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A Basic Model of Voter Loyalty

An Application of Conventional Marketing Theory to Political Marketing

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Abstract

This paper investigates how voter loyalty is established in a political setting, by looking at conventional marketing theory and applying it to the political world. The problem statement is formulated as: “How do satisfaction and brand equity influence voter loyalty, and what role does habit play?”

Voter loyalty is defined as a combination of attitudinal and behavioral measures, satisfaction is defined as the extent to which voters’ expectations are confirmed, brand equity is defined as the differential effect of voter knowledge of the party brand on the voter response to political marketing, and habit is defined as a low-involvement decision to vote for the same party in sequential elections.

In conventional marketing, satisfaction and brand equity have been found to have a significant positive influence on loyalty. Habit positively influences behavioral loyalty, but bypasses and does not affect attitudinal loyalty. This means that, as a whole, habit does influence customer loyalty. Furthermore, habit likely acts as a negative moderator of the relationships between satisfaction and loyalty, and brand equity and loyalty. The explanation for this is that the low-involvement character of habit leads it to decrease the influence of high-involvement cognitive constructs like brand equity and satisfaction on loyalty.

When looking at the differences between politics and conventional marketing, the fact that parties and politicians are seller and product at the same time, coupled with a focus on ideology, lays several restrictions on the application of marketing to politics. For example, parties and politicians have to be particularly careful to preserve their integrity, and this means that there are restrictions to maximizing satisfaction and brand equity by using marketing techniques such as product positioning and placing.

The low frequency of elections, the low amount of control over the fulfillment of campaign promises, and the absence of price are important differences that might suggest that brand equity plays a more prominent role in politics than in a conventional setting. This is because brand equity is one of the only variables in politics that can create competitive advantage, and furthermore, it might be easier to control than other variables like satisfaction.

With regard to habit, additional specific differences exist. While habitual voters engage in low-involvement, repetitive voting behavior, they do not seem to be spuriously loyal as is sometimes proposed in conventional marketing, but actually exceptionally loyal. This means
that parties should strive to be consistent in their ideology so as to attract the same group of voters for a longer time, which will create habit among them.

Voters can generally be divided in two groups, habitual voters and high-involvement voters. These two groups require different approaches to create loyalty. Among habitual voters, loyalty is increased by creating brand awareness. Advertisements and other ways of grabbing attention, such as “getting on the news”, are good ways to do so. High-involvement voters are affected less by brand awareness, and respond more to a strong brand image. Parties can create a strong brand image by being distinct and unique, but also congruent and consistent, in their actions and ideology.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem background

In the last decades, political marketing has become a popular subject. These days, every party has its own legion of marketing consultants to figure out how to sell its ideas to the people and even to find out which ideas will win votes and which will not. Scholars have attributed the success of some politicians, like Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, to their perfectly thought out programs and campaigns (Ingram and Lees-Marshment 2002; Rantavellas 2003).

Although the academic field of political marketing is flourishing, there are, as in any relatively new field of research, still quite some gaps in the theory. One of these gaps can be found when looking at the subject of voter loyalty. From the fifties through the eighties, an average two-third of voters in democratic countries used to vote for the same party in sequential elections (Shachar 2003). Political analysts have since observed a general worldwide decrease in voter loyalty, a phenomenon attributed to the continuing evolution of the media, which has given the electorate more opportunities to gain information on the subject of politics and the state of society, as well as to the weakening of social divisions (Butler and Harris 2009; Meguid 2008; Negrine and Lilleker 2002).

With voter loyalty slowly but surely declining, political parties now face an increasingly difficult balancing act of appealing to floating voters while still keeping the loyal voter base satisfied. Political marketers often decide to focus on the floating voters, at times seemingly forgetting the voter base (Dann and Hughes 2008; Lilleker 2005). This neglect of loyal voters can be seen as a strange development, particularly when comparing politics to a conventional business setting, where companies also try to attract new customers, but simultaneously devote many resources to retaining existing ones, even creating special customer loyalty programs (Dowling and Uncles 1997; Dubé, Hitsch, and Rossi 2009). When politicians take their loyal voters for granted, it can lead to unwelcome surprises when those voters unexpectedly switch parties (Dann and Hughes 2008). The fact that political marketers seem to underestimate the value of voter loyalty seems to be a further indication that voter retention and voter loyalty are subjects that deserve to get more attention.

Much research on voter loyalty has been performed from a political science perspective, and even more research has been performed on customer loyalty in conventional marketing settings. Surprisingly however, no scholars have yet attempted to use political marketing to
look at voter loyalty from a marketing perspective, trying to find out how the process of party
loyalty plays out in the head of the voter. The following paper will address this gap in
political marketing knowledge by adapting conventional theory on marketing to a political
setting, and creating a model of voter loyalty. Political marketers may use this model to gain
better insights into the topic of voter loyalty. These insights will help them find ways to stop
the decrease of voter loyalty to their party or slow it down, thereby creating new possibilities
for competitive advantages.

