of political branding and social media as well as explains Millennials interest towards the latter. However, there is little research on political branding in Armenia and how it affects on Millennial generation of Armenia. There is also no information on what role does social media in political branding of Armenia. Further research tries to find information about the discussed limitations and make conclusions based on them.

Research question

The aim of this research is to answer two important research questions: "how does the personal branding of politicians affect the perception of their audience in Armenia" and "what kind of role does personal branding play in the success of Armenian politicians." Besides that, this study will also explore such questions as 'what personal branding is?' 'what are the main characteristics of successful personal branding?' 'how does personal branding effect on the public?' 'what are the qualities of a successful political brand? in the Armenian context."

Methodology

To answer the two central research questions mentioned above, mixed methodology research was conducted, including a survey and interviews. The first part of the methodology was focused on the interviews with media professionals and one psychologist who were asked various questions about Armenian politicians, their branding, and the influence of political branding in general. The next part of the research was conducted with the help of the online survey, which included questions about the people's interest in politics, specific Armenian politicians, and their political activity. The primary target group of this research were young adults, mainly in the age of 18-35 who are potential voters as well as active users of social media for getting news. Each participant was given the survey of consisting 17 questions referring to their engagement in politics, their usage of media platforms for getting news as well as their perception about several politicians of Armenia as well as the recent political changes of the country. Besides, most of the questions were either a multiple choice, rank-order, or close and open-ended.

As mentioned above, alongside with the conducted surveys and their analysis, the paper also includes several interviews conducted with media professionals such as journalist and reporters as well as a psychologist who either have sufficient experience of working in the field of politics or have qualified knowledge to raise their opinion. The interviews questions were mainly connected to political branding, its effectiveness, and relation to social media as well as several questions particularly connected to the existence and usage of political branding in Armenia. Overall, the surveys and interviews helped to understand and analyze the situation of political branding in Armenia both from a viewpoint of a media professional and as a citizen or a potential voter.

Research Findings

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with three media professionals who have experience of working either in the field of politics or directly with politicians as well as one psychologist who is specified in studying media psychology. The interview questions were mainly connected to the usage of political branding in Armenia and its influence on the people's perspective.

While speaking about the history of the existence of political branding in Armenia, Anahit Hovhannisyán, who is working as a journalist at Yerkir Media TV channel for already three years, mentioned that political branding in Armenia exists for quite a long time, while being used during the presidency of both Robert Kocharyán and Serj Sargsyan. However, as she said, political branding has changed a lot since then. "It is mainly because back in the early days of political branding, it was mostly used from election to election, meaning that the character of the politician wouldn't be consistently developed" Anahit Hovhannisyán stated.

In addition to that, Anahit Hovhannisyan also mentioned that one see politicians acting accordingly to his/her character throughout the political campaigns and then act differently after the elective processes. An example of such type of political branding was used for the former president of Armenia Serj Sargsyan, whose team of image makers were working on his branding mostly throughout the elective campaigns and not putting much effort in developing his image afterward. Besides, although the Serj Sargsyan's political branding has changed over time, especially in the recent years of his political career, it still did not have consistency in developing his character and meeting the expectations of the audience.

Political marketing has gone through major changes in the last several decades, especially with the growing popularity of technology, various marketing tools, and social media. It includes much more nowadays rather than simply a favorable positioning, marketing of politicians, or creating a successful image for them. During the interview with Hayarpi Baghdasaryan, who has a four-year experience in journalism, while both being a former reporter and a current journalist at 'Armtimes' news agency said that in the last few decades, branding has shifted its way from newspapers and magazines to social media platforms. This idea was also stated by Anahit Hovhannisyan who while talking about old and new communication mediums said this: "social media plays an important role in the development of political marketing because if long time ago, people could connect with the politicians through TV or radio which is a more Intermediary way of communication in its essence, today, social media allows the community to have much more direct communication with them". This way, the communication between the politician and the community is happening on a much more personal level, which attracts the audience and triggers their interest towards that politician.

