

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Jumping on the “brand-wagon”?
An Examination of Political Branding in the 2011 Canadian Federal Election

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Abstract

Political branding is an increasingly prominent term in both the academic and industry realms of political communication. Yet much debate has been waging regarding its viability as a concept of study. Some scholars express concern regarding the impact on democratic discourse and voter engagement, while others question its existence beyond a trendy marketing phrase. Before such questions of impact can be explored in-depth, it is important to first determine if political branding can actually be detected and measured as a truly unique form of political communication.

The question of political branding as a measurable form of political communication will be explored through the lens of the 2011 Canadian federal election. The study begins by briefly tracing the historical evolution of political communication in post-war democracies. From there, various definitions of the concept are discussed, before moving to some of political branding's key features. A multimodal content analysis is preformed on 33 television advertisements from the three major political parties participating in the 2011 Canadian federal election in an attempt to discover if branded qualities are present in the advertising content, and if so, to what extent?

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1. Introduction

The 41st Canadian Federal Election, held on May 2, 2011 was unique in the nation's history. From the pre-election chaos of a minority government and a non-confidence vote to the staggering defeat of the Liberal Party coupled with the dramatic rise of the New Democratic Party as the official opposition, it was evident that a new era in Canadian politics had begun. An examination of the media dialogue surrounding the election suggests there may have been other factors at work beyond the solely political. Pundits and reporters alike had begun to use terms like "spin," "frame," and "brand" with increasing regularity. While the inclusion of marketing professionals and techniques in election campaigns has been commonplace in the United Kingdom and United States for nearly twenty years, it was clear that in the eyes of media, Canada was now finally following in those footsteps. Political communication has always been unique in Canada, mostly due to the massive variance in geography and regional cultures and the restrictive nature of the Election Act. However, the recent proliferation of new media platforms is contributing to increased audience fragmentation and creating an entirely new environment in which politicians and political parties attempt to reach the voting public. In grappling with these changes, it seems all but inevitable that Canadian politicians would engage the expertise of professionals in the marketing, public relations and advertising realms. The most prominent outcome of this marriage between politics and marketing is the political brand.

Political branding is not an entirely new concept, claiming roots in the marketing efforts to revitalize the Labour Party in the UK throughout the

mid-1990s. The success of those efforts inspired marketing strategists such as David Muir, author of *The Business of Brands* to act as consultants for a growing number of political parties. The most famous example of a political brand is that of U.S. President Barack Obama, whose leadership campaign was commonly believed to have adopted the promotional techniques and advertising characteristic of a “trans-media, up-market consumer brand” (Adolphsen, 2008, p. 5). The language of marketing has also crept into the mouths of politicians themselves, with many stating the importance of the party brand, or remaining “on message”.

To some, branding appears solely as an extension of other marketing fads, a trendy phrase for image and presentation. However, a growing number of communications scholars have argued that branding extends beyond concerns of reputation as the new form of political marketing (Scammell, 2007, p. 176). They note that in particular, political branding encompasses a careful and deliberate effort by political parties and/or leaders to tie all communication activities to a particular group of messages and visual references, with the external presentation standardized across all media platforms and outlets. This is believed to differ greatly from traditional political advertising, as “there seem to be certain aesthetic and emotional qualities about political communication – and election campaigns in particular – that justify attaching the label ‘branded’” (Adolphsen, p. 6).

If these “branded” qualities exist, then subsequent questions of the visibility and measurability of these qualities in communication content,

particularly during the heightened atmosphere of an election, must be raised. Is political branding truly a new form of political communication between political entities and their voting public or is it merely a marketing fad that will eventually fade away, to be replaced by the next trend? Furthermore, are these branding strategies utilized in the unique Canadian political environment? If so, to what extent? Do they shape all modes of communication (visual, text, sound)? Are these strategies effective? Are they used differently by the different parties?

This study seeks to answer these questions by shedding light on the topic both at large and through the lens of a case study: the 2011 Canadian federal election. The topic itself has been characterized as neglected by communication and political sciences scholars alike. While the effect of branding on citizens and the democratic process is perhaps the most important element of study, these concerns cannot be addressed without an in-depth understanding of the changes in the political communication realm, or without a clear process for the identification of branding efforts. This paper represents an effort to address these concerns in a small-scale but in-depth study.

Given the relative newness of the topic, the study begins with a literature review exploring the evolution and phases of political communications to situate political branding in its historical context. From there, the review will also examine the definition of political branding, what branding activities entail and the various schools of thought regarding the merits and consequences of branding. A conceptual framework will then be provided to share the theoretical perspectives and concepts that will inform the analysis of the case study. The case study

comprises 33 television advertisements created specifically for the 41st federal election. Each advertisement will be carefully analyzed to identify patterns and trends of branding among the various parties specifically, which will aid in analysis of political branding in Canada generally. This contributes to knowledge by connecting concepts from a variety of academic fields, including communications, marketing, political science, psychology and sociology. It links concepts of modernization theory, emotional appeals and the citizen consumer together under the concept of political branding in hopes of providing insight into a largely unexplored field.

2. Literature Review

2.1 How has Political Communication Evolved?

As Alan French and Gareth Smith write, “one reason for the increased research into the political brand is the changing nature of post-war Western Democracies” (2010, p. 464). At the forefront of this research is modernization theory, which seeks to explore and understand changes in political communication patterns between citizens and political institutions, such as government and parties. It posits that traditional sources of authority like churches and trade unions have significantly less influence on voting decisions than in earlier eras, and as a result political party loyalties are less entrenched (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999, p. 255).

This approach is useful for several reasons. It allows researchers to account for the sweeping changes that occurred after World War II in most Western democracies without limiting the cause to a singular factor. Indeed, it manages to incorporate the many technological changes in communication during the 20th century without disregarding the major social and cultural changes that occurred in the post-war era. For example, modernization theorists point to such factors as the demise of manufacturing industries as the base of the working class or the spread of post-materialist values due to rising affluence as chief influences in the diminished political reach of these institutions—a radical shift from previous eras (Adolphsen, p.12).

Jay Blumer and Dennis Kavanagh (1999) describe this shift in political communication as occurring in three distinct eras, with the latest era giving birth

to a new form of political communication system that is qualitatively different from its predecessors (p. 209). The first era is believed to have begun in the 1950s, with the so-called “Golden Age” of political parties (*Ibid.*, p. 211). The age featured entrenched and stable institutional structures, which encouraged long-lasting party identification. Voters were seen to relate to politics through family or religious ties. Communication and political messaging flowed directly through a few, tightly controlled mass media outlets. Messages tended to focus on issues personally important to the political leader, often concerned with changes to the government itself. Political debate and discussion did occur but usually did little to sway voters (*Ibid.*, p. 212).

Conversely, the second era, beginning in the 1960s, is characterized by the growing dominance of television in political communication and lessening party loyalty among active voters. The widespread adoption of television and, importantly, television news meant that an entirely new segment of the population could be reached. The format of television news also served to alter the development and delivery of political communications. Emphasis was placed on timing, clarity (through sound-bites) and image. Blumer and Kavanagh note that political parties “accordingly adopted an array of tactics to get into the news, shape the media agenda, and project a preplanned “line” in press conferences, briefings, interviews, and broadcast discussions. From this development, the core features of the professional model of modern campaigning emerged” (p. 212).

Finally, Blumer and Kavanagh posit that the third era is still emerging. From 1990 onwards, the communication environment exploded in a massive expansion of media reach, content and fragmentation. There are now thousands of television channels, radio stations, and print outlets and a proliferation of digital platforms and social media. This era also features two distinct trends. First, voters are less influenced by class or religious affiliation and more likely to act like rational, economic actors when voting (French and Smith, 2010, p. 464). Indeed, as Adolphsen argues, “the old politics of faith and redemption” have been replaced by a “new politics of opinion and pragmatism,” in which political support is gained and lost quickly, often in connection to “concerns for environmental protection, individual freedom, social equality, civic participation, and a higher quality of life” (p. 10). Consequently, political parties place increased importance on the delivery of effective, specific messaging to voters more willing to move their vote than in previous years. It is here where the second key trend takes hold. As the media landscape continues to grow, political parties are increasingly turning to media and marketing professionals in an attempt to manage media and resist pressure from it (Blumer and Kavanagh, p. 213). Formerly routine events such as policy announcements and party conferences are now accompanied by carefully controlled large-scale publicity campaigns. This use of modern marketing techniques has led to the incorporation of new practices and concepts in the political communication process, none more prevalent than political branding.

