

The Brand Equity of the Lib Dems in the 2010 General Election: A National and Local Perspective.

GARETH SMITH (corresponding author)

I.G.Smith@lboro.ac.uk

(01509) 223126

Loughborough University, Leicestershire, UK, LE11 3TU

FIONA SPOTSWOOD

Fiona2.spotswood@uwe.ac.uk

(0117) 3283485

University of the West of England, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol, BS16 1QY

ABSTRACT. This paper considers the Liberal Democrat party as a brand, using appropriate branding concepts to analyse the fortunes of the party during the 2010 General Election. It explains Nick Clegg as a key influence on the brand's image nationally (the party leader as national brand spokesperson) and how the national image was moderated by Jeremy Browne (the focal constituency candidate and local brand spokesperson). The analysis then considers the effect of the subsequent Coalition Government (with the Conservatives) on the Liberal Democrat brand, focusing specifically on the new legislation to which it is inextricably associated.

KEYWORDS: Brand Equity, Liberal Democrats, Clegg, Brand Associations, Knowledge, Quality, Loyalty.

Gareth Smith is a Reader in Marketing at Loughborough University, UK. His research covers branding in political markets, political brand equity and personality plus brand extension effects. He has published on branding in the *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Marketing Theory* and *Journal of Political Marketing*.

Fiona Spotswood is Lecturer in Marketing at Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, UK. Her research focuses on using marketing for socially beneficial behaviour change, particularly through social marketing approaches. Fiona worked for the Liberal Democrats leading up to the 2005 general election.

INTRODUCTION

As the 2010 election campaign unfolded, we anticipated we would be analysing a Liberal Democrat breakthrough in British politics. Liberals have been the third largest British party since the 1920s, although have only existed in their present form since the 1980s when the Social Democratic Party and Liberals merged to form the Liberal Democrats. Although the Liberal Party was one of the two major British political parties from the mid 19th century, the rise of the Labour Party in the 1920s and the subsequent formation of the Liberal Democrat party have seen it stabilize as the third party. There are 57 Lib Dem MPs. It seemed quite plausible during the 2010 general election campaign that the Lib Dems might become the second party in terms of popular vote (if not Parliamentary representation). At least, we, like most commentators, expected an increase in the Lib Dem share of the vote over the 2005 election with upwards of 20 extra MPs.

After the event we find ourselves having to explain from a branding perspective, a number of different outcomes, namely a) why the Lib Dem ‘surge’ occurred during the campaign, b) why the ‘surge’ was not maintained on voting day, c) how a local campaign compounded or confounded the national experience and finally, d) now that the party has entered into a Coalition Government, the likely effects this will have on the Lib Dem brand into the future.

We consider the consumer value (brand equity) in the Liberal Democrat brand deriving from the party leader, Nick Clegg; and Jeremy Browne, a sitting MP who one of the authors observed closely during the 2005 general election and who substantially increased his support in the 2010 general election. We consider the way, from a branding perspective, that these two brand spokesmen affected the electoral success of their party on May 6th.

Having used a brand perspective to explain Clegg and Browne’s interaction during the campaign, we then consider the subsequent Coalition as a form of brand alliance (with the

Conservatives) and their joint legislative programme as a form of brand extension for the Lib Dems. We particularly consider the way that such extensions to the existing Lib Dem brand may be perceived by its supporters and the likely impact this will have on the brand into the future of this Parliament.

ANALYSING THE LIB DEM SURGE IN TERMS OF CLEGG AND BROWNE'S BRAND EQUITY

In politics, as in all services, the role of people is greater than for tangible brands (Booms and Bitner, 1981). Moreover, politics is a credence service (see Mitra, Reiss and Capella, 1999) in that it is often very difficult to determine what has been delivered in relation to what was promised at election time. Faced with such uncertainty, consumers look for clues from the people directly associated with it. In politics therefore, trust in the people making promises about future services is heightened in importance (Lloyd, 2006). The leader/constituency candidate are seen as acting as a heuristic device for voting decisions, particularly the majority of voters who are not actively involved in politics and thus not knowledgeable of all policies proffered (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991; Forehand, Gastil and Smith, 2004). As such, the image of party leaders has been seen to have a great influence on voting intentions at General Elections (Smith, 2001). More specifically, the personal characteristics of politicians in the form of their personalities influences consumers/voters (Guzman and Sierra, 2009).