Academics have already transferred parts of “regular” marketing theory to the realm of
political marketing in a successful manner, but have also noted that significant adaptations
often have to be made to fit the particular situation (Dean and Croft 2001). When considering
the subject of loyalty, the same is probably the case, for example because of the differences
between the relationships of a political party and its voters and a regular product and its
buyers.

When looking at literature from both conventional marketing and political marketing, a
number of variables seem to play a role in voter loyalty. Firstly, in conventional marketing,
satisfaction is often seen as a prime influence on customer loyalty (Hallowell 1996). In
political marketing, this variable is also mentioned frequently as an important means of
building brand loyalty (Lees-Marshalment 2001; Osuagwu 2008). Secondly, empirical analysis
suggests that habit plays a large role in voting (Shachar 2003). In conventional marketing, this
variable is thought to influence customer loyalty (Aarts, Verplanken, and Van Knippenberg
1998), as well as play a moderating role on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty
(Anderson and Srinivasan 2003) and possibly on other relationships (Ronis, Yates, and
Krischt 1989). Lastly, brand equity seems to be an important factor in both conventional
marketing and political marketing (Needham 2006; Taylor, Celuch, and Goodwin 2004). In
political marketing, a strong party brand is thought to increase loyalty even if the political
product offered changes a lot (Needham 2006).

1.2 Problem statement and research questions

1.2.1 Problem statement

Taking into account the relationships laid out in the last paragraph of the problem
background, the central problem statement of this thesis is as follows:
“How do satisfaction and brand equity influence voter loyalty, and what role does habit play?”

1.2.2 Conceptual model

(Figure 1: Conceptual model)

Short definitions of the variables will be given now; more comprehensive descriptions will be given in the following chapters.

- Voter loyalty is defined as the voter’s favorable attitude towards a party resulting in repeat voting behavior (Anderson and Srinivasan 2003).
- Satisfaction is defined as the extent to which a political party lives up to the expectations of the voter.
- Brand equity is defined as the differential effect of the brand of a political party on the voter response to political marketing (Keller 1993).
- Habit is defined as a low-involvement decision to vote for the same party in sequential elections.

1.2.3 Research questions

1. What is the relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty in a conventional marketing setting?
2. What is the relationship between brand equity and customer loyalty in a conventional marketing setting?
3. What is the relationship between habit and customer loyalty in a conventional marketing setting?

4. How does habit moderate the relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty in a conventional marketing setting?

5. How does habit moderate the relationship between brand equity and customer loyalty in a conventional marketing setting?

6. How can conventional marketing theories on customer loyalty be adapted to a political marketing setting?

1.3 Thesis structure

In the following chapter, the variable of customer loyalty will be defined briefly. In chapter three, the variable satisfaction and its relation to customer loyalty in a conventional marketing setting will be researched. In chapter four, the variable brand equity will be treated in the same way. In chapter five, the influence of habit on customer loyalty will be investigated. In chapter six, the moderating role of habit on the relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty will be researched. In chapter seven, the moderating role of habit on the relationship between brand equity and customer loyalty will be examined. In chapter eight, the differences between a conventional marketing setting and a political marketing setting will be investigated, with the goal of finding out how to adapt the various conventional marketing theories on loyalty to a political marketing setting. Finally, the last chapter will contain the conclusions, where the problem statement will be answered and discussed, followed by limitations and recommendations for further research.
2. Customer loyalty

Before researching the variables that influence customer loyalty, a definition of customer loyalty has to be established first, so this chapter will feature a brief discussion of the variable in question.

Customer loyalty is regarded as a very important concept in marketing. Indeed, obtaining and maintaining customer loyalty has been described as “the ultimate aspiration” for many companies (Harris and Goode 2004). The positive influence of loyalty on firm performance has been recognized broadly (Harris and Goode 2004), and it has even been called essential for a company to succeed (Anderson and Srinivasan 2003). Having a large loyal customer base provides many economic and competitive advantages (Reichheld and Schefter 2000). In addition, loyal customers are less susceptible to competitors’ marketing efforts and may even engage in favorable word-of-mouth advertising (Dick and Basu 1994).

Definitions of loyalty can be divided into two groups: behavioral and attitudinal definitions. The first view sees loyalty as a purely behavioral construct that can be measured by looking at the repurchasing behavior of consumers (Dick and Basu 1994; Hallowell 1996). Proponents of the attitudinal perspective believe that behavioral measures do not give an accurate picture of loyalty, because repeat purchases can also have other causes than true loyalty. Repeat customers who are not truly loyal might walk away from the brand unexpectedly. Therefore, scholars with an attitudinal perspective on loyalty attempt to define the concept as consisting of the attitudinal factors behind the repeat buying behavior.

