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**Exploring the Process of Creating and Managing Personal Political Brand Identities in  
Non-Party Environments: The Case of the Bailiwick of Guernsey**

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## **Abstract**

How do you create and build a personal political brand? Personal branding can enable individuals to self-commodify and formulate distinct identities created from both tangible and intangible characteristics. However, there is little insight into how individuals create and manage their personal brand identities. This paper contributes to this lacuna in the literature and focusses on personal political branding. Contextualised in the British Crown Dependence of Guernsey; the island community has no political parties and Parliamentarians [deputies] stand as independent candidates. Deputies construct their own personal brand with the aim of resonating with their constituents often with limited resources and without the 'political machine' found in party-systems. Therefore, this study examines the deputies' strategies to create, build and communicate their brands in a non-party system. Findings indicate that Guernsey's politicians created their desired identities around key components including legacy, heritage and experience, personality characteristics opposed to focused policies, personal values and acknowledged that brand building was a continuous process of maintaining presence, and communicating personal aspirations. Therefore, Guernsey's politicians formulated their personal political brand identities without the mechanisms of a party system. This paper extends the personal branding literature demonstrating the challenging process of formulating and managing personal political brands in a competitive environment and presents a Personal Brand Identity framework, a strategic tool to evaluate and refine desired identities within and beyond the setting of politics.

## **Keywords**

Personal brands, Brand Identity, Non-Party systems, Politics

## **Introduction**

Brands are heuristic devices that embody a series of symbolic values, characteristics, and ideas (Lin and Siu 2019). Further, the transfer potential of branding has been extended to politicians (Guzmán and Sierra 2009; Reeves et al. 2006). Politicians and candidates may present themselves as individual, personal brands. Indeed, the concept of personal branding, a strategy borrowed from the consumer based marketing discipline, can be conceptualised as manifestations of intended perceptions combining personal characteristics such as personality traits, experiences, feelings, beliefs and personal values (Jacobson 2020; Johnson 2014; Rampersad 2008; Resnick et al. 2016). However, the concept of personal branding is challenging and complex. Further, little research exists on how to build, monitor and maintain authentic personal brands, project clear differentiation and develop a unique “promise of value” that signifies your speciality (Marland 2016; Philbrick and Cleveland 2015:182).

Returning to the political environment, developing personal brands in political party systems are supported by, yet submissive to dominant political party brands. However, there are few occasions where this is not the case for example countries and territories such as Bahrain, Vatican City, the Republic of Nauru, Northwest Territories of Canada, Norfolk Island of Australia, Niue in New Zealand, the Falkland Islands (Döring and Regel 2019) and the Bailiwick of Guernsey. Guernsey’s current political system has no political parties, so politicians (deputies) are free to build their own brands unconstrained by party politics. This raises a serious question, how do you create and develop a personal brand particularly without the support of political parties and occasionally, with little experience of politics. The implications for personally branded politicians are wide ranging particularly as there are few mechanisms, tools and studies that provide guidance.

Using a phenomenological approach, this paper seeks to contribute to the political branding literature using personal branding as a theoretical lens to understand the creation and management process of personal political brands and explore how they develop identities unconstrained by party politics. We begin by introducing the construct of personal branding and outlining the challenges associated with this under-developed theoretical lens particularly limited insight into the process of personal branding (Jacobson 2020; Lair et al. 2005; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Thompson-Whiteside et al. 2017; Vallas and Christin 2018). Secondly, we visit the sub-discipline of political branding and discuss the different typologies of political brands before identifying limited studies and calls for further research on the personal brands of politicians (Billard 2018; Nai et al. 2019; Needham and Smith 2015; Nielsen 2017; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). We then turn our attention to introduce and justify the context of this study, which helps frame the investigation before moving on to the methodology.

### **Personal Branding**

Personal branding is a strategy, which promotes self-commodification and focuses on the creation, management and communication of an intentional identity (Casprini et al. 2019; Johnson 2014; Pluntz and Pras 2020; Vallas and Christin 2018). In addition, personal branding acts as a mechanism that projects an authentic character to their target audience, which is distinct from rivals and competitors (Holbrook 1995; Misra and Walters 2016). Further, personal branding has been described as a “process of developing, harnessing and classifying personal information and providing a comprehensive narrative for others to easily understand one’s identity” (Jacobson 2020:1). Personal brands are “attention getting devices” (Shepherd 2005, p597), a process used by individuals to “actively tries to manage others impressions” developed from an individual’s skills, talents, abilities and experiences (Johnson 2014, p2; Pluntz and Pras 2020). However, how do individuals manage the ‘process’ of formulating and developing a personal brand particularly as the strategy of

personal branding is challenging and often misunderstood due to the various interpretations of this subject area (Osorio et al. 2020; Thompson-Whiteside et al. 2017). Nevertheless, personal branding is often interchangeably referred to as ‘self-branding’, ‘self-marketing’, ‘self-promotion’, ‘human-branding’, ‘self-presentation’, ‘narrative identity’, ‘image-management and ‘impression management’ (Brooks and Anumudu 2016; Marland 2016; Marland and Boyd 2010; Osorio et al. 2020; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Resnick et al. 2016; Shepherd 2005; Speed et al. 2015). Therefore, personal branding remains contested across academia (Osorio et al. 2020), thus it is not surprising that there is no universal definition ascribed to personal brands (Marland 2016).

Personal branding can trace its origins to self-identity research developed in the 1940s as a method to express individuality (Philbrick and Cleveland 2015). More specifically, the practice of personal branding was then popularised by Peters (1997) in his seminal article entitled ‘The Brand Called You’, which argued the strategy could be utilised by individuals beyond the world of business, entertainment and politics. However, can all individuals formulate personal brands and do they have the skills and ability to manage an intentional identity particularly individuals inexperienced in this area? These challenges arise because personal brands are complex manifestations structured around tangible dimensions such as physical appearance, style, online and offline communications and actions/activities, plus intangible dimensions such as lived experiences, life-stories, values, charisma and perceived authenticity and authority (Cortsen, 2013; Green, 2016; Lopez 2010; Pluntz and Pras 2020; Rampersad, 2008). Indeed, a personal brand represents an individual’s ability, character, professional and personal attitudes and behaviours developed over time (Ewing and Allen 2017; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Vallas and Christin 2018).