2.2 What is Political Branding?

In its most basic form, branding refers to the process of making a distinctive mark, where the mark is understood to act as an identifier for a host of meanings and connotations. While it may encompass logos and slogans, branding usually consists of a combination of these elements, in addition to other stylistic factors. It is important to note that branding differs from traditional mass media advertising through its reliance on a “layer of emotional connection” (Scammell, 2007, p. 177). In other words, a brand is a “multidimensional construct, involving the blending of functional and emotional values to match consumers’ performance and psychosocial needs” (White and de Chernatony, 2002, p. 47). In this definition, functional value—also called the “product core” in marketing literature—refers to the utility of a product/brand (what it does or how it works), while emotional value is solely based on feelings or instincts and operates separately from logic or rationale. Patricia Cormack (2012) writes that this process becomes complex when it relates to a commodity or company because “it depends on consumers’ willingness to recognize and support the set of meanings, ideas and associations the brand is trying to establish” (p. 209). As a result, an entire subset of marketing literature is dedicated to this process—the art and science of branding (*Ibid.*, p. 209).

From a consumer perspective, branding is more about relationship building than transaction-based interactions. Indeed, the emphasis on personal connection and emotional appeals helps forge a relationship between consumer and product/company that extends beyond the point of purchase/contact. Brands

not only offer consumers the ability to differentiate products but also to represent a reassuring promise of value (Kotler and Gertner, 2002, p. 249). Branding also enables consumers to partake in a larger “brand” community, with shared values, interests, culture and beliefs (Barnes, 2003, p. 182). This type of relationship places the product/company under heightened scrutiny from its brand community of consumers, again meaning that everything from production practices to investment strategies must fall under one cohesive whole (Cormack, p. 210).

According to marketing theory, brand integration, where all of the brand’s activities reflect and reinforce a standardized unique identity in some fashion, is crucial to the development of a successful brand (Adolphsen, p. 5). Another key component of branding is that of brand equity. Brand equity represents an attempt to acknowledge the effect of brand associations on a consumer/citizen response to the brand (Smith and French, p. 6). In other words, a brand is thought to have positive brand equity when the consumer/citizen responds more favourable to a marketing element from a particular brand than they would if the same marketing element was attributed to unknown source (*Ibid*). Brand equity differs from concepts like reputation and image due to its increased sensitivity to competition and shifts in audience perception. Indeed, brand equity serves as source of both strength and weakness for companies and parties engaged in branding activities.

It is important to note that branding is not restricted to commercial products. As Margaret Scammell notes, “the term brand is everywhere now, applied not just to products, companies, organizations, and celebrities but also to

cities, nations, and even private individuals” (Scammell, 2007, p. 178). The perceived success of branding efforts for large-scale companies led many marketing professionals to expand branding into different realms, politics being the most prominent and perhaps the most controversial.

While dissent remains regarding the full extent of the applicability of branding to politics, a consensus has emerged regarding the concept’s definition. Political branding is described as a deliberate strategy undertaken by political actors or groups in which communicative content consists of a specific and standardized set of messages and visual presentation, which are delivered at every point of contact with an audience (White and de Chernatony, p. 47). Discipline and control over all aspects of external presentation are considered key to successful political branding efforts. Smith and French (2011) state that political branding consists of three discrete elements: “a trinity with the party as the brand; the politician as its tangible characteristics; and policy as core service offerings (p. 719). They continue by noting that the party can be categorized as a brand because it can produce “customer signals that are simple, credible, salient, and continuous over long periods of time “(*Ibid.*, p. 719).

Echoing this sentiment, Catherine Needham (2005) posits that branding is a useful concept in the political realm due to its encompassing nature. She argues that terms like “reputation” and “image” are insufficient as stand-alone concepts. Instead, branding accounts for these terms, while simultaneously including other elements such as internal values, external presentation and consumer perception (p. 347). Additionally, branding’s use of “non-rational

elements or decision shortcuts, such as the reliance on heuristics and decision cues” are seen as helpful tools in assisting voters to make their decision (Henneburg, 2004, p. 233). For example, a popular decision cue is the attribution of positive personal qualities of a leader across an entire political party. While some may dismiss these techniques as shallow and limiting, others see them as a necessary expression of the coping strategies innate in human beings (*Ibid.*, p. 233). Finally, political branding’s emphasis on emotional appeals can assist in “understanding efforts to sustain relationships and maintain loyalty during the period between elections” (Needham, p. 347).

2.3 How does Political Branding use Emotional Appeals?

One of the most important components of political branding is its emphasis on emotional appeals. As Nicholas O’Shaughnessy (2001) notes, products have ceased to be defined by their utility function alone, instead becoming endowed with the symbolic meanings and lifestyle associations that advertising has poured into them (p. 1050). A 2004 study by George Marcus and Michael MacKuen found a clear link between enthusiasm (described through terms such as pride, hope and sympathy) and political involvement. They also found that “emotion matters not only in how it colors people’s voting choices but also in how it affects the way they regard the electoral contest” (p.173). But perhaps most interestingly, they determined that emotion, particularly anxiety, is significantly linked with increased attentiveness to the campaign and policy-related learning—suggesting that “affective investment in politics, then, is a necessary condition for political

involvement and participation” (Scammell, 2006, p. 779). Recently, scholars have also attempted to make sense of the use of emotion in branding, sparking renewed interest in the concept of emotional intelligence. Lisa Feldman Barrett and Peter Salovey (2002) define emotional intelligence as “the capacity to access and generate feelings that motivate and facilitate cognitive activities, and the ability to appraise, express and manage emotions in a way that promotes growth, well-being and functional social relations” (p. 1). Essential to the concept is the belief that the cognitive and emotional systems interact with each other in a meaningful and consistent manner. Therefore, emotions should not be judged as being good or bad but rather as helpful or unhelpful in a certain context or decision-making process.

Margaret Scammell (2006) was one of the first scholars to link emotional intelligence to the academic assessment of political branding. She describes emotional intelligence as a key concept in branding, noting that the concept supports efforts to “judge not just whether emotion is used, but how it is used and to what extent the audience is assumed as emotionally intelligent” (p. 779). Emotional intelligence alone cannot be used to rate or quantify the success of branding efforts, but it is an important step towards the multi-faceted analysis that political branding all but demands.

2.4 How does Political Branding use the Consumer-Citizen Model?

An additional key element of political branding analysis is the consumer-behavior model, which accepts that voting and purchasing involve the same cognitive and affective processes (Smith and French, 2011, p. 718). Some scholars have gone so far as to call branding the best available method for understanding the complexities of voter decision-making (O'Shaughnessy, 2001, p. 1049). In short, earlier political science-based models of voter research sought to measure views on political parties, leaders and parties in a rational manner. However, as Stephan Henneburg (2004) notes, any 'rational' voting behaviour theory shows only part of the complex human processes of deciding and acting (p. 232). Needham goes a step further to argue that an voting decision is entirely similar to the scenario of a consumer choosing between "similar products with limited information in which the high costs of acquiring information compared to the likely pay-offs act as a disincentive for voters to become politically informed" (p. 346). Therefore, the consumer-behavior model sought to address this gap by integrating the findings of consumption studies with those of voting behaviour theories (Henneburg, p.232). Scammel (2007) summarizes this approach as a perfect circle: "campaigners research citizens as though they were consumers, and their research tells them that citizens' attitudes toward politics are profoundly shaped by their experience as consumers" (p.189).