Modern definitions usually combine behavioral and attitudinal components to create the most effective measure of loyalty. These definitions are able to distinguish between spurious loyalty, which is repeat buying behavior coupled with a weak attitude towards the brand, and true loyalty, which is repeat buying behavior coupled with a strongly positive attitude towards the brand (Anderson and Srinivasan 2003; Dick and Basu 1994). Therefore, in this paper a definition of loyalty with combined behavioral and attitudinal elements will be used.
3. Satisfaction and customer loyalty

In this chapter, the first research question about the relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty in a conventional marketing setting will be answered. Firstly, a definition of satisfaction will be established. Subsequently, different views on this variable’s relationship with customer loyalty will be discussed.

3.1 Satisfaction

While satisfaction is a widely used concept, it seems to be very ambiguous. According to Giese and Cote (2000), many different definitions of satisfaction exist. Academics variously define it as a cognitive or an affective response focused on the product itself, the consumption experience, or expectations formed about the product. They also disagree on the moment at which the satisfaction response is determined. These disparities will be resolved by formulating a suitable definition given the context.

With respect to the focus of satisfaction, Giese and Cote (2000) have suggested that it depends on the context. In the context of this political model, a focus on expectations would seem to be appropriate, as the interaction between expectations and confirmation or disconfirmation of these expectations can be said to lie at the heart of politics, with voters judging parties based on how well they live up to their election campaign promises (Henneberg 2004; Lees-Marshalment 2001). Additionally, the expectancy disconfirmation model has proven to be the dominant paradigm within the field of satisfaction research (Andreassen 2000; Ladhari 2007). Expectancy disconfirmation has been described as a cognitive process, but adding affective elements to the model has been shown to enhance its predictive power (Ladhari 2007; Oliver 1993). The timing of the satisfaction response in the expectancy disconfirmation model is variously stated to occur during or after consumption (Giese and Cote 2000). Considering the political context, the most logical timing would be during consumption. As mentioned earlier, expectations are formed during political campaigns, and the satisfaction response develops during the period between elections, when political parties are evaluated on how well they fulfill those expectations (Henneberg 2004).
3.2 The relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty

Intuitively, it makes sense that if customers are satisfied with a product, they will be more likely to buy it again in the future. Indeed, many scholars have established a connection between satisfaction and loyalty. For example, Heskett et al. have stated that “loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction” (Heskett et al. 1994, 120), and Hallowell (1996) has found evidence for a relatively strong influence of satisfaction on customer loyalty in the banking industry. Several academics have postulated that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is of a reciprocal nature, for example because loyal customers are less susceptible to negative information. However, this relationship has not been confirmed (Lam et al. 2004).

Oliva, Oliver, and MacMillan (1992) have noted that the influence of satisfaction on loyalty is a non-linear one. Among extremely satisfied customers the amount of repeat purchases lies much higher than among satisfied customers. A similar phenomenon occurs with extremely dissatisfied customers, while the differences in the middle of the spectrum are marginal in comparison. Heskett et al. (1994) have agreed with this analysis and have thus advised companies to strive for the highest satisfaction level possible. They have also suggested that extremely dissatisfied customers might be even more harmful because they may be inclined to discourage other potential customers from buying the product.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the first research question has been addressed. To conclude, there seems to be a broad consensus among scholars that satisfaction has a positive influence on customer loyalty. Academics have also established that this positive influence is larger at both extremes of the satisfaction response. This means that it literally pays to strive for extremely satisfied customers. Conversely, companies should do everything not to create extremely dissatisfied customers.
4. Brand equity and customer loyalty

In this chapter, the concept of brand equity in a conventional marketing setting will be discussed. Firstly the concept itself will be investigated and a definition will be given, and secondly the term’s relationship with customer loyalty will be established, thereby answering the second research question.

4.1 Brand equity

Brand equity has been a popular topic among academics in the last few decades. Scholars knowledgeable on the subject have searched to emphasize the importance of maintaining a long-term focus within brand management (Wood 2000), and have talked about the benefits of such an approach (Aaker 1992a). They have also stated that brand equity can bring a competitive advantage when circumstances in the market make it hard for companies to differentiate themselves from competition through price or product quality (Aaker 1992a; Burmann, Jost-Benz, & Riley 2009). Therefore, brand equity could have a particularly large influence in the world of politics.

However, while brand equity is an established concept, its definition remains subject to debate, because of the term’s vague and subjective nature (Broyles, Schumann, and Leingpibul 2009). Academics agree that the concept of brand equity is about the added value of a brand through consumers’ perceptions of and associations with the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001), but the opinions differ on what constitutes this added value, and brand equity has also been analyzed from multiple perspectives. The many different available definitions can be divided into two groups: definitions that take a company-based approach to the concept and ones that take a consumer-based approach (Keller 1993; Wood 2000). The consumer-based approach seems to be most appropriate for this thesis, because customer loyalty constitutes consumer behavior, and satisfaction and habit are consumer-based concepts as well. Wood (2000) suggests that the consumer-based approach is similar to the concepts of brand strength and brand image.