Building, monitoring and maintaining personal brands is a long-term, continuous strategic process that takes time and perseverance (Brooks and Anumudu 2016; Johnson 2014; Ind et

al. 2017; Shepherd 2005; Philbrick and Cleveland 2015). However, critics of personal brand creation argue that personal brands can lack authenticity, be manipulative, insincere, disingenuous and duplicitous (Thompson-Whiteside et al. 2017; Ward and Yates 2013). In addition, this planned approach “does not work for everyone” as some individuals may find it problematic to implement (Lair et al. 2005, p331). Furthermore, constructing a personal brand takes experience and “does not come naturally. It takes practice, training and tools” (Vallas and Christin 2018, p13). Therefore, the creation and management of desired professional and personal identity appears to be a key dimension of personal branding (Misra and Kyla 2016; Lopez 2010; Osorio et al. 2020; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Vallas and Christin 2018). In addition, the extant literature appears to focus on the virtues and limitations of personal branding rather than the process of how to formulate personal brand conceptions or identities. Further, the process of managing personal brands which can provide individuals with the capability to reflect on their character, attitudes and behaviours when designing and maintaining an intended identity is under-developed in the literature (Jacobson 2020; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Vallas and Christin 2018). Indeed, scholars have called for more empirical research to understand the experiences of personal branding and studies to capture how individual’s develop the “unique set of identity traits exhibited by the individual” (Pluntz and Pras 2020:3), which constitute their personal brand (Jacobson 2020; Osorio et al. 2020).

Finally, it is important to recognise that personal branding is employed by different types of professions for example by students-graduates (Pagis and Ailon 2017), celebrities (Chen, 2013), sports personalities (Cortsen 2013; Green 2016), journalists (Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2017), business leaders and entrepreneurs (Lair, et al. 2015), personnel in different industries (Vallas and Christin 2018), and politicians (Marland, 2013, 2016). Politicians including elected officials, aspiring candidates, party leaders and political personalities have started to recognise the benefits of constructing a personal brand to raise

their profile, connect with the electorate and signify what they stand for particularly in the sub-discipline of political branding (Grimmer and Grube 2017; Marland et al. 2017; Nai and Ferran 2019; Scammell 2015; Speed et al. 2015).

### **Political Branding**

There are many typologies of political brands. For example, political parties, candidates-politicians, party leaders, election campaigns, political groups, policy initiatives and legislators can all be conceptualised as political brands (Pich et al. 2020; Needham and Smith 2015). One conceptualisation that has received little attention is the exploration of the personal brands of politicians (Guzmán et al. 2015; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). However, this area of study is multifaceted. Firstly, the notion of applying branding principles politicians has been described as ‘oversimplified’ and investigations should be grounded upon distinct theoretical lens (Speed et al. 2015; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). For example, scholars have utilised theoretical lens such as human branding (Speed et al. 2015), candidate brands (Guzmán et al. 2015), celebrity branding (Marland 2016), co-branding (Besharat and Langan 2014), identity, image (Pich et al. 2020), brand equity, (Ahmed et al. 2015) personality traits (Nai et al. 2019), orientation and positioning (Robinson 2010). Irrespective of the theoretical lens used to frame studies, politicians set about crafting a desired authentic identity and position grounded on their heritage, local prominence and authority (Speed et al. 2015). Nevertheless, investigating the brands of politicians through the theoretical lens of *personal branding* remains ‘uncommon’ yet remains an area of interest for researchers (Guzmán et al. 2015; Kaneva and Klemmer 2016; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019).

Secondly, existing research has tended to focus on the political brands of leaders and high-profile individuals rather than less prominent politicians (Cwalina and Falkowski 2014; Marland 2016; Nai et al. 2019; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). For instance, studies often



investigate the relationship, alignment and differences between party leaders and political party brands (Billard 2018; Needham and Smith 2015). In addition, research has shown that political parties have an important role in maintaining party discipline, communicating cohesive, simplified, messaging (Marland et al. 2017), and support politicians with building and managing their personal brands (Ahmed et al. 2015). However, research has also demonstrated that image-reputation associated with political party brands can extend and influence the brand image-reputation of politicians, which can help or hinder politicians especially during elections (Speed et al. 2015). Nevertheless, research on how politicians create and develop their brands without the help of political parties or the party machine particularly in non-party systems remains under-explored.

Thirdly, current research in this area is often conceptual with calls for more empirical studies (Ahmed et al. 2015; Speed et al. 2015). For example, the conceptual work of Kaneva and Klemmer (2016) critically discuss the rise of branded politicians otherwise known as ‘brandidates’. Kaneva and Klemmer (2016) contextualised their study in UK and the US to investigate the sociocultural conditions that motivate the development of branded politicians [candidates] and how branding is utilised to build relationships with voters-citizens. Further, Kaneva and Klemmer (2016) proposed that branded politicians adopt three principles to gain support and build relationships with voters-citizens. *Principle 1* focuses on politicians using appropriate terminology to communicate and appeal to voters-citizens. *Principle 2* focuses on politicians communicating personal stories to humanise their brands. Whereas, *principle 3* involves politicians recognising and validating the feelings, thoughts and concerns of voters-citizens. Therefore, Kaneva and Klemmer (2016) suggest if politicians follow the three principles they can develop a clear authentic identifiable brand and build a sense of community with the public. Kaneva and Klemmer (2016:309) conclude with explicit calls for empirical research on the ‘processes’ of branding politicians particularly in different political

systems and argues ‘does branding give candidates with minimal or non-existent policy records an advance over seasoned politicians with years of experience. Importantly, does a candidate’s brand constrain his or her ability to advance particular policies once in office’? In other words when does policy drive the brand narrative and when does the brand narrative drive the political positions?

Finally, existing studies tend to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of voters-citizens rather than the standpoint of politicians (Cwalina and Falkowski 2014; Scammell 2015; Smith and Spotswood 2015) and this is supported by calls for further insight on the brands of politicians from an ‘insider-relational’ politician perspective (Nielsen 2017). An illustration of the identified gaps for this study can be seen in figure 1.

