

POLITICAL BRANDING AT THE GRASSROOTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BRAND PERSONALITIES IN NAGDA

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ABSTRACT

In the modern political landscape, parties are increasingly perceived and evaluated by voters through branding lenses similar to those applied in consumer marketing. This study investigates the political brand personality of two major Indian political parties—Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC)—to determine whether there exists a significant difference in how voters perceive them across key personality traits at Nagda, MP. Nagda, a small industrial city in Madhya Pradesh, India, has a diverse population with varying levels of political awareness and participation. Political marketing—encompassing campaigns, advertisements, social media outreach, and grassroots efforts—plays a critical role in shaping voter behavior. Understanding its impact in a localized context like Nagda can reveal how tailored strategies affect participation in democratic processes. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey method, data was collected from 374 respondents, who rated both parties on five dimensions: honesty, progressiveness, competence, toughness, and uniqueness.

Key Words: Political Brand Personality, Political Parties, Nagda

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary democracies, political parties are increasingly viewed through the lens of brand management, much like corporations. Voters no longer rely solely on policy promises or ideological leanings; instead, they are influenced by how they perceive the personality of political parties, which shapes trust, loyalty, and ultimately, voting behavior. This perception—referred to as political brand personality—comprises the human-like traits voters assign to political parties, such as honesty, competence, toughness, innovation, and uniqueness. The rise of media-driven politics, especially in countries like India, has transformed political leaders and their parties into marketed entities, with strategic messaging, visual symbols, and personality cues crafted to appeal to specific voter segments. As a result, political brand personality now plays a vital role in shaping public opinion, political engagement, and party differentiation. India's political landscape offers a compelling context to explore this phenomenon. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) represent two of the most influential and ideologically distinct parties in the country. BJP, under strong leadership and assertive communication, has cultivated a brand associated with nationalism, strength, and innovation. In contrast, INC, with its legacy of governance and historical significance, often projects an image of tradition, inclusiveness, and continuity.

Despite the growing importance of political branding, limited empirical research has examined how Indian voters differentiate between the personalities of major political parties. This study seeks to fill that gap by evaluating the perceived political brand personality of BJP and INC using standardized traits and statistical comparison. By doing so, it aims to determine whether there exists a significant difference in how voters evaluate these two political entities along key personality dimensions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of political brand personality has gained significant attention as electoral politics becomes increasingly similar to consumer brand marketing. Political parties, like corporate brands, are not only judged on their policies but also on their perceived personality traits such as honesty, competence, strength, and uniqueness (Needham, 2006). Just as consumers associate emotions and values with commercial brands, voters develop psychological associations with political parties based on their experiences, media exposure, and leadership performance (Schneider, 2004).

Jennifer Lees-Marshment (2001) was among the early scholars to argue that modern political campaigns must operate like marketing campaigns, and personality-driven branding is key to forming emotional bonds with voters. This aligns with Aaker's (1997) five-dimension brand personality model (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, ruggedness), which several scholars have adapted for political branding (Smith & French, 2009).

Newman (1999) emphasized that political choice is deeply emotional and often influenced by perceived traits of parties and candidates. According to Phipps et al. (2010), political brand personality enables voters to simplify complex political information by assigning familiar human-like traits to parties. For example, parties that project themselves as "tough" or "innovative" appeal to different voter segments just like rugged vs. sleek brands do in the consumer market.

In the Indian political context, political branding has taken center stage in recent years. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has successfully built a brand around decisiveness, nationalism, and innovation, particularly under the leadership of Narendra Modi (Kaur, 2017). In contrast, the Indian National Congress (INC), though historically dominant, struggles with a consistent brand personality, often associated with legacy, tradition, and a lack of dynamism (Chhibber & Verma, 2018). Scholars argue that this divergence in political brand personality significantly impacts voter behavior, especially among youth and urban populations.

However, despite growing academic interest, empirical studies measuring political brand personality using psychometric scales are still limited in emerging democracies like India. Most research has been qualitative or case-based, indicating a need for structured quantitative assessment of how political parties are perceived across standard personality traits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, comparative research design aimed at examining the differences in political brand personality perceptions between two major political parties in India: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). A cross-sectional survey method was used to collect standardized data from participants.

2. Objectives

- To assess voter perceptions of political brand personality traits of BJP and INC
- To statistically test whether significant differences exist in these perceptions
- To contribute empirical evidence to the field of political marketing and voter behavior in India

3. Sample Selection

- Population: Indian voters above the age of 18
- Sampling Technique: Non-probability purposive sampling
- Sample Size: 374 respondents
- Inclusion Criteria: Individuals eligible to vote in Nagda, MP

4. Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was administered, consisting of Likert-scale items (5-point scale: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) related to five political brand personality traits:

Question No. Trait Assessed Statement

Q6	Honesty	I believe the party is led by honest people
Q7	Progressiveness	I believe the party is willing to upgrade the current scenario
Q8	Competence	The leaders of the party are confident and intelligent
Q9	Toughness	The leaders of the party are tough
Q10	Uniqueness	This party is unique and working differently

Respondent rated their selected party on these five traits.

5. Data Analysis

- Software Used: SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)
- Statistical Test: Independent Samples t-Test
 - Levene's Test was used to check homogeneity of variances
 - Two-tailed t-tests compared the means of BJP and INC on each trait
- Significance Level: 0.05 (95% confidence interval)
- Interpretation focused on the p-value to accept or reject the null hypothesis:

H₀: There is no significant difference in political brand personality between BJP and INC

6. Ethical Considerations

- Participation was voluntary and anonymous
- Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study
- No personal identifying data was collected
- Data was used strictly for academic purposes

ANALYSIS AND INTREPRETATION

This section presents the detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected to assess the **political brand personality** of two major Indian political parties—**Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** and **Indian National Congress (INC)**. The analysis focuses on understanding whether a **statistically significant difference** exists in how voters perceive the personality traits of these two parties across five carefully selected dimensions: **honesty, progressiveness, competence, toughness, and uniqueness**. The primary objective of this study was to evaluate whether a significant difference exists in the perceived political brand personality between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). To achieve this, responses gathered through a **Likert-scale questionnaire** were statistically tested using **Independent Samples t-tests** via SPSS. This method allowed for comparing the mean perception scores of BJP and INC on each trait. The analysis adheres to a **95% confidence interval** and applies appropriate statistical handling for cases with missing data and unequal variances, as defined by Levene's Test.