Overall, the goal of the market research approach is to determine how identifying brand elements are perceived by voters/consumers and if there are any patterns within those perceptions. While these identifying elements or "brand

differentiators” can take on different meanings for voters based on their individual experiences, these elements usually operate at a low level of consumer awareness, also known as low-involvement processing in the consumer psychology realm (Scammell, 2007, p. 180). Popularized by James Donius, this model emphasizes the importance of separating a brand into two parts: the “boundary conditions’, the functional and economic and functional component of a brand and ‘brand differentiators’, the aforementioned cultural, social, and psychological associations elements of a brand” (*Ibid.*, p. 180) Scammell notes that in “mature markets” (stable democracies), where many “products” (parties) meet the basic boundary conditions of functionality and similar economic pricing/policies, consumer choice is overwhelmingly influenced by the less tangible attributes of brand differentiation (*Ibid.*, p. 180). Everything from the quality of the paper on a brochure to the length of a shirtsleeve is thought to “sneak into our brains invisibly,” influencing decision-making at a later date (*Ibid.*, p. 180). Therefore, good market research strives to define and make obvious what normally goes unsaid and presents it in a fashion that can aid in the creation of a desired brand image.

2.5 What are the Academic Debates Surrounding Political Branding?

As Patricia Cormack notes, the discussions of political branding “run in many directions, rooted in various assumptions” (p. 210). There are two prominent schools of thought on the matter. The first argues that branding has very negative consequences for the general public. Winfried Schulz (1997) contends that this

newly forming system of media abundance encourages a “fragmented and ‘peripheral’ style of information reception” in which people are exposed to “the more spectacular, sensational and negative aspects of politics” and pick up “bits and pieces from different programs without contextualizing and digesting the information properly” (p. 66). On a similar note, Jayson Harsin (2007) argues that the repeated emphasis on key messages serves to stigmatize political opponents while simultaneously quashing dissent. Richard Baberio and Brian Lowe (2006) echo his sentiment, noting “an over-reliance on branded communications can all too easily shift into pure manipulation of the public and cause undue injury to the nation’s fundamental democratic discourse” (p. 24). The most damning criticism comes from Reg Whitaker (2001) who says that branding creates a cynical and short-lived relationship between parties and their voters. In his analogy, the party name used to serve as a flag, a nation-wide symbol for loyalty and strength, whereas the party brand represents a promise to an individual to do something for him or her. He argues that the focus on instant and individual gratification damages the common good and can make it more difficult to accomplish large-scale projects, which by their very nature require sustained political effort and attention.

Even branding proponents admit the branding process can run a fine line between substance and style. As Needham allows, “it can easily turn into a traditional marketing show that makes voters even more fed up with politics” (p. 9). However, O’Shaughnessy (2001) is quick to note that the majority of this criticism is grounded in normative models sprung from faith in democratic ideals.

(p. 1049). He argues that these models are out of touch with a reality in which voters simply do not have the time, energy, or desire to fully deliberate on all parties and their platforms. Instead, O'Shaughnessy and French and Smith among others posit that cognitive shortcuts and other heuristic devices found in branding strategies are a necessary component of modern political communication.

Conversely, a group of scholars in political science and communication studies feels branding has the potential to create positive change. For Needham, the establishment of emotionally intelligent political brands is a unique method of reaching otherwise apathetic voters. She states that by following existing rules used for commercial brands, political parties have a better chance of establishing an emotional connection with their audience. Additionally, she notes that a pronounced focus on voter activity may help parties to be "more cognizant of and responsive to public opinion," in effect re-politicizing the voting population (p. 356). For Scammell (2007), branding offers value in both analytical and practical form beyond its professional usage, as it "provides a conceptual framework to distinguish and fathom links between the functional perceptions of parties and leaders and the emotional attractions such as "one of us," authenticity, approachability, and attractiveness to the ear and eye" (p. 187). Put simply, branding allows researchers and scholars to better account for more of the many factors that are believed to influence voting patterns.

The vast differences in opinions in the literature suggest that branding cannot yet be "easily categorized as a force for either good or ill" (Scammell,

2007, p. 191). Regardless, it is evident that much more nuanced research is needed to avoid the premature dismissal of political branding often seen in the political science realm, or conversely, blind embrace by market-orientated communication scholars. Recent studies have improved understanding of the links between marketing and politics, but more attention needs to be given to the implications for voters and the health of democracy to make any sort of claim for either positive or detrimental development.

3. Conceptual Framework

The study of political branding encompasses many fields, both academic and professional, which therefore provides the opportunity to approach with subject from a variety of theoretical perspectives. The theoretical framework chosen for this study is post-positivism. Post-positivism is a paradigm that has grown increasingly popular with communication scholars in recent years. It rejects the positivist assumption that research consisting solely of observation and description of experiences will shed light on truth and reality. Instead, post-positivism expresses doubt in regards to the researcher's ability to ever know truth or reality with full certainty. Post-positivists argue that no singular person can view reality exactly due to inherent biases found in every human (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011, p.7). However, through the use of multiple approaches and perspectives, we can come much closer to ascertaining a sense of the truth, even if it is never achieved. Post-positivism argues that human behaviour occurs in patterns, which can be analyzed to make larger claims about society and social beliefs (*Ibid.*, p. 7). In other words, it seeks to isolate biases through the extraction of patterns in data obtained via case studies. This is useful for this particular study as it avoids predictive theories which are generally ill-suited to human affairs and instead gives preference to context-dependent knowledge. The narrative generated by this case study allows for generalizations to be made for the Canadian political landscape, but not beyond that particular context. It also fits with the study's stated goal of contributing to an emerging body of

literature to encourage further discourse, analysis and hopefully enhanced objectivity.

To further contextualize the results of the study, modernization (or secularization) theory will be used. For the purposes of this study, modernization theory will assist in the exploration and understanding of changes in political communication patterns between citizens and political institutions, such as trade unions, religious organizations, government bodies and political parties. As traditional sources of political influence lessen in power and the new media platforms emerge, previous campaign strategies based solely on ideological appeals are increasingly less successful. Instead, techniques imported from the marketing industry such as emotional appeals are used to address growing numbers of undecided voters in the hopes of sparking a connection between voters and political activities. Marketing literature also notes the suitability of using branding in a fragmented and multi-platform media landscape. As Adolphsen notes, these arguments are somewhat novel to political communication theorists, but they provide a compelling rationale for the popularity of political branding with today's political parties (p. 14).

Another important concept is that of emotional intelligence. As political advertisements grow increasingly reliant on emotional appeals and less concerned with logic or rational appeals, researchers must note not only the presence of emotion but also how it is used and what assumptions are made regarding the intended audience. It is not a simple additive to a content analysis or a checklist to quantify whether one piece of political advertising is emotionally

good and another bad (Scammell, 2006, p. 779). Instead, emotional intelligence provides a perspective from which to consider the role of emotion in decision-making, what emotionally based appeals are asking of the audience, and how emotion interacts with cognitive systems. The concept of emotional intelligence enables my analysis to move beyond the question of whether emotional appeals are good or bad and to explore the specific ways in which emotional appeals can be helpful and unhelpful; this approach is a necessary shift for the future of political marketing discourse.

Another gap identified in the literature concerns the need to examine the impact of political branding on voters and on overall democratic discourse more generally. These are important questions that need to be answered thoughtfully beyond the preliminary assessments of political branding, which, as discussed in my literature review, are predominately negative. However, studies must first determine whether branding is being used in particular political contexts such as Canadian elections, and these studies depend on the development of analytic techniques for identifying and/or quantifying political branding strategies. In this way, studies like my own, which focus on identifying branding strategies and evaluating their effectiveness in campaign materials, are the necessary first step toward research on the broader impact and implications of political branding. If political branding is not being used on a wide scale, or turns out to be a passing fad in political communication, then studies of impact may be less pressing.

This study will explore branding both generally and specifically. It will seek to determine to what extent branding techniques are present in political

communication, especially during election periods. It will also explore the ways in which branding is used across different modalities and by different practitioners. Once those questions are addressed, it will be possible to engage with questions about the effectiveness of branding techniques in the context of the case study. The 41st Canadian federal election was chosen for this case study due to the proliferation of media coverage featuring marketing experts and terms like “spin” and “branding”. Election television advertising from the three major parties will be compared to determine whether parties are deliberately and intentionally deploying conventional branding practices to create and develop discrete political brands in the Canadian political landscape.

Therefore, the specific questions to be answered by this research are as follows:

1) To what extent are branded qualities present in the television advertising of the major political parties in the 41st Canadian federal election?

