ADOPTION OF GREEN MARKETING STRATEGY BY INDIAN POLITICAL BRANDS: CREATING A GREEN IMAGE AND GAINING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of political parties' green marketing strategies on constructing a green image and a competitive advantage for the political party brand. Primary data was gathered using a survey approach from 246 citizens of India. To estimate empirical findings, PLS-SEM 4 was used. The study is undertaken in the political sector for the first time, and it reveals that by implementing a green marketing strategy, political brands may develop a green brand image and provide them an edge over other political brands. Based on these findings, political party managers may adopt green marketing strategies for their political party brand to meet voters' ecological demands better.

Keywords: political marketing; environment; green marketing; green image; competitive advantage

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the ever-increasing scarcity of natural resources required to produce products and services, societies are today confronted with tremendous challenges in responsible production and use. Consumers and producers are no longer the last stakeholders to be held accountable for ensuring a sustainable environment. Governments, too, play a critical role in closing the loop by creating, informing, consuming, and supporting green initiatives, products, or promises(Antoniades, 2020; Shamsi & Siddiqui, 2017). Due to a great surge of interest in environmental conversation among academicians, practitioners, and even the general public (Behnam et al., 2018), political parties also have started adopting long-term environment-related decisions or actions based on data from a number of sources, such as government statistics, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN DESA, 2022)and voter pressure (Wynes et al., 2021). In this regard, it has also been noticed in the business world that the creation of environmentally friendly goods and company operations results in greater efficiency in terms of resource investment, enhanced market, and improved corporate branding (Fraj-Andrés et al., 2009). All these benefits are not limited to the business houses; political parties may also gain from these green innovations (green actions).

We are aware that India has a population of 1.4 billion and has a few cities listed in the list of most polluted cities of the world (Broom, 2020). Because of this large number of populations and a bad natural environment (Chandra, 2015; Ambrogio, 2019) it becomes very important for researchers to escalate the research in Indian political marketing domain to better understand the impact of environment friendly actions taken by governments on the behavior of voters in the country. The current research also focuses on India's political environment, which is involved in the adoption of the generation of green ideas, production, and promotion of environment-friendly initiatives (Guha et al., 2019; Madalitso Anastanzio Nahuku et al., 2020). Examples of such green initiatives are the Namami Gange Project, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, and the Odd Even scheme, (Choudhary & Gupta, 2015; Thakur & Qamar, 2021; Raj, 2020; Rumi, 2021). These examples are the promises or regulations framed by popular political parties, which were highly promoted at the time of elections (Suthar et al., 2019). Acee-Eke, (2020) has also suggested that governments should adopt a green marketing strategy to promote sustainable development by offering green products. This sector has been selected to address the research topic because political parties are an important part of the economy of India and a very huge cost is incurred by both the government (ORF, 2019) and the candidate running for elections (Sircar, 2018). Indian political parties are always in a fight among themselves to prove who is responsible for the pollution 'a blame game played by governments all across the world' (Bache et al., 2015; Rajão & Georgiadou, 2014; Lahsen et al., 2020). Parties forming government, enact various laws and undertake measures to protect the environment (Vetrivel, 2012, Zhang, 2012). These initiatives or promises in political marketing jargon are the products or services on offer by these parties (Falkowski et al., 2000; Henneberg, 2004; Gopal Krishan et al., 2019; Widagdo, 2014).

Therefore, in this article, the green initiatives which are the promises made or actions taken by these parties after coming into power have been identified as green products.

Recent studies in Corporate Social Responsibilities also reveal that green management plays a critical role in developing a firm's image. Environmental practices have been regarded as one of the most important factors in determining green image and green firm's competitiveness, (Schwaiger, 2004; Sellitto & Hermann, 2019). Developing environment-friendly products leads to an increase in sales, and finally sustainable competitive advantages (Fraj-Andrés et al., 2009). Although competitive advantage as a result of green production is commonly examined in academic research in the area of consumer behavior (Cegliński, 2017; Sigalas, 2015; Porter, 1985; Stalk, 1988); the antecedent influence of green products on green brand image and green competitive advantage, has received little attention (Zameer et al., 2020). Political parties majorly pay attention to social responsibility projects; therefore, they might also benefit from environment related activity in terms of competitive advantage (Twum et al., 2022). Consumers' responses to the government's green initiatives have been studied only in terms of emotional responses by Anand & Gaur (2019). Green initiatives of governments have been mentioned in articles related to green marketing (R. Yadav & Pathak, 2013) but very few have identified or projected them as green political products. By taking cues from these research gaps, we propose to investigate the impact of green initiatives or green products of governments (political parties) on brand's green image and competitive advantage.