Two of the most used models of brand equity are those developed by Aaker (1992a) and by Keller (1993). While Aaker has taken a company-based approach, his work is still notable, because he has distinguished four categories that together make up brand equity: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.
Keller (1993) is a proponent of the customer-based approach. His model on customer-based brand equity defines the concept as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” (Keller 1993, 8). Further defining the concept of brand knowledge, Keller has identified brand awareness and brand image as its two components. Brand awareness can be defined as the familiarity a consumer has with a brand name, while brand image comprises all the associations a customer has when thinking of a certain brand. The effectiveness of a brand image primarily comes from the favorability, strength, and uniqueness of associations. Companies constantly look to create “unique selling propositions”, which are designed to differentiate them clearly from competitors. Keller has suggested that brand awareness plays a more important role in low-involvement decisions, while brand image is more important in a high-involvement decision setting. This last observation has been made by Krishnan (1996) as well.

4.2 The relationship between brand equity and customer loyalty

The reasoning behind the relationship between brand equity and customer loyalty is clear: when consumers are familiar with a brand and rate it highly, they are more loyal than when these things are not the case. This logic is followed by Pitta and Katsanis (1995) among others.

Nevertheless, other interpretations of the relationship between brand equity and customer loyalty exist. Company-based models, like Aaker’s (1992a), actually often include brand loyalty as one of the components of brand equity. Aaker argues that the predictable streams of sales and profit generated by a large loyal customer base signify a financial advantage to the brand, and thus have a positive effect on brand equity. Other academics, such as Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000), Jones (2005) and Broyles et al. (2009) have too mentioned brand loyalty as a source of brand equity. Still, Aaker (1992b) has also stated that brand equity has a positive influence on brand loyalty, so he seems to hypothesize a reciprocal relationship.

There are contradicting views on whether the relationship between brand equity and customer loyalty is a direct one or not. Yoo et al. (2000) prove that brand loyalty is directly related to brand equity, while Broyles et al. (2009) find an indirect relationship. This incongruity might be explained by the fact that Broyles et al. have split up brand equity into perceived quality, perceived performance, resonance, and imagery, whereas Yoo et al. have researched brand
equity as a whole. These different models might account for the different results. Another reason might be that Broyles et al. have only included two companies in their research, while Yoo et al. have chosen twelve brands, which suggests that Yoo et al.’s study is the more generalizable of the two.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter is concentrated on the second research question. While most literature on brand equity has focused more on the company side than on the customer side of the concept, it can be concluded that brand equity has a positive influence on customer loyalty. Moreover, many academics seem to think that a mutually reinforcing relation exists between the two concepts, which points to the great importance of brand equity and marketing efforts to improve this brand equity to the success of companies. While some contradictory opinions exist on whether the relationship is direct or indirect, it most likely is direct. Lastly, companies should focus their efforts on creating brand awareness when they are marketing a low-involvement product, while creating a strong brand image should be the first priority when the product is characterized by high-involvement decision making.
5. Habit and customer loyalty

In this chapter, the variable habit will be researched. Firstly, a definition of habit will be constructed, and secondly, the third research question about the relationship between habit and customer loyalty will be answered.

5.1 Habit

Research has shown that habit has a significant influence on consumer behavior. For example, Beatty and Smith (1987) have shown that 40 to 60 percent of customers purchase at the same store out of habit, while Gefen (2003) has established that habit has a significant influence on the behavior of experienced online shoppers.

In conventional marketing, habit has been defined as “a repetitively performed, stable behavior which is not actively deliberated upon at the time of the act” (Beatty and Kahle 1988, 3). Beatty and Kahle (1988) have further defined habit as the opposite of brand commitment: while the latter is the result of psychological processes, the former does not necessarily have psychological causes. They have also found that habit is directly linked to behavior: when a behavior is repeated frequently, habit formation will occur.

Rundle-Thiele and Bennett (2001) have stated that habit is usually a consequence of low involvement in the purchase process. They have written that buying behavior typically associated with a high-involvement process can also undergo habit formation, because when consumers show repeat buying behavior, they will get used to the act, which will turn the high-involvement process into a low-involvement process. Beatty and Kahle (1988) have also observed the important role of habit in low-involvement processes and have found evidence that habit can play a prominent role in decision making even in the behavior of individuals who are highly committed to a brand.

Habit can be seen as related to concepts such as inertia (Anderson and Srinivasan 2003) and spurious loyalty (Dick and Basu 1994), as these concepts also describe repeat buying behavior in a low involvement decision-making process. Dick and Basu (1994) have stated that because of the low involvement in the purchasing process, spuriously loyal customers tend to be affected by situational cues, such as familiarity.
In their research into consumer inertia, Dubé, Hitsch, and Rossi (2010) have suggested that when buying a specific brand, customers unconsciously give it an advantage with regard to future purchases. This mechanism works as a sort of switching cost: if the exploration costs of switching to another brand are too high, the customer will stay with the current one.