What is more, an interesting commonality that all of the three interviewees mentioned is that the key aspect of political marketing in the social media is the level of accessibility or approachableness of a politician as well as his/her presence and engagement in the various social media platforms. As Anahit Hovhannisyan mentioned, “there is a constant pretension for politicians to be accessible and engaged in social media.” This idea of politicians using social media for their branding and communicating directly with their audience has been existing in Armenia as well, however, it developed on a new level and even has become a trend specifically after the Velvet Revolution. “Nowadays more and more Armenian politicians use social media platforms to voice their thoughts,” a young journalist Elen Aghajanyan says.

The use of social media in political marketing helps to break barriers between politicians and the community. It also creates a perception of approachability and reliability of politicians in the mind of the society, which positively affects their image. However, this element is not working on its own; it is part of a bigger process, which is the political image creation. While speaking about the changes and various techniques that are used by Armenian politicians for their image creation in the last years Hayarpi Baghdasaryan said this: “Nowadays, Armenian politicians try to be more connected and open to the public; they pay a lot of attention to their words, actions and even their clothing.” As mentioned by all of the media professionals, these details play an essential role in the effectiveness of political branding and make the politician’s image much more complete.

Another important characteristic of personal branding that all the interviewees mentioned one way or another is the establishment of a specific type of positioning for the politician and maintaining it consistently. In other words, it is important for the politician to have unique characteristics that are typical for his character and image which would associate with him and

would make him associated with as a certain type of a person among the public. As an example for this characteristic, Anahit Hovhannisyan mentioned the president of Armenia, Armen Sargsyan, who is considered a well expressed political character and he is usually associated as an intellectual man, who is clever, educated and well-aware about different science fields. As Hovhannisyan said, this characteristic is quite apparent in most of his speeches; he frequently uses wise words and expressions to show his intellectual side and transfer a message that he'll develop the country with his knowledge which is indeed perceived positively by the public.

When speaking about successful Armenian politicians and their branding, all of the interviewees frequently mentioned that in terms of well-thought image making and personal branding, Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan is one of the most exemplary politicians of the country. He is especially distinguished for his approachable and relatable characteristics which are part of his established image. During the interview with Hayarpi Baghdasaryan, she talked about the political branding of Nikol Pashinyan, while saying that with his political image, Nikol Pashinyan is trying to say that he is always open and accessible for the society and that he's one of them. Baghdasaryan also mentioned the fact that during the first weeks after becoming the PM of Armenia, Pashinyan was doing live streams from his working office or his family residency. "This way he was building trust in the mind of people that if he's showing such private areas of his life, he can't simply hide anything important from people that have to do with our country," said Hayarpi Baghdasaryan.

Another recent example of such type of approach was brought by Anahit Hovhannisyan, who mentioned the speech of Nikol Pashinyan during one of the latest sessions of National Assembly. In his speech, Nikol Pashinyan said that he also has to pay credits for their washing machine, just like many other people in the country. "What he was trying to say is that he also has problems like any other person in the society, or that he's not richer than the rest or better

than the rest. Instead, he's trying to say that he's one of them, that he lives and shares the same problems as the rest of the community" stated Anahit Hovhannisyan. This type of image approach typically creates a positive perception and trust in the mind of society toward a particular politician and helps to have an influence on them in the long run.

An interesting point was brought by Saten Grigoryan, who is a lecturer of general psychology at the Yerevan State University as well as specialist at media psychology who discussed people's perception about Nikol Pashinyan from the viewpoint of psychology. While speaking about creating a specific character and the importance of connecting relationship with the society, Saten Grigoryan mentioned that nowadays politicians are more inclined to create a democratic or heroic character which is perceived very positively by the society.