An additional importance of the party leader is his/her ability to change the image of his/her party. Blair did it with New Labour. More recently Cameron enhanced the Conservatives' brand equity by dropping several 'old' Tory policies and introducing symbolically 'modern' replacements. This effectively repositioned its image from a 'nasty party'¹ to a more caring 'liberal' party (Riddell, 2006). Clegg, since becoming leader in 2007, was faced not with a

disliked party, but a poorly understood one nationally and, at a personal level, with a poorly known leader. Conversely, Browne was the sitting MP for Taunton Deane, a marginal seat in the south-west of England, where he had been very active in building awareness and understanding of what he stands for. As such he had a clear brand image prior to the 2010 election campaign amongst constituents.

To structure our analysis of Clegg's effect nationally and Browne's impact locally, we consider their relative brand equity (BE); the value they were perceived by the electorate to offer during the election campaign. The BE construct has been applied already to analyse the value to the electorate of the UK Conservative and Labour parties (French and Smith, 2010) and Australian Liberal and Labour politicians (Phipps, Brace-Govan and Jevons, 2010). It is posited that a brand has "positive (negative) customer-based brand equity when consumers react more (less) favourably to an element of the marketing mix for the brand than they do to the same marketing mix element when it is attributed to a fictitiously named or unnamed version of the product or service" (Keller, 1993: 1).

Herein, we propose to use BE to identify the sources of value (or cost) that Clegg and Browne offered to the electorate on May 6th. Specifically, four sources of brand equity are considered for both men: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Keller 1993). Where they reinforce each other the overall brand equity for the Lib Dem brand is enhanced. Where they contradict or do not match, a more neutral or even negative affect was possible (as was the case for Labour where Gordon Brown was seen as a liability by its MPs in marginal seats). A model of the interaction of the leader and constituency candidate brand equity is supplied in Figure 1.

TAKE IN FIGURE 1 HERE

Awareness of Clegg and Browne

At its most basic level, a brand needs high consumer awareness for a concomitant high level of BE. Having been starved of publicity whilst leader of the third party, the television debates provided Clegg with this in abundance and he gained more in awareness than the other, relatively well known leaders. However, high awareness is not of itself sufficient for BE. For example, the brand knowledge of Clegg may be positive (and add to his BE), neutral or negative (and thus not add or dilute his BE).

An important part of the awareness that was attained by Clegg in the first debate was that he was generally perceived to have ‘won’ it (e.g. Wardrup, 2010). Not only did he gain positive awareness of himself as a person (his appearance, speaking style, perceived intelligence plus a raft of other personality dimensions), he appeared to have won the argument with his opponents. This raft of positive awareness was amplified by the media-commissioned research on the debates that filled the papers and TV news over the next few days. Thus those who were not interested enough in politics to watch the debates live (low involvement consumers) were still made aware of his success. As such, the first debate in particular produced a high level of positive awareness of Clegg’s symbolic meaning (him as a person) and values (on social and economic issues) across a wide spectrum (i.e. high and low involvement) of the electorate. As such his BE was dramatically enhanced.

In contrast to Clegg’s meteoric rise to household name status, Browne had between six and seven years to build strong brand awareness in his constituency. Browne campaigned hard as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate in Taunton Deane leading up to the 2005 election, appearing in local newspapers, visiting schools, community organisations and local events and ‘shaking the hand’ of as many potential voters as possible. After his election in 2005, this ‘permanent campaign’ approach continued (Needham 2005), and now with the aid of Twitter

and Facebook, Browne ‘meets’ (virtually or literally) hundreds of constituents every day. He behaves like a celebrity, updating his fans about his status and each carefully crafted update provides evidence of his public personality and personification of the local Lib Dem sub-brand.

On Twitter or Facebook, Browne will comment, for example, that he has been watching a documentary on The Rolling Stones, or that he has voted in The House on a particular environmental issue, or that he has been visiting a brewery in the constituency. Each comment provides evidence of the personality he wishes to be associated with the local Lib Dem brand; a serious politician, a ‘genuine’ local and a hard working constituency MP. Browne’s Facebook page is testament to his awareness and following, with every status update being immediately commented on by hundreds of people each believing they have a personal relationship with him.

Clegg’s brand awareness is arguably higher than Browne’s. Clegg is now a household name. However, the relationship the public has with Browne and Clegg are very different. Clegg is a distant figure, personifying a larger set of party values and promises, whereas Browne is an individual who his constituents may have met, who lives near them and who is far more ‘real’ to them, rather than representative. As is now discussed, this distinction had considerable influences over the outcome of the General Election for both.