- a. Are branding techniques being used to shape multiple modes of communication (visual, text, sound) in television electoral advertising?
- b. Were branding strategies equally evident in the television advertising of all three major parties, or can different levels or techniques of branding be observed?

The first research question seeks to detect the presence of branded communication within the television advertisements by examining the different modalities used in the ads. Like similar studies by Adolphsen, Scammell,

Cormack and Needham, this study uses content analysis to examine how specific modes of communication can be manipulated to deliver a desired message. This type of analysis has grown more nuanced in recent years but still lags behind in addressing the individual roles of each of the modes. Earlier analytical structures were geared towards easily observable facts (i.e., positive or negative, presence of party leader and/or slogan, etc.). This analysis will use such elements as a starting point but will grow to include more specific details like clothing and character traits in hopes of detecting more of the “invisible details” that have come to define political branding efforts. Emphasis will be placed on emotional appeals, which are understood to form an essential component of branding efforts.

The research subquestions move beyond detection to explore possible differences in the branding strategies used by the parties in their attempts to create and develop unique brand images. Here, the various modalities that form television advertisements are examined separately for evidence of branding, before being compared within and between the political parties. Marketing theory argues that successful branding efforts involve careful brand integration, or in other words a “certain level of discipline and standardization in the management of their external presentation” (Adolphson, p. 5). As a result, similarities among the various modes of communication will serve as evidence of deliberate branding strategy. These questions are more difficult to answer, which is why comparison within and between the political parties is crucial. Incongruence noted within a party’s set of advertisements could have an impact on its desired

messaging and on its brand image as a whole. The focus is not on if stylistic choices can or should be interpreted as “good” or “bad”, but rather if these particular choices help to build and strengthen a party’s brand image throughout the television campaign.

4. Methodology

Earlier sections of this paper have addressed the theoretical underpinnings of this field of study. This section will discuss the methodology chosen for this empirical component of the study.

4.1 Multimodal Content Analysis

Multimodal content analysis is an approach popularized by semiotic scholars Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. Multimodality refers to the “use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined – they may for instance reinforce each other, fulfill complementary roles, or be hierarchically ordered” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, p.20). In other words, audio, visual and textual components (modes) can be combined to better understand media content as an integrated practice, rather than treating each mode independently. Communication is then defined as the process in which this semiotic product or event is used or consumed in some fashion. Awareness of this approach has grown in recent years, with Kress and Van Leeuwen (*Ibid.*) noting its prominence in the communications industry, albeit with a much slower ascent in popularity in the theoretical realm (p.45). Nonetheless, they argue that multimodality remains “palpably, a fact of everyday communicational life of post-industrial societies” (*Ibid.*, p.45).

Essential to this approach is the understanding that the different semiotic modes offer different advantages and limitations in regards to meaning-making.

Written and spoken language can no longer be considered the only source of representation in communication. Indeed, multimodal analysis posits that all forms of communication, including visual, are coded in some way. However, the meaning and understanding of these codes rely on society-specific contexts. This is referred to as the “semiotic landscape” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, p.35). The discourse and study of modes within a particular semiotic landscape is believed to reveal much about why a “specific domain of social reality is organized the way it is ... how they are to be thought about and of what values – in the widest sense – attach to these ways of living” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 25). These modes are approached from numerous angles including physiological, sensory appeal, experiential and biological.

Much like the effect on political communication, modernization theory has also had an effect on semiotic-based analysis. An increased cultural emphasis on social stratification via “lifestyle” instead of class has had ramifications on a host of discourses including advertising, politics and social behavior. It has resulted in greater individuation, which is defined as the self-definition of individuals through forms of consumption (*Ibid.*, p.35). This is of note because if individuality can be defined and differentiated through consumption as signs, then semiotic modes become heightened and more influential.

This approach was a natural fit for the analysis of television advertisements because of its emphasis on integrated modes. Television combines visual and linguistic components, so the method of analysis needs, at the very least, to acknowledge this feature of the medium. As Kress and van

Leeuwen (1996) write, “We seek to break down the disciplinary boundaries between the study of language and the study of images, and we seek, as much as possible, to use compatible language, and compatible terminology in speaking about both, for in actual communication the two and indeed many others come together to form integrated texts” (p. 183). Their frameworks have been criticized in the past for lacking clarity and cohesion; nonetheless, their ideas form the basis of a new way of examining media content in a multi-platform, media-heavy environment. This study has not followed Kress and van Leeuwen’s approach to the letter but rather has used it as a starting point for thought and discussion about the roles of different modes of communication contained within one medium. Important here are the potential of each mode to contribute to meaning-making, the constant state of interaction between these modes, and the effect of these modes on communicative behavior.

4.2 Research Design Outline

Given the potential scope of this paper, several key decisions had to be made regarding the design of the research. Political communication takes many forms, including press releases, brochures, posters and websites. Elections in particular bring forth a massive amount of content, all designed to gather and solidify voter support. However, much of the content disappears from public view after elections. Campaign offices close, websites are updated, and posters are taken down and thrown away. With this in mind, it was decided to focus solely upon television commercials as a research site.

Television advertising has emerged as the most dominant form of campaign communication for Western democracies (Scammell, 2006, p. 764). Even as new platforms of direct communication grow in popularity (Facebook, Twitter), television advertising remains the most influential in the eyes of most communication practitioners and scholars. As a result, academic analysis of political advertising has expanded greatly and grown more nuanced. Television commercials offer much in the way of comparison, as they must adhere to certain standards set out by Election Canada (length, identification and cost), while still allowing for creative freedom in regards to visual approach and content. As a result, it is assumed that branding efforts would be readily apparent if in fact present. Visual elements and aesthetic concerns can be more difficult to analyze given the often-subjective nature of aesthetic values. However, as Scammell (2006) is careful to note,

there are workable canons of art criticism (unity, complexity, intensity), and agreed great works which stand as shared reference points. It is probably not difficult to agree at least a limited canon of great political advertising, works that stand out as landmarks of style. This is an important point to make because it suggests the possibilities of aesthetic judgment separate from personal taste and ideological preference. Likeability of ads is not only determined by partisanship. (p. 779)

In other words, Scammell is suggesting that shared aesthetic values not only exist, but that it is possible for researchers to use them as points of reference when analyzing an advertisement. This is an important distinction to make within this paper, as visual/stylistic components play an integral role in the development of a brand image. Even clothing choices of the people appearing in the advertisements are believed to send messages about the brand, whether it be

rolled-up sleeves indicating willingness to work hard, or a traditionally cut suit and tie suggesting firm and steady leadership.

Additionally, these commercials have not been altered since they were released publicly via YouTube, allowing for a true snapshot of content created specifically for the election. The other significant decision that needed to be addressed through the research design was that of measurement: how can branding efforts be measured, if at all? Multimodal analysis was deemed an appropriate method for analyzing advertising content due to its attentiveness to the different modes at work within a television advertisement (visual, auditory, textual), whereas content analysis was chosen to further explore the development of brand images through these commercials. Traditional content analysis uses the data itself to determine the coding framework for analysis, however with this particular case study, a more directed approach was decided upon, where existing theories and literature were relied upon to develop initial codes and categories. This was deemed necessary due to the role of industry literature in the development of political branding. If marketing trade journals consistently note emotional appeals as key component of political branding, then researchers should ensure that emotional appeals are included in their analytical framework. Therefore, the categorical framework developed for this case study is characterized as one guided by the industry professionals, but with its own codes emerging from repeated in-depth interactions with the data set.

4.3 Content Analysis Advantages and Limitations

Any type of content analysis offers advantages and limitations. Multimodal content analysis allows for a direct look at communicative texts/products to gain insight to sites of social interaction. The use of codes for interpretation allows for both statistical and relational conclusions to be made, increasing the versatility of the study. In this particular scenario, the data chosen for analysis is untainted by fading memories or personal biases. The commercials exist today exactly how they did in 2011. Content analysis is well-suited to media production, politics and audience research, thus making political branding a natural fit.