She also mentioned about the Karpman triangle or else known as drama triangle and connected it to the Velvet Revolution and explained people perception about Nikol Pashinyan. In essence, the Karpman triangle is about the relationship between three specific roles people play in the society which are: victim, persecutor, and rescuer. When explaining how it is connected to the Velvet Revolution, Grigoryan said that people perceive Nikol Pashinyan as a hero or heroic character because in essence, he was the rescuer during the Velvet Revolution, who came and helped the society from the persecutor. In other words, looking at the situation from the perspective of Karpman triangle roles, Nikol Pashinyan was the rescuer, the society was the victim, and the previous government was the persecutor.

Meanwhile, when discussing whether personal branding can be considered as a way of manipulation, most of the media professionals said that it is either 'a partial manipulation' or that 'it can become manipulative in some cases.' According to Hayarpi Baghdasaryan, "Branding can be considered as a way of manipulation and having an influence on masses, but it does not

necessarily mean that it is a bad thing or that it can hurt anybody.” Personal can indeed have an influence on masses for various situations, but very often, the ultimate goal is to have an influence on people’s decision during the elections. It is no surprise that during every elective process, almost every politician or a party hires a team of professionals who work on developing a clear image as well as a personal brand. As stated by Hayarpi Baghdasaryan, It is almost impossible to grab the attention and the interest of the potential voter without having a well-thought personal brand and image”.

Another similar idea was said by Anahit Hovhannisyan, who said: “Political branding is so powerful that every new party who enters the political field, uses political branding to create a well-perceived image and take high positions in the political field.” She went on by bringing the example of the latest elections in Armenia, including the local self-government elections and elections for the mayor of the city, during both of which the winning candidates had well-developed and effective political campaigns.

Overall, the interview discussion showed that personal branding plays an important role in political marketing in Armenia. Nowadays, most of the existing, as well as newly emerging political parties or individuals, use personal branding to develop their political image in public. In addition to that, with the growing popularity of social media, more and more politicians use to incorporate social media in their political branding. Lastly, the interview discussion revealed that approachability and relatability are the most common characteristics among successful Armenian politicians, and those characteristics are well-emphasized in their political branding.

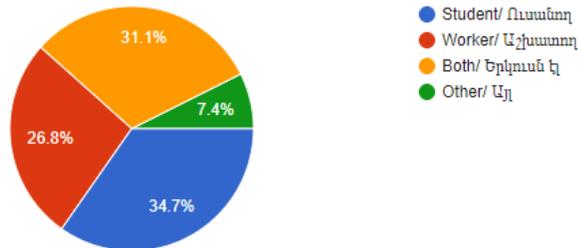
Online Surveys

The second stage of the study included the process of collecting data about personal branding in Armenia through online surveys which were conducted from February 17th to March 29 of 2019. They included 17 questions regarding Armenian politics and politicians, Nikol Pashinyan in particular. The primary purpose of the online surveys was to understand the role and the influence of personal branding in political marketing in Armenia among Millennials. Besides, it also helped to understand the engagement of the Armenian millennial generation in politics and their reasons for having an interest in specific politicians of the sphere.

The first four questions of the survey were mainly connected to the demographics of the participants, such as their age, gender, education, and occupation. The overall number of survey participants were 209, most of which were millennials of ages either from 18-24 to 24-35. The results of the survey demonstrated an uneven correlation of genders among the participants, because the number of female survey participants sufficiently surpassed the number of male participants with 165 (80.1%) being female and 40 (19.4%) being male, while the rest at (0.5%) were categorized as 'other'. As for the education and occupation of participants, the majority of participants (59.6%) had a bachelor degree while being either student (34.7%), worker (26.8%) or both (31.1%).