Clegg and Browne’s Perceived Quality

French and Smith (2010) have considered the perceived quality of the political party brand but no comparison of a party leader’s and local candidate’s perceived quality has yet been undertaken. Using Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry’s (1990) seminal work, those dimensions of perceived quality that appear particularly apposite to Clegg and Browne are highlighted in the following table. Insight about Browne was gleaned from observation of his

2005 general election campaign and from informal interviews during the 2010 general election period.

TABLE 1

Clegg's credibility and trustworthiness must be set against the backdrop of declining trust in political parties and politicians in the UK (Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd, 2005). Added to these trends is the high overall level of perceived 'sleaze' with all parties mired in the expenses scandal. During the election, Clegg attempted to position himself and his party, with some degree of success, as the non-political 'we're not really like the old parties' party and thus less sleazy and more open to change by inference. As such, Clegg damaged Cameron's attempted position as the 'new/change' candidate. In so doing he followed in the footsteps of Blair in 1997 and many US presidents (Carter, Clinton, Reagan, Bush through to Obama) who positioned themselves as 'non-political politicians' not part of the Washington/Westminster political elite, but closer to the people.

Clegg's communication was developed clearly during the debates where he listened attentively to the questions, attempted to answer the question rather than a pre-prepared one and critically referred to the questioner by their first name, thus personalising the response to him/her and the wider viewing audience. Less clear cut was Clegg's perceived quality in terms of his reliability and competence, as manifest in his position on national security and immigration control. Unsurprisingly, after the first leaders' debate, Brown and Cameron sought to highlight these concerns at any opportunity, culminating in the 'get real' riposte by Brown in the second leaders' debate.

As with his associations, Browne has had more time to build his perceived brand quality. He has used this time to build a relationship with key opinion leaders and any source of positive word of mouth within his constituency. So, for example, since his first day in office in 2005,

he has treated everyone attending a surgery as a customer and anyone writing a letter or coming into contact with his constituency office as a potential voter who must receive a slick, efficient and satisfying service. Reinforcing his communication and competence quality dimensions, Browne's office replies to each individual casework enquiry within 48 hours and he signs every letter which bears his name, with major campaign letters (such as to Greenpeace or Amnesty International supporters en masse) being written by him personally.

As mentioned, Browne has conformed in his actions to the 'permanent campaign' approach in politics and this consistency has reinforced the quality dimensions of his brand and as such his overall BE. Against this backdrop, Clegg's perceived quality during the campaign, personifying a credible, competent and attractive national Lib Dem brand, reinforced Browne's own quality dimensions and framed his tangible successes. Constituents who focused on Browne's ability to resolve their problems may have ignored his political context until 'Cleggmania' brought the Lib Dem brand into the limelight.

During the election campaign itself, Browne commented that he was aware there was a 'bandwagon' and felt foolish to let it pass by without jumping on. However, his view was that his own brand was stand-alone and strong, and did not need to rely on an increase in national support to have a local following. Browne's reliance on Clegg in campaign material was select; Clegg appeared just enough for constituents to make the necessary connections and therefore for Browne's brand to experience the halo effect of 'Cleggmania' without there being any risk of doubt cast over Browne's personal competence.

Clegg and Browne's Brand Associations

In measuring brand associations it is evident that they are not all of equal importance or positive and as such affect equity differently. There are a myriad of potential associations that consumers may have learned about Clegg and Browne. Some are controllable (i.e. how Clegg

behaved during the leadership debates), some uncontrolled (as Gordon Brown exemplified in the Gillian Duffy ‘bigoted woman’ fiasco). To help in the analysis of the important associations relating to Clegg and Browne we consider their own perceived personalities as well as BE components from the wider taxonomy of brand associations (Keller, 2002).

There has been some discussion of political brand personality (Schneider, 2004; Smith, 2009, Guzman and Sierra, 2009) and using the dimensions of political personality, it is again notable to see how Clegg’s BE developed during the campaign. Of the six core dimensions of brand personality (Guzman and Sierra, 2009) all seemed evidenced by Clegg’s performance in the first leaders’ debate on the 15th May that saw an 11% increase in Lib Dem support in a week. It was widely acknowledged that Clegg was manifestly competent (intelligent, a leader and successful), open (sharp, innovative and modern), empathetic (friendly, cheerful, cool and young), agreeable (sincere), handsome (good looking and charming) and energetic (dynamic). Clearly, those partisan to other leaders would query this but the 50% plus who thought he won the first leaders’ debate had learned very quickly about the man and his personality – particularly as compared to an older, more damaged Brown and a strangely nervous Cameron whose star billing looked to inhibit him.

