

Krakow, 10 January 2025

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REVIEW

Doctoral dissertation by mgr Bartłomiej Białas
"The impact of brand management in politics on candidates' competitive
advantage in the U.S. Presidential Elections"

written under the supervision of
Prof. UEK dr hab. Adam Figiel and Prof. UEK dr hab Janusz Nesterak

Legal grounds for conducting the review

This review has been prepared in response to the letter from the Director of the Doctoral School, Prof. Dr inż. Stanisław Popek, dated 25 October 2024, informing that I have been entrusted by the Council of the Discipline of Management Science and Quality of the Krakow University of Economics as a reviewer. The legal basis for the preparation of this review is Article 187 of the Act of 20.07.2018. Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 742, as amended) according to which "a doctoral dissertation is to present the candidate's general theoretical knowledge in a discipline or disciplines and the ability to conduct scientific or artistic work independently. Moreover, the subject of the doctoral dissertation is to be an

original solution for the application of the results of the candidate's own scientific research in the economic or social sphere or an original artistic achievement".

At the beginning of the dissertation, Mr Bartłomiej Białas points out that although there is a consensus among management researchers on the role that brands play in contemporary management: "brands are seen as important strategic assets that contribute significantly to the development of competitive advantage it is still worthwhile, however, to ask the key questions that constitute the starting point for further analysis: "What is a brand? What is strategic brand management? What is brand orientation?". Although most management scholars agree on the role that brands play in today's organisations - both for-profit and nonprofit - there is still much ambiguity about what exactly constitutes a brand. This interdisciplinary approach to the issue allows the author to identify a research gap, as the issue under discussion is at the center of many areas not only of management and quality sciences but also of psychology, or sociology.

The Ph.D. student points out that "the word brand is now commonly used in political discourse and popular vernacular. In political science, it tends to be used as a surrogate for party labels, packaging, personalities, and valance issues in a manner that does not suggest academic familiarity with the brand construct" with which I agree and therefore appreciate the commitment to the effort made in attempting to fill the research gap identified.

Consequently, Mr Bartłomiej Białas identified as the main objective of his thesis "research [which] aims at filling the cognitive gap of the dynamic interplay between political brand dimensions and voters' perceptions of the candidate, drawing heavily on the concepts which emerge from the discipline of management" and specific objectives:

1. Proving that the application of brand management principles and strategies in the U.S. electoral politics increases the incidence of success in presidential elections.
2. Proving that existence of voting-consumption analogy justifies the application of brand strategies in the U.S. electoral politics.

The formulation of the main objective is positive, but I would liked to have seen more specific objectives.

The contribution to the discipline of the doctoral student is to "try to prove that well-managed select components of the political brand promote political candidates'

advantage in the elections", which I agree with after reading the entire text of the dissertation.

Evaluation of the structure and content

The dissertation submitted for review consists of five chapters, introduction, conclusion, bibliography, list of figures, and list of tables. The whole comprises 302 pages. The layout of the dissertation is logical, consistent with the scope of the research problem analysed and the hypotheses adopted. The thesis meets the standards for doctoral theses adopted within the discipline of management and quality sciences.

Although the basic structure of the thesis is correct, after reviewing the content of the individual chapters, I believe that a separate methodological chapter should have been distinguished, which would have allowed the author to give a broader characterisation of the research strategy adopted. Also, when analysing the volume of the individual chapters it is noticeable that Chapter 2 is disproportionately more extensive than the others, but I appreciate the author's research aspirations in this chapter.

At the beginning of the dissertation, in the introduction, the Ph.D. student correctly presented the motivators and assumptions of the thesis topic. He also indicated the research gap and the main resulting objective and then presented the hypotheses. He also described the research strategy adopted.

Chapter 1 is the result of a literature review. In it, the author included a consideration of the sociocultural context of branding, elements of political branding strategy and voters' perceptions of presidential candidates. In this chapter, which should be emphasized and appreciated, the Doctoral Student has not only presented diverse approaches to defining particular concepts, but has also drawn his own systematics and conclusions. This shows that the Doctoral Student has thoroughly analysed the above-mentioned issues.

Chapter 2, like Chapter 1, is a conceptual analysis of the selected issue of brand strategy management used in the context of American electoral politics. The author describes the basic concepts based on the collected references. As I mentioned before, this chapter is disproportionate to the others, presumably the author intended to show an extensive body of literature, while he did not make an authorial

systematisation here. It would have been worthwhile to present some of the content in graphical or tabular form.

Although I appreciate that in the construction of the text the Ph.D. student refers to research hypotheses (e.g. p. 58), the manner of their verification is insufficient. The Ph.D. student spins a story and does not present concrete arguments.

However, I agree with Mr Bartłomiej Białas that the content of this chapter is relevant to Chapter 5.

In the third chapter, the doctoral student presented the essence of building competitive advantage and factors that contribute to the development of competitive advantage. I assess this chapter as correct and in line with the author's intentions, the multifaceted characterisation indicates Mr Bartłomiej Białas's in-depth knowledge of the issues.