What is your occupation? Ձեր կարգավիճակը:

190 responses

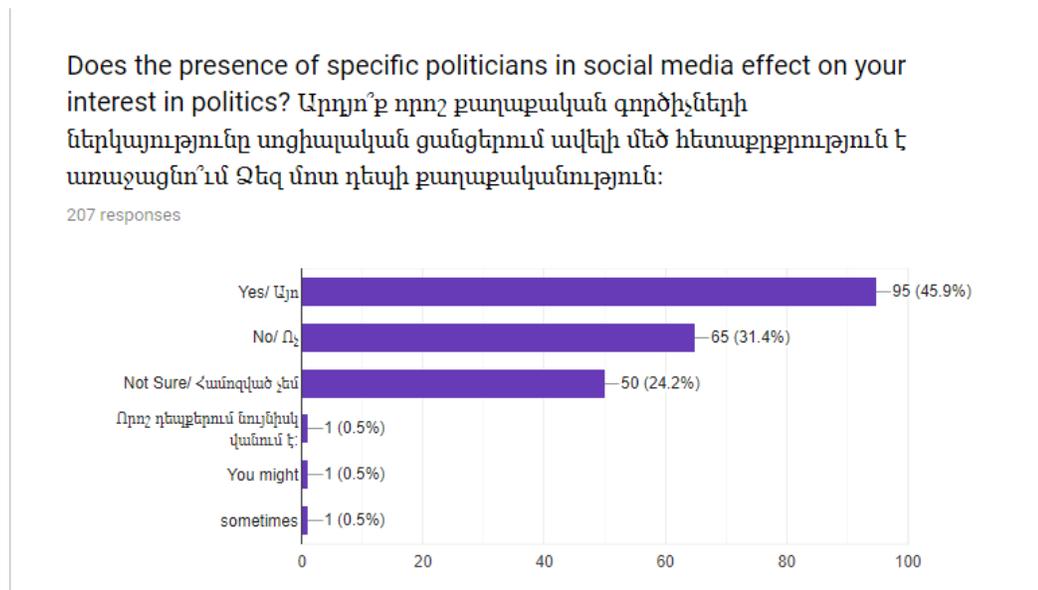


In order to understand the engagement and the level of interest of participants toward politics, the participants were asked to answer whether they consider themselves engaged in politics and if yes, what is it in politics that interests them most. Interestingly, the majority of answers were either no (48.3%) or not sure (29.7%). Only 22% of participants were found to be engaged in politics and the rest 0.5% answered that they are partially involved or they are involved in politics but not actively. A common pattern was found in the answers question 6 which aimed to understand what are the specific aspects that interests participants in politics. Recurring answers were “justice,” “changes that happen in my country” and “civil rights” as well as other similar answers that had to do with international relations, resolution of the country’s issues or changes that might affect the society. Meanwhile, most of the participants who considered themselves not engaged in politics, generally answered that nothing interests them in politics or did not answer at all. In addition to that, to the question “What are your primary sources of information about political news?” the majority of people (61.7%) answered ‘social

media platforms' and the second popular answer was 'Online sources' with the total of 30.6% votes.

The questions in the next part of the survey were aimed to understand the influence of social media on politics and the interest level of participants toward specific politicians.

Questions 8 and 9 were somewhat interconnected, while one asking whether the presence of particular politicians in social media effect on the interest of participants in politics? And the other asking to specify a politician/politicians whose activity on social media interests them the most and why. As a result, almost half of the participants (45.9%) agreed on the idea that the presence of politicians on social media affects their interest in politics, while the other majority (31.4%) disagreed on it. At the same time, the rest 24.2% of participants answered that they are unsure in their answer to this question.



As for question 9, a common pattern has been noticed in the answers of the participants which is that the significant majority of the participants named Nikol Pashinyan as a politician whose presence and activity on social media interests them the most. The other common names were

Armen Sargsyan, Ararat Mirzoyan, Arayik Harutyunyan, Hayk Marutyan, Arsen Torosyan as well as Donald Trump. There was a low number of answers regarding as to why they named specifically these politicians, but the collected responses demonstrated that the main reasons for the participants choice were due to those politicians' positions and their privilege of making important decisions as well as their intelligence and the manner of political activity.