5.2 The relationship between habit and customer loyalty

To establish the nature of the relationship between habit and customer loyalty, loyalty must be divided into behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. When looked at from a behavioral perspective, Beatty and Kahle (1988) have defined habit as repetitive, stable behavior, and behavioral loyalty is repetitive purchasing behavior, so the two concepts are clearly related. As for the nature of the relationship, Aarts et al. (1998) have described a pattern of reciprocity: due to a pattern of repetitive behavior, habit formation occurs, and habit in turn increases the likelihood that the customer will purchase the familiar brand again. Beatty and Kahle seem to agree about the reciprocal character of the relationship, but the influence of habit on loyalty is assumed to be indirect. However, a direct influence does seem make intuitive sense, and Beatty and Kahle have based their model on the theory of reasoned action, which, Aarts et al. have argued, does not apply where the influence of habit on loyalty is concerned.

From an attitudinal perspective, conflicting opinions seem to exist as well. Dick and Basu (1994) have stated that spurious loyalty, which they deem similar to inertia, is defined by a low attitude. On the other hand, Aarts et al. (1998), as well as Ronis et al. (1989), have stated that habit bypasses attitudes and does not affect them. Furthermore, Beatty and Kahle (1988) have established that highly brand-committed individuals are also affected by habit formation. The solution would be to see spurious loyalty as a concept related to, but not the same as, habit.

In this paper, customer loyalty has been defined as a synthesis of attitudinal and behavioral components. When using this definition, it can be concluded that habit as a whole positively influences customer loyalty. This assumption is shared by academics such as Lin and Wang (2006), who have used a similar definition of loyalty and have tested its effect in mobile commerce contexts.
5.3 Conclusion

To answer the third research question, the nature of the relationship between habit and customer loyalty depends on which definition of loyalty is used. From a behavioral perspective a reciprocal relationship seems likely, while from an attitudinal perspective habit does not affect loyalty. As this thesis has defined loyalty as a combination of attitude and behavior, the conclusion must be that habit as a whole positively influences loyalty.
6. Habit and the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty

A definition of habit has already been given in the previous chapter, so this chapter will focus solely on answering the fourth research question about the influence of habit on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty.

6.1 The influence of habit on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty

Not much research has been conducted on the relationship between habit and satisfaction, but the available papers seem to converge on the idea that habit has a moderating influence on satisfaction. For example, Anderson and Srinivasan (2003) have written about habit in an online setting and have noted that when customers develop a high level of inertia, satisfaction becomes less important in determining loyalty. Furthermore, although Oliver (1999) has not explicitly described habit as a moderator of satisfaction, he has noted that satisfaction becomes less significant over time as an influence on loyalty as other mechanisms to create loyalty begin to work. Habit could be one of these mechanisms, seeing that it grows stronger with time and repeated behavior. Additional support for a moderating influence can be found in research on switching costs, which are thought to work similarly to mechanisms of habit (Dubé et al. 2010). Switching costs are generally thought to have a negative moderating influence on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Bell, Auh, and Smalley 2005; Lee, Lee, and Feick 2001).

Not many academics elaborate on the process behind the relationship (Aarts et al. 1998). However, the definition of habit states that habit is paired with a low-involvement purchasing process. This means that the high-involvement cognitive evaluations in the decision-making process are disregarded in favor of mechanisms of habit. So, logically it follows that as habit becomes more important, these mechanisms of habit will have a negative moderating influence on the relationship between loyalty and a cognitive process like satisfaction. Ronis et al. (1989) have similarly concluded that cognitive constructs are only significantly related to behavior when habit is weak, while they do not significantly influence behavior when habit is strong. Furthermore, Verplanken et al. (1998) have tested and found evidence for habit as a negative moderator of the relationship between intention and behavior. Although satisfaction is not the same as intention, it seems reasonable to assume that the same holds for satisfaction.
6.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, the fourth research question has been addressed. It can be concluded that habit has a negative moderating influence on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. This can be explained by the fact that habit is characterized by low involvement. Consequently, habit formation leads to a decreasing influence of high-involvement cognitive evaluations such as satisfaction on loyalty.
7. Habit and the relationship between brand equity and loyalty

In this chapter, the influence of habit on the relationship between brand equity and loyalty will be discussed, thereby answering the fifth research question.

7.1 The influence of habit on the relationship between brand equity and loyalty

Literature on the influence of habit on the relationship between brand equity and loyalty is virtually non-existent. Most scholars have chosen to accentuate the company side of brand equity instead of placing it in a customer behavior perspective and researching its influence on customer loyalty, so unsurprisingly, the effect of habit on the relationship between brand equity and loyalty has not been investigated well either. Still, there are good reasons to suspect that habit does have an influence on this relationship. The relationship between satisfaction and loyalty has already been shown to be moderated by habit, and a number of important similarities exist between the variables of brand equity and satisfaction. Brand equity, like satisfaction, has a significant cognitive element: as stated earlier in this thesis, Keller (1993) has defined it as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. As explained in the last chapter, when the low-involvement process of habit formation sets in, mechanisms of habit negatively influence the effect of cognitive evaluations on loyalty (Ronis et al. 1989), and it does not seem unreasonable to assume that brand equity is also subject to this influence.