There are some limitations associated with this type of data set and analysis. Eleven commercials is not a sizeable amount of data from which to draw conclusions. Ideally, the content analysis would also include other artifacts from the election, such as pamphlets or posters; however, it was simply beyond the scope of this paper to do so. Additionally, having multiple coders would have helped minimize the possibility of bias, but was simply not possible given the time and financial constraints

4.4 Data Selection: The Case Study

The 2011 Canadian federal election was an obvious choice for further study of political branding. The election was a unique occurrence in Canadian political study from start to finish. It marked a tumultuous era in Ottawa, beginning with a failed non-confidence vote against the Conservative minority government in 2009. In 2011, a parliamentary committee found a Minister of the Crown and,

separately, the Cabinet, to be in contempt of Parliament. The Liberal Party, as the Official Opposition, proposed a second motion of non-confidence, which passed by a slim 156-145 margin. The writs of election was then dropped on March 26 by the Governor General after being advised by Prime Minister Stephen Harper to do so.

The results of the election reflected the preceding political drama. The Conservative party formed a majority government, while the Liberal Party won the fewest number of seats in their history. Conversely, the New Democratic Party received the largest number of seats in party history, allowing them to form the Official Opposition for the very first time at the federal level.

However, what makes this election unique extends beyond simply its results. 2011 marked the first time that both marketing experts and new media platforms had noticeably infiltrated the political realm. Some even called it Canada's first "social media election" (Misener, 2011). While "old media" like television still received the lion's share of the budget, political parties began to recognize the outreach potential of these new platforms, and shifted their thinking in regards to communication strategies. "#elxn41" (the designated social media hashtag for all things election-related) may not have been on the tip of the nation's tongue in 2011, but the communication culture surrounding Canadian politics was beginning to change significantly. The New Democratic Party was particularly vocal in its new, centralized approach to election campaigning, whereas the Conservative Party went so far as to rebrand its minority government as the "Harper Government" in the months leading up to the election

(Cheadle, 2011). Furthermore, at the time of the election, the three major political parties were relatively even in levels of support, placing more importance on voter engagement. It is precisely this environment that makes for such an excellent test case for content analysis: a historically significant moment in federal politics with converging trends in media and communication.

4.5 Data Selection: Sampling

The specific data set chosen for analysis consists of thirty-three thirty-second television commercials that aired between March-April 2011. Eleven commercials from each of the three major political parties (Conservatives, Liberals and the New Democrats) were chosen to ensure a balanced sample (one for each major party). Excluded from the sample were province-specific videos, online-only videos, third party advertisements, and content from other federal political parties like the Bloc Quebecois and the Green Party because they lack the financial budget to create television advertising on a national scale. The videos were collected from four locations: the ElectionsAds.ca YouTube Channel and the official YouTube channels of each of the three parties (Liberal, NDP, Conservative). In total, 44 advertisements were collected. To ensure a balanced sample size, eleven ads from each party were randomly chosen through a randomizing software program, resulting in a population of thirty-three advertisements.

4.6 Coding Procedure

Given the novelty of branding in political communication, very little exists in terms of a coding framework. Previous studies by Adolphsen and Scammell proved to be very helpful in developing such a framework. This framework utilizes both the elements of branding, including functional value/product core, emotional appeals and character traits discussed earlier in this study, as well as elements from Kress and van Leeuwen's concept of multimodality. The advertisements were broken into textual, visual and auditory data subsets for analysis. The auditory component of each advertisement was transcribed to aid the coding process. After carefully and repeatedly reviewing the data, the following categories and codes were developed.

Category	Example	Codes Included in Category
Tone	"We've got to put the partisan games aside and work together to get things done"	Positive Negative Contrast/Comparison
Character Trait	"Your Family. Your Liberals."	Tough/strong leader Trustworthy Family-orientated Compassionate/kind Unclear/not stated
Major Issue/Policy Area	"What's this election all about? It starts with leadership."	Leadership Health care Economy Taxes Immigration Families/Children Corruption Seniors Military/Security

Topic of Ad	“That’s because its always about Michael. Always has been, always will be. Ignatieff- he didn’t come back for you.”	Own Leader Image Own Party Image Other Leader Image (attack) Other Party Image (attack) Issue/Policy
Emotional Appeal	“We’re in safe hands with Stephen Harper. With so much at stake, why would we risk changing course?”	Optimism Anxiety/Fear Determination/Coming Together Anger Patriotism
Campaign Slogan	“That’s Canadian leadership. “	Stated Not-Stated

Following this process, the visual components of the ads were then analyzed. It was important to measure and analyze the textual and auditory elements first to provide context for the visual modes, as an important part of branding is congruence and unity between the various modes of communication. Based on frameworks from existing research, the following visual elements were chosen for study: party/leader logos and slogans, portrayal of leader, style of leader’s clothing and finally overall visual style and setting of the advertisement. These visual elements run the gamut from easily observed functional branding components such as the logo or slogan to more emotionally based, cultural brand differentiators like the style of clothing (e.g., rolled-up sleeves). This range was deliberately crafted in hopes of best detecting the many factors that contribute to a party or politician’s brand image.

5. Results

This section of the study will detail its findings. The findings will be presented in two parts. First, data relating to the functional value of a political brand will be shared (i.e., what is being offered to citizens/consumers as a product core). Second, data relating to the development and use of brand differentiators, or the cultural, social, and psychological associations elements of a brand, will be considered. The results will demonstrate attempts by all three of the parties to create a brand image, albeit in significantly different ways. These findings can then be used to determine how effective these techniques were in delivering a standardized brand image across various modes of communication in numerous advertisements.

Figure 1
Policy Areas Mentioned (multiple codes used)

Policy Area	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Leadership	5	45.5%	6	54.5%	8	72.7%
Health care	6	54.5%	0	0%	8	72.7%
Economy	3	27.3%	6	54.5%	4	36.4%
Taxes	3	27.3%	7	63.6%	2	18.2%
Immigration	1	9.1%	1	9.1%	0	0%
Families/children	7	63.6%	1	9.1%	3	27.3%
Corruption	4	36.4%	0	0%	3	27.3%
Seniors	5	45.5%	1	9.1%	5	45.5%
Election/Government	0	0%	7	63.6%	0	0%
Military/Security	2	18.2%	2	18.2%	0	0%

Marketing theory argues that a successful brand contains a clear product core, in which benefits of purchase/use are evident to the consumer/citizen. As

discussed earlier, a political brand exists as “a trinity with the party as the brand; the politician as its tangible characteristics; and policy as core service offerings (Smith and French, 2011, p.719). Therefore, the policy positions held by each party should be easily understood and clearly demarcated from each other. However, the findings only support that hypothesis to a certain extent. As seen in Figure 1, the Conservative Party ads highlighted its traditional values of lowering taxes (appearing in 63.6% of ads) and economic growth (54.5%) through the office of the Prime Minister (54.5%). Policy areas such as health care and seniors were almost ignored entirely. The NDP also chose to accentuate its usual policy positions: health care (72.7%) and seniors (45.5%), but in a surprising result, also emphasized their plans for the economy (72.7%) and ability to lead (72.7%) for one of the first times in federal NDP history. This new focus served as an attempt to target undecided voters and convince them about the viability of an NDP government. As NDP senior campaign advisor Brad Lavigne (2012) wrote in an article detailing the party’s campaign strategy, “In past campaigns, NDP platforms never really helped the campaign, but they’ve certainly hurt. We weren’t going to let that happen again” (p. 7). Finally, the Liberal Party appears to have embraced a different strategy entirely. In an attempt to appeal to the widest spread of voters, it included a whole host of policy areas, with no clear focus. Positioning the party as the “family-friendly” (63.36%) party seems to have been the goal, but nearly the same levels of attention were paid to health care (54.5%), seniors (45.5%) and combating government corruption (45.5%). While it could be argued that the Liberals were simply offering a diversified policy platform to

voters, it resulted in a massive amount of information to be shared with voters over the course of a thirty-second ad. Marketing theory indicates that political branding efforts are best served by a focused and easy-to-understand policy core.