As a result, the study intends to propose a fresh analytical framework to fill the aforementioned knowledge gaps. It examines the process of a political party's green competitive advantage generation through factors such as green brand image and green products. Also being investigated is the mediating influence of green brand image on the link between green production in terms of green initiatives and green competitive advantages. Voters' responses were collected using google forms and by circulating hard copies of the questionnaire to participants. The complete study of data from voters or political consumers provides political leaders and managers with useful insights. The study's findings, in theory, provide a foundation for future research on strengthening the competitive advantage of political party brands through various non-traditional factors such as environment. Finally, the study provides a framework for the government to develop appropriate policies for a cleaner environment and to foster green innovation practices in the country.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Political Marketing: An Integral Part of Marketing

Political marketing can be described as the strategy of attracting voters with political candidates and ideas to meet their political needs and so win their support for the candidate and ideas in question (Shama, 1975; 'Cass, 1996 Wring, 1997;Henneberg, 2004;Venu, 2008; Lees-Marshment, 2019). In the ever-expanding scope of marketing

research, political brands have become a highly researched topic of interest (Farhan & Ahmad, 2016) and are assessed in the same manner as a commercial product. According to Kotler (1969), political candidates are marketed in the same way a soap is. While there are scholars, such as 'Shaughnessy, (2001), who believe that the political and business world are completely different and marketing is not as relevant in politics as it is believed by some to be. Shama (1975), provided a summary of concepts and tools which are common and denote similarities between marketing and political marketing. He also suggested that marketing and political marketing have a similar history and concepts and hence it becomes logical to say that political marketing is an integral part of marketing (Korschun et al., 2020; Schweidel & Bendle, 2019). The consequence of non-profit organizations' use of marketing has received some attention and it is advised that political parties be treated like companies to get clients (voters) (Twum et al., 2022). Political party brands in India have also recognized the benefit of reaching customers or voters through marketing tactics (Banerjee & Chaudhuri, 2016; Jain & Ganesh, 2020; Safiullah et al., 2022; Antil & Verma, 2021), and green innovation has become critical due to global environmental issues such as climate change, air pollution, biodiversity loss, and water stress (Miedzinski et al., 2021). Political marketing and green marketing we can say, are linked by the fact that changes in politicians' images, as well as changes in visions of a sustainable future, occur top-down, with ideas migrating from cultural and government elites to other sectors of society and these brands must become more innovative and promote environmentally friendly items with a good marketing and advertising plan followed by a definite intention of action (Falkowski et al., 2000). Researchers have not paid much attention to this sector of society which is catering to their green needs.

2.2 Green Initiative as Green Political Product

According to the literature on political marketing, a political product includes a party, candidates, public image, and electoral initiatives (Bigi, 2017). Additionally, we know that a "green product" safeguards the environment without causing resource depletion or putting it in danger (Ansu-Mensah, 2021). Therefore, we can state that political parties' green initiatives are their green products (P. Yadav et al., 2024).

2.3 Green Image

A green brand image is a collection of brand impressions in customers' minds that are related to environmental concerns and commitments (Chen, 2010; Bashir et al., 2020). As more and more businesses want to position themselves as a sustainable brand. A marketing term known as 'Corporate Image' has acquired its own identity to lead the industry as 'Green Corporate Image' (GCI). Green corporate image is a result of Green Branding. Green brands are synonymous with environmentally friendly products and activities. The firm's green corporate image is derived from its stakeholders' green perceptions. (Bathmanathan & Hironaka, 2016). According to various studies, there is a positive relationship between green activities and improved business image (Miles & Russell, 1997; Chen, 2008; Namkung & Jang, 2013; Amores-Salvadó et al., 2014; Yao