The last part of the survey concentrated particularly on Nikol Pashinyan political activity and people's perception as well as interest toward him. When answering to the questions 13 and 14 which were particularly connected to participant's attitude and reasons behind their opinion about Nikol Pashinyan, many of the participants mentioned that they do like him as a politician, but the majority of the participants said that they have a neutral or indecisive attitude towards him. The common reason that participants mentioned was that it is too soon to make a conclusion or have a specific attitude toward him because not much has been done since him becoming the PM of Armenia. Several people also mentioned that the reason behind their indecisive attitude towards Nikol Pashinyan is that he lacks enough experience in politics and that his decisions or actions lead people to question his professionalism and motives. As for the other majority who said that they do like Nikol Pashyan as a politician, the main three reasons for their opinion was that he is smart and professional, he cares about people, and that had a significant role in the Velvet Revolution.

In order to understand people's interest Nikol Pashinyan before and after the Velvet Revolution, as well as his, becoming the PM of Armenia, the last few questions focused on people how much engaged were people at his activity before the recent political changes. The answers showed out that 37.4% of the participants were partially following Nikol Pashinyan's political career before the Velvet Revolution while another big majority of people (34%) were

not. What is more, it turned out that only 27.7% of the participants mentioned that they were engaged in his political activity before the Velvet Revolution.

As mentioned above, this study used mixed methodology research in order to answer the main questions of this study, while including both interviews with three media professionals and online surveys with 209 participants. As a result of the three interviews, several important conclusions can be made. First of all, one of the main things that all of the journalists mentioned is that personal branding plays a significant role in political marketing because it has the capability of affecting people's perception towards a particular politician as well as their voting decision. It is mainly because during the process of creating an image and personal brand in general, typically the best characteristics of the politician are used and then showed in a way that is the most favorable for him or her. This way, it consciously or unconsciously affects people's mind and creates a particular type of perception towards a specific politician, which eventually also affects their voting decision one way or another.

While this process and techniques might seem to be manipulative, in fact as all the journalists mentioned, personal branding can be somewhat manipulative, it does not necessarily mean that it is a bad thing or that it is intended to hurt anybody. It is merely a way of establishing the politician's image and grabbing the attention of the people, while eventually aiming to affect their voting decision.

The next important element of political branding as mentioned by the interviewees is the importance of having a specific image and positioning. While speaking about this, all the journalists also said that one of the most critical characteristics of image and positioning is the relatability and approachability factor. It is mainly because the approachability of politician creates trust and develops positive perception among people toward particular politician. In

addition to that, the interviews also confirmed the increasing importance and interconnection of social media in order to have a successful brand in politics. Besides, it also became apparent that the engagement of politician on social media is also part of establishing an approachable and relatable image among people as well as creating trust and increasing their interest toward the particular politician.

Meanwhile when talking about the personal branding of Armenian politicians, as a result of the interviews, it turned out that more and more politicians start to pay attention to creating a relatable and approachable image as well as a developed personal brand and one of the most frequently mentioned names from all the Armenian politicians was Nikol Pashinyan. As all the journalists said, Nikol Pashinyan is one of the distinctive examples among the Armenian politicians who has a well-thought, established image and personal brand which is positively perceived and loved by society. In fact, as results of the interviews showed that it is not only due to the approachability factor but also due to his activity on social media, his charisma and look. In other words, it is about the complete package of characteristics and elements that make the personal brand distinguish and be successful.

As for the online survey results, they showed that the majority of the participants interested in politics are engaged in it mainly for the reason to be informed about the decisions or actions of the government that may affect the society or country in general. It also turned out that online sources are the primary news outlets for the Armenian Millennial generation and that their interest level is indeed affected by the presence of specific politicians in social media. In fact, according to the survey results, Nikol Pashinyan, Ararat Mirzoyan, Arayik Harutyunyan, and Hayk Marutyan were the main politicians whose presence and activity on social media interests them the most among representatives of the field.