At the level of brand associations, the interplay between the national and local Lib Dem brands becomes the most interesting. It has been argued that Clegg’s brand associations are positive. In terms of organizational associations, newly formed and largely positive national Lib Dem brand associations centred around the personification of Clegg (Smith, 2009) will have contributed to Browne’s credibility as part of the newly elevated challenge party, and Browne was quick to position himself as being from the same mould as Vince Cable and Clegg to support the important part of his brand image as a serious politician.

However, Browne's perceived value really lay in the strength of his own tangible track record and very (locally) familiar, personable character. Where the debate around Clegg was largely limited to his personality, personification of values and potential as a credible alternative, the local debate surrounding Browne (largely instigated by Browne's own campaigning activity) centred on a tangible history of supporting the local constituency, which backed up a credible list of future ambitions. This perceived value, combined with the fortuitous boundary changes to his constituency, forged Browne's 2010 election success.

Lloyd argues that engagement with the political brand comes primarily from a sense of value; 'what can it do for me?' She comments that in the 2005 election campaign, people were citing that they were involved more in single issue campaigns like Make Poverty History than political parties because they felt their involvement would actually *do* something (Lloyd, 2006). This sheds light on the relationship between the 'Clegg' version of the Lib Dem brand (the 'national' brand) and the Browne 'local' version. Clegg's success added an ideological credibility to Browne's local Lib Dem brand, which was lacking in his 2005 election, but Browne's campaign attempted to make politics personally important to individual electors by presenting national policies firmly rooted in the local and backed up with demonstrations of his commitment to individual local causes (e.g. photos with local campaigners). Browne's election slogan was 'Jeremy Browne: a true champion for Taunton Deane', and this emphasised on all marketing communications materials the fact that he was *already* championing constituents' needs.

Browne's approach supports the view of many commentators who have drawn the link between voting and 'buying' a product; the motivation for both being ultimately self-interest. Browne was able to draw on his recent history to bring the intangible ideology of politics into line with individual motivations and preoccupations. Clegg did not have this powerful weapon and so his brand associations were far less tangible, based on promises, and also

tainted with a confused history of the Lib Dems as lacking credibility. Clegg was largely dependent on his own, positively received, personality to improve the brand associations of the Lib Dems, without the benefit of credible ‘proof’ that he could live up to his promises and perceived potential.

Loyalty to Clegg and Browne

Loyalty to a brand is a signal of a high level of BE, being the outcome of strong and positive brand awareness, brand quality and brand associations. In politics, loyalty relates to the extent that voters repeat purchase (vote for) the same party/leader over time. Such repeat purchase clearly adds to the value of the brand. Browne’s supporters were able to weigh up their purchase decision in 2005 with their post-purchase satisfaction, which Browne ensured was as high as possible. Luckily for Browne, the electorate is more likely now than ever to change its party identification (Clarke et al., 2004), and Browne’s support Browne’s loyal following has mushroomed to incorporate natural Tory and Labour supporters as he carefully segmented, targeted and positioned his campaign.

Loyalty towards the Lib Dems can have built up over decades; whereas loyalty to Clegg as party leader had less time to develop and as a result was much less likely to be strong. It is accepted that the surge in the fortunes of the party during the campaign was from his performances in the Leaders’ debates. The next section discusses the ebbing of that support in the last days of the campaign and explains that this is equally a sign of the fragility of Clegg’s overall BE and loyalty to him in particular.

THE EBBING OF LIB DEM SUPPORT

It is clear from this analysis that Browne managed to develop a very clear sub-brand of his own, with strong brand equity, which ultimately saw him boost his lead over his Conservative

rival from 573 to 3993 votes. Conversely, support for the Lib Dems slipped from second place and 30% of the predicted vote at the beginning of May to an actual 23% on May 6th as those who had been attracted to the party by Clegg during the campaign were not sufficiently motivated to vote Lib Dem, or chose to abstain, on polling day. Ipsos MORI research (Mortimore, 2010) has identified a ‘softness’ in their support on May 5th. When asked “How important is it to you who wins the next General Election?”, significantly less Lib Dem supporters said ‘very important’ and significantly more said ‘fairly important’ than for the other two parties. In addition, a new phenomenon, the ‘shy Labour voter’, has been suggested (Boon and Curtice, 2010). The polls identified a large number (one in five) who were ‘undecided’ just prior to the election. Of those who did then vote, twice as many voted Labour as Lib Dem. However, neither of these explanations address why the surge was not maintained.

An explanation that does is supplied by the Expectancy Theory of motivation (Vroom, 1964), which suggests that consumers will be motivated to act if they believe that such action will lead to a valued outcome. This idea has been ‘amended’ for use in politics (Worcester, 2001) and we can use this to help analyse why Clegg’s improved brand equity did not translate into a similar improvement in support for his party (see Figure 1). Why, if his value was increased did more voters not ‘buy’ his party?