et al., 2021). Also, there is a positive impact of distinctive demand from consumers side for green products on organizations' performance in the form of an improved green image (Chivhungwa & Chinomona, 2019).
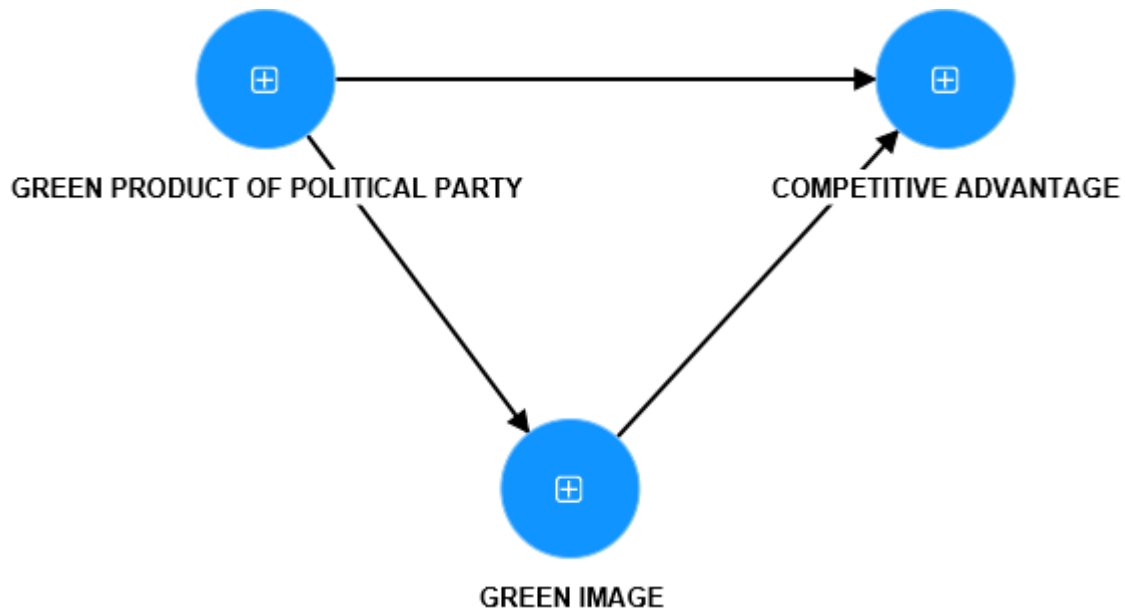
2.4 Political Party's Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantages can be found almost anywhere. A competitive advantage arises when a company can provide the same advantages as rivals but at a cheaper cost (cost advantage), or when the benefits outweigh those of competing goods (differentiation advantage)(Wen-Cheng et al., 2011). Flak & Głód, (2020) has defined competitive advantage as any value that a company delivers that inspires its consumers (or end users) to buy its products or services rather than those of rivals and that creates barriers to replication by present or potential direct competitors. Competitive advantage is the managed ability to add, create, and keep up a profitable business offer by offering better esteem than the client through either one-of-a-kind profit that offsets a higher cost or lower costs than rivals for equal profits, and thus many companies use green marketing to outsmart their rivals in the industry to gain the upper hand (Timothy et al., 2014)

In the same manner, a political party brand's competitive advantage is, by definition, something that competitors do not have. Competitive advantage has been defined by Pascal D König, (2017) as a party's capacity to outperform any competition in a specific voter segment over time, with not just better appeal in that group but also a resource or efficiency component. To have a lasting competitive advantage, political brands should look for strategies that their competitors cannot easily replicate or imitate. Since, political parties at the national level play a vital role in ensuring representative democracy (Lindberg, 2008) and people expect the government to have a significant role in environmental protection (Anand & Gaur, 2019) and by being innovative they may gain competitive advantage at least in this sphere.

3. FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY, AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The study synthesized the literature on sustainability practices, green brand image, and green competitive advantage into a new research framework to strengthen green competitive advantage for political party brands. Although many studies have been conducted in the past to investigate the mechanism of increasing competitive advantage, very little research has been conducted to investigate the antecedent effect of green actions of governments on a green brand image (as a mediating factor) and green competitive advantage. The following research framework developed here has been adapted from the work of Zameer et al. (2020). The proposed framework is shown in **Figure1**.

(Figure 1. Research Framework)

Political party brands' green initiatives or promises may reduce environmental damage. By doing so, a political brand may develop a green brand image or an environment-friendly image as well as a competitive advantage. We provide a conceptual framework that hypothesizes that the government's sustainability programs establish a green brand image in the minds of customers (in our study, the general public), resulting in the development of a competitive advantage for that particular political party. The green brand image serves as a bridge between government green actions and competitive advantage. The purpose of this study is to expose governments or political brands to customers' reactions, which take the shape of the construction of a green brand image in their minds. As a result, we anticipate that substantial consumer responses to the government's green programs will result in favourable word of mouth about that party while countering negative information about the government (Anand & Gaur, 2019). As a result, the hypothesis for mediation is:

H1. The government's green actions (green products) lead to the creation of a green brand image for that particular party.

H2. The Green brand image of the political party brands leads to a competitive advantage.

H3. The government's green actions (green products) lead to the generation of competitive advantage.