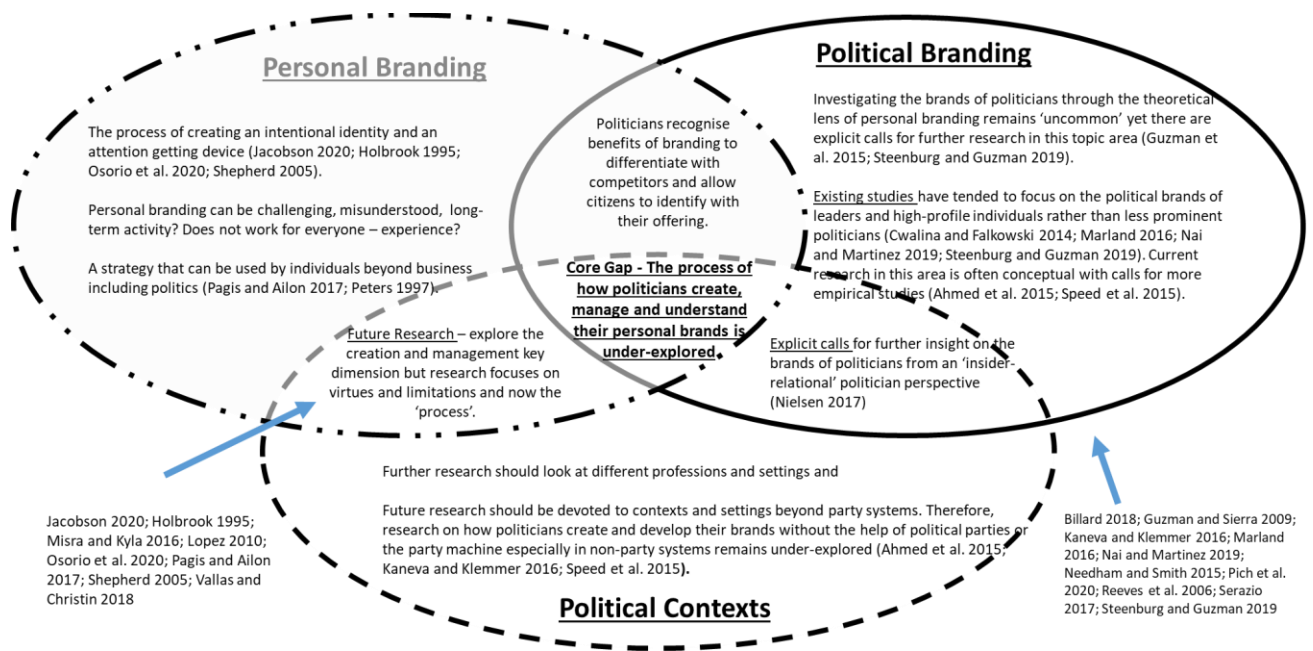


Figure 1. Theoretical Map for Personal Political Branding

Therefore, there appears to be a paucity of research that investigates the process of personal political branding and how elected officials, aspiring candidates, party leaders and political personalities strategically create their personal brand and how they evaluate their intended identities (Guzmán et al. 2015; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). This is supported by explicit

calls for further research in this area (Billard 2018; Guzmán and Sierra 2009; Kaneva and Klemmer 2016; Marland 2016; Nai et al. 2019; Needham and Smith 2015; Pich et al. 2020; Reeves et al. 2006; Serazio 2017; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). Therefore, the aim of this empirical study is to investigate the brands of politicians through the theoretical lens of personal branding from an ‘insider-relational’ perspective (Nielsen 2017). More specifically, this research will explore how politicians create and develop their personal political brands to differentiate themselves in a competitive marketplace, particularly where the candidate stands alone, independent of any party affiliation. This in turn will reveal the process of branding politicians in different political systems.

### **Context**

In order to frame this study, the British Crown Dependency of Guernsey serves as an appropriate context. Guernsey currently has a political non-party system and all forty Members of Parliament (deputies) are independent figures. As of September 2019, Guernsey’s population was 63,276 ([www.gov.gg](http://www.gov.gg)). During elections, deputies’ stand and campaign as individuals. Once elected, deputies take their seats in Guernsey’s parliament known as ‘The States of Deliberation’. Elected deputies become part of the government of Guernsey and individuals join a series of committees, boards, authorities and commissions to govern the island community. For example, the government is structured into one senior committee [Policy and Resources Committee] and six principle committees ranging *Home Affairs, Health, and Education*, and several other boards, commissions and authorities (<https://www.gov.gg/committees>). In addition, deputies administer and vote for policies put before parliament and they only become law once a consensus is reached. This raises interesting questions for scholars and practitioners. How do deputies formulate and manage their personal brands? Therefore, the context of Guernsey presents a suitable opportunity to

investigate the process of personal branding and seek to understand the creation and management process of personal political brands, unconstrained by party politics.

Therefore, understanding the process of how to manage and audit personal brands will provide individuals with the capability and knowledge of how to reflect on their character, professional and personal attitudes and behaviours when designing and maintaining their intended identity (Casprini et al. 2019; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Vallas and Christin 2018). This research will address explicit calls for research on how individuals formulate and develop their brands framed within the political environment (Billard 2018; Guzmán and Sierra 2009; Marland 2016; Nai et al. 2019; Needham and Smith 2015; Reeves et al. 2006; Serazio 2017; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019).

### **Methodology**

Personal brands are characterised by the personalities, lived experiences and values of the individual combined with their interaction with their environment and community within a specific cultural context (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 2010; Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber, 2011). Phenomenology can help to explain how personal brands reflect their social interactions, building meaning between individuals and their community and how that shapes perceptions and identities building a recognised social reality (Lowrie, 2007; Edvardsson, et al. 2011). Further, “the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence”, which in turn provides first-hand accounts to the phenomenon under study (van Manen 1990, p36). Therefore, given the complexity of personal political brands, this study was undertaken with phenomenology as its guiding principle (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009; Moran, 2000; Schutz, 1967) to examine the lived experiences of political candidates seeking to create their personal political brands and understand if or how they are managed in non-party contexts. Using the Guernsey political

system as the context this study, we aimed to capture a rich contextual understanding of human experiences rather than propose generalisations which, enables researchers to access ‘closed worlds’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This is consistent with the explicit calls for more interpretive research on different types of political brands to ‘unravel’ the deep meanings ascribed to political brands and their potential impact on society (Needham and Smith 2015).

### **Data Collection and Sampling**

Extended interviews were conducted in the form of a conversation to uncover the meanings of the lived experiences in the political and social environment and how they relate to the construction of the personal political brand. Phenomenological in-depth interviews offer researchers the opportunity to build deep understanding associated with the phenomenon through the lived experiences of the participant (Beamer 2002; Glaser 2014; Trochim and Donnelly 2007). In the political environment these are often referred to as elite or expert interviews or conversations with a “purpose” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin and Rubin 1995, p6; van Manen, 1990). For Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) participants should be given the time and encouragement to reveal and reflect on their personal narratives and perspectives. Therefore, phenomenological interviews provide participants the opportunity to describe their life experiences and highlight how they formed personal opinions, attitudes, perceptions and associations often revealing their self-identity (Creswell 2007; Cortsen 2013; Saunders et al. 2012) or personal brand.