Chapter 4 describes the psychological and emotional factors that influence consumer behavior and brand-related decision-making processes. In it, the Ph.D. describes a range of determinants that influence consumer decisions. This chapter is a mixture of considerations from psychology, sociology, and management. Unfortunately, in my opinion, it is a weak section of the dissertation due to its multifacetedness and lack of order. Instead of this chapter, there should be a chapter here that describes the research strategy in more detail, which I will write about later.

The final chapter 5 is a presentation of the results of both quantitative and qualitative research, and contains empirical data collected to gain a more detailed understanding of the phenomena identified. Here, Mr Bartłomiej Białas used the case study of Pete Buttigieg's brand development during the 2020 United States presidential election by conducting a multicriteria qualitative evaluation of it. The doctoral student has also included suggestions for practitioners. I evaluate this chapter positively; however, it raises a certain cognitive deficiency for me, as most of the analysis was developed based on secondary sources and not enough emphasis was placed on the author's research.

The dissertation ends with a Conclusion, which synthetically addresses the stated aims of the dissertation. However, it lacks a reference by the Doctoral Student to the limitations of his research, as well as to the prospect of continuing research.

In the chapters presented, the doctoral student has comprehensively met the stated objectives of the dissertation and verified the set of research hypotheses.

Evaluation of the research procedure

The characteristics of the proposed research procedure are included in the Introduction. Aiming to fill the previously indicated gap in the research procedure, Mr Bartłomiej Białas posed four research questions:

1. Does Brand Equity in politics lead to electoral competitive advantage?
2. Does Strategic Branding in politics facilitate a politician's long-term career growth?
3. What are the success factors in Political Branding?
4. Can the conceptualization of voters as consumers (voting-consumption analogy) facilitate the use of Strategic Brand Management principles in politics?

He then formulated five hypotheses:

1. The use of the Strategic Brand Management principles is necessary for the U.S. presidential candidate to successfully appeal to voters.
2. It is necessary for the U.S. presidential candidate to develop Brand Identity, Brand Authenticity, Brand Logo, and Brand Positioning in order to attract voters' support.
3. Brand Identity, Brand Authenticity, Brand Logo, and Brand Positioning have impact upon voters-consumers' perceptions of the US presidential candidate.
4. A number of select essential components of the Political Brand Strategy have the greatest impact upon voters-consumers' brand perceptions:
5. The conceptualisation of voters as consumers justifies the application of Strategic Brand Management principles in politics.

The hypotheses presented have been formulated correctly and it is possible to refer to their content within the research procedure carried out in the dissertation in the different parts of the dissertation.

To verify the hypotheses adopted, the Ph.D. student designed a research procedure in which he used a mixed-method approach: both qualitative and quantitative tools. The primary research method used in this dissertation is a case study. Other supplementary research techniques employed in this dissertation include a quantitative survey, observational method, a comprehensive literature review, and

document analysis. Given the nature of the research objectives and questions, the author of this dissertation chose the social constructivist approach as the most appropriate for this dissertation.

In the qualitative research, the author performed a diagnosis of the issues thematically related to the dissertation using the method of critical analysis of the literature, as well as the method of analysis of documents and data found. However, this cannot be called a systematic review of the literature, as the principles of source selection and biometric data are not presented in the dissertation.

The next stage of the research was a case study - the development of the political brand during the 2020 presidential elections in the U.S. However, there was a lack of detailed information on what methods and tools the author used in addition to the observation mentioned in the introduction.

His quantitative research used surveys of 600 U.S. citizens who voted in the 2020 presidential election.

The research culminated in the proposal of the principles of strategic brand management focusing on 1. Core messaging, 2. Brand awareness, 3. Targeting, 4. Brand equity, 5. Party brand equity, 6. Exposure which I consider to be an interesting and interesting example of adapting well-known management solutions to the practice of other business areas.

In summary, the research strategy presented in the dissertation is primarily based on the analysis of the accumulated literature. Extensive references were used from a wide range of sources, which is the most important strength of the dissertation. However, quantitative research should be regarded as complementary rather than leading.

Evaluation of the formal side and terminological issues of the dissertation

I assess the formal side of the dissertation of Mr Bartłomiej Białas as correct. The text is well-prepared editorially and the dissertation is written in a scientific language.

The doctoral thesis correctly uses the characteristic concepts of management and quality sciences. What I missed in the work was the use of tables and figures to a greater extent, which would have made it possible to organise and emphasise selected contents. It would also have made it easier for the reader.

Conclusions of the review

Submitted for review is the doctoral thesis of Mr Bartłomiej Białas entitled "The impact of brand management in politics on candidates' competitive advantage in the U.S. Presidential Elections. "The impact of brand management in politics on candidates' competitive advantage in the U.S. Presidential Elections", written under the supervision of Prof. UEK dr hab. Adam Figiel and Prof. UEK dr hab. Janusz Nesterak fulfils the conditions set out in the Law on Higher Education and Science. It constitutes an original solution to a scientific problem, and the Doctoral Student presented in it his general theoretical knowledge in the field of management and quality sciences and the ability to conduct scientific work independently.

In view of the above, I recommend that the Council of the Discipline of Management Science and Quality at the Krakow University of Economics accept the doctoral dissertation and admit Mr Bartłomiej Białas to public defense.