As Keller (1993) has stated, brand awareness makes up the larger part of brand equity when a low-involvement product is concerned, while brand image has a larger influence on high-involvement decisions. This suggests that the negative moderating role of habit on the relationship between brand equity and loyalty might have a stronger effect on the brand image part of brand equity than on the brand awareness part. Consequently, habitual buyers might be insensitive to the brand image of their preferred brand as well as that of other brands, while brand awareness could still play a role in their decision making process.

7.2 Conclusion

This chapter is focused on the fifth research question. To conclude, the extremely poor amount of material written on habit in relation to brand equity makes it impossible to
corroborate the suspected moderating influence of habit on the relationship between brand equity and loyalty through academic evidence. However, when making comparisons between the variables of brand equity and satisfaction, a number of significant similarities suggest that a negative moderating influence is nevertheless likely. Furthermore, when a high degree of habit is present, only part of brand equity is considered: brand awareness still plays a significant role, while brand image is not very important anymore. As a result, the effect of brand equity as a whole on brand loyalty is diminished.
8. Application to political marketing

In this chapter, the conventional marketing model of loyalty, as constructed in the previous chapters, will be applied to a political setting. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the differences between a conventional marketing setting and a political one. Most differences are related to the model as a whole, or to multiple variables present in the model. These differences will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. Subsequently, the variable habit will be discussed specifically, because this concept is affected by additional differences that are specific to this variable only. At the end of this chapter, the consequences of the model to parties and politicians will be considered, and recommendations will be given on how parties, politicians, and marketers should interpret and apply the model. This last section will serve as an answer to the sixth research question.

8.1 Differences between a conventional and a political setting

Conventional marketing can be a very useful tool to gain a better understanding of consumer behavior in a different setting such as political marketing. Indeed, conventional and political marketing have many basics in common: they both involve the exchange between a buyer and a seller, and many conventional marketing concepts, like segmentation, targeting, and positioning can be adapted to politics without many problems (Smith and Hirst 2001; Wring 1997). However, as Egan (1999) has noted, there are also a number of significant differences between conventional and political marketing. This means that voting behavior cannot be compared one on one to regular customer behavior in a commercial transaction.

Perhaps the most fundamental difference lies in the nature of the buyer-seller relationship. In political marketing, the seller and the product are the same: the party and its representatives try to “sell” themselves to the voter. Moreover, the product of a party consists of views on society that can have a lasting impact on this society. This focus on ideology in politics constitutes a significant difference between political and conventional marketing and has several consequences. For one, it means that it is impossible to attract all voters, not even in theory. No matter how good a party is quality-wise, people who do not agree with its ideology will simply never vote for it. It also means that integrity is seen as a very important issue in politics (Egan 1999; Henneberg, Scammell, and O’Shaughnessy 2009): you have to practice what you preach; otherwise voters will doubt your integrity. To take a clear example, a
politician who is known as a family man and who emphasizes family values will take a particularly large hit to his popularity if he is revealed to be an adulterer. This focus on integrity can be seen as one of the reasons that political marketing is a somewhat controversial concept – often being criticized as detrimental to the integrity of the democratic process, making it more about image than about issues (Egan 1999) and inviting populism (Henneberg 2004) –, while conventional marketing is accepted as a normal practice by most.

In any case, in the political setting limits exist to the application of marketing concepts like positioning. Political parties and politicians cannot change their image and views like a company and its products can, because voters have certain perceptions and expectations of them. If the party and its politicians tread outside their image and expectations, or are perceived as inconsistent, they will be seen as opportunistic and insincere (Smith and Hirst 2001). For example, during the 2004 US presidential campaign, John Kerry was consistently labeled a “flip-flopper” by his opponent George Bush because of his changing views on the Iraq War, and this had a damaging effect on his image (Harwood 2008).

Similar limitations exist with regard to the element of place. Especially in countries with district voting systems, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, politicians who run for office in a place with which they have no clear connection might be thought of as opportunists, and this can have a harmful effect on their election chances. In the United States, politicians like Robert Kennedy, John McCain, George H.W. Bush, and Hillary Clinton have all had to shake off accusations of being a so-called “carpetbagger” at some point in their political career (Applebome 1988; Buckley 1999; Nowicki and Muller 2007), which points to it being a significant phenomenon.

Another important difference in the nature of the buyer-seller relationship is the extremely low frequency of purchase moments in politics: only during Election Day do voters get to make a purchase decision, and in many countries this occurs only once a year at most. Moreover, due to the nature of the democratic process, a large minority of political parties and politicians, namely the opposition, cannot deliver its product and fulfill its promises, while even the majority often has to make compromises on certain issues. This means that parties and politicians have much less control over their product than companies, and this might make it harder to satisfy their customers. Parties and politicians can even deceive their voters and deliver an entirely different product than promised, which is illegal in most conventional buyer-seller transactions.
The fact that the price aspect of marketing is not present in politics can also be seen as a major difference. In conventional marketing, price is often used by companies to create competitive advantages. As this element is not present in politics, this makes it harder for a marketer to create competitive advantages. Because political marketers have to turn to other methods to create these advantages, this might mean that the role of brand equity is even more important in a political setting than in conventional marketing.