Purposive sampling served as a suitable sampling framework for this study as the technique selects the most appropriate participants to address the research objectives (Daymon and Holloway 2011). Further, purposive sampling ascribes to the notion that researchers will put forward specific predefined groups which often are conveniently available and ideal for this type of research (Alston and Bowles 2007; Zikmund 2003). The intention of this study was to

investigate the lived experiences that formed the personal brands of the Guernsey’s Members of Parliament from a pool of forty individuals. Deputies were invited via email to take part in the study. Nineteen Deputies from across the seven districts of Guernsey namely, Vale, St Sampson, St Peter Port-North, St Peter Port-South, South East, West and Castel responded and served as the sample for this study. Interviews were conducted 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016 – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2017. A detailed outline of the sample of the nineteen Deputies can be seen in table 1.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>District-Constituency</b>
P1	Castle
P2	Vale
P3	South East
P4	Castle
P5	West
P6	Castle
P7	Vale
P8	South East
P9	South East
P10	St Peter North
P11	St Peter North
P12	St Peter North
P13	St Peter South
P14	St Peter South
P15	St Peter South
P16	St Peter South
P17	St Sampson
P18	Vale
P19	Vale

Table 1. Sample – 19 out of 40 Current Members of the States of Guernsey Parliament

The researchers developed a broad discussion guide based on the research objectives and key themes from the literature to help facilitate the in-depth interviews. The discussion guide included broad themes rather than specific questions as this encouraged a more natural like discussion and strong rapport between the participants and researcher. In addition, this flexible, reflective approach is consistent with phenomenological in-depth interviews (Creswell 2007; Cortsen 2013; Saunders *et al.* 2012). A copy of the discussion guide can be seen in appendix 1. The discussion guide was piloted [participant 1 and participant 2] and this gave the researchers the opportunity to assess the usability of the guide and determine

whether the guide would address the research objectives. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face apart from three interviews which were conducted via Skype and interviews ranged from 40-80 minutes in length. All forty deputies were contacted via email with an invitation to take part in the study, nineteen participants accepted the invitation, three declined and eighteen failed to respond.

### **Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim; read and re-read by the researchers, notes and memos were created during the data collection process and formed a key part of the analysis process (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009), then the data were coded manually. The personal stories provided a rich account of their journey from citizen to elected (often re-elected) Member of Parliament, which was consistent with the philosophical assumptions of this study (Gephardt 2004; Saunders et al. 2012, McAdams, 1993; van Manen, 2014). This study loosely followed the guidelines outlined by Butler-Kisber (2010) reading and re-reading, note taking and identifying descriptive comments. Following on from this, a thematic approach was adopted (Bird et al. 2009; Butler-Kisber 2010; Warren and Karner 2005). Thematic analysis involves identification and development of themes and sub-themes uncovered from the interviews (Saunders et al. 2012) while reflecting on how findings are co-created by the participant and the interviewer (Cunliffe, 2011; Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). More specifically, this study followed the first and second order thematic analysis set out by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013). The following section presents the findings and discussion.

### **Findings**

The first-hand accounts revealed five broad themes linked to the personal brand identities of politicians including legacy and experience, continuous brand building, personalities not policies, personal relationships, and transient alliances – illustrated in figure 2.

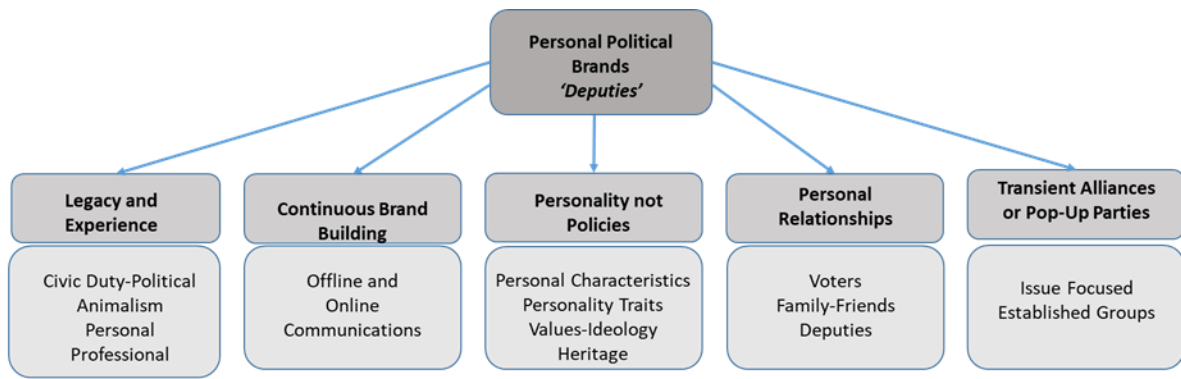


Figure 2. Key Themes of Personal Political Brand Identity

These five themes provide deep insight into how the deputies [personal political brands] conceptualised, created and managed their intended identities.

### *Legacy and Experience*

The first theme uncovered legacy and experience. The legacy element related to the personal political brand's background or rationale for entering politics. Many deputies highlighted that it was an aspiration of civic duty that underpinned their desire to put themselves forward as prospective candidates. For example, several deputies argued a key driver was “that desire to make a difference...that civic responsibility...to make things better” (P5) and wanted to “take on society and the world immediately around me” (P14). In addition, many deputies highlighted that another key reason for entering politics was frustration with the efficiency and effectiveness of current Guernsey Government and that determination, pragmatism and passion could bring about positive change. For example, it was often revealed that “my leap into politics was born out of frustration...I was a political agitator” (P2) and “everyone is moaning about the current government, me included, and I just thought I could do this” (P8). Therefore, this aspiration to make a difference often supported by frustration and being a “political animal” (P3), fuelled the desire to enter the world of politics and this built the initial foundation of the deputies' identity.



However, each deputy did not necessarily have previous political experience or the professional skill sets in order to create and develop their identity. Further, following the introduction of paid salaries for Parliamentarians in 2004, politicians started to come from different occupational backgrounds such as broadcasting, religion, aviation, law, accounting and finance, marketing, plus small business owners, and the performing arts. Professional experience helped to underpin their identity. Politicians emphasised their professional experience as part of their qualities for example “I’m a Barrister...I continue to practice law in the law profession” (P4) or “I’ve studied law and I’ve worked in a recruitment agency...trust me and I’ll do the best for you” (P11). This allowed participants to use their previous professional experience as a signal to voters to emphasise not only transferable skills if elected, but background information about the politician which positioned deputies as non-career politicians creating a stronger link with the region which differentiates them from the competition.

Deputies considered their personal experiences were a competitive advantage over other deputies and a core strength when building their brand. For example:

“At the age of 23, I had been driving hippy buses to India and back for a few years and tractors to Israel. I came back to Guernsey and I was just concerned of some developments and changes and populations policy and put my name forward as a protest really because in those days nobody under the age of 55 was elected to the States” (P9).

