

The main objective of the present project is to examine the relationship between political parties and voters in terms of political branding. This approach assumes that political parties are brands, which have to present themselves favorably and differentiate from the competition in order to attract consumers, it means voters. Voters, casting the ballot “buy” a brand which they find the most attractive at the moment.

This approach has many advantages. Firstly, it enables comprehensive explanation of how voters learn about parties, how they perceive them and how they behave when it comes to consumer’s (voters’s) choice. Secondly, this approach better describes the relationship between parties and voters in changing political environment (related to emergence of catch-all parties and the de-alignment process) where traditional cleavages and stable party identification are no longer useful. It is of particular importance in case of Poland, where none the above mentioned approaches enabled a satisfactory explanation of relationship between parties and voters. Last but not least, it offers broader perspective as it concentrates on various aspects of politics. It binds not only voters with parties and politicians, but also these groups with opinions, evaluations, policies, enabling profound description of political system.

The political brand approach can be applied to describe and analyze any setting involving consumer choice, including, in our opinion, vote choice. In the present project we intent to study this phenomenon, focusing on three main research objectives we want to achieve. Firstly we intent to develop understanding of how voters view the political brand: what features and values are ascribed to particular parties/brands, what are their strengths and weaknesses, what distinguishes these parties/brands from the competition? Secondly, we plan to study the influence of brand perception on loyalty and vote choice: whether perception of brand influences propensity to vote for particular parties; whether change in brand perception leads to voters’ support for different party/brand or abstention? Last but not least, we intend to describe the target group of particular parties/brands: who are the voters/clients of particular parties/bands; what is their experience with the party/brand; what needs does the party/brand satisfy?

The matter of party brands has not yet been examined in Poland, despite the fact that there are various theoretical arguments for application of this concept in this relatively young post-communist democracy, where new parties came into being at the time of the rapid rise of popularity of mass media, which reshaped relationship between parties and voters. The former did not need support of expanded organizational structures nor the support of various groups (such as class or religious groups), as media made it possible to hit broad masses of voters (this effected in increased use of political marketing strategies among parties). The latter were able to collect information and make political decisions without parties’ support. This changed patterns of political behavior, as better educated and informed voters became more likely to make rational decisions based on actual content of policies and performance.

The present research project is based on qualitative and quantitative analyses of data derived from focus group interviews and online survey. We expect qualitative analyses of the data derived from focus group interviews enable us to get detailed picture of political parties (brands) and their adherents (target groups). These findings would be further enriched with the knowledge derived from the survey. Quantitative analyses of the data will allow development of mental maps for each political brand and verification of hypotheses related to the influence of political brands on party support when controlled for other determinants of vote choice.

Despite its great potential to explain relationship between parties and partisans in today’s democracies, the concept of political brands has not been systematically examined in Poland. The present project is first such attempt. The results of the project will surely contribute to the development of Polish political science. It will not only enable in-depth description of important aspects of political system: political parties and their adherents (which, we believe, will go beyond survey knowledge we poses), but it will also make up deficits of knowledge about linkage between political parties and their adherents, political and social processes that lead to formation of these bonds and political behavior which is its effect, providing better understanding of the matter. Moreover it will bring practical marketing knowledge related to party brands’ images and their target groups. This knowledge can be beneficiary not only by political scientists, but it may also be useful for practitioners (politicians, journalists, marketing specialists, NGO employees and citizens).