3.1 Sampling

The respondents (voters) were selected randomly as well as through snowball sampling method, google forms were circulated using WhatsApp and Gmail addresses. Hard copies of the questionnaire were also made and circulated in English and Hindi language as India

is a non-English-speaking state and were filled by randomly asking people in the Delhi metro, outside educational institutions, and on public transport. All respondents were above eighteen years of age (voting eligibility in India). The total responses received using Google Forms were 87 and 159 through the random physical distribution of the questionnaire.

3.2 Development and Measurement of the Constructs

Respondents responded to the questions such as "In my opinion as a voter, environment-friendly policies save the environment" on a scale of 1 to 5 (where, 1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree). For green brand image, this study referred to Chen (2010). Five items were taken from his study. For green products, three items were taken from Suhaily & Darmoyo (2019), and for competitive advantage, four scales were used from the work of Wu & Chen (2012). The items were modified as per the need of the study and indicators in the model were named GP1, GP2, and GP3 for green products of political parties, GI1, GI2, GI3, GI4, and GI5 for green image, and GCA1, GCA2, GCA3, GCA4 for green competitive advantage as shown in **Figure 2**
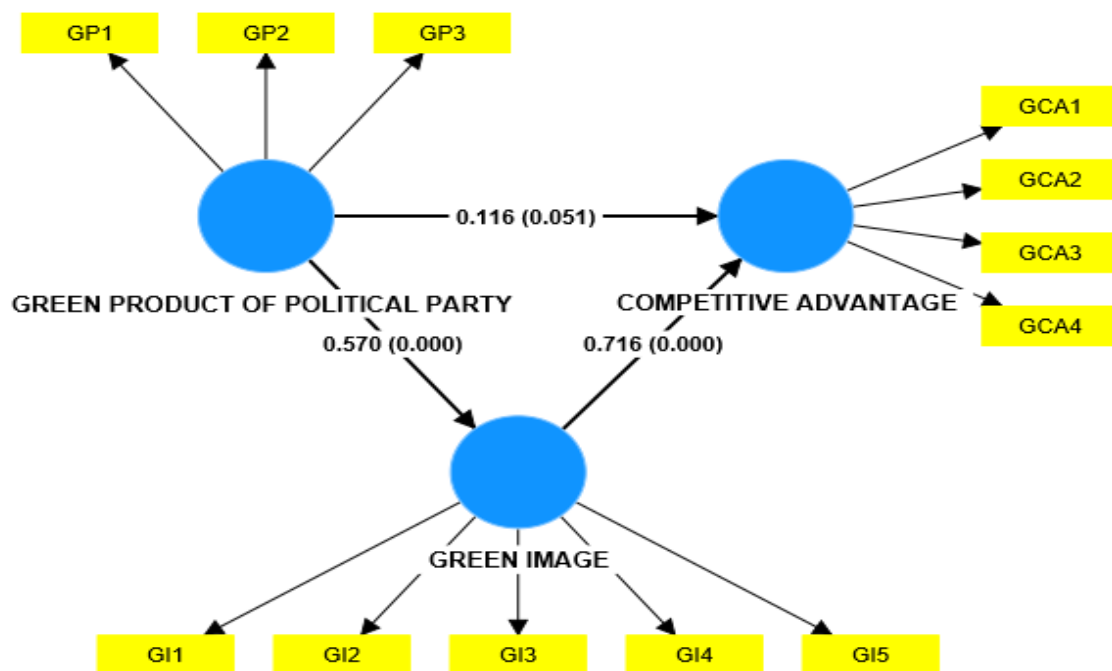
(Fig. 2: Structural model assessment.)

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As noted in the preceding section, all of the constructs considered in the questionnaire survey were derived from prior investigations. SmartPls 4 software was used in the study because, with a small sample size, the use of latent variables and PLS-SEM works well. Furthermore, the assumption of data distribution in PLS-SEM is more flexible than in CB-SEM. The examination estimated two kinds of validity, convergent and discriminant

measurement model validity. Convergent validity is typically discovered in a measurement model by investigating the outer loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). To establish convergent validity, the loadings must be greater than 0.5, and the CR and AVE must be greater than 0.7 and 0.5, respectively. The discriminant validity is examined by the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio and the method (Henseler, 2017). The output of the measurement model is given in **Figure 2** and **Tables 1–3.**