Similarly, experiences were extremely personal for example “through fostering, I became more socially aware of social needs in Guernsey” such as “domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse” (P12) and “you won’t hear this a lot these days but my dad was working-class, I consider myself to be from good working-class stock. My dad was a trade unionist who just felt you had to make sure your interests and families interests came first” (P14). Therefore, the majority of participants believed their legacy represented the foundations for the

development of their own personal political brands highlighting professional and personal experiences signify key elements of the personal political brand identities.

### ***Continuous Brand Building***

The second theme was the importance of ongoing, long-term brand building. Opinion was divided as to how long it takes to develop a reputation that contributes to their personal identity with some elected representatives arguing the optimum amount of time to create a political presence is eighteen months to two years before polling day. For example,

“If you’re coming from a position where you’re not known or no track record...you’ve really got to be starting a couple of years prior” (P7).

Contrastingly, a small number of politicians argued that it took as little as three weeks to develop a political profile prior to polling day “I only had three weeks to get my points of view across...but three weeks is when you can send out your manifestos” (P8). Either way, all politicians used a small number of offline and online communication devices to create and manage their political brands. The majority of politicians utilised online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to create and communicate their brand however very few had a dedicated website. Some politicians engaged with social media tools on a daily basis whereas some were less frequent often engaging every couple of weeks. In addition, a third of politicians avoided social media tools and relied on communicating with constituents via email or telephone.

Offline communication tools included simple, short, “vague manifestos” (P12) often two sides of A4 paper, posters, and small leaflets, writing articles or letters to the island’s only newspaper or calling in to discuss the issues of the day on local radio shows. For instance, ‘typical’ identities on the island would be grounded on a manifesto and each one would follow the same format such as

“very small, maybe two sides of A5 half the front was a picture you could get ‘I went to school at such and such, I am local, my family’s been here for 850,000 years and this is where I worship on a Sunday. I will do my best. I’ve sat in the Douzane which is our parish, very local government and have run a business for x number of years, please elect me” (P2).

In addition, some politicians, but not all, held monthly or twice-yearly constituency surgeries to give constituents the opportunity to raise issues and concerns. Further, politicians had the opportunity to take part in one constituency-wide hustings debate during every general election campaign period. Hustings events would last one hour with ten to fifteen politicians given one minute to promote their identity or core slogan such as “let’s vote for common sense” (P8) followed by facilitated questions from the audience. Although, opinion was divided on the success of hustings events as politicians have very little time to communicate their position on key issues, answer questions or project a detailed narrative-identity. In addition, several politicians believed it was a challenge to communicate their own brand given that there was only one island-wide newspaper known as ‘The Press’, two localised television channels [BBC Guernsey and ITV Channel TV] and two local radio stations [BBC Radio Guernsey and Island FM].

Despite the fact politicians used few offline tools to create and communicate their brand, all agreed that door-knocking was the most important activity to develop and manage their brands. Door-knocking consisted of politicians solely canvassing every house in their constituency only permitted during the official election campaign period to personally hand deliver a manifesto, often invited in for refreshments to discuss matters of the day and ascertain support on polling day (P13). For example “people in Guernsey still to this day expect you to knock on their door and to talk to them...you are at a disadvantage if you don’t get out there and knock on door after door, people on Guernsey expect it” (P1); likewise “Guernsey people put the emphasis on seeing you face-to-face and having one-to-one

conversations with you” (P7). Consequently, if politicians did not carry out door-knocking islanders would “think you’re taking them for granted” (P16). However, it was found that the practice of door-knocking was not used to conduct market research or identify issues of concern to develop the personal political brands but more of a ‘meet and greet’ to ascertain support at the General Election.

### *Personality not Policies*

The third theme uncovered was the importance of personality rather than policies. For example, it was highlighted that Guernsey politics is “personality based as we stand as candidates and we’re elected on that basis” (P2). Similarly, it was also revealed that “there’s this strong culture of the individual and it’s very much about personal branding...an emphasis on the personality over issues and I think that is part of the Guernsey culture” (P4). In addition, the majority of politicians concurred that personality politics is a key trait for success in Guernsey politics and that many political brands position themselves as either “who I am rather than what I stand for” (P2) as this increases the likelihood of success on polling day. Likewise, “you stand for election as an independent so your personal brand is your political brand” (P4), “I’m enthusiastic...engaging” (P19), and “I am chatty, friendly person and I always want to hear other people’s opinions that is part of my brand” (P5).

As there are no political parties in Guernsey and all politicians are independent figures, politicians “can’t make promises because they will be only one among 40. If they’re elected they at least set out “if you elect me this is what I will try and do on the major issues” (P2). Similarly, the “people of Guernsey vote for the individual, they don’t vote for policies” (P4). Each politician embraced broad values or issues, which represented their ideology and outlook. For example, values were developed from personal support for political ideological leanings such as “centre-left Conservative thinking” (P4), “fiscal Conservatism” (P17),

“Conservative-Socialist” (P13) and “centre-left Liberal” (P9). Nevertheless, values were also developed from personal beliefs such as support for equal opportunities (P5), Island wide voting (P13), population management (P6), campaigner for waste management (P10), freedom (P19), changing the education system, voluntary euthanasia (P14), champion for sustainability (P3; P11), the importance of family (P8) advocate of social justice (P12), strong economic responsibility (P16), common-sense politics (P19). Therefore, these broad values indicated what they stood for and it was the responsibility of each politician to create and develop their values and issues.

This emphasis on personality rather than policies was a result of the political system across the island. Many argued that there was no distinction between the ‘executive and legislative’ and that once elected, politicians were part of the government (P2). There are distinct implications for a non-party system such as Guernsey, principally, there is no official opposition, so politicians were not necessarily held to account but most curious was the fact that policy could not be developed until after the general election rather than as part of the election campaign process. This leads to a sense of “paralysis for six-nine months” (P9) with any newly elected government so therefore developing policy was a “slow process” (P2). Following a general election Committees would be reformed, the policy agenda would be planned and discussed and as a result, new policy or a mandate for government would not be developed for up to “fifteen to eighteen months” (P9) after rather than before an election. This supports the notion that the non-political system was “reactive not proactive” when it came to governance (P2). This reaffirms that personal political brand identities were grounded and developed from personality characteristics opposed to focused policies and policies only become part of personal brands after elections rather than prior elections. Therefore, only incumbents could refer to past achievements or retrospective policies in action as part of their brand building something unavailable to new politicians.