What is more, it turned out that the majority of the participants who follow Nikol Pashinyan on social media platforms started following him almost a year ago, which was approximately during the Velvet Revolution. The results also showed that the majority of the participants were hardly or only partially aware of the political activity of Nikol Pashinyan before the Velvet Revolution. In addition, as interviewees mentioned, the Velvet Revolution was the main period when Nikol Pashinyan started to become more popular, and it was the time when his political branding started to be more emphasized and developed. In other words, the political branding of Nikol Pashinyan, who according to survey results is one of the most politically interesting individuals in the online community, is also possibly connected to the Velvet Revolution.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration all the research findings and the analysis of the collected data, it becomes evident that political branding is significantly connected to the success of a politician. However, it should be mentioned that personal branding is a big concept, and there are several specific techniques used as part of political branding that can not be separated from it. As it turned out, few of the most influential factors that play an important role in political branding are well-though image making, positioning, as well as the engagement level of the politician in the

social media. Both primary and secondary research showed that in order to have a successful political brand, the politician should create a defined political character and be consistent with it.

After the analysis of the interviews with media professionals, it became apparent that emphasizing the unique skills and characteristics of the politician is very effective in increasing the interest level of the audience towards him or her and it can possibly help with the further positioning. As the analysis showed, many successful Armenian politicians use this tactic to make specific associations with them, which help them to develop their brand and create a particular perception about them among the audience. Some of the most effective factors and qualities used by Armenian politicians turned to be knowledgeableness, authenticity, approachability, caringness, and relatability. These are some of the most effective qualities that were particularly distinguished and highlighted in their actions, speeches, and overall presence in the society.

What is more, the research showed that social media is another critical factor in the success of political branding nowadays, because it helps the politician to engage with the audience more directly and helps to create a more authentic political image in the mind of the society. In addition to that, as mentioned by media professionals, more and more Armenian politicians use social media as part of their political activity and brand which helps them to gain the attention of the audience and possibly engage or somehow influence them. Besides, the analysis of the survey showed that millennials are probably more inclined to follow the political activity of a politician if he or she is engaged in social media.

Having considered all the research findings, it can be said that personal branding is continuously developing phenomena in Armenia. It consists of various essential elements which help to develop the politicians brand from different perspectives and make it much more

effective overall. This study has attempted to identify the possible connection of personal branding to the success of politician in the field as well as get a probable understanding of how it can influence people's perception about a concrete politician. Lastly, the research of study also suggested that social media plays a significant role in developing a more direct communication between the politician and the public as well as effects on their interest and engagement with that politician.

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Appendices

Here is the complete list of questions that the participants were asked in the survey of this study.

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. What is your age?

- 18-24
- 24-35
- 35-55

3. Education

- School
- Bachelor
- Masters
- Post Graduate

4. What is your occupation

- Student
- Worker
- Both
- Other

5. Do you consider yourself being engaged in politics?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

6. What is it about politics that engages and interests you the most?

7. What are your primary sources of information about political news?

- Printed Newspapers
- TV
- Radio
- Social Media Platforms
- Online Sources
- Other Specify _____

8. Does the presence of politicians in social media effect on your engagement interest in politics?

- Yes
- No

- Not sure

9. Which politician's presence in social media interests you the most and why? Please specify.

10. Did you participate in the Velvet Revolution?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

11. Which of the options reflect your opinion about the recent political changes of Armenia?

- Great
- Good
- Neutral
- Bad
- Really Bad

12. Do you like NP Nikol Pashinyan as a politician? Please specify a reason for your answer.

13. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, can you choose 1-3 reasons why you like NP Nikol Pashinyan?

- He is a good politician
- He cares about people
- Because he had a major role during the Velvet Revolution
- He's smart and professional
- He's popular
- Not Sure
- Other _____

14. Were you following Nikol Pashinyan's political activity before the Velvet Revolution?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

15. Do you watch Nikol Pashinyan's live streamings?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

16. Do you follow Nikol Pashinyan on any social media platform? If yes, do you remember when did you first follow him?

- Last Month
- Approximately six months ago
- Approximately a year ago
- More than a year ago

17. Do you find Nikol Pashinyan democratic politician?

- Yes
- No
- Partially
- Other _____