8.2 Habit

Intuitively, habit seems to play a significant role in voting behavior. Many voters have been voting for the same party for years out of a feeling of loyalty, but often cannot tell why. A significant segment of partisan voters is thought to be apolitical (Smith and Hirst 2001), and many people vote for “their” party even when they do not agree with its current policies (Glover 2010).

However, there are some indicators that the political environment may not be ideal for habit forming. For example, the frequent repetition of behavior that is critical for habit formation (Aarts et al. 1998) is not present in a political context: the frequency of elections varies from country to country, but they generally do not occur more than once a year. Schweiger and Adami (1999) have warned that one should be careful making straightforward comparisons between habitual low-involvement buying of low-cost products and voting behavior, because they are of a totally different nature.

Still, habit is perceived to play a significant role in politics (Egan 1999). Shachar (2003) has proven that voters have a tendency to vote for the same party they voted for in the previous election, even when taking into account variables such as candidates’ attributes, compatibility of candidates’ and voters’ political positions, and voter characteristics. He has also found that older voters are more likely to vote out of habit than younger voters. His explanation for habit formation is that voters are inclined to rationalize their voting decisions, which leads them to develop certain feelings towards parties. These feelings in turn affect their voting behavior in subsequent elections. Additionally, Lock and Harris (1996) have noted that voters’ perception of parties’ political positions are remarkably stable; in other words, many voters do not notice changes in parties’ stances. This might be another explanation why individuals who are less interested in politics are inclined to vote through habit.
The question could be asked whether habitual customers in politics are in fact spuriously loyal customers. Though their behavior does seem to be characterized by low involvement, it could be argued that the habitual voters are actually the most loyal of all, often sticking to their party even when they do not agree with its policies (Glover 2010). Moreover, even when they decide not to vote for the party, they generally have a strong negative attitude towards rival parties (Glover 2010). Therefore, defecting to another party is generally much harder for voters than defecting to another brand of products in a conventional marketing setting, and it could be argued that in politics, habit has a particularly large positive influence on loyalty. It must be noted that these observations do not completely deviate from conventional marketing theory. As stated earlier, spurious loyalty and habit might not be totally similar, and Beatty and Kahle (1988) have concluded that habit often plays a role among brand-committed customers in that setting.

8.3 Conclusion

In this conclusion, the sixth research question will be answered by giving recommendations on how to apply the model of voter loyalty to political marketing.

8.3.1 General remarks

Because politics is about individuals and their views on society, integrity is much more important in political marketing than in conventional marketing. The concept of integrity is difficult to place within this model of voter loyalty, but could be seen as related to both brand equity and satisfaction. Voters have certain expectations that derive from the brand image, and if these expectations are disconfirmed, parties and politicians will lose integrity as a result. Therefore, parties and politicians’ image, viewpoints, and actions all need to be congruent and consistent. Overall, the limits to which parties, politicians, and political marketers are bound in their marketing efforts are much tighter than those in conventional marketing: they might not be able to maximize customer satisfaction and brand equity without compromising their integrity.

Political parties and politicians also have less control over their product than companies, and this might make it harder to satisfy voters. Additionally, the dimension of price is not present.
Due to these two differences, brand equity might be even more important in politics than in a conventional setting, because it is one of the only variables left that can create competitive advantage (Aaker 1992a; Burmann, Jost-Benz, & Riley 2009). Furthermore, parties and politicians could be said to have a larger amount of control over it than over other variables. They can coordinate their own actions and statements and thereby influence their brand equity, while satisfying voters is harder, because politics involves making compromises, which means that parties and their voter bases often do not get what they want.

8.3.2 Habit

Political marketers should also be aware of the differences with regard to habit. There is much evidence for its presence in politics, but no one-on-one comparison can be made between voting habit and habit in conventional marketing. Voting behavior seems to be characterized by more diversity in decision involvement than normal purchasing behavior. On the one hand, there is a significant group that is highly involved in the voting decision, reading party programs and watching debates, while on the other hand there is a significant group that votes based on habit and hardly searches for information.

While habit is sometimes seen as a bad thing in conventional marketing, it may be something to strive for in politics. Due to the negative moderating role of habit on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, habitual voters often stay with their preferred party even when they do not agree with its current course. Moreover, habit might have a particularly large positive effect on voter loyalty. However, habit in politics takes a long time to form due to the low frequency of elections, so it is hard to formulate specific strategies to facilitate habit formation among voters. The best strategy would seem to be one that stays consistent over time. This way parties attract the same voters over longer periods, and the repetitive voting behavior of these voters will cause habit to form.