Nevertheless, some politicians make a deliberate effort to include policy in their manifestos despite the nature of politics in Guernsey that makes it impossible to implement policy without a consensus. Further, it was also reported that some politicians have over-promised in their manifestoes a result of naivety especially if candidates were new to the system or politicians were playing politics knowing full well that the policies could not be implemented due to the nature of the electoral system. However, the practice of communicating personality traits and personal values are particularly crucial for new candidates. Once politicians are elected, gain experience and progress in government then these political achievements can also form part of the personal political brand identity. For instance, an incumbent politician was able to include additional detail and accomplishments such as “what I did over the last four years and this is what I didn’t do and this is what I’d like to achieve over the next four years” (P2). In addition, seasoned politicians would use their track record in office to signal credibility and authenticity about their personal political brand identity. This in turn builds accountability something that is rarely achievable by new candidates unless they have influenced policy outside government.

It was also found that politicians not only positioned their intentional identities based on personality and values but also strategically emphasised their heritage, and localism to create and strengthen their brands. Therefore, the majority of candidates-politicians used their ancestry to differentiate their identity, provide some “colour” (P17) and reinforce their personality. For example, one politician highlighted that

“I think the notion of having a good name and people put a lot of trust into a local surname so if you’re a Dorey or another local name the notion of having a Guernsey surname is part of your brand”. Non-local surnames would have to go “out their way to emphasise the localness and champion this in their manifesto. I’m not having anyone assume I’m not local. Emphasise local connection through marriage, family connection” (P4).

For one participant this was essential because “if you’ve got no local connections at all you’re finished” (P4). In addition, heritage was underscored by local surnames and this was a common theme across the interviews for example “I think half my branding was the fact I had a very parish local surname” (P3) and increased the likelihood of acceptance by local constituents. Thus, if you were deemed as an outsider or newcomer with very few connections with the community or island it would be difficult to put forward a believable and credible brand. This resulted in some politicians placing greater emphasis on their local credentials in the form of championing the fact relatives were former members of Parliament, changing their surname to sound more local, not “too English” (P13) and emphasise they were local, “Guernsey born and bred” (P7). Therefore, it was found that politicians as brands in Guernsey are a curious hybrid of personality traits, personal values, local heritage, traditional regional values. Moreover, politicians must “craft a narrative” (P17) and avoid making promises regarding specific policies due to the nature of the electoral system. However, importantly while all recognised the need to present an individual, personal brand based on personality opposed to focused policies, the danger that they can “become more of a generic brand” (P11), which could impact their differentiation.

### ***Personal Relationships***

The fourth theme revealed was the significance of personal relationships between the politician and their voters-constituents, family-friends, and other politicians. It was found that the majority had a close, familiar and accessible relationship with their constituents. For example, many wanted to be seen as approachable and often encouraged constituents to contact them beyond the usual business communication methods of email and post. Therefore, they provided their personal number or suggested that constituents even ‘call in’ to their home address (P8). Politicians also claimed that due to the small scale nature of island living and island culture constituents would approach them off-duty when on holiday,

dining at restaurants or pubs, shopping in supermarkets, collecting their children at the school gates or simply walking down the street. This personal, “accessible” (P15), friendly and “informal politics” (P9) allowed the politicians to create a real local presence which is reinforced when canvassing during the official election campaign.

Despite the importance of close, personalised relationships with various stakeholders when building and maintaining a personal brand, in a non-party system, it was seen as “very, very lonely” (P12), but part of island culture. It was the responsibility of the individual rather than friends and family to develop and communicate their brand. For example, “people want to meet you, not your friends and family” (P12) and “you are an individual and canvas as an individual. So you’ve got no party infrastructure, no party support, you literally have to do it yourself with your friends and family” (P4). Nevertheless, despite the individual nature of building a political identity in a non-party system, many politicians argued that the indirect support of family, friends, existing networks and possessing an established profile were important features of managing a personal brand. For example, friends and family would act as “proof-readers” (P17) or “stuff envelopes” (P16) with manifestos. In sharp contrast to contemporary party politics elsewhere there was collaboration, with politicians sharing canvassing, campaigning, reflecting on voting in parliament and working with members within committees. Indeed, as there was no party machine, there were virtually no resources in place to support politicians prior the general election and for politicians post-election. For example, there were no campaigners, or support staff such as administrators, researchers or assistants with limited funding to create and manage communication campaigns [up to £600 grant and spending limit of £2300 during the official election campaign]. In addition, there was no induction process post-elections particularly for new or inexperienced politicians. Several politicians believed it was a challenge to communicate their own brand given that there was only one island-wide newspaper known as ‘The Press’, two localised television



channels [BBC Guernsey and ITV Channel TV] and two local radio stations [BBC Radio Guernsey and Island FM]. Therefore, support for politicians was limited and the unique environment was often challenging.

Moreover, there was an agreed consensus that there was no culture for negative campaigning “bitchiness and backstabbing” (P8) as it was not “considered acceptable...not really considered fair-play” (P6). In addition, it was argued “it’s not the way to go on” (P7), as politics on Guernsey was civilised, not confrontational and “you’ll probably lose more than you gain so you have to have to be clever how you put across your positives and let people make their own judgements” (P6). This supportive, respectful approach to politics revealed a collaborative mentality, which was considered a unique selling point to the island. Therefore, developing a personal political brand identity in a non-party system centres on the individual where the independent politician receives no support from the political institutions.

### *Transient Alliances or Pop-Up Parties*

Despite the fact Guernsey had no political parties, and politicians were independent officials, many participants revealed that there were unofficial transient alliances. A key reason for the presence of pop-up parties was based on the unique political system in Guernsey. Once elected, most politicians are elected to committees each comprising of five members, but each member remains an individual and independent of government ‘whipping’ or instructed how to vote. Thus, elected officials use their own judgement and conscience. The committee structure operates as a consensus system encouraging elected officials to “work together and find a consensus for a way forward” (P4). Similarly, P6 argued that “the strongest argument for the system is that people look at each issue on its merit and reach a conclusion”. Nevertheless, the consensus system of government ensures there is compromise, flexibility

and ensures ample time is given for scrutiny by both individual and committee research which is augmented with debates.

Despite this collaborative system of government, groupings, unofficial political parties or pop-up parties would unofficially unite around a single issue, amendment or proposed change to the law. For instance, valence issues relating to health, education, population management and the environmental would be debated and voted on in Parliament and this would lead to alignment of personalities. For instance,

“you get different people aligned like we recently did for the Education Bill and you get a lot of people that voted either way will be suddenly aligned...people are either left, right or centre so you’ll get that division according to ideological leanings” (P5).