Figure 2
Party/Leader Logos and Slogans (multiple codes used)

Element	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Campaign Slogan (visually presented)	0	0%	2	18.2%	1	9.1%
Party Logo	7	63.6%	5	45.5%	11	100%
Own Leader's Name (visually presented)	3	27.3%	2	18.2%	3	27.3%
Other Leaders' Names (visually presented)	6	54.5%	10	90.1%	3	27.3%

Having found that two of the three main parties offered focused policy positions as their branded product core, it now must be determined whether the parties also utilized brand differentiators to distinguish themselves with voters. Figure 2 features an analysis of the signs and symbols often found in political advertisement. There was a very low level of visual representation of campaign slogans, which differs greatly from recent American elections, where slogans are highlighted in almost every ad. The NDP's Jack Layton often personally voiced the slogan, "That's Canadian Leadership" (81.8% of ads), but it only appeared written on screen once. Campaign slogans are designed to be used repeatedly to help citizens easily identify with a particular party or leader, so in theory should be used regularly in advertising efforts. Yet, in this study, slogans did not factor

much into the television ads for two out of the three major parties, despite the presumed wide reach of the ad. Conversely, party logos were more prevalent in all of the parties' advertisements, an unsurprising finding given their role as a visual shortcut for the audience. It is much faster to see and understand the "NDP" logo then to read "New Democratic Party of Canada," which is likely why it appeared in every single ad. More surprising was the low visibility of the Conservative Party logo, which appeared in less than half of the studied television advertisements. However, as later discussion will reveal, the majority of the Conservative ads were negative, attack-style ads directed at the other parties, so it would be in their interest to make them appear as if they were coming from an outside source. The Liberals also used a large number of attack ads in the party's television campaign which may help explain their relatively low logo usage (64.6%).

Figure 3
Topic of Ad (multiple codes used)

Topic	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Own Party Image	4	36.4%	0	0%	4	36.4%
Other Party (attack)	5	45.5%	5	45.5%	2	18.2%
Own Leader image	0	0%	1	9.1%	8	72.7%
Other Leader (attack)	8	72.7%	9	81.8%	6	54.5%
Issue/policy	3	27.3%	1	9.1%	2	18.2%

Figure 3 outlines the dominant topics discussed in the television ads. The Liberals again displayed a varied approach to its chosen topics, alternating

between highlighting their own party image (36.4%), attacking other parties/leader (45.5%/72.7%) and emphasizing a particular policy area or issue. Here, it must be noted that Liberals did not extensively display the image of their leader Michael Ignatieff in any of the ads analyzed. He was visually present in many of the ads, but not a single ad was dedicated to detailing his perceived strengths as a leader, which is particularly odd given that Election 41 was his first as party leader. This suggests a reliance on existing brand equity by the Liberal Party and/or a lack of confidence in his connection with voters.

In a similar vein, Stephen Harper's leader image was only featured in one of the ads, with over 80% of the Conservative ads dedicated to negatively portraying the leader image of the other political leaders and nearly half attacking the other parties. The opposite is true of the NDP. Leader Jack Layton was the primary subject of the majority of the NDP ads, and maintained visible presence in 100% of the ads, even those that were issue-based.

Figure 4
Leadership/Party Traits (multiple codes used)

Trait	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Family-based	4	36.4%	0	0%	8	72.7%
Tough/strong leader	0	0%	3	27.3%	7	63.6%
Trustworthy	1	9.1%	2	18.2%	8	45.5%
Compassionate/kind	5	45.5%	0	0%	4	36.4%
Not mentioned/ unclear	3	27.3%	7	63.6%	0	0%

Next, the specific personality traits attributed to each party/leader through appearance or statements were measured (Figure 4). Here the approaches of

the parties varied wildly. The NDP were striving to appeal to voters who had never voted NDP, so much of their campaign messaging sought to remind Canadians that they a choice beyond the Conservatives and Liberals (Lavigne, pg. 7). Indeed, the message emerging from their television commercials fell under that narrative, positioning the NDP as a tough (63.6%) party that Canadian families (72.7%) could trust (45.5%) to stand up for what was right (36.4%). Conversely, the Liberals messaging was that of a family-oriented (36.4%) party that cared for others (45.5%) with commercials entitled “Liberals Have A Better Plan To Help Families,” “Your Family. Your Liberals,” and “A Canada We Can All Be Proud Of.” There was no mention of trust, which even Liberal party senior management admits became a serious issue for the Liberal “brand” after the sponsorship scandal (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011, p. 13). Finally, the Conservatives did not offer much in the way of their own personality traits simply because the majority of their commercials were targeted solely at Michael Ignatieff and the Liberal Party. If Stephen Harper was mentioned, it was in to reference his strong leadership (27.3%). The results suggest that branding strategies can expand beyond the brand of the party/leader in question to encompass efforts to amplify a perceived negative brand image of an opponent.

Figure 5
Portrayal of Leader (multiple codes used)

Leadership Element	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Official Leader	4	36.4%	1	9.1%	11	100%
Official Leader supported by voters	2	18.2%	2	18.2%	5	45.5%
One of the people	3	27.3%	0	0%	1	9.1%
Not seen/Couldn't be classified	5		8	72.7%	0	0%

Another key component of branding is the portrayal of the leader. As the face of the party, the leader's image acts a "heuristic device for voter assessment of overall party competence, responsiveness and attractiveness" (French, p. 4). Figures 5 and 6 address leader-specific image representations in the advertisements. Figure 5 codes the visual depiction of each leader, whether it be in official leadership capacity (working at desk/in Parliament, addressing the camera directly), as leader supported by voters (addressing a crowd, public meet-and-greets), or as "one of the people" (one-on-one meetings, casual environments). Conservative leader Steven Harper did not make many appearances in the advertisements (27.3%), but when he did, he was portrayed in an official manner, walking purposefully down a hallway, working at a desk or speaking to supporters at a rally. The portrayal was decidedly traditional and reminiscent of American presidents in popular culture. Conversely, Michael Ignatieff was often depicted in a more casual, engaged manner (27.3), in what could be an attempt to combat his intellectual, "Harvard" image. Indeed, he was featured in footage laughing with senior citizens or surrounded by supporters at family-friendly barbecues. However, the use of extreme close-ups during his

taped segments were more akin to lecturing than friendly and open discussion. At times, Ignatieff was literally looking down upon voters. Even when not in extreme close-up, Ignatieff was still only seen from the shoulders up, suggesting (unintentionally) that he had something to hide. Finally, as previously discussed, it was a stated goal of the NDP party to depict Jack Layton as a credible leader, one that could be trusted to run the country in a competent fashion. It then comes as little surprise that he was depicted in some sort of leadership capacity in every single ad. Even if the ad began in an animated style, it would ultimately switch over to Jack Layton in front of the Canadian flag, suggesting the allegiance to the country as a whole. He addressed the camera/audience directly from a frontal seated position, likely matching the position of the viewer at home. This not only places Layton physically as “one of the people,” it also demonstrates that he was trustworthy and had nothing to hide, as he was physically seen from head to toe. There were no props or sophisticated graphics to distract from the one-on-one nature of the ad. The overlying message was simple: Layton was asking for voter support so he could lead the entire country. At times, he would be superimposed over footage of him at a town hall assembly, doubly reinforcing the visual of image as a leader.

Figure 6
Style of Clothing (multiple codes used)

Clothing Style	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Formal	6	54.5%	2	18.2%	4	36.4%
Semi-Formal	5	45.5%	1	9.1%	10	90.1%
Casual	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Not seen/Couldn't be classified	5	45.5%	7	63.6%	0	0%

While examining the clothing choices of the leaders may seem like a task better suited for fashion researchers, consumer psychologists and marketing theorist agree that the tiny details, even in attire, can send powerful messages to consumers/citizens. The codes were developed to acknowledge these details: formal (e.g., dress shirt and either tie or blazer), semi-formal (e.g., dress shirt, sleeves rolled up, dress pants) and casual (e.g., jeans). Michael Ignatieff was often seen in close-up, revealing only a formal dark blazer and open collar white dress shirt (54.5%), indicating the gravity and seriousness of the leadership role. He is also seen in similar attire, minus the blazer (45.5%), when in meet-and-greet scenarios. This positions him as more approachable but still authoritative. Conversely, Jack Layton appears wearing a dress shirt, loosened tie, open collar and rolled up sleeves in almost every single ad (90.1%). This suggests to voters that Layton is already hard at work, albeit in a more formal manner and will continue once elected. This dressed-down look suggests that Layton is “one of the people” while underscoring the NDP message of “change.” When seen in the ads, Stephen Harper wears basic, traditionally tailored suits (18.2%), indicating firm and conventional leadership. None of the party leaders were glimpsed in

anything resembling casual clothing, again suggesting that they are auditioning for the role of “Prime Minister.”