Firstly, for Clegg to motivate he must be associated with promises that have a salience/valence for voters; if they care about an issue, they are motivated to support those who promise to deliver on it. Given the general disaffection with the behaviour of UK politicians with regards their expenses, Clegg’s position on the need for a fundamental change to the system that allowed such excesses was clearly salient and a positive motivational force. However, overall Clegg’s position was ambiguous for many. Scrapping

Trident for example would motivate positively those who want disarmament but have the opposite effect on those who want a strong deterrent.

Whilst it is necessary to be positively associated with important (salient) issues, this is not of itself sufficient for motivation. Beyond salience there is discernment. If voters can discern a difference on an association they care about there is a reason for greater motivation. So, inasmuch as Clegg's position on electoral reform and Trident was different from the other parties, this reinforced his/Lib Dem's salience for many.

Beyond salient, discernable differences voters need to believe that a leader with the best ideas also has the control (power) to enact them. At one point it looked as if, for the first time in living memory, there was a realistic chance that Clegg could actually deliver on his promises through increased power/influence in a hung parliament. The final element, the perceived determination (will) to deliver on promises, also looked assured for Clegg whose performances in the leader's debate suggested a strong desire to implement key promises such as electoral reform. Superficially, Clegg looked like the man in the right place at the right time as polls revealed that more of the electorate wanted a hung Parliament than wanted a given party to have a majority- a situation unique in post war Britain.

However, when it came to the crunch voters were not motivated in sufficient numbers by Clegg's promises. Lacking a deeper awareness of Clegg, some may have doubted his determination. Some clearly will have been in favour of some of his salient policy promises but worried by others. In the final debates the 'I agree with Nick' approach adopted by both Cameron and Brown inevitably reduced the discernment criteria. However, it is likely that the major concern was over his perceived ability to deliver on his promises (i.e. control). It was not clear what a hung Parliament would be like and the fear of inaction in the face of an economic recession would have frightened off a lot of possible Lib Dem support. Allied to

this was the underlying concern that a vote for the Lib Dems would not deliver a hung Parliament but a small majority for a Labour government or, more likely, a Conservative one - a prospect not welcomed by large swathes of their potential supporters. Even if a hung Parliament was achieved it was by no means clear how much control in implementing Lib Dem policies Clegg would have. Those with a longer memory had the experience of an emasculated Liberal party under David Steel in the so called Lib-Lab Pact in 1977 and Blair's snubbing of Paddy Ashdown after Labour's landslide victory in 1997.

From a brand equity perspective, Clegg's position whilst clearly stronger than at the beginning of the campaign was not that powerful; a powerful brand requiring associations that are strong, favourable and unique (Keller, 1993). Having one or two of these criteria is not enough. We have seen that Clegg initially had favourability and uniqueness but that these were slowly pegged back in the later leaders' debates. It is also doubtful whether in the short time that was available, the positive associations built up by Clegg were strongly held by many 'new supporters'. As we have seen, the associations and 'promises' for the future Clegg had developed over the four weeks of the campaign/leaders debates had some motivational salience, value and difference but it was still unclear as to what he would do in practice. This latter point is confirmed by the polling evidence which showed that support for Nick Clegg was always softer than that for the other leaders (Reuters, 2010).

This is in marked contrast to Jeremy Browne whose brand equity was assured over time and who was perceived to have fulfilled promises at the local level. He had salience; thanks to his constant and visible support for local businesses, the local Royal Marine Commando camp and local campaigns for a new hospital unit or school facilities. He could demonstrate significant differences from his opponents, both of whom he overshadowed in live debates thanks to his experiences as an MP; and by campaigning for Taunton Deane in The House (and reporting this back to constituents), he presented an image of having real power.

Thus, Browne was able to exhibit his brand equity to his constituents. Clegg's equity, whilst building and favourable and had some uniqueness, was less strongly held by the electorate. Add to this the uncertainty as to the outcome of voting for such a brand and the retrenchment back to core Lib Dem supporters becomes not only explicable but to be expected.

Having considered the BE of Clegg and Browne in the run up to the election, we conclude by considering the way that the Coalition is likely to influence their BE into the future.

CONCLUSION: CLEGG AND BROWNE IN THE COALITION

A feature of the UK's first past the post electoral system is that it usually produces a majority party that can form a stable government for up to five years. The election of 2010 was exceptional with the Conservatives as the largest party but nineteen seats short of an overall majority. Thus the predicted hung Parliament was achieved and either a minority Government or a Coalition Government was the main options. Clegg, faced with the opportunity of power and the promise of a referendum on political reform accepted coalescing with the Conservatives.