Therefore, the transient alliances were often characterised by ideological positioning. Nevertheless, the ideological position of politicians was often inconsistent where a politician would appear left-wing for one issue and right-wing for another. This inconsistent positioning could be a result of the fact some politicians ascribed to the idea that they would not be a “one trick pony” (P3). They also needed to demonstrate an appreciation of their regional and personal values which led to multiple viewpoints on often contrasting issues. Alternatively, it was also attributed to ideological conflicts as many of the public services on Guernsey are under public ownership such as water, transport and power yet Guernsey “is a conservative place to live” (P14) as it is a pro-globalisation, low-tax, anti-green, anti-Brexit jurisdiction. However, the transient alliances were not necessarily grounded on political ideology so therefore strategic voting was based on reciprocity, which also encouraged the pop-up parties. For example, for one delegate

“There is a friendship element...if somebody is 51 or 49% on an issue they might say ‘oh I’ll go that way’. The other thing that happens which is probably not the best way is that ‘he supported me on that issue so I don’t feel strongly, I’ll support him on that issue’. So if you don’t work with other people you won’t get anywhere” (P6).

Likewise, “you get people [Parliamentarians] not understanding what they’re doing and as I say do the sheep vote and you’ll get other people voting to please someone else because we vote in front of each other” (P5). The pop-up parties can also be spearheaded by determined politicians who can approach members of another committee about an issue of personal interest and lobby the committee to take the issue forward, which eventually acts as a catalyst to develop the transient alliances (P8). Thus, the majority of politicians concurred that the existence of informal transient alliances or pop-up parties were commonplace across the island. Ultimately, politicians need to find a coalition that will support a particular issue and the consensus system of transient alliances ensures less radical positions and the likelihood of centre-ground politics.

### **Discussion**

This paper seeks to contribute to the political branding literature using personal branding as a theoretical lens to understand the creation and management process of personal political brands and explore how they develop identities unconstrained by political parties. Further, this study addresses the paucity of research that investigates the process of personal political branding and how elected officials, aspiring candidates, party leaders and political personalities strategically create their personal brands and how they evaluate their intended identities (Guzmán et al. 2015; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019). This research addresses explicit calls for more research on how individuals formulate and develop their brands (Billard 2018; Guzmán and Sierra 2009; Kaneva and Klemmer 2016; Marland 2016; Nai et al. 2019; Needham and Smith 2015; Pich et al. 2020; Serazio 2017; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019) particularly from an ‘insider-relational’ politician perspective (Nielsen 2017). Likewise this study answers the calls for more empirical research on personal branding as we captured

how individual's develop the "unique set of identity traits exhibited by the individual" (Jacobson 2020; Osorio et al. 2020; Pluntz and Pras 2020:3).

This study revealed that the personal branding is an 'uncommon' (Guzmán et al. 2015) yet appropriate theoretical lens to explore the crafted desired identities of Guernsey's politicians and like previous research they position their brands grounded on heritage, local prominence and authority (Speed et al. 2015). For example, key components emerged from the findings and illustrated that a successful political personal brand included legacy and experience, continuous brand building, coherency of personal values; visibility and presence, and goals and aspirations. These elements come together to form the essence of the political brand which is authenticity. However, in politics an authentic brand is one that delivers on its promise but that can only be re-assessed at the next election (Lock and Harris, 1996).

This study revealed that both inexperienced and experienced politicians used various principles-markers to formulate and manage their preferred identities (Ind et al. 2017; Vallas and Christin 2018). Despite the fact that some participants had limited experience of politics and developing their brand, the process of personal branding was unproblematic for Guernsey's politicians. However, incumbent politicians exhibited an advantage over new candidates as they often used their experiences in office of successful campaigns-initiatives-policies, which in turn contributed to the narrative of their personal political brand (Kaneva and Klemmer 2016). Although, incumbents and new candidates could not use examples of focused policies as part of their narratives due to the nature of Guernsey's political system which demonstrates they were unconstrained by political parties and unconstrained by policy (Kaneva and Klemmer 2016). Consequently, Guernsey's experienced and inexperienced politicians formulated identities and a "promise of value" (Philbrick and Cleveland 2015:182) without the mechanisms of a party system.

The findings suggest that Guernsey's politicians create and develop their personal political brands consistent with the three principles proposed by Kaneva and Klemmer (2016) to gain support and build relationships with voters-citizens. For instance, the branded politicians or 'brandidates' used appropriate terminology to communicate and appeal to voters-citizens, expressed personal stories to humanise their brands and appeared to tailor their brands in line with the wants and needs of voters-citizens (Kaneva and Klemmer 2016). Therefore, the personal political brands appeared to offer clear authentic identifiable identities and a sense of community. However, future research from the perspective of voters-citizens would be needed to assess whether this is the case. Therefore, this study provides deep insight into the constructed identities of less prominent personal political brands compared to the existing studies on the brands of leaders and high-profile individuals (Cwalina and Falkowski 2014; Marland 2016; Nai et al. 2019; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019).

### ***The Personal Brand Identity Framework***

Vallas and Christin (2018, p.18) argued that constructing a personal brand takes experience and "does not come naturally. It takes practice, training and tools". From the findings emerging from this study, a systematic framework is introduced that may provide guidance to developing a consistent, authentic personal brand. The Personal Brand Identity Framework can be used in a number of ways. Firstly, the tool can be used by individuals to formulate new-desired identities as they embark on key stages of employability and career progression. Secondly, the tool can be adopted to audit and reflect on existing identities to reveal strengths, limitations and opportunities. Thirdly, once audited, individuals can respond to the strengths, limitations and opportunities and map out an intended identity with the aim of managing and strengthening the personal brand. This systematic process of formulating, auditing and managing personal brands should be done routinely to ensure identities are clear, consistent and authentic (Casprini et al. 2019; Ewing and Allen 2017; Jacobson 2020;

Misra and Walters 2016; Osorio et al. 2020; Pluntz and Pras 2020). Individuals need to ensure they safeguard and control their “attention getting device” (Shepherd 2005, p597) otherwise competitors may attempt to manage the impressions associated with the individual, which may not necessarily be positive (Johnson 2014, Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel, 2006).