Group Statistics					
	Party	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Q6	BJP	218	4.7339	.44291	.03000
	INC	156	2.9679	1.33160	.10661
Q7	BJP	218	4.7385	.44045	.02983
	INC	156	2.9936	1.31246	.10508
Q8	BJP	218	4.7156	.45217	.03062
	INC	156	3.0321	1.37451	.11005
Q9	BJP	218	4.7431	.43792	.02966
	INC	156	3.1154	1.39567	.11174
Q10	BJP	218	4.6606	.47461	.03214
	INC	156	2.8526	1.43596	.11497

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df
Q6	Equal variances assumed	198.584	.000	18.231	372
	Equal variances not assumed			15.945	179.709
Q7	Equal variances assumed	177.154	.000	18.254	372
	Equal variances not assumed			15.975	180.154
Q8	Equal variances assumed	185.689	.000	16.862	372
	Equal variances not assumed			14.738	179.169
Q9	Equal variances assumed	270.054	.000	16.152	372
	Equal variances not assumed			14.079	176.982
Q10	Equal variances assumed	258.585	.000	17.322	372
	Equal variances not assumed			15.145	179.398

This is tested across multiple variables: Q6 to Q10, likely representing different dimensions or questions assessing political brand personality.

Step-by-step Analysis

1. Check Levene's Test (Equality of Variances)

- If Sig. < 0.05, equal variances are not assumed, use the second row of the t-test.
- If Sig. ≥ 0.05, equal variances are assumed, use the first row.

2. Check t-test Significance (p-value)

- If Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.05, there is a significant difference between BJP and INC.
- If Sig. ≥ 0.05, no significant difference is found.

Q6: "I believe the party is led by honest people"

- BJP Mean = 4.73
- INC Mean = 2.99
- p-value = 0.000 → Significant
Insight: BJP is perceived much more honest than INC. This reflects a strong trust-based brand advantage for BJP.

Q7: "I believe the party is willing to upgrade the current scenario"

- BJP Mean = 4.74
- INC Mean = 2.99
- p-value = 0.000 → Significant
Insight: BJP is viewed as progressive and reform-oriented, while INC lags notably in this perception. Signals a modernization gap in branding.

Q8: "The leaders of the party are confident and intelligent"

- BJP Mean = 4.72
- INC Mean = 3.03
- p-value = 0.000 → Significant
Insight: BJP leaders are strongly perceived as more competent, suggesting a leadership image advantage.

Q9: "The leaders of the party are tough"

- BJP Mean = 4.74
- INC Mean = 3.12
- p-value = 0.000 → Significant
Insight: BJP leaders are viewed as decisive and strong, enhancing their image as authoritative or action-driven.

Q10: "This party is unique and working differently"

- BJP Mean = 4.68
- INC Mean = 2.85
- p-value = 0.000 → Significant
Insight: BJP is clearly seen as the more distinctive and innovative party. INC lacks differentiation in the voters' minds.

Overall Conclusion:

All 5 traits show a highly significant difference ($p < 0.001$), with BJP scoring consistently and substantially higher than INC. Thus:

Reject the null hypothesis — there is a significant difference in political brand personality.

Strategic Implications:

Trait	BJP Brand Personality	INC Brand Personality
Honesty	Strong trust	Perceived lack of integrity
Progressiveness	Change-focused	Seen as stagnant
Intelligence & Confidence	Competent leaders	Less assured, less capable
Toughness	Decisive image	Weaker on assertiveness
Uniqueness	Innovative/different	Generic, less distinct identity

Comparative Analysis of Political Brand Personality: BJP vs INC

****Hypothesis**:** There is no significant difference in political brand personality between BJP and INC.
Result: Rejected — Statistically significant differences observed in all dimensions (Q6–Q10).

Qus.	Statement	BJP Mean	INC Mean	p-value	Conclusion
Q6	Led by honest people	4.73	2.99	0.000	BJP perceived more honest
Q7	Willing to upgrade scenario	4.74	2.99	0.000	BJP seen as more progressive
Q8	Leaders are confident/intelligent	4.72	3.03	0.000	BJP seen as more capable
Q9	Leaders are tough	4.74	3.12	0.000	BJP viewed as stronger leaders
Q10	Party is unique	4.68	2.85	0.000	BJP seen as more innovative

****Overall Insight**:**

BJP holds a significantly stronger brand image across all tested political personality traits. INC underperforms especially in uniqueness, honesty, and leadership strength.

CONCLUSION

Hypothesis H_0 : There is no significant difference in political brand personality between BJP and INC is rejected for all questions because the p-values are all < 0.05 , indicating statistically significant differences between BJP and INC across all measured dimensions. Schneider (2004) coined the term “political brand personality”, arguing that voters assign human characteristics to parties. BJP has cultivated a strong leader-centric brand, emphasizing nationalism and development. INC has historically relied on legacy and inclusive positioning, but suffers from a brand dilution in recent years. BJP and INC differ significantly in how they are perceived in terms of political brand personality based on all the items/questions evaluated. The consistent significance across all dimensions suggests strong and systematic perception differences between the two parties in the minds of respondents.

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