In BE terms, this effectively allowed the party to implement some of its promises but also be associated with other (Conservative) policies that it had vehemently opposed only days before. The main determinant of successful extensions is the perceived 'fit' between parent and extended brand, which occurs when the consumer accepts the brand development as logical (Tauber, 1988) and consistent with the parent brand (Aaker and Keller, 1990). In politics, extensions are typically close fit, being the introduction of policies derived from manifestos and thus expected of the brand. However, the coalition has introduced a novel experience, namely distant extensions. For the first time in living memory, a UK party is voluntarily embracing policies that it disagrees with and its supporters did not expect to see delivered (i.e. poor fit). So for example, Liberal Democrat supporters are asked to accept

policies that the party campaigned against during the election (for example, the increases to VAT announced in the emergency budget of June 22nd).

The wider branding literature has identified the danger of BE dilution, (negative changes in consumer beliefs) when extension associations are inconsistent with those expected of the parent brand (Roedder John, Loeken and Joiner, 1998). An ICM poll for the Sunday Telegraph (ICM, 2010) may well be signalling such brand dilution with Lib Dem support falling to 16% in the aftermath of George Osborne's Emergency Budget of June 22nd 2010; this from the height of its support at 31% during the Election Campaign. An even clearer indication of dilution of the Lib Dems BE came when it was revealed that 48% of Lib Dem supporters at the General Election were less inclined to support the party after the Budget (Helm and Asthana, 2010).

Paradoxically, over the same period, the BE of the Conservatives, appears to be strengthening as their support has increased by 5% since May 6th and both George Osborne and David Cameron's approval ratings have risen. For the Conservatives, an early and tough budget was in their manifesto, making it a close fit with their promises and, as such, more positively received.

Looking further into the future, Clegg's BE will be affected by the longer term attribution of blameⁱⁱ by Lib Dems for 'distant fit' decisions that he will be associated with. For the wider electorate, Clegg must avoid being 'positioned' in the minds of the electorate over the next five years as the Tories' 'poodle' – a short-hand devise already being used by political cartoonists (Rawnsley, 2010). This has resonance with the experience in 1977 of the then leader of the Liberals, David Steel, being portrayed as the 'Boy David', a six inch figure fitting into David Owen's breast pocket in the political satire, Spitting Image.

If Clegg cannot point to real change that he/his party has wrung from the Conservatives he will find it very difficult to ‘frame’ consumer perception positively and his BE will diminish accordingly. In the light of a dip in consumer affection for Clegg’s national Lib Dem brand, Browne’s strong BE will protect him to some degree, but his marketing activity will need to bolster the perception that he is credible and independent, which will be difficult given his new position as a junior minister.

Thus Clegg and the Lib Dems need the Coalition even more than the Conservatives do. It will be severely tested if there is a delay to electoral reform referendum, the rejection of proportional representation, a double dip recession exacerbated by fiscal control, tuition fees or a host of other ‘totemic’ Lib Dem issues that might cause an internal rebellion.

REFERENCES

- Aaker, D.A. and Keller, K.L. 1990. Consumer Evaluations of Brand Extensions. *Journal of Marketing* 54, January: 27–41.
- Benoit, W. L. and Brinson, S. L. 1999. Queen Elizabeth's image repair discourse: Insensitive royal or compassionate Queen? *Public relations Review* 25, 2: 145-156
- Booms, Bernard H. and Mary Jo Bitner. 1981. Marketing strategies and organization structures for service firms. In J.H. Donnelly and W.R. George, eds. *Marketing of Services*. Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association: 47-51.
- Boon, M. and Curtice, J. (2010). General Election 2010: Did the opinion polls flatter to deceive? *research*, 6 July. Available at <http://www.research-live.com/comment/general-election-2010-did-the-opinion-polls-flatter-to-deceive/?4003088.article>. Accessed September 9, 2010.
- Clarke, H.D., D. Sanders, M.C. Stewart and P.F. Whiteley. 2004. *Political choice in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dermody, Janine and Hanmer-Lloyd, Stuart. 2005. Promoting Distrust? A Chronicle of the 2005 British General Election Advertising Campaigns. *Journal of Marketing Management* 21, 9-10: 1021-1048.