<b>Key Principle-Marker</b>	<b>Personal Brand Identity Framework Markers Defined</b>	<b>Pointers to Consider</b>
<b>Legacy and Experience</b>	Ensure professional and personal experiences, biography, skills, credentials and capabilities are developed into a narrative, which will underpin personal brand identity. This should be communicated via all touchpoints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When creating and managing personal brand identities individuals need to develop their brands in line with the target market and tailor for different groups and audiences where/when appropriate.</li> <li>• Research and monitor key competitors, environment and the wants and needs of your audience to reveal areas of best practice and points of parity and differentiation.</li> <li>• Ensure goals, aspirations [and policies] are consistent with personal brand identities and complement personality characteristics and values.</li> <li>• Ensure personal brand identities are clear, simple, authentic and believable supported by style and substance.</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous Brand Building</b>	Periodically review and reflect on all online and offline communication tools and assess effectiveness and efficiency. Ensure all touchpoints are coherent and non-contradictory. This includes style, communication, appearance and actions. Accept that personal political brand identity formation and management is a long-term, continuous process.	
<b>Coherency of Personal Values</b>	Identity is grounded on personal values, characteristics, and/or ideology and heritage and continuous reflection. Personality and personal values should be coherent to ensure identity is authentic and credible. Inconsistency can undermine identity.	
<b>Develop and Maintain Personalised Relationships</b>	Personal yet professional relationships with family, friends, colleagues, businesses, competitors and citizens at large are important to the identity formation process. Individuals should ensure that their identity is positioned as approachable, relatable, genuine, trustworthy and authentic. This will be supported by building personalised relationships developed and maintained where/when possible including working with numerous different stakeholders.	
<b>Visibility and Presence</b>	It is important to actively engage in the local and national communities to establish and maintain presence, visibility and recognition. This could raise awareness, relatability and approachability as part of personal brand identity. All markers should be consistent and non-contradictory.	
<b>Goals and Aspirations</b>	It is important to communicate and demonstrate personal goals and aspirations as part of the personal brand identity. Goals and aspirations serve to get measurable, achievable targets. However, goals and aspirations must be achievable, believable and realistic. Goals and aspirations should be revisited on a regular basis to assess progress and development. In a political setting this can include reference to policies and pledges adopted as part of the personal brand identity.	

Table 2. Personal Brand Identity Framework

Individuals also need to recognise that personal brand identities need to be tailored to different settings and contexts, all principles-markers need to be consistent, and designed to appeal to the specific target audience. Therefore, the Personal Brand Identity Framework provides systematic guidance for creation and management of intended professional and personal identity a key dimension of personal branding (Jacobson 2020; Lopez 2010; Misra

and Kyla 2016; Osorio et al. 2020; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Pluntz and Pras 2020; Vallas and Christin 2018) which can be utilised beyond the political environment.

Therefore, the Personal Brand Identity Framework has implications for practitioners and academics beyond the political environment. For example, personal brands can build identities based on personal values, ideology and areas of interest arising from their background and the needs of their target audience. Moreover, incumbents can use past achievements or refer to policy retrospectively as part of personal brand identity management providing evidence that enhances credibility and authenticity. Therefore, when developing personal brands, individuals need to consider the environment, the context and audience as this will determine which identify principles-markers to include/discount in the creation and management process (Casprini *et al.* 2019; Ewing and Allen 2017; Ind *et al.* 2017; Lin and Siu 2019).

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to understand the creation and management process of personal political brands and explore how they develop identities unconstrained by party politics from an ‘insider-relational’ perspective (Nielsen 2017). This research provided deep insight into the process of formulating and managing a personal brand, and responds to the scant research devoted to this area of study (Guzmán et al. 2015; Guzmán and Sierra 2009; Jacobson 2020; Misra and Kyla 2016; Lopez 2010; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Pluntz and Pras 2020; Reeves et al. 2006; Steenburg and Guzmán 2019; Vallas and Christin 2018). This research focussed on politicians in Guernsey who have the freedom to develop their personal brands based on their personal characteristics, professional and personal experiences, legacy, and heritage rather than political party values, policy and ideology. However, rather than self-commodify, deputies and aspirational deputies during an election campaign have to co-commodify in line

with the needs, wants and values of their region. Therefore, this study extends the literature on personal branding, demonstrates the branded politicians can be conceptualised as personal political brands and uncovers how Guernsey's politicians created their desired identities used to position themselves vis a vis their rivals (Kaneva and Klemmer 2016; Nai et al. 2019; Philbrick and Cleveland 2015). Further, this study goes some way in addressing the calls for more empirical research on personal branding and political branding (Ahmed et al. 2015; Kaneva and Klemmer; 2016; Jacobson 2020; Osorio et al. 2020; Pluntz and Pras 2020; Speed et al. 2015).

This has clear implications for practitioners. As outlined in the previous section the Personal Brand Identity Framework can be used by individuals and practitioners to identify the essence of their brand and how they can create a distinctive personal brand from that. Who are they and how can they strategically position themselves in a career, political marketing place, or build a memorable social media presence? Through a systematic auditing process, they can create and manage their personal brand identities and make strategic changes if necessary. Therefore, the Personal Brand Identity Framework can be adopted by individuals at different stages of their career, experienced or inexperienced in the brand building process and across different settings-industries as a strategic tool to manage and safeguard desired identity (Casprini et al. 2019; Chen 2013; Pagis and Ailon 2017; Vallas and Christin 2018).

Further empirical research should adopt personal political branding as a theoretical lens to investigate the intended brand identities of individuals over time and compare different types of personal political brands across settings and contexts. Therefore, longitudinal and comparative research on the process of personal political branding will continue to expand the limited understanding of the topic area. In addition, future research should investigate personal political brands in different political systems and from multiple perspectives for example an insider-relational politician perspective, competitor perspective and a voter-



citizen perspective to name but a few. Multiple perspectives compared across different political settings would provide deep insight into the consistency, authenticity and credibility of the personal political brands. Further research should evaluate the operationalisation of the Personal Brand Identity Framework in settings beyond politics and consider the usability of the model as a strategic tool to assess the components and capabilities of personal brands and make adaptations if required.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Discussion/Interview Guide – Independent Candidates

##### **Biographical Information**

- How long in politics?
- How/why did you get into politics?
- Party politics?
- Other roles/jobs?
- Current role?

##### **Independent Identity**

- What does it mean to be an independent candidate/politician?
- How does the political system on Guernsey work?
- Day in the life of an independent candidate?
- Core values?
- Key issues of concern?
- Compare/differ compared with rivals?
- More personality than ideology?
- How do you communicate your identity?
- What does it mean to be a Deputy?
- How do you feel about independent politics?

- How do you feel about party politics? Political parties?
- Independent politics – help or hindrance?
- Political allies? Political rivals?
- Developed independently or as part of a team?
- Funding?
- Volunteers?

### **Campaign-Communication**

- Campaigns/initiatives?
- Memorable campaigns/initiatives?
- Most effective way to communicate?
- How often do you communicate with the electorate?
- How often do you meet/engage with the electorate?
- Typical voter? Target market?
- Logo? Visual cues?
- Campaign-communication materials? How often?
- Traditional-non-traditional?
- Cost? Funding?
- Personal?

### **Policies**

- Key policies of interest? Why?
- Pledges?
- Policies during your campaign?
- Policies brought in during your time in politics?
- One thing you would change tomorrow?

### **Personal Perceptions**

- Independent deputies? Examples of good governance?
- Political parties in Guernsey?
- Europe?
- Economy?
- How do you see political life on Guernsey in the future?
- Your political 'brand' in three words?