Figure 7
Style of Advertisement (multiple codes used)

Style	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cartoon/Computer Generated	7	63.6%	10	90.1%	6	54.5%
Real-life footage	5	45.5%	4	36.4%	5	45.5%
Studio footage	3	27.3%	0	0%	11	100%

Continuing with the multimodal analysis, the particular visual styles of the ads were also examined. Multiple codes were used here, as the ads often combined multiple types of footage together. The NDP displayed the most discipline with their video style, alternating between two distinct styles. This choice coupled with regular use of party logos and prominent display of Layton rendered the NDP ads almost instantly identifiable. The Conservative Party had similar levels of control over their style, predominantly using animated American-style attack ads (90.1%) that made it difficult to determine the source of the ad. Adding to this difficulty is the lack of footage of Stephen Harper or any other senior Conservative Party member. It appears that nothing specific was filmed for use in the advertisements, with any “real-life” footage obviously taken from previous events, perhaps in an attempt to suggest to voters that Stephen Harper was too busy leading the country to film television advertisements. Stephen Harper did not address the audience through the advertisements at any point during the election. Some may argue that this was a missed opportunity to further

establish the Conservative brand, but this was clearly not the goal for Conservative strategists, who instead sought to diminish the Liberal brand to sway undecided voters.

Figure 8
Emotional Appeal

Emotion	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Optimism	1	9.1%	0	0%	8	72.7%
Anxiety/Fear	6	54.5%	11	100%	0	0%
Determination/Coming Together	1	9.1%	0	0%	4	36.4%
Anger	4	36.4%	3	27.3%	4	36.4%
Patriotism	1	9.1%	1	9.1%	2	18.2%

Thus far, the analysis has addressed the policy positions (or product core) of each party, the personality traits and other image details of their respective leaders, and their overall portrayal of the leader/party in the ads. Yet, no branding analysis would be complete without an examination of the emotional appeals, which have been identified as a key component of branding strategies. Figure 8 outlines the emotional appeals observed in the each of advertisements, through statements made and various other elements that conveyed mood (music, images, colour usage). Early patterns in the analysis hold true across this particular subset of data. The NDP predominantly relied on messages of optimism (72.7%) and the belief that Canadians needed to come together (36.4%). Any NDP ads that featured an appeal to anger (criticizing government corruption or Michael Ignatieff and Stephen Harper's attendance record) was

balanced by an appearance by Jack Layton explaining that things could be made right. No appeals to fear or anxiety were made in NDP ads, which is the opposite of the approach taken by the Conservatives. The Conservatives appear to have based their entire television advertising campaign on appeals designed to scare voters into action. Nearly half of the ads warned of the repercussions of changing leadership, while the remaining half cautioned voters about Michael Ignatieff's "true" nature. Appeals to anger also encompassed just over 27% of the Conservative ads, in reference to the perceived unnecessary election. The Liberals also utilized an anger-based approach (36.4%), arguing that Canadians deserve better. One ad even featured Michael Ignatieff stating that Stephen Harper "makes him angry." However, this messaging clashed prevailing voter sentiment, as pre-election polling suggested that "68% of Canadians felt that there was 'no need for an election'" (Ipsos Reid, 2009). Therefore, the emotional appeal used in over one third (36.4%) of the Liberal ads ran counter to the majority of public opinion, while the Conservative ads were able to tap into it.

Figure 9
Tone of Ad

Tone	Liberal		Conservative		NDP	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Positive	2	18.2%	1	9.1%	4	36.4%
Negative	4	36.4%	9	81.8%	1	9.1%
Contrast	5	45.5%	1	9.1%	6	54.5%

Finally, as illustrated in Figure 9, another aspect of emotional appeals is the overall tone of the advertisement. Here again, the campaign discipline of the NDP and the Conservative Party is highlighted against a less cohesive Liberal

campaign strategy. The Liberals seemed to be fighting battles on multiple fronts, releasing numerous negative ads (36.4%) while also contrasting themselves with both the Conservatives and the NDP. This likely reflects a last-minute decision to actively target the NDP once poll numbers revealed a surge in their popularity. Conversely, the Conservatives opted to stay the course and continue their targeted attacks on Liberals and, more specifically, on Michael Ignatieff, even going so far as to note that a “vote for the Liberals is a vote for Ignatieff.” Hoping to separate themselves from the fray, the NDP took a more positive approach (36.4%) with ads that claimed “together, we can do this.” Contrast was also a key part of the NDP television ads (54.5%), as they attempted to demonstrate why they would be suited to form the government. Only one NDP ad was deemed to be negative in tone, an increasingly rare occurrence in the North American political realm.

6. Discussion

Prior to making conclusions regarding branding in the 41st Canadian federal election and its status as a new form of political communication, the findings from the study in regards to the brand image of each of the party and party leaders will be briefly summarized.

The Conservative Brand: The television advertisements of the Conservative Party did not focus on the Conservative brand, as the majority of the ads aimed at attacking their opponents. However, one could argue that by portraying their opponents as unready and ill-suited to governing, the Conservatives positioned themselves as the only viable option. Nonetheless, the ads presented a product core that consisted of policies relating to lowering taxes, growing the economy and cutting government spending—traditional Conservative values. In terms of more specific brand differentiators, Stephen Harper is displayed as a tough but detached leader, respectful of the magnitude of the job. His clothing choices emphasized his formality, and he was only seen within the confines of official leader duties. Conservative ads uniformly invoked feelings of anxiety and fear, which, as discussed in the literature review, have been credited as an effective method for increasing voter awareness.

The NDP Brand: The television advertisements of the New Democratic Party were the most cohesive of any of the parties. In other words, its ads demonstrated high levels of standardization across the various modes of communication. They too presented a focused product core consisting of a health care and seniors-oriented policy platform, wrapped in the promise of

strong and determined leadership. The campaign slogan was often verbalized in the ad, and the party logo was used in all ads, ensuring consistency between the two differing styles of ads used. The brand differentiators helped to project Jack Layton as experienced politician that would bring change to Ottawa in a trustworthy fashion. He was seen in semi-formal clothes, sleeves rolled up, often interacting with groups of voters, or even one-on-one. Every ad featured Layton speaking directly to camera, suggesting honesty and openness. The NDP ads were overwhelming positive in nature, as even the ads that began as criticism of the other parties ended with expressions of hope for a better future.

The Liberal Brand: The television advertisements for the Liberal Party displayed the lowest levels of branding in the study. The product core was diluted between many vague policies, preventing the development of a unique brand image. Marketing theory argues that a successful brand contains a clear product core, in which benefits of purchase/use are evident to the consumer/citizen (Adolphsen, p. 5). The Liberal ads did not clearly state what a vote for the party would actually mean for voters. The topics of the ads varied from attacking both the Conservatives and the NDP to issue-based to the promotion of the party, all while curiously neglecting to promote party leader Michael Ignatieff in any meaningful way. The leader of the party is thought to be another primary element in political branding, and in this case, he simply was not a key component of their television strategy. The Liberal ads evoked numerous emotions, alternating between all of the emotional categories included in the subset.

The vast differences in television campaign strategies are significant, despite the relatively small sample size. As noted throughout the study, intangible differences are essential to distinguishing between brands, so any noticeable difference in approach/content of the advertisement would be analyzed for evidence of branding. Indeed, the brand images and differentiators used by each of the three parties were statistically unique. While the NDP branding attempts were the most prominent, particularly in their use of emotional appeals and “tiny details,” it is evident that all three parties attempted to brand their ads in some way. These results are surprising, particularly in a Canadian context, where election materials are fall under strict guidelines. As the voters demonstrate that they are more willing to move their vote around, new methods of voter engagement and outreach becomes ever more important.