- Elliot, L. and Wintour, P. 2010. Budget will hit poor harder than rich, according to IFS report. *The Guardian*, June 23. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jun/23/budget-welfare-poor-ifs-report>. Accessed June 23, 2010.
- Folkes, V. 1984. Consumer reactions to product failure: An attributional approach. *Journal of Consumer Research* 10, March: 398-409.
- Forehand, M., Gastil, J. and Smith, M.A. 2004. Endorsement as Voting Cues: Heuristic and Systematic Processing in Initiative Elections. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 34, 11: 2215-2233.
- Guzman, F. and Sierra, V. 2009. A political candidate's brand image scale: Are political candidates brands? *17*, 3: 207-217.
- Helm, T. and Asthana, A. 2010. Half of Liberal Democrat Voters Ready to Defect After VAT Rise. *The Observer*, June 27.
- ICM Poll. 2010. ICM Research, June 23-24. Available at http://www.icmresearch.co.uk/pdfs/2010_june_st_post_budget_poll.pdf.
- Keller, K.L. 1993. Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing* 57, 1: 1-22.
- Lloyd, J. 2006. The 2005 General Election and the emergence of the 'negative brand'. In: Darren G. Lilleker, Nigel A. Jackson and Richard Scullion, eds, *The marketing of political parties. Political marketing at the 2005 British general election*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mitra, K., Reiss, M.C. and Capella, L.M. 1999. An examination of perceived risk, information search and behavioral intentions in search, experience and credence services. *Journal of Services Marketing* 13, 3: 208-228.
- Mortimore, R. (2010, May). That election in figures. *The Coventry Conversation*, Available at <http://www.scribd.com/The-Election-in-Numbers-Roger-Mortimore-MORI/d/31301507>. Accessed August 23, 2010
- Needham, C. 2005. Brand Leaders: Clinton, Blair and the Limitations of the Permanent Campaign. *Political Studies* 5, 3: 343-361.
- Phipps, M., Brace-Govan, J. and Jevons, C. 2010. The Duality of Political Brand Equity. *European Journal of Marketing* 44, 3/4: 496-514.
- Rawnsley, A. 2010. The worm of anxiety is already eating away at the Lib Dems. *The Observer*, June 27. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/27/andrew-rawnsley-lib-dems-coalition-anxiety>. Accessed June 27, 2010.

Reuters. 3rd May, 2010. Reuters Marginal Constituencies poll - Wave 5. Available at <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2606>. Accessed June 28, 2010.

Roedder John, D., Loken, B. and Joiner, C. 1998. *Journal of Marketing* 62, January: 19-32.

Smith, .G. 2001. The 2001 General Election: Factors Influencing the Brand Image of Political Parties and their Leaders. *Journal of Marketing Management* 17, 9/10: 1058-1073.

Smith, G. 2009. Conceptualizing and Testing Brand Personality in British Politics. *Journal of Political Marketing* 8, 3: 209-232.

Sniderman, Paul M., Richard A. Brody and Phil E. Tetlock. 1991. *Reasoning and Choice. Explorations in Political Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vroom, Victor. 1964. *Work and Motivation*. New York: Wiley.

Wardrup, M. 2010. Election debate: Nick Clegg emerges victorious. *The Telegraph*, April 16. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/election-2010/7596176/Election-debate-Nick-Clegg-emerges-victorious.html>. Accessed June 25, 2010.

Zeithaml, V., A. Parasuraman and L. Berry. 1990. *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations*. New York: The Free Press.