Construct	Indicators	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Composite reliability	AVE
GREEN PRODUCT	GP1	0.835	0.824	0.832	0.895	0.740
	GP2	0.860				
	GP3	0.885				
GREEN IMAGE	GI1	0.839	0.899	0.901	0.925	0.712
	GI2	0.836				
	GI3	0.863				
	GI4	0.841				
	GI5	0.839				
GREEN COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	GCA1	0.714	0.835	0.852	0.890	0.669
	GCA2	0.863				
	GCA3	0.845				
	GCA4	0.843				

Table 1: Internal consistency, convergent validity, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker criterion

	COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	GREEN IMAGE	GREEN PRODUCT OF POLITICAL PARTY
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	0.818*		
GREEN IMAGE	0.782	0.844*	
GREEN PRODUCT OF POLITICAL PARTY	0.524	0.570	0.860*

Table 3: Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio

	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

GREEN IMAGE -> COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	0.887
GREEN PRODUCT OF POLITICAL PARTY -> COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	0.621
GREEN PRODUCT OF POLITICAL PARTY -> GREEN IMAGE	0.655

Table 1 shows that the loadings of all items are greater than 0.6, the CR values for all variables are greater than 0.7, and the AVE values are greater than 0.5, as recommended by (Ramayah et al., 2017). As a result, this study establishes the validity of convergence. According to Henseler, (2017), discriminant validity is tested by matching correlations between variables and the AVE square root of that variable.

According to **Table 2**, the square root of the AVEs is greater than the construct correlations. The heterotrait-monotrait ratio also demonstrates that this study established discriminant validity because all HTMT ratio values are less than 0.90. (Referring **Table 3**). In this study, both validity measures (convergent and discriminant validity) were established.

5. STRUCTURAL MODEL EVALUATION

To test the significance of the path coefficients, the bootstrapping technique was used (Shiau et al., 2019). A bootstrapping method with 1,000 resamples was used to examine the t-values. **Figure 2** and **Tables 4-5** show the results of the structural model.

The results of direct effects are shown in **Table 4**. The results showed that GP (green product of political party) has a significant and positive effect on GI (green image) with beta value = 0.570, t = 11.975, and p = 0.000 and GI also has a significant and positive effect on GCA (green competitive advantage) with beta value = 0.716, t = 14.948 and p= 0.000. But GP does not have a significant relationship with GCA where beta value= 0.116, t =1.954, and p= 0.051 Hence, H1 and H2 are supported but H3 is not supported.

Table 5 shows the results of GI's mediating role in the relationship of GP and GCA. GI significantly mediates the relationship, according to the findings. GP with GCA (beta= 0.048, t = 9.016 and p= 0.000). It also demonstrates that GI plays an important mediating role in the relationship.

Table 4: Structural Model Assessment Direct Effect.

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	STD	*T-Values*	*P-Values*
H1	GP > GI	0.570	0.048	11.975	0.000
H2	GI > GCA	0.716	0.048	14.948	0.000
H3	GP > GCA	0.116	0.059	1.954	0.051

Table 5: Structural model assessment indirect effect (mediation effects).

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	STD	*T-Values*	*P-Values*
H3	GP > GI> GCA	0.048	0.045	9.016	0.000

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The continual expansion of India's economy and industrial policy has resulted in several environmental challenges. India is now one of the world's major carbon polluters. To deal with environmental concerns, India's government is enacting strong environmental legislation. Similarly, environmental rules and consumer pressure imply that Indian governments (at national and state levels) cannot continue to thrive at the price of environmental deterioration. Therefore, research in this area was required to inform and persuade political brands about the presence of green needs and the benefits that can arise from taking necessary actions.

The results align with the research conducted by Zameer et al. (2020). According to his research, green production gives businesses a competitive edge, and the two factors are mediated by green image. This study supports the same idea, namely that when a political brand produces and markets a green product, it establishes a green brand image or, to put it another way, an environmentally friendly image that gives that brand a competitive advantage over others.

7. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

The research has several theoretical and practical significance. This article examines the government's green actions as their green products and green competitive advantage in depth. It investigates the mechanisms that strengthen green competitive advantage for political parties, which has not been studied before. According to the survey, voters' green need is a motivator for political party brands to switch to green production or take green initiatives. As a result, it adds to the literature on green marketing as well as political marketing. Competitive advantage theory in politics was recently applied by (König, 2017; Jamil & Hesti, 2019;Antoniades, 2021). This study adds to the same in a new form. In this paper, it was also investigated to what degree green initiative strengthens green brand image and green competitive advantage. It was found that governments or political party brands can improve their brand image in terms of safeguarding the environment and this can ultimately lead to gaining competitive advantage.

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