Due to the negative moderating influence of habit on the relationship between brand equity and loyalty, as discussed in the previous chapter, habitual voters and high-involvement voters become and stay loyal to parties through different methods. To increase the loyalty of habitual voters, parties should try to create more brand awareness: grabbing the attention of habitual voters who are sympathetic to the relevant party seems to be a good way to create loyalty among this group. The importance of brand awareness could partly explain why campaign
expenditure is found to be positively related to votes won (Benoit and Marsh 2008; Samuels 2001; Thomas 1989): campaign funds are used to create brand awareness through various types of advertising, and this results in higher loyalty among habitual voters. Brand awareness can also be created by “getting on the news”, and in this light, the perceived increasing trend of politicians focusing on sound bites could be seen as evidence that parties are well aware of the importance of creating brand awareness. It must be noted that brand awareness also plays a role in attracting high-involvement voters, but this effect is relatively small when compared to that on habitual voters.

To attract high-involvement voters, parties should focus primarily on creating a strong brand image by clearly distinguishing themselves from other parties, creating “unique selling propositions”, and being congruent and consistent in their actions and ideology (Keller 1993). In this respect, strategies for creating a strong brand image in politics may be similar to those found in conventional marketing.
9. Conclusion

In this chapter, the problem statement will be answered by summarizing and discussing the answers to the research questions, which have been treated in the previous chapters. Subsequently, limitations to the model will be discussed and recommendations for further research will be given. The application of the model has already been discussed in the previous chapter, so it will merely be recapitulated in the conclusion.

9.1 Answer to the problem statement

The problem statement of this thesis is formulated as follows:

“How do satisfaction and brand equity influence voter loyalty, and what role does habit play?”

In short, the answer to this question is that satisfaction and brand equity positively influence voter loyalty. Habit also influences voter loyalty in a positive manner and has a moderating role on the relationship between satisfaction and voter loyalty, as well as the relationship between brand equity and voter loyalty.

9.2 Conclusion

Political marketing has grown to be a popular field of research, but up until now it has lacked an overview of voter loyalty and the variables influencing this central concept. In this thesis, a basic model of voter loyalty has been proposed, and its assumptions have been investigated by looking at what conventional marketing has to say about the concepts included in the model. Most ideas presented in this paper may be familiar to academics, but the value lies in the integration of these different concepts and its application to the field of political marketing. This model can be used to understand better the process of creating voter loyalty, but also as a basis for creating strategies to create loyalty.

There are no reasons to believe that the relationships in the model, as established within conventional marketing theory, do not hold in general in a political setting. Nevertheless, the differences between a conventional setting and the political world do have consequences for the application of the model. For example, there are certain limits to the ways in which parties
and politics should express themselves: they have to act in accordance with the perceptions and expectations of their voter base, much more so than in a conventional setting; they have to “stay true to themselves”. Their actions and statements have to be consistent and congruent; otherwise their integrity will suffer damage.

All of this means that maximizing satisfaction and brand equity, when done in a conventional marketing manner, will not lead to maximization of voter loyalty. Of course a high-quality political product will win voters, but this is not enough. Parties and politicians should maximize satisfaction and brand equity while taking into account integrity at all times.

Consistency is not only important to maintain integrity, it is also essential in creating habit among the voter base. When a party does not have an ideology that is consistent over time, it will constantly attract different groups of voters, and habit will not be able to form. This means that consistent parties with a long history enjoy a considerable advantage over inconsistent, younger parties, because they have far more credit among their habitual voter base.

Finally, parties have to make good use of brand equity, because it is one of the only variables that can really make the difference in politics and that parties actually have control over as well. A strong, distinct, congruent, and consistent brand image can be used primarily to bind high-involvement voters to a party, while strong brand awareness can create loyalty among habitual voters.

9.3 Limitations and recommendations

Firstly, this model on voter loyalty focuses on three independent variables that were established beforehand: satisfaction, brand equity, and habit. Apart from these variables, no other influences on voter loyalty have been investigated. Further research could take the model presented here and use it as the foundation for more sophisticated models by investigating the possible influence of other variables, such as trust, which is said to play a large role in conventional marketing (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Harris and Goode 2004) as well as the political world (Harrop 1990). One could also investigate voter personality: which type of voter is more inclined to be loyal and which type is more susceptible to marketing efforts of competing parties.
Secondly, while most relationships suggested in the model have been empirically tested in a conventional marketing setting, many have yet to be tested in a political setting. Further research should focus on verifying the model in a political setting, because of the significant differences that have been shown to exist between conventional marketing and political marketing. Specifically, the concept of habit in politics might be too different from that found in a conventional context, and this means that part of the knowledge obtained from conventional literature might not apply to the political setting.

Finally, the concept of habit as used in this model has not been researched very well so far, and the relationships between habit and the other variables are the least established of all the relationships present in this model. Therefore, the field of marketing and consumer behavior might benefit from additional studies on the subject of habit. Research has been found to be lacking on two subjects in particular: firstly, the relationships between concepts such as habit, inertia, and spurious loyalty need to be clarified; secondly, the lack of knowledge on the moderating role of habit on various other variables demands further research as well.
10. References