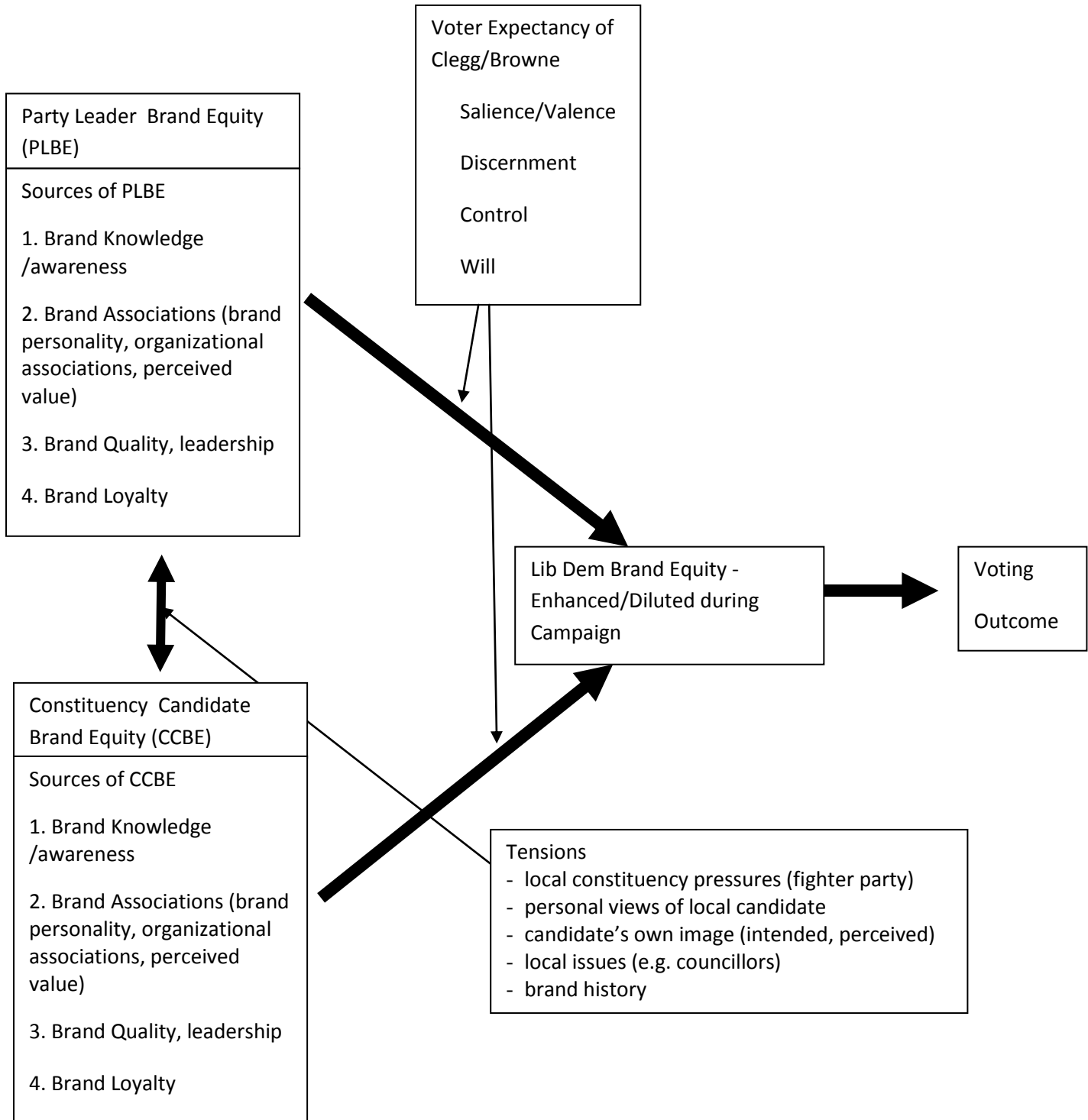
Table 1. Potential Influences on the Perceived Quality of Nick Clegg

Service Quality Dimension	Features	Political Events Allowing Service Quality Judgement	
		Clegg	Browne
Credibility	Trustworthiness, honesty and believability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clegg positioning of Lib. Dems as ‘not the old parties’. ▪ Distancing from the wrangling over MPs expenses ▪ Clegg emphasised the Lib Dems made the right call over Iraq ▪ Cable’s prediction of the bank crisis added trust and honesty to Clegg’s profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Browne positioning himself as a credible, serious local champion for his constituents, supported by tangible successes
Communication	Listening and keeping consumers involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clegg’s attentiveness during the leaders’ debates; use of first name to personalise response and emphatic use of simple jargon-free language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Browne is a personable, memorable and very proactive about attending as many community events, from school prize givings to fetes, as possible.
Reliability/competence	Ability to perform the promised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clegg’s relative newness to voters likely to leave doubt over ability to deliver ▪ His position enhanced by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Browne has tangibility on his side. As the incumbent he has 5 years of championing his

	service	<p>perception of incompetence by Brown and similar 'newness' from Cameron.</p>	<p>constituency behind him; including promptly answering letters, mentions of Taunton Deane in The House and successful campaigns for local services.</p>
--	---------	--	---

Adapted from Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990

Fig. 1: The Brand Equity of the Lib Dems in the 2010 General Election: A National and Local Perspective.



ⁱ Theresa May, the current Home Secretary, dubbed her party ‘the nasty party’ at the Conservative’s 2002 Conference in Bournemouth.

ⁱⁱ It is possible to explain this in terms of attribution theory (Folkes, 1984), which deals with how consumers apportion credit and blame from events/actions. Given that Clegg had a choice with regards joining a coalition, Lib Dem supporters, after considering the discrepancy between pre-election promises and post-election actions, appear to be attributing the blame with him/his party.