The Conservative Party campaign used branding strategies in the most surprising manner. Instead of using their television commercials to further develop their own branding, branding techniques were used to tarnish the brand of the Liberal Party. Fear and anxiety-based emotional appeals coupled with visual imagery depicted Ignatieff as unfit to lead. Little attention was given to the party’s own brand image, suggesting that the party had confidence in the brand equity of its leader, Stephen Harper. Simply put, brand equity is a concept that argues that well-known brand names have more success in the marketplace than a lesser-known group (Smith and French, p. 6). The Conservatives didn’t stress their own suitability to lead because they had already been leading a minority government, and therefore did not feel the need to prove their competency to

Canadians. Instead, they capitalized on the negative aspects of Ignatieff's brand image and magnified them through their television commercials.

On the surface, it appears that the Liberal Party displayed incoherent, unfocused attempts at branding that were ultimately unsuccessful. However, closer examination of the data revealed that branding strategies as discussed in the literature review of this study were simply not present. While they may have been guided by branding techniques, the Liberals' strategy execution was greatly flawed. Their leader, Michael Ignatieff, was not incorporated into any of their advertising efforts, their core product of policy positions was not expressed to voters, and there very little standardization within their television content.

Campaign slogans were not used, the party logo was often not visible, and their content did not answer or even acknowledge the lingering questions held by voters. That is, of course, not to suggest that a lack of branding was responsible for their lack of success at the ballot box; rather, incongruent messaging and advertising exacerbated a negative brand image of the Liberals and Ignatieff already held by the voting population. However, the apparent mismanaging of its brand in Election 41 served as a wake-up call to the Liberal faithful, who are now operating a much tighter ship in regards to their communications content. A Liberal post-election status document produced by senior party management made no less than fifteen direct references to the Liberal "brand." Current party leader Justin Trudeau has already been the subject of many articles and studies debating the strength and viability of his own personal brand.

The Liberal Party television strategy contrasts with the tightly run, centralized NDP campaign. As discussed earlier, the NDP campaign displayed high levels of branded content throughout all of their television ads. From the optimistic emotional appeal to use of slogans and logos to the constant presence of Jack Layton, the NDP commercials created an entirely new brand image in the eyes of voters—one of credible governance. While, of course, many factors contribute to a party's electoral breakthrough, it cannot be denied that the professional and easily digestible nature of the communication assisted this process.

The results of this study open the door to further discussions of the visibility and measurability of branding in campaign content. The significant statistical differences identified in this preliminary study indicate that such a topic can be successfully measured. Currently, no formalized frameworks for analysis are in place, but if branding continues to be recognized as a new form of political communication, then new forms of research and data collection must also be introduced. However, two important details must be highlighted. First, it should be noted that television is the most traditional, and the most expensive, form of promotion available to political parties. Many communications professionals would likely advise against testing new techniques and strategies on such a large stage. Therefore, parties would be more likely to rely on existing narratives and use newer and more innovative strategies on less expensive platforms. Additionally, the design of this study was far from ideal. Many of the small elements that branding theorists identify as essential to successful branding such

as music and sonic cues, narration tone/style could not be fully captured or measured for study. Future studies would do well to include such elements but risk losing some level of objectivity along the way.

In sum, this study concludes that based on the results of the analysis, branding was detected in the communications content of the 2011 Canadian federal election. More specifically, some parties appear to be using branding strategies more extensively than others. For example, the NDP party logo appeared in every single ad chosen for study, whereas the Liberals and Conservatives used theirs more infrequently. The NDP and Conservatives also used a consistent narrative/emotional appeal and visual style throughout their ads, whereas the Liberals varied between numerous emotions and visual techniques creating the appearance of an unfocused campaign. This also speaks to the overall effectiveness of the brand strategies employed. The Liberal ads, aside from their variety, did not address lingering voter concerns of trust and fiscal responsibility, which weakened their brand equity with voters. The disconnect between the chosen brand messaging and voter perceptions equates to an ineffective branding strategy. Conversely, the Conservatives were able to maximize their brand equity by capitalizing on an angry voting public, frustrated by three years of political upheaval. They chose to use fear-based appeals to attack the other parties in a continued effort to portray themselves as the only safe and logical choice for voters. The NDP lacked the entrenched brand equity held by the Conservatives but used the election campaign to develop a positive one of their own. Previous elections demonstrated that most voters did

not see the NDP as a plausible governing party. Therefore the NDP branding strategy sought to move the party towards the centre by highlighting voter-friendly policies like health-care in a fiscally responsible manner. Their message of Canadian Leadership was simple and presented in every single ad that aired. This messaging was underscored with the extensive use of party leader Jack Layton within all of these ads. He was portrayed as professional and hard-working, ready to provide the change that Canadian voters were seeking. Overall, the NDP campaign displayed the most evidence of political branding, clearly in an attempt to develop positive brand equity with voters. It was deemed to be most the effective due to its responsiveness in addressing voter concerns and perceptions.

The depth in which branded content was detected in all three of the parties also suggests that branding cannot and should not be dismissed as a mere “buzzword” or marketing trend. Instead, the multimodal content analysis of television advertisements has revealed that not only can branding be detected in political communications, it can also be measured and compared for effectiveness.

7. Conclusion

The guiding purpose of this study was to contribute to the limited knowledge of political branding through the exploration of a unique and interesting case study. The broad research question of branding as a new type of political communication was explored through the lens of the 41st Canadian federal election within the confines of the post-positivist theoretical framework. Post-positivism allows researchers to search for patterns within human behavior while acknowledging that many contributing factors remain unknowable. Literature and data from fields as diverse as political science, communication, marketing and psychology were reviewed before modernization theory was introduced as the primary factor in branding's rapid rise in popularity. Earlier eras relied on traditional sources of cultural authority like trade unions and churches to guide and sway voting decisions, but as these outlets decline in influence, political party loyalties become less entrenched. This trend, coupled with the onset of new media platforms, caused those working in the political communications realm to search for new methods of reaching voters. Branding emerged as a popular strategy as practitioners saw the potential of emotional appeals in developing closer ties with growing numbers of undecided voters. Branding's emphasis on message and visual cohesion also make it well suited for a multi-channel/platform media landscape.

The research question of whether or not branding strategies could be observed in the 41st Canadian federal election was then explored through content created specifically for the election campaign. The 41st election was chosen due

to high levels of branding-related language detected in the media coverage and the expansion of new media platforms into the political realm (i.e.: Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and digital-only content). A multimodal content analysis of thirty-three television advertisements, eleven from each of the three major political parties, was performed to determine if branding strategies were utilized.

The results of the study revealed numerous differences in the ways the three parties approach their communication efforts. From the use of emotional appeals to portrayal of the leader to the policy positions that formed the product core, it appears that two of the three parties used political branding techniques in some way. While their own brand was less of a priority, there is evidence to suggest that the Conservatives used branding methodology to systemically attack the Liberal campaign. The Liberal campaign did display certain elements of branding, but the lack of cohesion within their commercials simply did not support conclusions of large scale branding efforts. Conversely, the NDP campaign is characterized as having been highly branded. In fact, the prominence of branding techniques in their content not only suggests a concerted, centralized effort from the party but also supports this study's hypothesis that branding can be detected as a distinct form of political communication.

However, as O'Shaughnessy notes, "case studies, of course 'prove' nothing, merely establish a foundation for further argument (O'Shaughnessy, 2001 p.1056). The results of this study indicate that it may be likely branding practices will continue and grow in the Canadian political landscape. If those in

the academic and professional communities accept it as a new form of political communication, then formalized procedures regarding both the performance and study of branding should be discussed in detail. Further study with political communicators regarding their motivations and perceived incentives for using branding strategies would assist greatly in testing the results of this study.

Indeed, politics and more specifically political communication remain difficult and at-times impenetrable fields of study. Politics and voting remain deeply personal for many citizens, and it can be difficult for researchers to obtain an accurate reflection of the situation. But as scholar Daniel Kriess notes, “that’s sort of one of the beauties of politics. That it can’t be totally rationalized in that way, of knowing exactly what is going to influence the electorate,” he says. “You know, it’s not quite a science. But it’s not quite as messy as an art. It’s somewhere in between” (Misener, 2011). Somewhere in between is where political communications specialists and researchers find themselves operating. It might be troublesome to label, quantify, and discuss but these topics remain worthy of such efforts, particularly as the political realm grows evermore tumultuous.

8. References

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